



**HEAD START**

MSU Extension Head Start-Early Head Start Programs

# ANNUAL REPORT

**SY 2023-2024**



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# HEAD START LOCATIONS

## **MSU-Extension Head Start Administrative Office**

521 34th Street, Gulfport, MS 39507

Phone: 228-241-2181 | Email: [msuheadstart@ext.msstate.edu](mailto:msuheadstart@ext.msstate.edu)

## **East Biloxi Head Start**

590 Division Street, Biloxi, MS 39530

Phone: 228-967-7290

## **Gaston Point Head Start**

1526 Mills Avenue, Gulfport, MS 39501

Phone: 228-731-3746

## **Gilbert Mason Head Start**

4221 Popp's Ferry Road, D'Iberville, MS 39540

Phone: 228-967-7257

## FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



**Jamila Taylor**  
*Executive Director*

Mississippi State University Extension Head Start/Early Head Start's 2023-2024 Annual Report reflects the dedication and hard work of our staff in serving children and families in Harrison County. We deeply appreciate the trust and support of our local community—our partners, Advisory Board, the Policy Council, and especially the parents who entrust us with their most precious assets. Thank you for your continued interest and commitment to our program.

We are passionately committed to providing the highest quality of service to the children and families in Harrison County, striving to set a national standard for excellence in early care and education. A recent visit from the Head Start Bureau recognized our dedication to wellness for both staff and children, encouraging us to share our innovative approaches with Head Start programs nationwide.



**Roslyn Reed**  
*Director*

We are grateful for the ongoing support of our staff, partners, Board, and Policy Council. It is with pride that we deliver exceptional early childhood services, ensuring that we remain the safest and most reliable choice for children and families in our community.

While it's impossible to capture all the achievements of this program year, we hope this glimpse showcases the lasting positive impact we strive to create in our region.

Yours in Service,

*Jamila and Roslyn*

### MISSION:

MSU Extension Head Start strives to promote optimal development of each child and his/her family through positive learning experiences and high-quality service.

## FROM OUR BOARD

As we reflect on another year of service to the Harrison County area, I am honored to continue serving as the Board Chair for MSU Extension Head Start. Over the past year, both the Board and staff have worked diligently to enhance and expand services for children and families, with a strong focus on a holistic approach, encompassing education, family services, health, nutrition, and mental health.

I am deeply grateful for the unwavering commitment of our staff and the generous support of our community and stakeholders. Your contributions have been vital to another successful year, and it is my pleasure to share the results of our collective efforts. This report is just one example of how our program has positively impacted the lives of hundreds of children and families in our community.

We firmly believe that every child, regardless of their circumstances at birth, has the potential to thrive. We are in this together, and it is our privilege to continue bringing high-quality Head Start services to you. As we look ahead to the coming year, we remain steadfast in our mission to provide the best possible foundation for the children and families we serve.

*Anissa Pace*, Board Chair

### Advisory Board:

Anissa Pace, Board Chair

Dr. Ashten Yost, Early Childhood

Taylor Brinkley, Attorney

Josh Ervin, Fiscal

Hunter Andrews

### VISION:

The MSU Extension Service provides research-based information, educational programs, and technology transfer focused on issues and needs of the people of Mississippi, enabling them to make informed decisions about their economic, social, and cultural well-being.

### Policy Council:

Monica Washington

Goeissi Hernandez

Tiffany Dexter

Savannah Wilson

Liana Wheeler Mansion

Asia Smith

Thuy Tran

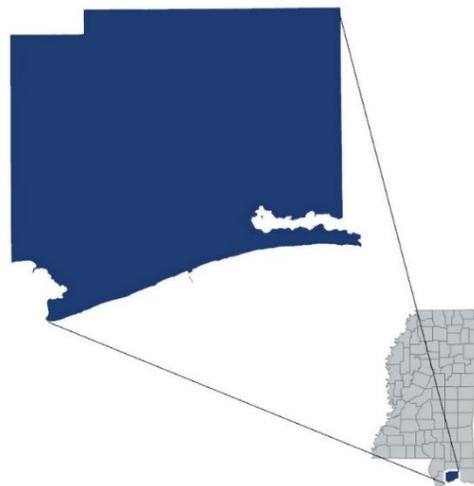
Mariah Green



## ABOUT US

The Mississippi State University (MSU) Extension Head Start and Early Head Start program in Harrison County is designed to support children and families during the critical transition from early childhood education to kindergarten. By combining strong local partnerships with research-based practices, our program helps ensure children are prepared for lifelong learning and success.

Our Head Start centers proudly serve the communities of Gilbert Mason, East Biloxi, and Gaston Point, while our Early Head Start program operates out of the Linda Lyons Center. We are deeply committed to delivering high-quality early childhood education through strategic collaborations with local school districts, including the Gulfport and Biloxi Public School Districts. In partnership with Moore Community House—home of our Early Head Start program—and Shine Early Learning, which provides essential program support, we offer comprehensive services that meet the diverse needs of children and families.



This past year, our program received a favorable visit from the Region 4 Program Specialist with the Office of Head Start, affirming our commitment to quality, compliance, and innovation in early childhood education. In addition, we successfully completed a facilities audit conducted by the Office of Head Start, which confirmed our dedication to maintaining safe, supportive, and enriching environments for all children in our care.

As we continue serving the children of Harrison County, MSU Extension is working to develop a successful, scalable model that can be shared and replicated throughout Mississippi. Through these ongoing efforts, we remain dedicated to changing the narrative for Mississippi's most vulnerable children and families—and to create a brighter future for all.

## STATE OF THE STATE

In overall child well-being, Mississippi now ranks 48th in the nation, showing slight improvement but still trailing behind most states. The state ranks 50th in Economic Well-Being, 50th in Health, 50th in Family and Community indicators, and 30<sup>th</sup> in Education. A child’s chances of thriving depend not only on individual, family, and community characteristics but also on the state in which they are born and raised. States differ in wealth and resources, and policy choices and public investments play a significant role in shaping opportunities for children to succeed.

Indicator	Year	Number	Percent/Rate	Rank
<b>Economic Well-Being: 50<sup>th</sup></b>				
Children in poverty	2023	154,000	23%	48
Children whose parents lack secure employment	2023	209,000	31%	48
Children living in households with a high housing cost burden	2023	166,000	25%	17
Teens not in school and not working	2023	15,000	8%	38
<b>Education: 30<sup>th</sup></b>				
Young children (ages 3 and 4) not in school	2019-2023	37,000	50%	8
Fourth-graders not proficient in reading	2024	N/A	68%	14
Eighth-graders not proficient in math	2024	N/A	78%	40
High school students not graduating on time	2021-2022	N/A	11%	9
<b>Health: 50<sup>th</sup></b>				
Babies with low birth rate	2023	4,290	12.5%	50
Children without health insurance	2023	43,000	6%	32
Child and teen deaths per 100,000	2023	384	53	50
Children and teens (10-17) who are overweight or obese	2022-2023	N/A	43%	50
<b>Family &amp; Community: 50<sup>th</sup></b>				
Children in single-parent families	2023	277,000	44%	48
Children in families where the head of the household lacks a high school diploma	2023	64,000	10%	32
Children living in high-poverty areas	2019-2023	138,000	20%	49
Teen births per 1,000	2023	2,596	25	50

Note. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, (n.d)

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Total 2023-2024		Head Start	Early Head Start
Federal, state, and local funding  <b>\$6,605,333</b>	Base	\$4,878,147	\$1,151,735
	COLA	\$273,176	\$64,497
	Quality	\$138,114	\$26,986
	TTA	\$46,111	\$26,567
	<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>\$5,335,548</b>	<b>\$1,269,785</b>

MSU Extension Head Start has the administrative infrastructure, system-wide fiscal capacity, and financial resources necessary to implement, manage, report on, and achieve the goals and objectives of the Head Start and Early Head Start grant. At every stage of implementation and management, the MSU Extension team adheres to established policies and procedures that ensure fiduciary and financial responsibility for all grant-related activities.

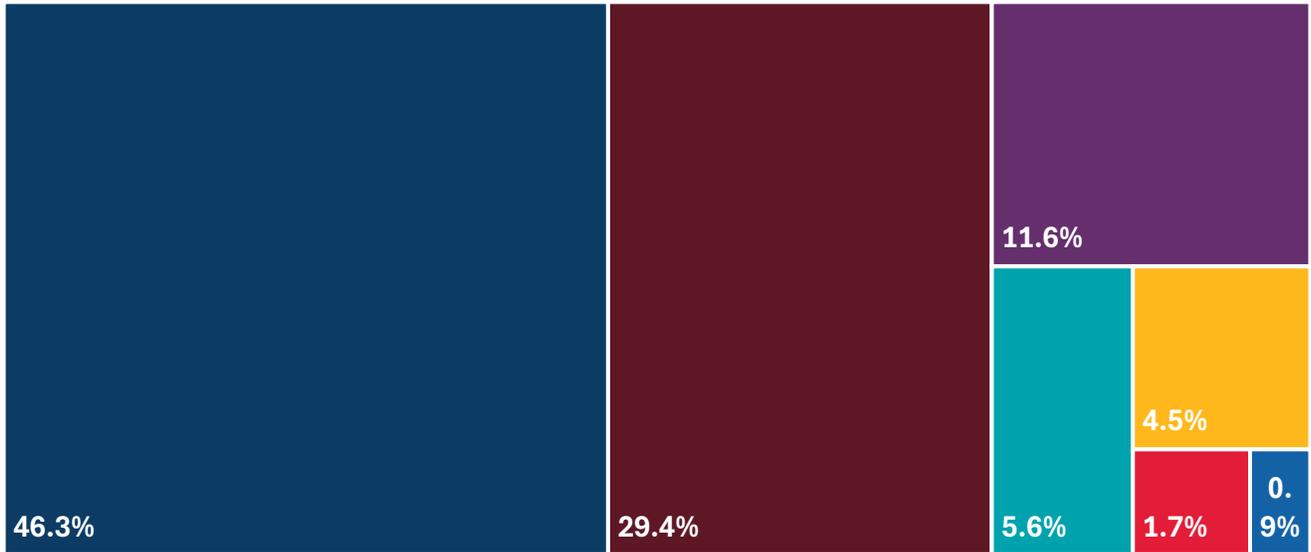
These responsibilities include maintaining accurate payroll and accounting records; archiving supporting documentation for all charges; preparing and submitting expenditure reports; certifying that all expenses are true and correct; properly classifying and reporting accounting transactions; and maintaining thorough procurement documentation.

We have robust monitoring protocols in place to ensure that all federal funds passed through to partners are used appropriately and that all expenditures are reasonable, allowable, and allocable under Head Start guidelines. The Board and Policy Council play an active role in setting program priorities and reviewing budgets and expenditures, with financial oversight as a standing item at regular meetings.

As a part of the broader Mississippi State University system, MSU Extension Head Start is included in the University's annual audit process. MSU has consistently received unqualified audit opinions, reflecting the strength and integrity of its financial systems. The University administers more than \$300 million annually across all programs, supported by comprehensive financial, grant accounting, and compliance systems that ensure strong fiduciary oversight. Reviews of other MSU early childhood programs have consistently affirmed the strength of our financial accountability and internal controls.

## 2023-2024 Expenditures

■ Travel 
 ■ Supplies 
 ■ Other 
 ■ Indirect 
 ■ Fringe 
 ■ Personnel 
 ■ Contractual



2023-2024 Head Start Budget			
	Head Start	Early Head Start	Total
Personnel	\$1,924,744	\$14,249	\$1,938,993
Fringe	\$763,546	\$5,653	\$769,199
Travel	\$55,877	\$2,480	\$58,357
Supplies	\$111,206	\$2,500	\$113,706
Contractual	\$1,821,159	\$1,234,666	\$3,055,825
Other	\$296,838	\$0	\$296,838
Indirect	\$362,178	\$10,237	\$372,415
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$5,335,548</b>	<b>\$1,269,785</b>	<b>\$6,605,333</b>

## STAFFING

We are extremely fortunate to have a team of dedicated, well-trained, and supported staff who work tirelessly to serve our children and families. Over the past several years, we've seen a notable shift in the educational qualifications of our teaching staff. Currently, the majority of Head Start teachers (55%) hold an associate degree, and there has been a modest increase (3%) in those with a bachelor's degree, now totaling 36%.

In our Early Head Start program, teacher qualifications are evenly distributed: one-third hold an associate degree, another third possess a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and the remaining staff are actively enrolled in programs leading to a degree or credential in early childhood education.

Despite the strength of our staff, we continue to face the same workforce challenges affecting Head Start programs across the nation—recruiting and retaining qualified classroom staff. Early childhood education, a historically underpaid field, is struggling to attract and keep talent. Even when staff are hired, burnout remains a significant concern, contributing to high turnover.

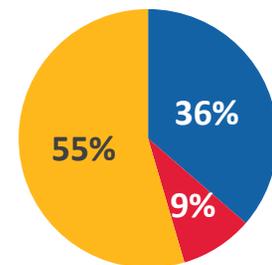
This past year, we experienced direct impacts from staffing shortages. Several classrooms could not open due to our inability to recruit, hire, and retain qualified staff, which reduced our capacity to approximately 60% of our funded enrollment. Staff retention also posed a challenge: six Early Head Start teachers and 21 of our 46 Head Start staff (46%) departed during the year. Of the Head Start staff who left, 15 (71%) were part of the education team.

Out of the 27 staff who left, only 20 were replaced during the program year. This staffing gap had a negative impact on the continuity of care and learning in affected classrooms. Exit surveys revealed a range of reasons for staff departures—approximately 30% left due to involuntary separation, while another 30% transitioned into careers outside of early childhood education.

We remain committed to finding solutions to these workforce challenges and to supporting the well-being and professional growth of our dedicated team.

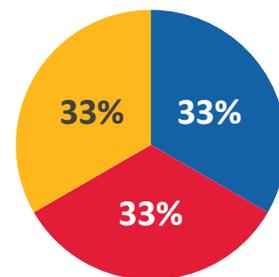
### Head Start Teachers

■ Bachelors ■ Masters ■ Associates



### Early Head Start Teachers

■ Associates ■ CDA ■ None

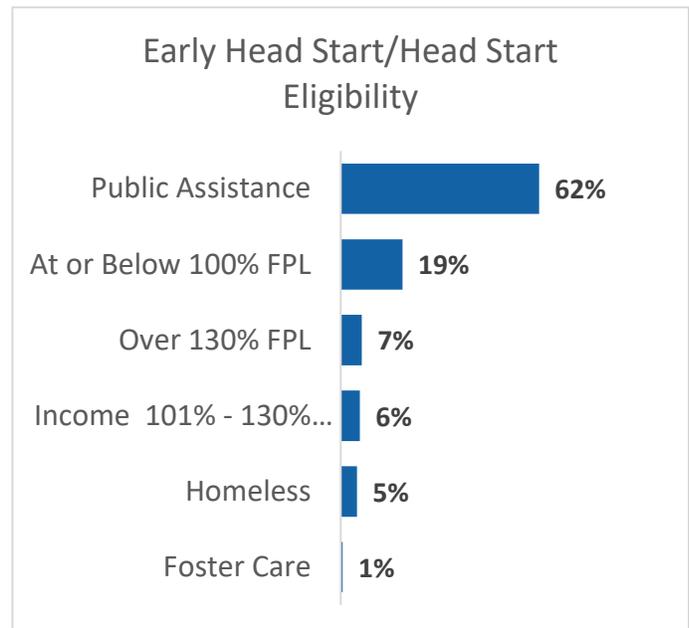


## SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPANTS SERVED

MSU Extension is funded to serve a total of 552 children, 488 in Head Start and 64 in Early Head Start, across three directly operated Head Start centers: East Biloxi Head Start, Gilbert Mason Head Start, and Gaston Point Head Start. MSU Extension provides oversight and management for each of these centers.

In addition to these centers, we maintain a strong partnership with the Gulfport School District, operating five pre-K classrooms, with one classroom located at each of the five different elementary schools across the district.

East Biloxi Head Start is currently housed at Nichols Elementary in Biloxi, Mississippi, and serves families residing in the Biloxi Public School District. Gilbert Mason Head Start is in D'Iberville and serves families in the Harrison County School District. Gaston Point Head Start is in Gulfport and, along with the Gulfport School District partnership classrooms, serves families throughout the Gulfport School District.

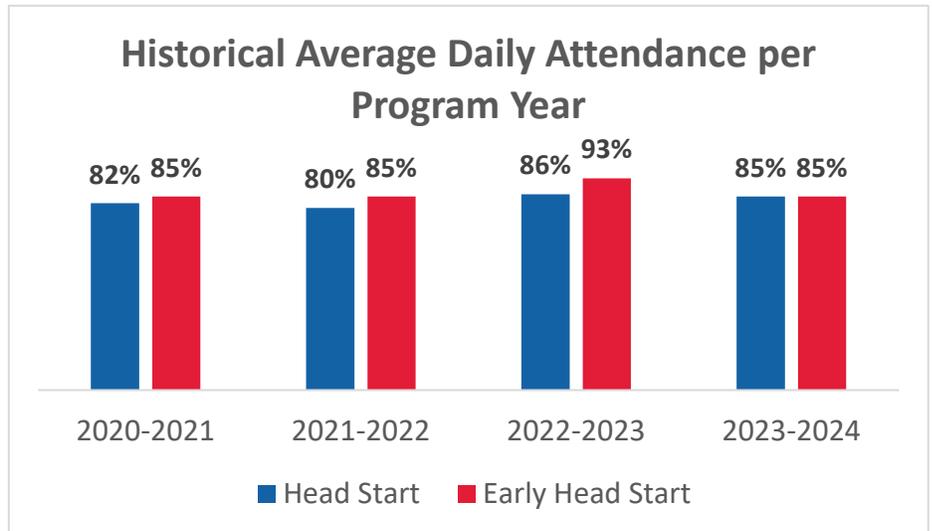


Over the course of the 2023–2024 school year, our program served a total of 288 children in Head Start and 39 children in Early Head Start. Our Early Head Start program operates in partnership with Moore Community House and is located at the Linda Lyons Early Head Start Center in Gulfport, Mississippi.

In 2023–2024, 19% of enrolled children were income-eligible, living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level, which for a family of four is approximately \$30,000 per year. An additional 68% of children qualified through categorical eligibility, including foster care, receipt of public assistance, or experiencing homelessness (5%).

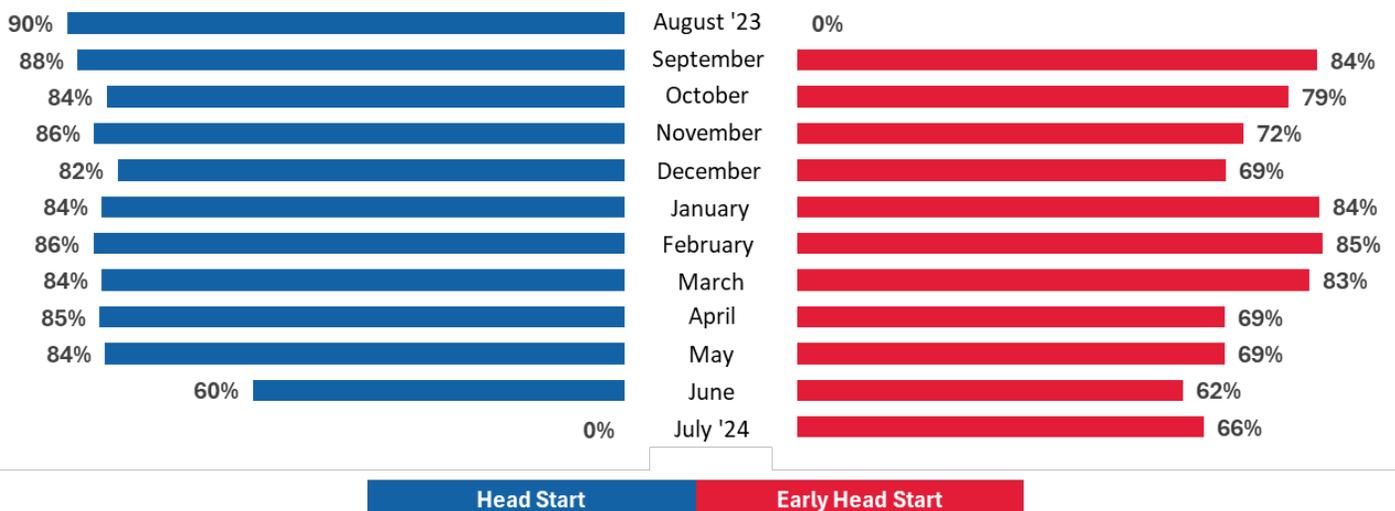
Based on current estimates, there are approximately 1,945 income-eligible infants and toddlers for Early Head Start and 1,318 income-eligible preschool-aged children for Head Start in Harrison County. At full enrollment capacity, we can serve just 3% of the eligible Early Head Start population and 37% of the eligible Head Start population within our service area.

Early Head Start and Head Start programs operate on staggered start dates, resulting in approximately one month each year without enrollment for each program. Like many programs across the country, we have been significantly affected by the ongoing shortage of qualified early childhood professionals. This national staffing crisis, combined with the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, has directly impacted our ability to operate at full capacity.



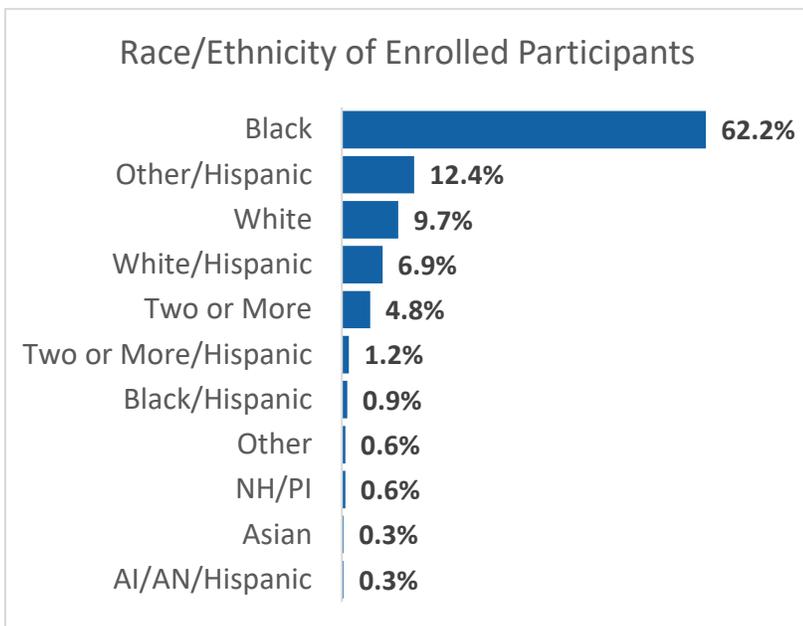
As a result, we were able to serve only about 60% of our funded enrollment during the 2023–2024 program year. Our attendance data reflects only the number of classrooms that were open and staffed during the year.

### Average Attendance 2023-2024



The following chart shows the number of children and families that were served by the center during the 2023-2024 program year and the total numbers and percentages of children with physical and dental exams.

Location	Children Served	Families Served	Physical Exams	%	Dental Exams	%
East Biloxi Elementary	39	37	29	74%	31	79%
Gaston Point	57	49	27	47%	36	63%
Dr. Gilbert Mason	106	100	90	85%	89	84%
Gulfport Partnership	87	85	57	66%	63	72%
<b>Total Head Start</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Linda Lyons (EHS)</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>82%</b>



We serve diverse children and families and are continuing to see increases in our Hispanic/Latinx population. Sixty-six (66) of our children are Dual Language Learners, with most of those children being proficient in Spanish (92%), but also a few families whose primary languages are Middle Eastern or South Asian. We strive to ensure that we can communicate with children and families in their home language by providing staff and partners who can interpret and translate important information.

## FOCUS ON WELLNESS

Building on our commitment to workplace wellness, we’ve seen great success with our *Wellness Wednesdays*, which offer staff regular opportunities to recharge and focus on self-care. These weekly activities include yoga sessions, beach walks, and dedicated time for relaxation and connection. In addition, we continue to provide mental health support through facilitated sessions that help staff manage stress and maintain emotional balance.

To further enhance staff’s well-being, we’ve also introduced massages, which have been well received as a way to reduce physical tension and promote calm during the workweek. Our on-staff nutritionist plays an active role in supporting healthier lifestyle choices by providing guidance, resources, and once-a-month healthy snacks in the breakroom, encouraging small, sustainable habits that lead to long-term wellness.

These efforts are complemented by our quarterly *Wellness Newsletters*, which keep wellness at the forefront and provide staff with practical tools, encouragement, and inspiration. MSU Extension Head Start remains committed to being a regional leader in staff wellness, creating a workplace culture where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to care for themselves as they care for others. As one team member reflected, “I never knew what it meant to indulge in self-care, but now I know that I not only need it—I deserve it.”

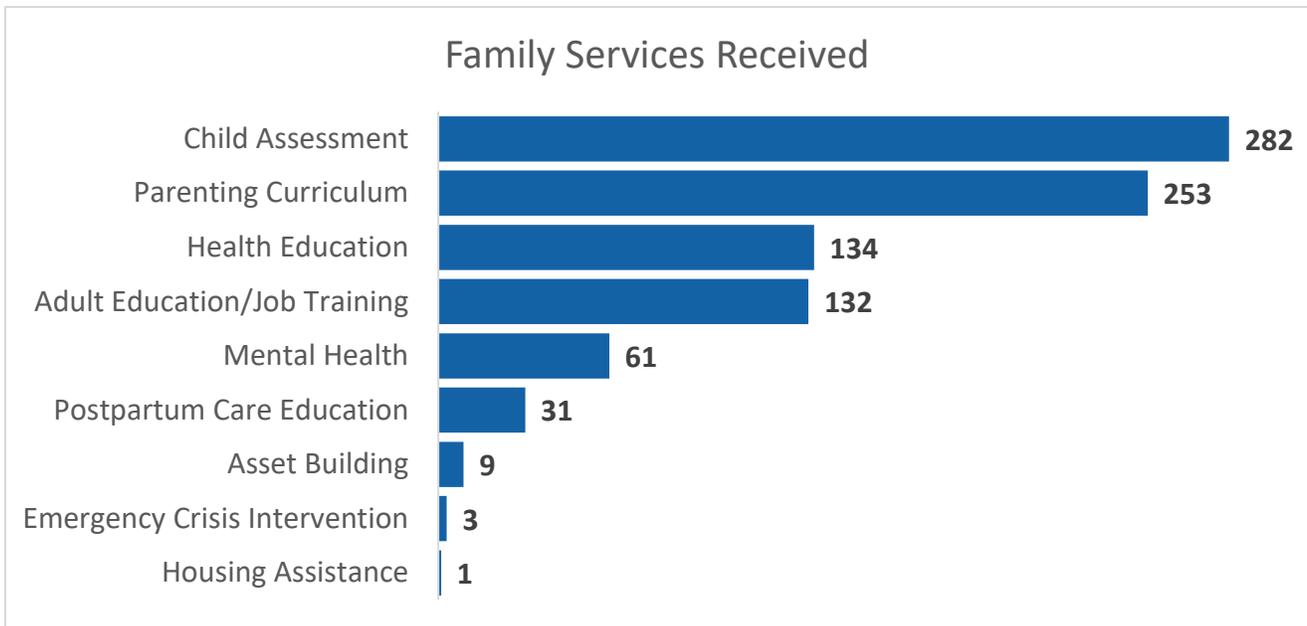
This enduring focus on staff well-being underscores our belief that investing in people is the key to sustaining a healthy and high-impact program.

## PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our relationship with parents begins with the initial application for their child, where we discuss their hopes and dreams. We emphasize the importance of parental involvement in their child's educational journey. Upon acceptance into our program, we conduct a parent orientation to outline what parents can expect from us and how they can actively participate. Our commitment to child health includes partnerships with community health experts like The Vision Center, South Mississippi Smiles, and Coastal Family Health Clinic, who offer on-site services as needed.

Our family services are guided by the philosophy of the Child Development Group of Mississippi: 'Head Start is not just Pre-Kindergarten, but Communigarten.' We focus on providing tools and resources that enrich our 'communigarten,' such as engaging family activities, promoting language and literacy, connecting families with community resources, and offering parenting classes.

Examples of our activities include starting the year with a Parent Cafe, where parents participate in fun activities like potting plants to symbolize growth and success. We also host a fall festival, inviting community partners to share resources with staff and families through vendor tables.



Among the community partners present were Feeding the Gulf Coast, our partners in the Backpack program, providing nutritious and easy-to-prepare food for hungry children over the weekend. Additionally, we invited Happy Healthy to conduct a food demonstration for our families and how to read food labels. South Mississippi Smiles and Canopy Children's Solutions were also in attendance, providing dental services and other family support to our families in the program.

Other significant activities from last year were the launch of our Family Learning Parties as part of our Parent Curriculum, Shine On, Families. The theme was "Blast off into a Bright Future," where families joined their children, teachers, and family advocates to model high-quality adult-child interactions used in classrooms. These parties focused on family life practices such as family routines, positive discipline, expressive language, and literacy, aiming to get families excited, motivated, and engaged in their child's learning journey. Lastly, the University of Southern Mississippi offered parenting classes focusing on child development stages, setting boundaries for children, positive discipline, and improving communication with children.

**Other Family Metrics:**

- One or more parent employed – 219
- Active military parent – 6
- Grandparents raising grandchildren – 1
- One or more parent in school – 17
- Single-parent families – 215
- Two-parent families – 87

## PREPARING OUR CHILDREN FOR KINDERGARTEN

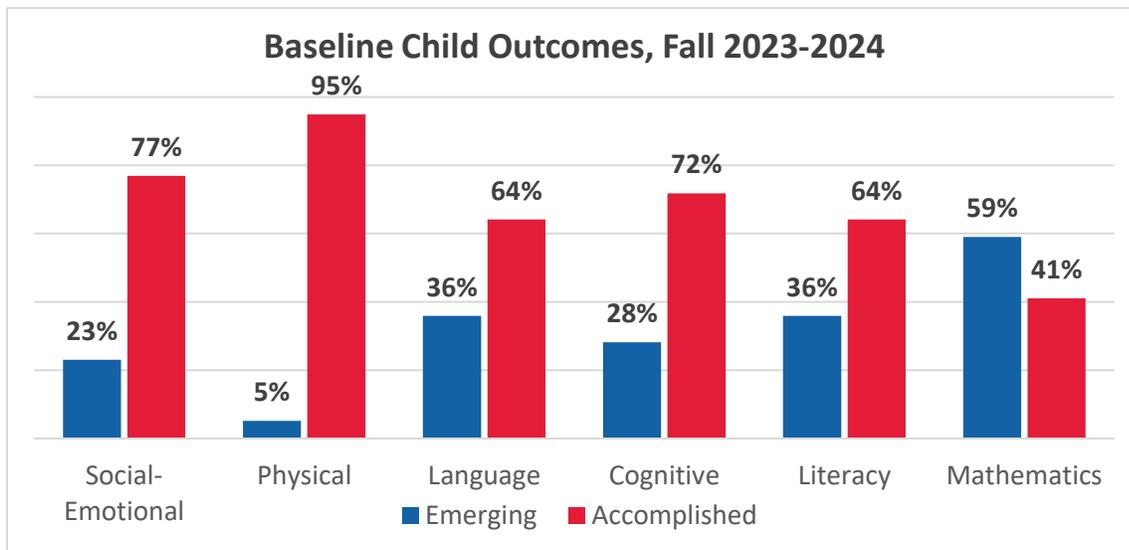
Everything we do in the MSU Extension Head Start program is designed to support children’s success in the school setting—from classroom experiences to parent training. Our ultimate goal is to leverage community partnerships and research-based methods to build a strong program that serves children during their youngest and most vulnerable stages of life, helping them achieve optimal outcomes.

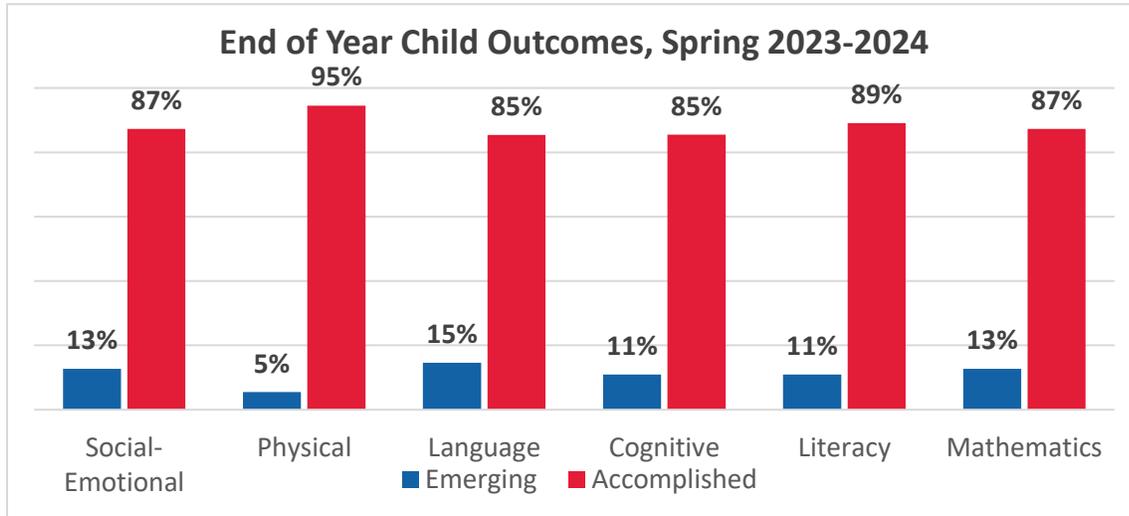
Throughout the year, we provide hands-on learning opportunities that expand children’s experiences. Teaching staff employ multiple modalities to engage children across a variety of settings—including indoor and outdoor environments, mealtimes, and transitions. Teachers individualize instruction to meet each child’s unique needs, building on skills and abilities as children grow and learn.

We strive to create a seamless experience at every transition—from home to Early Head Start, from Early Head Start to Head Start, and from Head Start to the local school system—ensuring children feel comfortable and confident in each new educational setting. Our Head Start program offers high-quality, early childhood education in a fun and nurturing atmosphere, laying a strong foundation for lifelong success. Each classroom is equipped with materials and supplies designed to enhance school readiness.

Our holistic approach addresses the whole child and family. We focus on physical and mental health, balanced nutrition, and creating supportive home learning environments that extend classroom learning. For children enrolled in our school district partnerships, assessment and individualized instruction are guided by data from Renaissance to inform each child’s educational journey.

At the start of the year, we assess each child across developmentally appropriate domains—including Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, and Mathematics—to tailor our instruction and support. The following charts demonstrate the growth of our children from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.





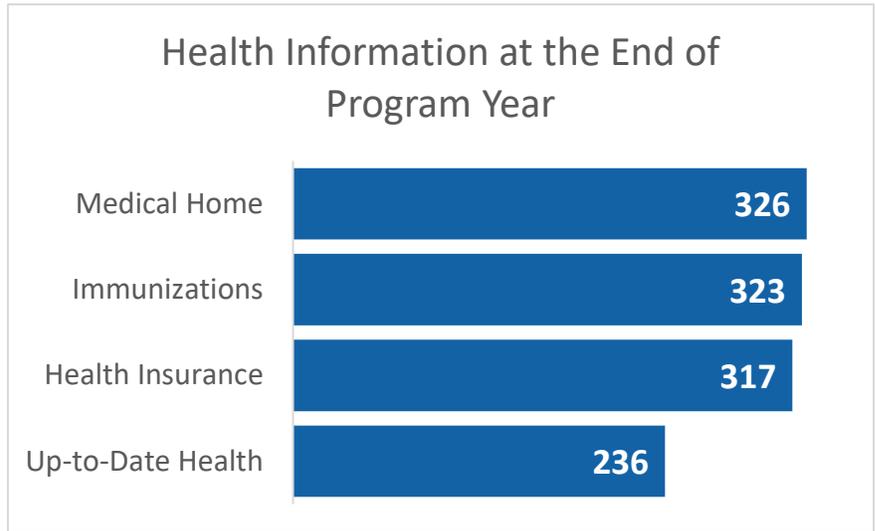
There is tremendous growth in all areas except mathematics, as the percentages shift from emerging skills at the beginning of the year to accomplished skills by the end of the year. We recognize there is still significant room for improvement in both mathematics and literacy. To address this, we plan targeted professional development for teachers focused on evidence-based practices proven to enhance child outcomes in these specific areas.

To support and guide our educational approach, we have established a School Readiness Committee composed of staff, parents, and community leaders who assist in analyzing outcomes and provide input on educational activities throughout the year. Throughout the year, staff build transition portfolios to share with parents, featuring samples of each child’s growth. Periodically, staff meet with parents to review progress, highlight strengths, and identify areas where learning can be further supported.

As children near kindergarten entry, we provide parents with information about their receiving schools, registration details, and opportunities to visit. Parents also receive information about kindergarten camps, where children can meet their future teachers and tour the school, including the cafeteria, library, classrooms, and playground. At the end of the school year, parents receive a “report card” along with materials designed to support their child’s continued growth over the summer months.

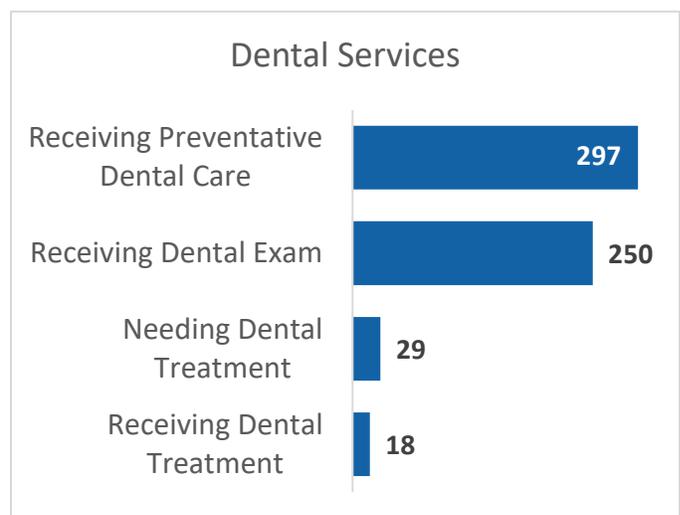
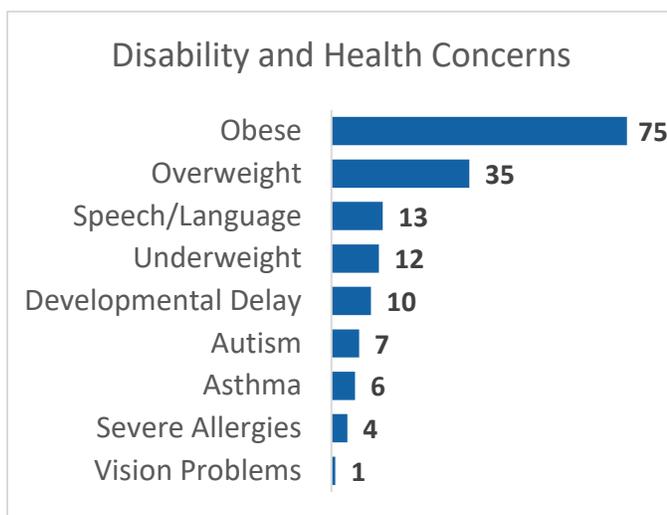
## HEALTH SERVICES

Our holistic approach to educating children begins with ensuring that they are free from physical or developmental barriers to learning. Each school year, enrolled children receive a full range of comprehensive services that support their health and well-being. These services include physical and dental examinations, developmental screenings, immunizations, and access to affordable health, dental, and vision care.



Our Family Advocates work closely with families to ensure that children receive all necessary screenings, assessments, and follow-up treatment. In addition, we collaborate with a wide network of community partners, including pediatricians, local health departments, mental health providers, and local education agencies, to provide health and disability services for children with chronic conditions or those requiring special accommodation as outlined in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

Through these coordinated efforts, we help ensure that each child is healthy, supported, and ready to learn.



## PARTNERSHIPS

It would be impossible to serve our communities effectively without the support of our dedicated partners. We are deeply grateful for their collaboration, which helps us fulfill our vision of providing a holistic approach to education and support for children and families.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the following organizations for their invaluable contributions:

 <p>Moore Community House</p>	 <p>Shine Early Learning</p>	 <p>Gulfport Public Schools</p>
 <p>Harrison County Schools</p>	 <p>Oasis Mental Wellness</p>	 <p>Biloxi Public Schools</p>
 <p>Premier Professional Counseling</p>	 <p>MS Gulf Coast Community College</p>	 <p>Fordham University</p>
 <p>The Vision Center</p>	 <p>Feeding America – Gulf Coast</p>	 <p>University of Southern Mississippi</p>
 <p>Southern MS Planning &amp; Development</p>	 <p>South Mississippi Smiles</p>	 <p>Coastal Family Health</p>