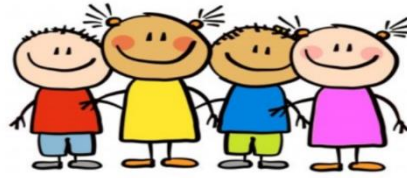




HEAD START

Ascension Parish



Community Assessment 2022



**ASCENSION PARISH HEAD START
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

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ASCENSION PARISH HEAD START COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

PURPOSE

Head Start regulations require that programs must conduct a complete and thorough community wide strategic planning and community assessment at least once every five years. A complete Community Assessment has been conducted for Ascension Parish Head Start which describes community strengths, needs, and resources. The purpose of this Community Assessment is *“to design a Head Start program that meets community needs, and builds on strengths and resources,”* as outlined in 45CFR Part 1302.11 of the current Head Start Program Performance Standards. These standards go on to state: *“The community assessment must use data that describes community strengths, needs, and resources.”*

PROCESS

Community Assessment data was gathered from community partners including health and social service providers, public schools, childcare providers, local and state government agencies, and the U. S. Census Bureau. The data in the Community Assessment is compiled as applicable from those named in the Data Sources section at the end of the assessment, along with current Head Start program data gathered by Ascension Parish Head Start.

UTILIZATION OF DATA

Community Assessment data will be used to:

- Help determine the philosophy of Ascension Parish Head Start for serving Head Start children and families.
- Evaluate services provided and to determine how services can be improved.
- Determine the type of services that are most needed in the communities served and which services can be provided by available community partners and those that may need to be directly provided by Head Start resources.
- Determine recruitment areas that will most effectively and efficiently serve the families having the greatest need for services with the limited resources available.
- Determine program options that will be implemented to best meet identified needs.
- Determine the appropriate locations of centers in which to provide Head Start services.
- Plan for expansion of services in areas identified as having greater needs.
- Reallocate resources where services are duplicated or no longer needed.
- Identify and better collaborate with community partners.
- Set recruitment and selection criteria that define the types of children and families who will be given priority for the limited enrollment opportunities.
- Develop a Strategic Plan which will outline short term program goals and long-range objectives for the Head Start program in Ascension Parish.

HEAD START SERVICE AREA DEFINED

The service area for provision of Head Start services to children ages three to compulsory school age includes the entirety of Ascension Parish. This is the exact geographic area currently served by Ascension Parish School Board which functions as the grantee for the Head Start program serving eligible children and families living within the parish. The Head Start service area has been approved in the grant application process by the Region VI Head Start Office.

OVERVIEW OF ASCENSION PARISH, LOUISIANA

Ascension Parish is located in south Louisiana, approximately 25 minutes outside of Baton Rouge and 45 minutes from New Orleans. The parish seat of government is Donaldsonville, and the parish was formed in 1807. Early European settlers of the area that became Ascension Parish were of French and Spanish ancestry, and they settled among the Native Houma Indians who lived in the area prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The parish is divided by the Mississippi River with 20% of its land area located on the west bank of the river and 80% located on the east bank of the Mississippi.

Major industries in Ascension Parish are related to production of chemical products with numerous companies located along the river in what is referred to as the “chemical corridor”.

The parish also has a large farming industry. In 2018, the USDA determined that the value of agriculture and natural resources for Ascension Parish topped 51 million dollars. The parish has a diverse agriculture related base which includes production of sugarcane, soybeans, livestock, and nursery crops, with sugarcane being the most valuable commodity.

Historic plantations are open to the public located along the historic “River Road” which follows the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to New Orleans. This makes the tourism industry another significant part of the economy for Ascension Parish. Tourists come from all over the world to visit these beautifully restored homes and to see rooms filled with period antiques and Louisiana artwork. The bed and breakfast industry “allows tourists to enjoy lush acres of gardens, ponds and majestic live oaks, often relaxing with a refreshing mint julep, enjoying the breeze off the Mississippi River”, stated by Ascension Parish Tourism Commission.

DEMOGRAPHIC MAKE-UP OF ASCENSION PARISH

Population Data for the Parish, Cities, Towns, and Unincorporated Areas of Ascension Parish Reported in the U.S. Census Bureau American Community 2018 Survey:

	Total Population 2010 Census	Total Population 2018 Estimate	# Persons Living Below Poverty	% Total Population Below Poverty	Total Children Below Age 5	# Children < 5 Below Poverty
U. S. Census-Population						
ASCENSION PARISH TOTALS	107,891	124,672	13,673	10.8%	7,066	1,105
Donaldsonville	7,436	8,090	3,175	39.2%	514	362
Gonzales	9,781	10,677	1,826	17.6%	466	126
Sorrento	1,357	1,809	187	10.3%	112	3
Lemannville	1,409	1,078	169	33.7%	102	49
Prairieville	26,132	31,721	2,270	7.2%	2,409	288
All Other Unincorporated Areas	61,776	71,297	6,046	8.2%	3,463	277

Estimated Number of Eligible Children

The 2018 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey estimated 1,105 children under the age of 5 living below poverty in Ascension Parish. Statistical extrapolation from the survey would indicate that there are approximately 552 children ages 3 or 4 living in the parish who would be eligible for Head Start based on economic circumstances alone. In a February 2020 Multiple Statistics by School System Report for the Louisiana Department of Education, the Ascension Parish School Board reported 56.81% of its student enrollment as “Economically Disadvantaged” as defined by State Department of Education guidelines.

Geographic Location of Eligible Children and Families

As indicated in the population data above, there are children below poverty living throughout the parish. Ascension Parish Head Start has placed its Head Start classrooms on both sides of the Mississippi River to serve the most eligible children possible based on the resources available.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

The racial and ethnic composition of persons living in Ascension Parish from the U. S. Census Bureau American Community Survey of population estimates for 2018 are as follows:

Race	Total Number	% of Population
White	88,992	71.38%
Black/African American	27,087	21.73%
American Indian	386	0.31%
Asian	1,875	1.50%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	176	0.14%
Some Other Race	2,862	2.30%
Two or More Races	3,294	2.64%

The 2018 U. S. Census data estimated that 7,160 persons or 5.7% of the total population living in Ascension Parish were of Hispanic or Latino origin. The Louisiana Department of Education statistics by school district reported on February 1, 2020 that Ascension Parish schools had 2,294 Hispanic students enrolled in the school district. The Ascension Parish Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) for 2019 indicated 27 children enrolled having Hispanic or Latino origin.

Primary Languages Spoken by Families

According to the 2018 U. S. Census American Community Survey, 94.3% of the population over age five living in Ascension Parish spoke English only in the home, 4.0% spoke Spanish, 0.8% spoke an Asian language, and 0.9% spoke another Indo-European language in the home, believed to be “Cajun French”. The current enrollment for Ascension Parish Head Start indicates a total of 27 children enrolled are of Hispanic or Latino origin, and 23 of those children came from homes where the primary language spoken was Spanish. All other Head Start children were from families who spoke English in the home.

Children Experiencing Homelessness

In the May 2019 report to the Louisiana Department of Education, the Ascension Parish School Board reported a total of 689 homeless students enrolled in all of Ascension Parish schools who had been

determined to be homeless by McKinney-Vento Act qualifications. The Ascension Parish Head Start program is currently serving 2 homeless children. In the Board and Policy Council approved Ascension Parish Head Start selection criteria, children identified as homeless receive additional points to assure they rise to the top of the prioritized waiting list for selection and enrollment.

Children in Foster Care

The Louisiana Department of Child and Family Services indicated there are currently 189 children in foster care in Ascension Parish. The Annie E Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center reported 40 children in Foster Kinship Care in the parish. A Kinship Care subsidy provides cash assistance to relatives who are caring for a related child in their home. The Ascension Parish Head Start program currently has one foster child enrolled. The approved selection criteria for the Head Start program assigns additional points to children in foster care to assure their enrollment.

Children with Disabilities by Type and Services

The Ascension Parish School Board currently has 2,340 enrolled children with identified disabilities. These children are receiving special services in Pre-K through 12th grades. Of that reported number, 13 are enrolled in the Head Start program. The Ascension Head Start program reported in the 2020 PIR that a total of 20 children were enrolled in Head Start with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) indicating they had been identified with one or more disabilities. All of these were determined eligible to receive special education and related services. The following chart shows the total numbers of children reported with disabilities by type and services received.

Type of Disability	Identified with IEP's	Receiving Services
Speech or Language Impairments	12	12
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	1
Non-Categorical Developmental Delays	12	12
TOTAL	25	25

EDUCATION, HEALTH, NUTRITION, AND SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS OF HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Education Needs of Head Start Children and Families

The most prevalent education need for Head Start children is for them to be ready to learn at their next education level when they enter kindergarten. A quality preschool education is necessary to assist children to overcome setbacks or obstacles caused by poverty. Academic researchers have always understood the achievement gap in which middle- and upper-class students have started school well ahead of their less affluent peers (Kagan, 2002). The Head Start program works to eliminate that achievement gap and allow poor children to begin kindergarten on a more equal footing with those who have had additional opportunities based on economic circumstances alone.

A need for Head Start families is that they also advance their own learning interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting skills, careers, and life goals. The Head Start

program supports this by implementing strategies to support “Families as Learners” which is one of the family engagement outcomes stressed in the program. There is a need for more adult education in Ascension Parish. According to the U. S. Census American Community Survey for 2019, Ascension Parish had a total of 82,678 residents who were 25 years of age and older, and of those, the following educational attainment was reported:

	Number of Students	Percentage
Less than 9th Grade	1,244	1.5%
Between 9th and 12th Grade with No Diploma	5,189	6.3%
High School or Equivalent Degree	28,291	34.2%
Some College but No Degree	18,396	22.3%
Associate Degree	8,351	10.1%
Bachelor’s Degree	14,105	17.1%
Graduate of Professional Degree	7,102	8.6%

The 2020 PIR reported for Ascension Parish Head Start indicated the following levels of education for parents of enrolled Head Start children:

	Enrolled	Percentage
Less than High School Graduate	30	13%
High School Graduate or GED	113	49%
High School or Equivalent Degree	77	34%
Associate Degree or Some College	10	4%

Health Needs and Challenges for Children and Families

The health needs and challenges for children and families in Ascension Parish mirror those of the rest of the state of Louisiana. Health concerns in both the state and parish are the numbers of children and families without access to affordable, accessible health care based on lack of health insurance, increase in rates of cancer, increase in rates of heart attacks, increase in rates of diabetes, and the ever-growing problem of obesity based on eating habits and lifestyles. According to a 2018 report from TownCharts.com, 7.5% of the total population in Ascension Parish had no health insurance. The report indicated that 15.4% of persons earning under \$25,000 a year had no health insurance. The same report also indicated that 2% of children living in the parish had no health insurance.

A 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment report facilitated by St. Elizabeth Hospital compares healthy lifestyle indicators in Ascension Parish to those of the entire country. The report states, *“Health is influenced by both individual health behavior and the systems which produce the environments and choices available to us. This is especially true for young children. Overall population health may be indicative of the ability of children to live healthy lifestyles, while socioeconomic factors determine the resources available for health.”* This 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment report indicated the following excerpted data findings for Ascension Parish.

- Weight Management – With nearly 31% of adults classified as obese, Ascension Parish has more obese adults than the national average according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings. Also, higher than the national average, 10.9% of adults have a diabetes

diagnosis, and nearly 30% of individuals on Medicare have diabetes. Obesity, and comorbidities like hypertension and diabetes, are prevalent in the community and the community survey identified a great demand for wellbeing and educational services related to weight management (access to healthy food and safe places to walk and play).

- Community Assets - Ascension Parish has great strengths and successful programs addressing many of the significant health needs in the parish. There have been some efforts by public agencies to compile a resource directory, but it is challenging to keep the information current.
- Behavioral Health - Ascension Parish has a lower rate of behavioral health providers than the national average and community members identified existing outpatient behavioral health services as insufficient for the need. Law enforcement indicated that they are experiencing a greater volume of calls for behavioral health issues and had few options to resolve these calls.

The parish also has a tax millage that funds a counseling center which operates on a sliding fee scale, making behavioral health services accessible for those with transportation to the center. The center also works with law enforcement and clinical providers on programs to divert individuals from the criminal justice system. Our Lady of the Lake of Ascension refers individuals to the Ascension Counseling Center and the Gonzales Mental Health Unit and provides staff time to conduct programs on behavioral health and substance abuse.

- Health Education and Prevention - Ascension Parish trends negatively against the national average in both adults who have no regular physical activity and adults who do not get the recommended daily allowance of fruits and vegetables. The parish also has above average indications in several cancer types, including prostate and lung. The parish ranks higher than the national average for individuals who report not seeing a doctor due to cost. According to the Health survey, there is a need for creating a health education and prevention priority which would allow implementation of a strategy to address concerns across a broader spectrum of identified needs, including cancer and other preventative screenings.

According to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHHS), Louisiana leads the nation in avoidable hospital stays and costs. Many of these hospital admissions and costs can be directly correlated to obesity and its associated complications. According to DHHS reporting, Louisiana obesity rates have skyrocketed 150% since 1990, and Louisiana now ranks second nationally among the most obese states with 33.4% of residents deemed obese by medical professionals, who repeatedly warn that obesity is the major contributing factor to the high incidences of diabetes and heart attacks in the state.

Nutrition Issues for Children and Families in Ascension Parish

The Louisiana Department of Child and Family Services reported in September 2020 that 6,519 families were receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, previously known as Food Stamps) in Ascension Parish. This was reported as an increase of 5.18% over the same period in 2019. The increase was thought to be attributed to the effects of COVID-19 on the general economy.

Childhood obesity is a health issue related to nutrition. The 2019 Program Information Report (PIR) issued by the Ascension Head Start program indicated that 27 of the enrolled Head Start children were obese based on BMI scores greater than the 95th percentile and 22 children were reported as overweight based on BMI scores between the 85th and 95th percentile. The number of children either overweight or obese based on BMI scores made up 18% of the total enrolled Head Start children for the year. BMI

percentiles are determined by the American Academy of Pediatrics which provides warnings to parents that children with high BMI percentiles are at risk for diabetes and heart disease as adults.

The Annie E Casey Foundation reported the following numbers of women and children receiving nutrition education and dietary supplements through the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program in Ascension Parish in 2019: 1,175 mothers, 619 infants, and 1,778 children ages 1-5, for a total of 3,572. The 2019 PIR reported 72 mothers of enrolled Head Start children receiving WIC nutrition benefits.

Social Services Concerns for Children and Families

According to the U. S. Census American Community Survey for 2019 in selected Economic Characteristics for Ascension Parish, 4,099 homes with children were headed by a female only, and 1,836 were single parent homes headed by a male. A total of 631 grandparents were reportedly raising their grandchildren in the parish. The 2019 Community Survey reported a total of 44,267 households in the parish with annual incomes indicated in the following chart for households.

Family Incomes	# of Households	% of Households
Less than \$10,000 a year	1,691	3.80%
\$10,000 - \$14,999 a year	1,381	3.10%
\$15,000 - \$24,999 a year	2,652	5.90%
\$25,000 - \$34,999 a year	3,343	7.60%
\$35,000 - \$49,999 a year	4,243	9.60%
\$50,000 - \$74,999 a year	5,825	13.20%
\$75,000 - \$99,999 a year	6,494	14.70%
\$100,000 - \$149,999 a year	8,757	19.80%
\$150,000 or more a year	9,881	22.30%

The census data indicated that 9,067 families or 20.4% of all families living in the parish earned less than \$35,000 per year.

According to the Louisiana Workforce Commission report for September 2020, there were 3,970 unemployed adults in the labor force in Ascension Parish for an unemployment rate of 6.2%. The unemployment rate for the year prior in April 2019 was 4.3%. The increase in unemployment in the parish is reflective of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting effect on employment in 2020.

In September 2020, the Louisiana Department of Child and Family Services reported 25 families in Ascension Parish receiving benefit payments from the Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) for public assistance. The combined total of the monthly state-paid stipends to all of these 25 families was \$5,188, covering 54 children and 15 adults.

Typical Work, School, Training Schedules of Parents with Eligible Head Start Children

The Ascension Parish PIR Report for 2020 indicated the following family data as related to those parents working full or part time and in school or job training programs which would indicate their need for full day services.

Families	Head Start
Two Parent Families	40
Single Parent Families	190
Total Families Served	230
Parents Employed Either Full or Part-Time	152
Parents in School or Job Training Program	4
Neither Parent is Employed or in School	77

The work and school schedules of parents would typically be during the time that their children are in school. However, shift workers are not uncommon, particularly in hospital, retail, food service, or plant work situations. Before and after school care is often a problem for single parents who do not have caregivers to care for their children during those hours.

Other Child Development Programs Serving Head Start Eligible Children

Ascension Parish School Board serves as the lead agency for the Ascension Parish Early Childhood Community Network whose stated goal by the Louisiana Department of Education is *“to provide all children, ages birth to four, with a high quality and easily accessible early childhood education in order to ensure kindergarten readiness and future success in school and beyond”*. Access and referral information is available on the school district website including names, addresses, and contact information for all participating child-care centers and preschool programs in the parish. There are 19 licensed child-care centers on the school district website serving children from birth to five years. These early childhood programs are accessible to parents as part of the Community Network in the geographic area to be served by the Head Start program. All programs have committed to the stated goal of providing quality care and learning experiences to children. State Child Care Assistance Payments (CCAP) are available for eligible parents utilizing the following programs.

Name of Program	Location	Capacity	Age Range
Genesis Learning Center	Gonzales	135	6 weeks to 13 years
Grace Learning Center	Gonzales	70	6 weeks to 12 years
Kids Are People Too Child Care	Prairieville	109	6 weeks to 12 years
Kids Kave Child Care Center	Gonzales	69	6 weeks to 15 years
Kidz Corner Daycare and Learning	St. Amant	81	6 weeks to 12 years
Kidz Karousel Academy	Prairieville	142	6 weeks to 12 years
Le Chateau Des Jeunes	Gonzales	82	6 weeks to 12 years
Learn and Play Preschool	Prairieville	64	6 weeks to 12 years
Little Doves Daycare	Gonzales	65	6 weeks to 16 years
Little Lads and Lassies Child Care Center	Gonzales	75	6 weeks to 16 years
Little Learner’s Prep Academy	Gonzales	63	6 weeks to 15 years
Safe Harbor Learning Center	St. Amant	90	6 weeks to 16 years
Stepping Stones Early Learning	Gonzales	55	6 weeks to 12 years
Tonya’s Kids and Company Daycare	Gonzales	120	6 weeks to 16 years
Totally Kidz Daycare	Gonzales	47	6 weeks to 12 years
Tree Top Child Care	Gonzales	41	6 weeks to 12 years
Wonder Kids Academy	Prairieville	134	6 weeks to 12 years

Ascension Parish School Board offers Pre-K enrollment opportunities to eligible three-year-old children in 6 of its primary schools and four-year-old children in 17 of its primary schools. An assessment of the

pre-kindergarten programs available in Ascension Parish shows that additional resources are needed to meet the needs of all the parents of children from birth to five years of age. Though the Head Start program offered by Ascension Parish provides high quality and free services to as many eligible children and families as resources allow, other childcare programs charge fees or tuition to families who do not qualify economically. Many childcare programs do not serve children with disabilities. Ascension Parish Head Start is committed to serving economically disadvantaged and special needs children from three to five who do not have access to other early childhood education programs as a result of economic circumstances, special needs, or having to pay fees or tuition.

Consideration for Inclusion of Children from Diverse Economic Backgrounds

Consideration has been given to the characteristics of the community which may allow the Ascension Parish Head Start program to include children from diverse economic backgrounds in the program. As reported in the 2020 PIR, the program enrolled only three children whose family incomes exceeded the OMB Poverty Line. These children were enrolled based on a point system approved in the selection criteria and may include children above income with disabilities. The program ensures that all income eligible children are enrolled first, before serving this population. Due to a lack of space and financial resources, Ascension Parish must utilize its Head Start funded enrollment opportunities to serve the children most in need.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS NEEDS OF HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Ascension Parish Head Start is committed to involving the community in meeting its stated goals for children and families served by the Head Start program. Community service providers are involved at all levels of the program. Both state and local community groups assist in the Head Start effort in a variety of ways. Available resources include the following:

American Red Cross - Assists military service persons or families of service persons with illness or death; provides emergency response services in case of disaster, such as fire, flood, hurricane, etc.; provides classes in CPR, First Aid, Water Safety, Health and Safety, Lifeguard, and swimming classes.

Ascension Parish Council on Aging - This agency provides the following:

1. Assessment Screening - Provides regular monthly health screenings including taking of vitals such as blood pressure, vision, and glucose testing for the elderly.
2. Emergency Telephone Response Systems- Provides a referral to a company and assistance in using a companion box that will dial for assistance in case of an emergency.
3. Utility Assistance - provides an energy program for people on low or fixed incomes with energy expenses.
4. Information and Assistance - Provides answers to questions or connections with appropriate agencies to meet individual needs, including available caregivers.
5. Transportation - Offers daily transportation to physicians, hospitals, meals, food stamps, shopping, and banking for individuals of any age.
6. Advocates for the Elderly
7. Aides-Home Visitation Program
8. Meals on Wheels Program

9. Medic-Alert with Acadian Ambulance
10. Meals on Site Program - providing lunches for the elderly
11. Recreation Program for the elderly
12. SHIP - Senior Health Insurance Information Program
13. Material Aids (lends walkers, wheelchairs, fans, blankets, etc. to the elderly)

Ascension Parish Library The four public libraries located throughout the parish provide assistance to children and families in promoting family literacy through summer reading clubs for children and families, field trips to the library, computer labs with internet services, and opportunities for families to obtain library cards. Such experiences allow families to gain the experience of borrowing books for those without the economic capacity of owning books.

Ascension Parish Office of Children and Family Support provides the following services:

1. Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) - Provides assistance to parents to help pay for the childcare parents need to work or attend school or training.
2. Child Support/SES - Places primary responsibility for support of children on their non-custodial parent to reduce the children's dependence on public assistance.
3. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance for Needy Families – (SNAP) provides monthly resources for families to purchase food needed for good health.
4. Louisiana Temporary Assistance for Needy Families - (TANF) sets forth the criteria for operation for the Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program.
5. Strategies to Empower People Program (STEP) - provides public assistance recipients with educational, training, and work-related activities designed to lead to employment and self-sufficiency.
6. Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP) - Provides temporary cash assistance to families in need.
7. Kinship Care Subsidy Program (KCSP) - Provides cash assistance for eligible children who reside with qualified relatives other than parents.
8. Individual Development Account Program (IDA) - Matches savings accounts for low-income families seeking to purchase their own home.
9. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) - The nation's largest tax credit for low- to moderate-income workers. Free income tax assistance services are available throughout Louisiana.
10. Disability Determinations Services Program (DDS) - Provides benefits to disabled individuals.

Ascension Parish School Board - The public school district serves as the Local Education Authority (LEA) for the parish, and as such, it provides early childhood education and support services that include evaluation of referred children and disability support services for children with identified disabilities, including an audiologist to screen for hearing loss. Ascension Parish Head Start has an interagency agreement with the school district which allows services for children with identified disabilities to be provided by the Ascension Parish Pupil Appraisal Team. The school district nutrition department addresses nutrition needs of Head Start children by providing a healthy breakfast, lunch, and afternoon supplement to all enrolled children, meeting at least 2/3 of their daily nutritional requirements. School district provided nurses assistance in meeting the health needs of enrolled children. In addition, the school district staff members assist in transition activities and support for children and families moving from Head Start to its Pre-K and Kindergarten programs, and any other educational support services deemed appropriate in order to collaborate effectively in the school

readiness of young children. The Ascension Parish School Board serves as the lead agency for the Ascension Parish Early Childhood Community Network. Access and referral information is available on the school district website including names, addresses, and contact information for all participating childcare centers and preschool programs in the parish, including Head Start.

CareSouth Health Center of Donaldsonville – CareSouth is a private non-profit federally qualified health center that provides a comprehensive range of community-based medical, dental, and behavioral health services. Their stated mission is “to provide comprehensive, affordable, high quality health care with compassion and respect for all”. This resource provides a broad range of medical, dental, and behavioral health services to children and families in Ascension Parish at its clinic located in Donaldsonville.

Donaldsonville Rotary Club – The stated mission and vision of the Rotary Club is “to provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through our fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders. Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change — across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.” The Rotary Club serves as a much-needed community resource as the members work in the community to promote peace, fight disease, provide clean water, sanitation and hygiene, save mothers and children, support education, and grow local economies.

Donaldsonville Housing Authority - Provides housing for low-moderate income families.

EarlySteps - EarlySteps is a key collaborative partner to the Ascension Parish School System as related to serving children with identified disabilities. It is the state designated Part C provider which provides services to families with infants and toddlers aged birth to 36 months who have a medical condition likely to result in a developmental delay, or who already have diagnosed developmental delays. Children with delays in cognition, motor skills, vision, hearing, communication, social-emotional skills, or adaptive development are eligible for services. EarlySteps services are designed to improve the family's capacity to enhance their child's development. These services are provided in the child's natural environment, such as the child's home, childcare, or any other community setting typical for children aged birth to 36 months. EarlySteps refers children who have been identified with disabilities for enrollment in the Head Start program when they age out of EarlySteps at 3 years.

Donaldsonville ELKS Lodge 1153 is committed to helping the community. They offer service to veterans, youth activities, scholarships, education opportunities and more.

Hickley M. Waguespack Center (WAG) provides an outlet for the neighborhood children to play and learn. Also, an opportunity to interact with deputies in a positive way. After School tutoring and story time is offered to all school-aged children. Meals are provided.

Louisiana State Department of Children and Family Services serves as the child protection agency for abused and neglected children and those in foster care in the parish, providing a variety of social services which are available to all Head Start families, including:

1. Adoption Reunion Registry - a registry established by the Department of Social Services to facilitate voluntary contact between adult adoptees, their birth parents and/or siblings.
2. Adopt a Child - More information about taking the first steps toward adoption.

3. Adoption Services - The OCS Adoption Program seeks adoptive home placement of children who are in Department of Social Services custody and are legally free for adoption.
4. Adoption Petitions - Adoption petition services provide for staff to conduct investigations and the Louisiana Adoption Resource Exchange
5. Children waiting for Adoption-There is an adoption provider portal where parents can view children waiting for adoption.
6. Foster Care - A protective service provided to children in the custody of the Department of Social Services. It provides substitute, temporary care (e.g. foster family home, residential care facility, etc.) for a planned period of time when a child must be separated from his own parents or relatives because of abuse and/or neglect
7. Foster Parent Opportunities - Foster parents are recruited to help children by providing a home that provides them with stability, supervision, consistency, and affection. Foster and adoptive parents provide temporary and permanent placements for children who cannot remain in their own homes.
8. Child Protection Investigation - Investigation of child abuse and neglect and provision of short-term concrete services to children and families.
9. Continuous Quality Improvement - sometimes referred to as Performance and Quality Improvement, is a process of creating an environment in which management and, workers strive to create constantly improving quality.
10. Family Services - Family Services are social services, which are provided to families and children in their own homes to address problems of abuse/neglect and promote the safety of the children within the family unit.

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Center for Community and Preventive Health, known as the “Ascension Parish Health Unit” assists in providing the following:

1. WIC services (Women, Infants and Children program) - Good nutrition for infants and children up to 5 years of age, pregnant women, post-partial women, breastfeeding mothers.
2. Immunizations – Services include immunizations for children and adults.
3. Family planning services - Provide yearly exams by appointment for birth control which includes pap smears, breast exams, STD testing, and depo shots.
4. Sexually transmitted disease (STD) - Diagnosis and treatment services
5. Pregnancy Tests
6. Commodities - Take applications to supply groceries provided by Louisiana Food Bank to low-income families on a quarterly basis.
7. Social Services – Provide referrals for Food Stamps and Medicaid

Louisiana Department of Education

The Louisiana Department of Education is a key partner with the Head Start program as it houses the state childcare licensing and childcare rating systems. It offers early childhood training for all Head Start and Pre-K Teachers as well as child day care center staff. The State Act 3 passed in 2012 called for the establishment of the Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Network to unify the state’s early childhood education programs. This statewide network is comprised of 65 local early childhood community networks that include every publicly funded Pre-K, childcare, and Head Start program within the state. Every Early Childhood Community Network has a lead agency that facilitates the coordinated leadership functions for the community. Lead Agencies have the following responsibilities:

- Coordinate local CLASS™ observations for publicly funded sites,

- Facilitate the coordinated enrollment process for all pre-k children,
- Conduct community meetings, and
- Distribute communication from the Department of Education.

The State Department of Education has developed the Louisiana Continuum of Early Learning Standards which are standards of early learning and development designed to establish what children are learning and should be doing across the early childhood years. The continuum uses terms appropriate to the different stages of development and is aligned with the essential domains of school readiness - social/emotional development, language development, cognitive development, and physical development. Each part of the continuum lays a foundation for the next step with the whole continuum depicting information about children from birth to age five.

Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, also known as LSUAg provides:

- 1) Nutrition education programs for children.
- 2) Nutrition education for staff and families of enrolled children, promoting good nutrition and the wellness of children.
- 3) Education on financial planning.
- 4) Education on house furnishings.
- 5) Health and safety training.
- 6) Any other educational support services deemed necessary.

These services are provided to support the Head Start objective of promoting the wellness of children by providing nutrition services that supplement and complement those of the home and community. The LSUAg Center's mission is to provide the people of Louisiana with research-based educational information that improves their lives and economic well-being. The center is attacking the societal problem of obesity by directing its educational programs toward children. Research indicates the comprehensive LSUAg Center program is making a difference and that children are learning to change to a healthier lifestyle and are passing the information on to their parents. This program is extended and readily available to the children and families enrolled in Head Start.

Manantial de Vida, Church of God Food Bank – Located in Prairieville, the church acts as a referral source for Head Start families in need of food. The church operates a food bank which offers assistance to eligible needy families who may not have enough SNAP benefits to make it through the month.

New Song Methodist Church – The mission of the church is to respond to community needs and provide resources to those families in Ascension Parish and surrounding communities who have been affected by tragedies including hurricanes, floods, fires, etc. This includes providing ready to eat meals, tarps for damaged roofs, hygiene products, infant supplies including diapers and baby wipes.

Pat's Coats for Kids - This program initiated by a local television station provides coats in the winter months for children whose families do not have the resources to buy warm clothing. Head Start families are referred to this resource for children who start their day at a bus stop shivering, and kids who enter a school needing time to "warm up" to start their classes.

Prevost Memorial Hospital – This local community hospital serves as a resource for Head Start children and families by providing the following services: emergency department services 24 hours a day,

inpatient and outpatient hospital services, pathology–laboratory services, radiology services, respiratory treatment, and additional outpatient medical services as needed.

River Parish Community College – This local community college serves as a resource for Head Start family members who wish to continue their education. Programs and certifications available include: air conditioning and commercial refrigeration, business office administration, drafting and design technology, electric helper, industrial instrumentation technology, industrial maintenance technology, medical assistant, patient care technician, practical nursing, process technology. and welding

St. Francis of Assisi Church – This local church has numerous ministries which can benefit Head Start children and families including their Daughters of Charity Thrift Store, emergency utility assistance, Christmas Giving Tree providing Christmas gifts to needy children, Thanksgiving baskets for families, and a summer camp for the underprivileged.

STRENGTHS OF THE COMMUNITY

Despite some of the needs and challenges identified in this Community Assessment, the strengths of the Ascension Parish community lie in the willingness of its public, private, state, and local agencies and their combined resources to work together for the benefit of all of the children and families. Federal Head Start resources are maximized to provide high quality education services to as many children as possible, prioritizing the services to those most in need based on economic, health, and societal circumstances. A state funded parish health department in collaboration with local community health providers work hard to meet the health needs of children and families. Ascension Parish Head Start staff and school district special education staff work together to meet the disability needs of children and families in the parish. Nutritional needs are met through the school district school food service program and a relationship with the Louisiana State Agricultural Center to provide nutritional information to families and staff. Social service needs are met through a variety of public and private agencies, as outlined in the section on resources.

The Ascension Parish School Board and Head Start Policy Council are collaborative partners in their efforts to recognize the importance of preschool education and the need for quality programming for education of their youngest citizens.

Ascension Parish Head Start staff work together in collaboration with available resources in the state and community to assure that all enrolled Head Start children gain the awareness, school readiness skills, and confidence to succeed in their present environment and in later school experiences and in life.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

The recruitment area selected for the Head Start program, based on this Community Assessment data, includes the entirety of Ascension Parish. By establishing Head Start classrooms throughout Ascension Parish, the program has assured that eligible children will be served in the targeted recruitment area.

The center-based program option and hours of operation were selected for the Head Start program based on input from parents who preferred the program option and time schedule with the child's day extended by transportation services provided.

This Community Assessment data will be analyzed and updated annually in order to make appropriate program changes and to maximize the ability of Ascension Parish Head Start to meet community needs and understand community strengths.

DATA SOURCES

- Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data
- Ascension Parish Head Start 2020 Program Information Report (PIR)
- Ascension Parish School Board
- Ascension Parish Government Website
- Ascension Parish Tourism Commission
- Community Health Needs Assessment for Ascension Parish
- Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services
- Louisiana Department of Education
- Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals
- Louisiana State University Agricultural Center
- Louisiana Workforce Commission
- TownCharts.com
- U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey