

2025 Utah Head Start Collaboration Office

NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Background and Purpose

IN 1990, THE FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION for Children and Families (ACF) began awarding Head Start Collaboration grants to establish Head Start State Collaboration Offices (HSSCOs), with an appointed State Director of Head Start Collaboration tasked with supporting the development of multi-agency and public-private partnerships at the state level. State Directors of HSSCOs assist Head Start and Early Head Start grantees in collaborating with state and local planning entities and coordinating Head Start services with state and local programs. The Utah Head Start State Collaboration Office was established in 1996 to ensure the coordination of services and to lead efforts that support diverse entities working together.

The Utah Head Start State Collaboration Office addresses the needs of Head Start concerning collaboration, coordination and alignment of early childhood services and systems to ensure that children, from birth to school entry, and their families receive the supports needed to succeed. The Head Start Act of 2007 outlines the requirements for the Head Start State Collaboration Office grant, which was awarded to Utah to facilitate collaboration among Head Start agencies and entities that carry out activities designed to benefit low-income children and their families.

As part of the grant requirements, the Utah Head Start State Collaboration Office conducts a statewide needs assessment to identify systems and services that need alignment, ensuring children and families experience a healthy, secure and strong academic start. Additionally, it informs the strategic direction, supports continuous improvement and strengthens partnerships that serve Head Start and Early Head Start children and families. This assessment identifies emerging needs, barriers and opportunities for collaboration across early childhood systems in Utah, ensuring that the work of the Utah Head Start State Collaboration office remains responsive, relevant and effective.

To complete this needs assessment, data was gathered from a variety of sources, including Head Start, state agencies, early childhood educators, and stakeholders. Methods used to obtain information were survey results, in-person discussions and feedback sessions with the respondents named above. The survey data provided quantitative insights into trends and issues, while in-person discussions offered a deeper understanding of individual, program and agency experiences and perspectives. This valuable insight informs the work of the Head Start State Collaboration Office for the upcoming year.



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Introduction

THE IMPROVING HEAD START for School Readiness Act of 2007 requires Head Start State Collaboration Offices (HSSCOs) nationwide to conduct annual assessments of the needs of Head Start programs in their state. The Head Start Act also requires HSSCOs to use the needs assessment results to inform yearly updates to their strategic plan goals and objectives.

The information may be used to inform, improve and support Head Start programs in meeting Head Start Program Performance Standards and other federal regulations. A summary report is made available to the public in each state.

Head Start Collaboration Office National Priorities

1

Collaborate with state systems to align early care and education services and supports for children and families prenatally to age 5.

2

Work with state efforts to collect and utilize data on early childhood programs to guide decision-making and improve child and family outcomes.

3

Support the expansion of and access to high-quality workforce and career development opportunities for staff.

4

Coordinate with school systems to ensure continuity and alignment across programs, as appropriate.



Utah's Head Start Programs



12
programs
statewide

873
children
experiencing
homelessness

1,155
children with
an identified
disability

287
children in foster
care

164
pregnant
women



HEAD START PROGRAMS operate locally to help young children from low-income families prepare to succeed in school. Additionally, programs promote children's development through early learning, health and family well-being. Head Start programs deliver child development services in center-based, home-based or family child care settings. All programs continually work toward the mission of providing high-quality services in safe and healthy settings to eligible children and families, preparing them for school and life.

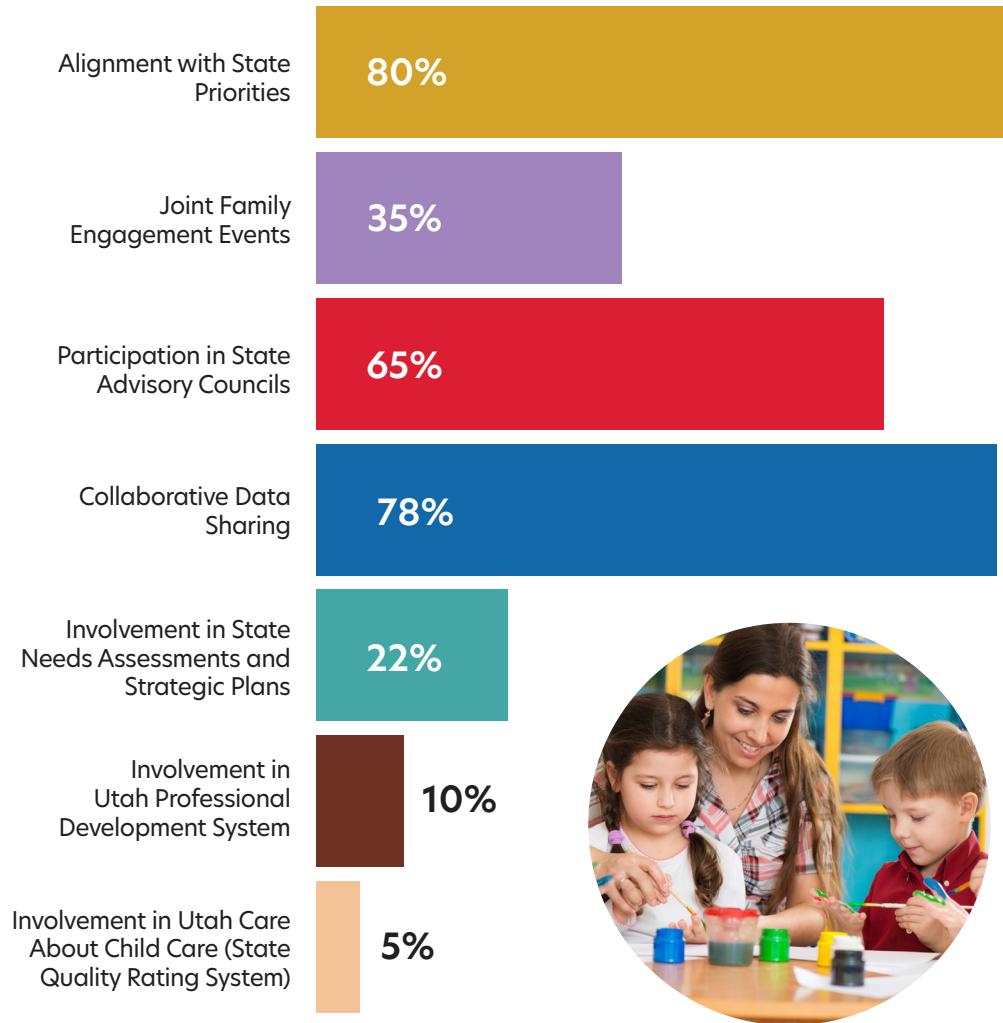


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Strengthening Alignment

Head Start Programs Identified Priority Areas
for Increased Involvement in State Systems



Identified Opportunities:

- Coordinate enrollment systems
- Increase Head Start program involvement in state level policy discussions
- Explore pathways for Head Start program participation in Utah's Quality Rating System

State Systems

Coordinated Funding

OVER 69% OF STATE AGENCIES, stakeholders, community partners and Head Start programs are interested in forming a work group to explore coordinated funding and how to support more integrated services in Utah.

The Office of Head Start encourages programs to participate in state and local mixed-delivery initiatives, reexamine program models based on family input and build community collaborations that maximize educational freedom. By layering funding, Head Start programs can help reduce financial barriers, empower family choice, optimize resources and align with federal programs to make them more effective for American families.



Identified Opportunity:

- Coordinate with Head Start programs, state agencies, stakeholders and community partners to explore opportunities for layered funding and coordination between Head Start programs and early childcare providers.

Background Checks

One of the biggest challenges for programs is recruiting and retaining qualified staff who can provide comprehensive, quality services to the children and families. In addition, programs must navigate complex background check requirements to ensure compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

- 90% of Head Start programs report no issues in maintaining compliance with background check requirements
- 67% of Head Start programs report less than 2 weeks
- 33% of Head Start programs report less than 1 month

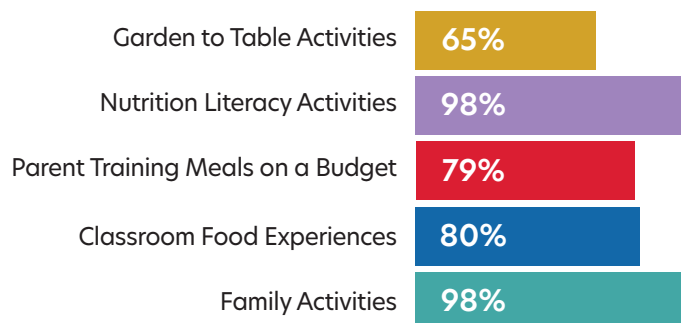


Identified Opportunity:

- Integration with existing fingerprinting system
- Research the state school system's internal fingerprinting system to identify potential opportunities for streamlining the process and avoiding duplication

Health

Engagement in Nutrition Education



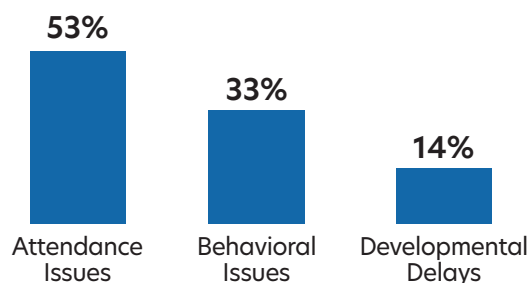
Identified Needs:

- Additional funding to provide ingredients for hands-on food activities
- Support to strengthen relationships with local nutrition resources

Families Affected by Substance Misuse

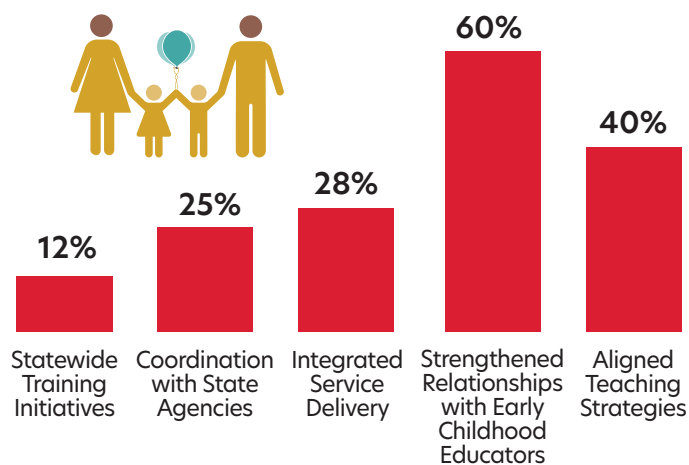


Significant Impact: At least 50% of families are thought to be affected by substance abuse including alcohol, vaping and tobacco use.



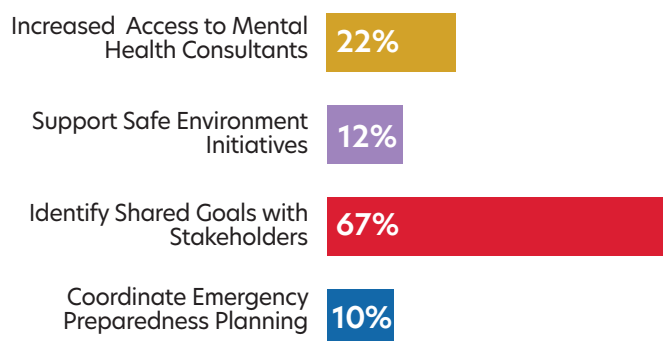
Challenging Behavior Support

Identified Needs and Strategies



Health and Safety

Identified Needs and Strategies



Data Systems

HEAD START PROGRAMS implement processes for using data to identify program strengths and needs, develop and implement plans that address these needs and continually evaluate compliance with program performance standards and progress towards achieving program goals.

Utah Head Start programs report using the following data sources to support this process:

- **Budget vs. actual financial outcomes report** - Financial performance report that identifies deviations and supports informed decisions for future planning.
- **Head Start self-assessment** - An annual process used by Head Start programs to evaluate their effectiveness and progress towards program goals. It helps identify strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring quality Head Start services are delivered each year. This assessment is a requirement of the Head Start Program Performance Standards.
- **Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)** - Identifying areas needing improvement, monitoring progress and supporting informed decisions for making changes.
- **Program Information Report (PIR)** - Comprehensive data on the services, staff, children and families served by Head Start Programs.
- **School Readiness data** (Ages and Stages questionnaires data and Learning Assistance Program data)
- **Strengths and Needs assessments**
- **Head Start Community assessment** - A comprehensive review of a community's needs and resources, specifically focusing on the needs of children and families eligible for Head Start services. It helps programs understand the context in which they operate and ensures services are tailored to the specific needs of the community. This assessment informs program planning, outreach, enrollment and the delivery of Head Start services.

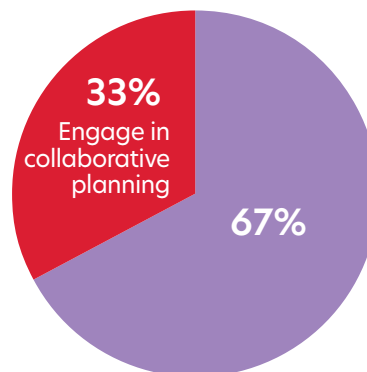
Strengthening Data Exchanges

What Works for Head Start Programs



Identified Opportunities:

- Increase engagement with Utah's Early Childhood Integrated Data System
- Arrange joint planning sessions with Local Education Agencies

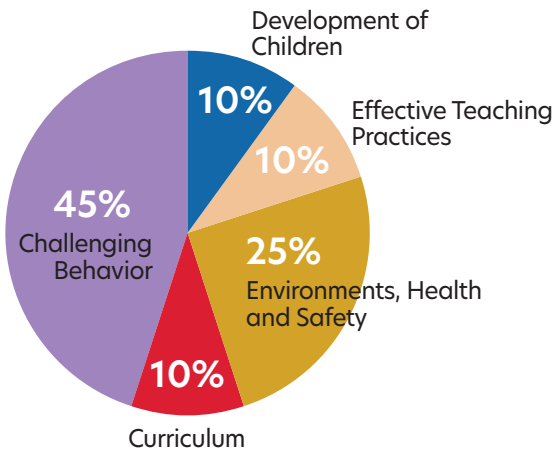


Develop formal data sharing agreements

Head Start Programs and Professional Development

Identified Needs:

- 45% of Head Start respondents listed Challenging Behavior as the highest need in professional development
- 25% of Head Start respondents listed Environments and Health and Safety as the second highest need



Utah Early Childhood Workforce TOP ISSUES



Lack of staff

Funding

Child behaviors

Staff turnover

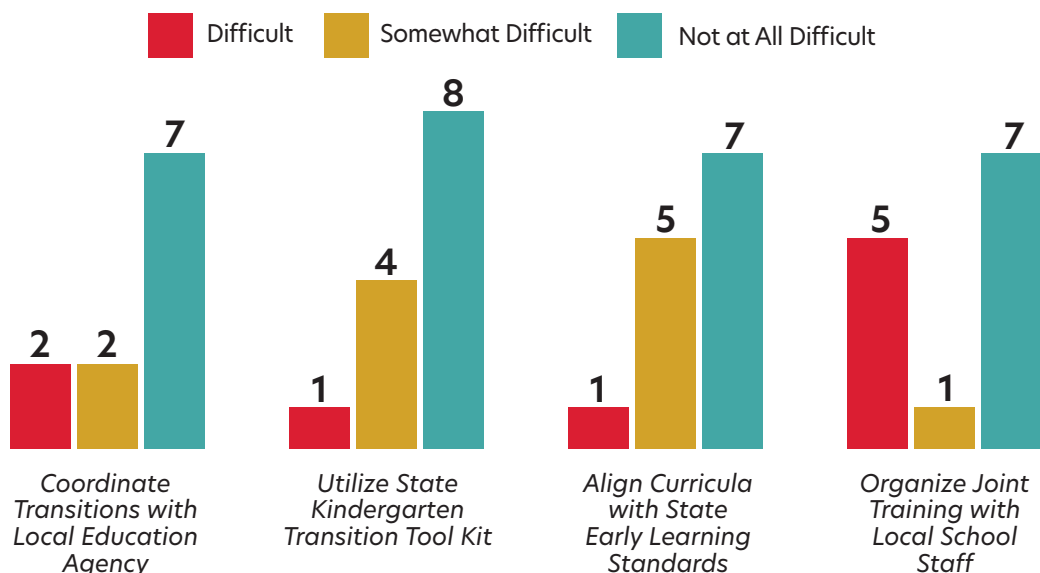
Lack of early childhood mental health providers

School Systems

Identified Opportunities

Head Start Responses to Questions

About Kindergarten Transitions and Alignment



- **Communication** - There is a desire for increased and more consistent communication, including regular meetings, check-ins and updates between agencies and Head Start programs. Specific suggestions include quarterly meetings, annual check-ins, monthly meetings between certain agencies and participation in existing meetings, such as preschool roundtables.
- **Referral Process** - Streamlining and improving the referral process, both within and outside of Head Start programs, is necessary. This includes a more seamless process, clearer contact points, follow-through on discussions and support for families during the application and waiting list process.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships** - More opportunities for collaboration and partnership building are desired, such as research partnerships, joint training opportunities and opportunities for professionals to meet and build relationships. Specific suggestions include virtual meetings, working with other preschool educators and meeting with early intervention providers.
- **Resources and Information Sharing** - Sharing resources and information, such as materials sent statewide, databases of Head Start agencies and teachers and information about tobacco cessation resources, would be helpful. One suggestion is to utilize or integrate with existing systems for sharing records, such as vaccine records.
- **Training and Presentations** - Providing training and presentations to other agency staff about Head Start would improve understanding and referral practices.