

## Cass County Head Start Community Assessment Fiscal Year 2022 Update

Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR Chapter XIII) provides guidance for programs to follow when implementing the Head Start Act (P.L. 110-134). According to §1302.11(b)(2), a program must annually review and update the community assessment to reflect any significant changes including increased availability of publicly-funded pre-kindergarten (including an assessment of how the pre-kindergarten available in the community meets the needs of the parents and children served by the program, and whether it is offered for a full school day), rates of family and child homelessness, and significant shifts in community demographics and resources.

### Cass County Child Care/Pre-Kindergarten

#### **Child Care**

As of August 20, 2021, there were several licensed child development and care programs serving Head Start and Early Head Start age eligible children in Cass County based on information from Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services:

	Number of Centers	Capacity
<b>Family Child Care Home I</b>	11	110
<b>Family Child Care Home II</b>	4	48
<b>Child Care Center</b>	6	358
<b>Provisional Child Care Center</b>	1	75
<b>Provisional Family Child Care Home I</b>	2	20
<b>TOTALS</b>	24	611

There are preschools in the area operated by public schools and the number of children served during the 2020-2021 school year: Weeping Water Public Schools Preschool (21), Conestoga Public Schools Preschool in Murray (50), Louisville Public Schools Preschool (53), and Elmwood-Murdock Public Schools Preschool (53). St. John the Baptist also operates a preschool in Plattsmouth and served 29 preschoolers in 2020-2021. Plattsmouth Community Schools currently operates a Sixpence home visitation program for children ages birth to three and their families. The Sixpence Early Learning Fund is Nebraska's signature effort to put our state's youngest and most vulnerable children on the path to success in school and life. Sixpence promotes high-quality early care and learning opportunities that help parents guide the healthy development of their infants and toddlers. As public-private collaboration at the state and local levels, Sixpence delivers efficiency, fiscal responsibility and measurable results for our investment in the next generation of Nebraska's citizens. The program in Plattsmouth has capacity for up to 15 children and their families.

#### **Comprehensive Child Care Program**

County statistics on children show the significant need for a program that provides preschool services to high-needs families with children ages three to four as well as a program that serves children ages birth-to-three. Data consistently shows that CC's high-needs children are well below **school readiness** benchmark levels when first attending Head Start classes.

Below is Teaching Strategies GOLD® (TSG) data for the beginning of the 2020-2021 program year.

<b>Readiness Indicator</b>	<b>% 3 year olds below</b>	<b>% 4 year olds below</b>
Social/Emotional	27%	29%
Gross; Fine	5%	20%
Language; Literacy	31%	22%
Cognitive	27%	26%
Math	36%	57%

These low readiness scores, highlight the necessity for PCSD to continue to use a comprehensive preschool framework and the research-base curriculum that has provided CCHS educators with the instructional guidance and support required for highly individualized teaching and the ongoing assessment that ensures high-caliber classroom instruction leading to children who are cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally prepared.

### **Head Start and Early Head Start Enrolled Children and Families**

The chart below outlines the program options/hours of operation for Cass County Head Start for the 2021-2022 school year.

<i>HS Program Option</i>	<i># of Children</i>	<i>Hours in Session</i>	<i>Hours a Day</i>	<i>Days a Week</i>	<i>Hours a Week</i>	<i>Days of Operation</i>	<i>Total Hours Per Year</i>	<i>Number of Teachers</i>	<i>Number of Teacher Associates</i>	<i>Are Tuition Children Served in Classroom?</i>
<b>Plattsmouth</b>										
Part year - Full day	82	8:00 AM to 2:30 PM M-F	6.5	5	32.5	163	1,060	5	13	Yes
<b>Conestoga (Murray, NE)</b>										
Part year - Full day	18	8:15 AM to 3:30 PM T-F	7.25	4	27	146	1,059	1	2	No – Head Start Only
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100 Head Start slots</b>							<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	

### **Characteristics of Children**

According to the 2020-2021 Program Information Report (PIR), the Head Start program had a cumulative enrollment of 65 students. There were 21 three year-olds and 44 four year-olds. There were 57 white, 1 Black or African American, 2 Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 5 bi-/multi-racial children. Of these children, 3 listed Spanish as the primary language of the family at home. In the 2020-2021 program year, there were 15 children with IEPs. Six had an IEP for speech or language impairments, one for autism, one for other health impairment, and seven for other developmental delays.

According to the 2020-2021 Program Information Report (PIR), there was a cumulative enrollment of 11 children in the home-based Early Head Start program. Two children were under the age of one, five were 1 year-old, and four were 2 years-old. There were no pregnant women in the program. Seven of the children were in the second or third year of the program. Ten of the children in the program were white and one was identified as bi-/multi-racial. All of the children in the program had English identified as the primary language of the family at home. There were three children in the Early Head Start program with Individual Family Service plans.

### **Characteristics of Families**

According to the 2020-2021 PIR report, the Head Start program served a total of 63 families, 43 of which were two parent/guardian families. Twenty were reported as single parent/guardian with sixteen being single mother families and four being single father families. Fifty-two families had at least one parent/guardian working, 33 had one parent/guardian working. Four of the families had a parent or guardian on active status in the military.

## **Homelessness**

Homelessness Point-in-Time Counts are unduplicated 1-night estimates of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations. The 1-night counts are conducted by Continuums of Care nationwide and occur during the last week in January of each year. Continuums of Care (CoC) are local planning bodies that are responsible for coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area, or an entire state. A CoC system has the goal of stably housing all persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in appropriate housing. This means identifying all homeless and at risk of homeless populations in communities, understanding their needs, and building a comprehensive and responsive system. In Nebraska there is a Balance of State Continuum of Care which is responsible for recording numbers for all regions in Nebraska (1-5) with the exception of Lincoln and Omaha.

Number of People Known to be Homeless (2020):

Nebraska State	2,404 including:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 143 individuals unsheltered</li><li>• 603 homeless individuals in transitional housing</li><li>• 1,658 homeless individuals in emergency shelters</li><li>• 458 homeless children under 18</li></ul>
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The Nebraska Homeless Assistance Program (NHAP) serves individuals who are homeless or near homeless. Not all people deemed homeless receive services through NHAP. In 2018, the NHAP served:

- 7,139 homeless individuals (down from 7,513 in 2017)
- 1,509 homeless children 18 and under (down from 1,546 in 2017)
- 2,516 homeless families with children (down from 2,710 in 2017)
- 17 unaccompanied homeless children (down from 46 in 2017)

More than 3,700 Nebraska public school students were identified as homeless in the 2017-18 school year (up from more than 3,000 for the 2016-17 school year). In 2018-19, Southeast Nebraska Community Action (SENCA), which serves Cass County, served 69 (down from 94 families in 2017-18) families who were considered homeless or near homeless. Some causes of homelessness in the SENCA area include: domestic violence, substance abuse, insufficient income, and loss of employment, mental health issues, and lack of a support system.

### **Homeless Children**

The number of homeless children enrolled in public school during 2017-2018 in Nebraska was reported as 3,771. These reports came from 61 districts. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of homeless children were “doubled-up”, meaning sharing housing with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. In 2017, the Nebraska Homeless Assistance Program assisted 2,710 homeless families with children. In 2018-2019, SENCA served 69 families who may be considered homeless or near homeless. Another 37 individuals participated in the transitional housing program known as Project First, which provides support for families transitioning out of homelessness. In the 2020-2021 program year, Plattsmouth Community Schools Head Start and Early Head Start program served one child whose family was identified as homeless.

## Cass County Community Characteristics and Demographics

### Characteristics of Cass County Families and Children:

#### **Economic**

Across the county and school districts, there is a significant variance in economic status. According to the “SENCA Partnership 2021 Update to the Community Demographic and Assessment Information” for Cass and other counties, 7.4% of the population in Cass County is in poverty compared with 11.0% of the population in Nebraska. The 2020 Federal Poverty Income Guidelines defines a family of four with an annual income of \$26,200 at 100% of poverty. The median household income (2019) is higher than that of the State of Nebraska (\$61,439), at \$71,846 (up from \$71,139 in 2018). The unemployment rate in Cass County for 2020 was 4.3% (up from 3.3% in 2019). This is slightly higher than that of the State of Nebraska (4.2%) and many families in Cass County struggle with securing jobs that provide a sustainable wage to provide for basic family needs.

#### **Social and Economic Needs**

Families in Cass County have a variety of needs. As reported in the “SENCA Partnership 2021 Update to the Community Demographic and Assessment Information”, town hall meetings were held to obtain feedback regarding community strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Attendees prioritized the following needs: drug/alcohol treatment/rehab, budgeting classes, crime prevention, transitional housing/homeless services, mental health services, and child care.

Work and school schedules vary for parents in Cass County. Most families have one or more parents working, some families have parents in the military and a few families have parents working on their education. The Early Head Start program is home-based and the teacher works around family schedules. Although CCHS families have not expressed concern with schedules, community data is helpful for future planning. When families were questioned in the 2021 Community Assessment Update, 42% of SENCA clients indicated a continued need for 3 to 5 preschool services mirroring the school year.

### **Cass County Selected Statistics Compared with State Averages:**

Selected Statistics	Cass County Percent	State Average
Households with Children Enrolled in SNAP Benefits (2017)	9.0%	15.2%
Children Under 6 in Poverty (2017)	9.6%	18.4%
Children in Low-Income Families (2017)	24.9%	N/A
Births with Inadequate Care (2018)	13.3%	15.0%
Children Without Health Insurance (2018)	4.3%	5.2%
Children Enrolled in Public Health Insurance (2018)	16.5%	28.7%
Child Food Insecurity (2019)	9.5%	17.4%
Rate of Child Welfare System Involvement (2018)	8.5 per 1000	7.1 per 1000
Rate of Children in Out-Of-Home Care (2018)	7.3 per 1000	N/A
Children Enrolled in Free- or Reduced-Price School Meals (2017-2018)	30.9%	44.8%
3 and 4 Year Olds Enrolled in School (2017)	56.2%	N/A
Poverty Ages 0-17 (2018)	9.4%	12.9%

### **County Population (2019 Estimates):**

Age Group	Cass County
0 to 5 Years	1,549
6 to 19 Years	6,325

**Population by Race/Ethnicity in Cass County (2019):**

Hispanic or Latino	White	Black	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	2 or More Races/Other
3.4%	96.5%	.7%	.6%	.6%	1.7%

**Cass County Community Strengths and Needs**

**2021 Town Hall Meeting Results**

In the spring of 2021, Southeast Nebraska Community Action Partnership (SENCA) held town hall meetings in each of its six core counties in order to gather customer, partner, and community member input on community strengths, weaknesses, and needs. The following outlines the top six community strengths and needs identified across the service area.

Community Strengths	Community Weaknesses
Human interaction and taking care of each other	Lack of youth activities
Schools and Head Start	Lack of affordable housing
Churches	Lack of transitional housing
Food Pantries	Lack of drug and alcohol treatment services
Working together during COVID-19	Lack of dental, vision, pharmacy, & baby delivery services
Southeast Community College	Unemployment and lack of job training services

Attendees were asked to prioritize the needs of the community. Across the service area, the number one need identified was housing services. The following depicts the results of the prioritization of eight highest ranked community needs across the service area.

Priority	Community Need
1	Drug/alcohol treatment/rehab
2	Budgeting classes & crime prevention
3	Transitional housing/homeless services
4	Mental health services
5	Child care
6	Housing & youth activities
7	In-town busing for students
8	Education to reduce stigma around low-income

**Information for the community assessment was obtained from a variety of sources including:**

- Southeast Nebraska Community Action Partnership (SENCA): 2021 Update to the 2019 Community Demographic and Assessment Information for the Nebraska Counties of Cass, Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, and Richardson which is available at this link: [https://www.senca.org/images/stories/PDF/2021\\_Community\\_Assessment\\_-\\_Update.pdf](https://www.senca.org/images/stories/PDF/2021_Community_Assessment_-_Update.pdf)
- Voices for Children in Nebraska: 2019 Kids Count in Nebraska Report which is available at this link: <https://kidscountnebraska.com/>
- Nebraska Department of Education: Membership Information by Grade which is available at this link: [https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CountyMembershipByGrade\\_20202021.pdf](https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CountyMembershipByGrade_20202021.pdf)