



EXTENSION

Head Start-Early Head Start

2020-2021

***Community
Needs Assessment***

Introduction and Purpose

This Community Assessment is in fulfillment of the requirements of Head Start Performance Standards (45 CFR 1302.11) which requires an assessment of the needs of the communities served every five years. The objective is to provide a snapshot of our service area and to identify characteristics which may have a significant impact on agency planning and program development. The Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations (45 CFR 1302.11 (b)) specify the information that must be included in the Community Assessment and submitted with the grant application. To summarize, the grantee agency is required to collect and analyze information in the Community Assessment about:

1. The number of eligible children 0-5, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages spoken, including:
 - a. Children experiencing homelessness;
 - b. Children in foster care; and
 - c. Children with disabilities, including types and relevant services/resources provided by community agencies;
2. The education, health, nutrition and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
3. Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
4. Other child development, childcare centers, and or family childcare programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of children served;
5. Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and
6. Strengths of the community.

The community assessment provides the most recent data available regarding demographics, early learning programs, disabilities, health and nutrition, and social services for children and families in the region. The assessment provides a portrait of our programs and activities and identifies community resources available. This assessment also identifies where there are gaps between available services and needs.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations (45 CFR 1302.102) state that the information gathered in the Community Assessment (CA) must guide decisions based on the status of eligible families and the community setting(s) within the service area. Specifically, they state that: The information in the Community Assessment will be used to:

1. Help determine the grantee's philosophy, and its long-range and short-range program objectives.
2. Determine the type of component services that are most needed and the program option or options that will be implemented.
3. Determine the recruitment area that will be served by the grantee, if limitations in the amount of resources make it impossible to serve the entire service area.
4. If there are delegate agencies, determine the recruitment area that will be served by the

grantee and the recruitment area that will be served by each delegate agency.

5. Determine appropriate locations for centers and the areas to be served by home based programs; and 6. Set criteria that define the types of children and families who will be given priority for recruitment and selection.

Ultimately, the community assessment is used to make decisions for outreach, enrollment, selection and the most appropriate delivery of Head Start services. It is a valuable resource for staff, parents and community partners to collectively think about the impacts of population shifts and equitable distribution of services.

Methodology

This assessment was developed from data and statistics collected from several national, state, and local resources including the 2020 Kids Count, the 2019 US Census Bureau, and local program statistics. With the onset of COVID, program statistics are atypical due to limitations on center-based activities by public health and Mississippi Regulated Child Care. In addition, MSU-Extension Head Start just concluded its first year of operation, with a phased in approach for facility openings. As health restrictions ease, our program will focus on facility acquisition and renovation to serve our full funded enrollment of 552 children.

Executive Summary

According to the 2020 Kids Count Data Book, Mississippi ranks 47th out of 50 states in all metrics of Economic Well-Being, including children who live in poverty, children whose parents lack secure employment and children who live in households with a high housing cost burden. The indicators for Health and Family and Community are even more dire, with Mississippi ranking last in both categories. Health metrics include children without health insurance, children and teens who are overweight or obese and child and teen deaths. Family and Community statistics include children in high poverty areas, children in single-parent families and children in families where the head of household lacks a high school diploma. Mississippi is a state in crisis and Harrison County, although higher than state averages in many categories, suffers along with the rest of the state in these areas. In overall child well-being, Mississippi ranks next to last behind New Mexico. A child's chances of thriving depend not only on individual, family and community characteristics but also on the state in which she or he is born and raised. States vary in their wealth and other resources. Policy choices and investments also influence children's chances for success.

This report includes demographic, economic and health data for Harrison County, and in most cases, a comparison with statewide statistics. Mississippi State University-Extension Head Start became a grantee in 2019, after reports that more than 70% of children served by Head Start were in programs that were identified as low-performing and subsequently forced to compete for their grants via the Designation Renewal System. In addition, Head Start children in the area consistently scored the lowest among all child care options in Kindergarten Entrance Assessments, with some Harrison County school districts reporting that Head Start children score lower than Head Start eligible children who had not been served. As the new grantee, MSU-Extension is committed to providing opportunities for children and families to experience positive outcomes to ensure future school success.

A snapshot of our commitment is evidenced by our Focus Area One (FA1) monitoring review conducted by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) from May 4-8, 2020. The review consisted of interviewing content area and leadership staff, Board and Policy Council members as well as policy and procedure review. **We were found to be in good standing with no areas of concern, non-compliance or deficiency during our first year of operation.** The review team also identified several areas of strength, including the use of various program data to monitor compliance and staff performance to inform continuous improvement in all service areas; the leveraged support and expertise of board members in assisting with the implementation of the goals and objectives related to identifying community resources for parents and helping to improve children's transition to kindergarten. Through our efforts, and other committed early care and education professionals, we will change the narrative for our most vulnerable children and families Mississippi.

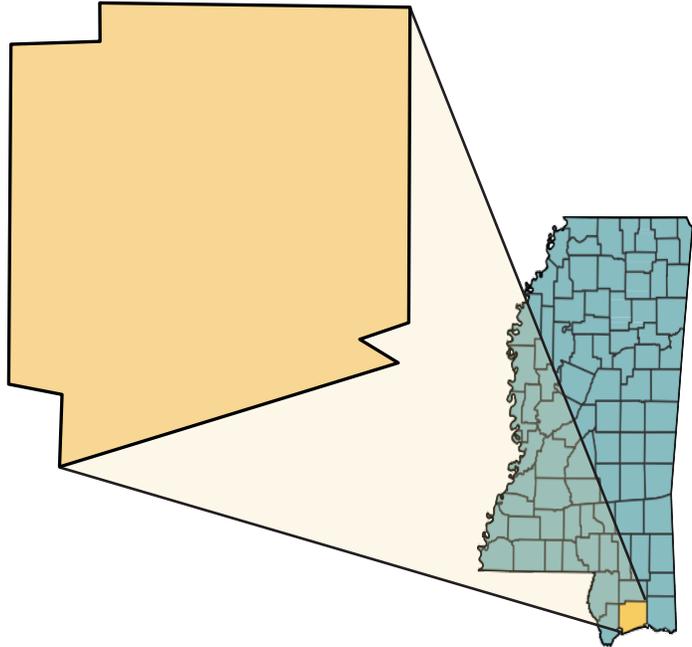
About Our Geographic area:

Harrison County is the largest county in Mississippi's coastal region, spanning more than 900 square miles, and is home to 204,502 residents (US Census Bureau), with 24% of this population including children under 18, according to Kid's Count (2020). The county, which is centrally located on the Gulf of Mexico, encompasses five distinct cities, including Biloxi, D'Iberville, Gulfport, Long Beach, and Pass Christian. In a state where one in five residents lives below the poverty line, it is actually among the wealthiest areas in the state.

Our organization has been a singular beacon for quality early childhood education in the state. Over the last decade, MSU-ES has been tasked with operating the Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, administering the state's QRIS and providing a network of quality improvement supports for early childhood

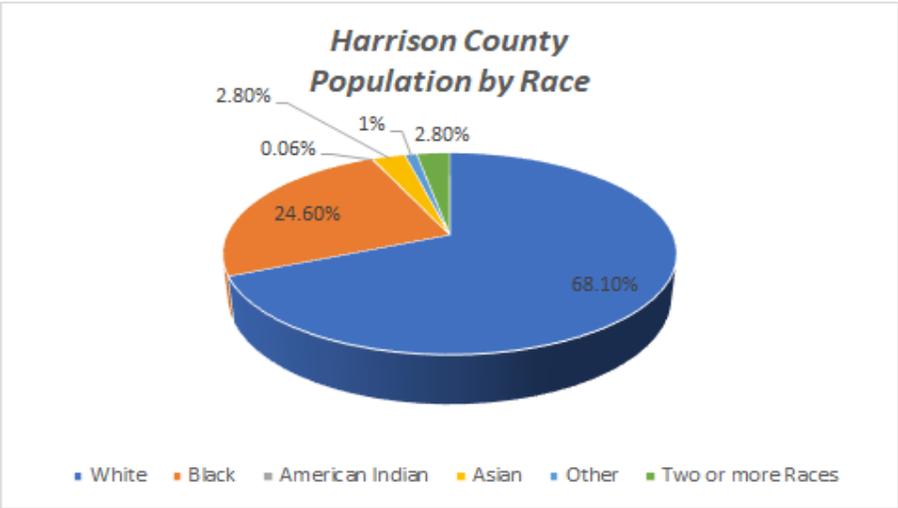
providers, culminating in the \$15M/year Early Years Network grant. There is no meaningful ECE initiative in the state in which MSU-ES has not played a leadership role. We expanded our capacity into new territory by entering the Head Start/Early Head Start world on August 1, 2019 for Harrison County, Mississippi.

Few counties have a higher median and per capita income, and with a poverty rate of 20%, only 18 other counties fare better. Bolstered by the tourism industry that creates opportunities for working families in casinos alongside the restaurants and retail environments that surround them, residents of this community benefit from a diversified economy, demonstrated by one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. As with many southern states, this area saw a significant increase in population post-Hurricane Katrina, complicating the need to rebuild, and adding to the strain on resources.

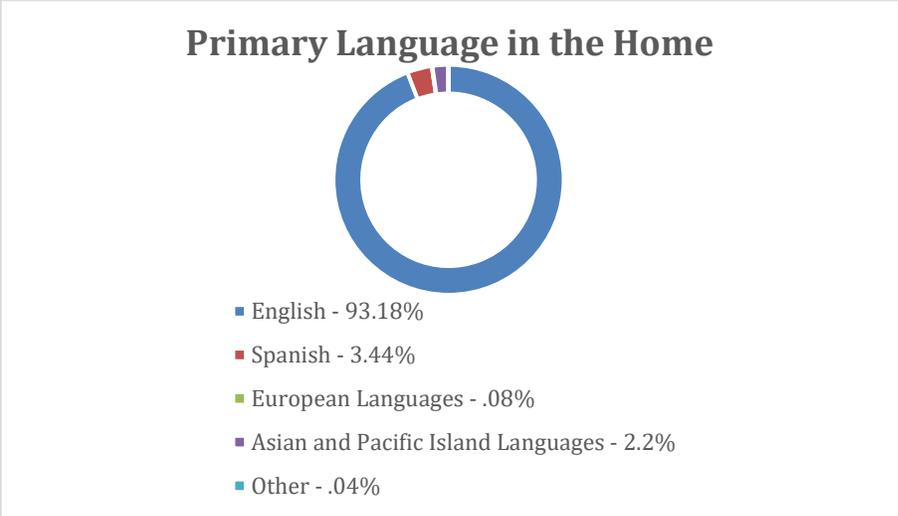


Population Statistics:

	Harrison County		Mississippi	
	Actual	%	Actual	%
Population	204,502	6.8%	2,988,762	100%
Male	99,750	49.2%	1,450,379	48%
Female	102,876	50.8%	1,538,383	51.5%
Children under 5	13,613	6.7%	188,575	6.3%



3.4% of Harrison County's population is Hispanic or Latino



93.18% of Harrison County residents speak only English, while only 6.82% speak other languages.

Economic Indicators:

	Harrison County	Mississippi
Median Income	\$45,355	\$44,740
Unemployment Rates	5.2%	5.4%
Children without Working Parents	11.2%	12.1%
People Living in Poverty	40,288	571,402
% in Poverty	20%	19.8%
Children in Poverty	9,514	138,665
% Child Poverty	26.9%	27%
Children in Single Parent Families	44.1%	43.7%
Owner Occupied Housing	61.8%	69.6%
Renter Occupied Housing	38.2%	30.4%
Children in Care of Grandparents	2,745	56,626

- Approximately 74% of all prospective Head Start and Early Head Start parents are single mothers.
- According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in 2016, only 1,400 people in Mississippi lacked secure shelter. However, the Department of Children and Families reported there are at least 13,000 homeless children under age six (or 1 in 18 children) and local statistics suggest there are currently at least 530 homeless men and women living in Biloxi alone.
- In Mississippi, 51% of all children without a permanent home are under age six and according to the Administration for Children and Families, 98% of those children remain unserved.

Child Health and Social Service Metrics:

	Harrison County		Mississippi	
	Actual	%	Actual	%
Child Health Indicators				
Low Birthweight Babies	290	10.9%	4,495	12.1%
Premature Births	342	12.8%	5,270	14.2%
Teen Pregnancy (rate per 1,000)	177	28.1	3,256	32.3
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000)	8.3		8.6	
Prenatal Care	1,861	69.8%	27,955	75.5%
Child Abuse and Neglect Reports	25,997		2,209	
Child Abuse Substantiated	602		6,865	
Children in Foster Care	1,415		8,547	
Mothers without a High School Diploma	338	12.7%	4,672	12.6%
Food Insecurity	25,820	17.7%	559,350	18.7%
Food Insecurity (Children)	10,250	20.9%	162,150	23%
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	\$483,936		\$6,034,744	
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	\$62,094,669		\$850,148,588	

Other Health Factors:

- Harrison County lead the state in the number of evidenced child victims of abuse and neglect.
- Mississippi is one of 19 states currently facing system-wide class action lawsuits that claim high rates of abuse and neglect of children and separately, serious foster home shortages.
- In 2016, Mississippi had 5,483 children in its custody, 1,415 living in Harrison County. Forty percent of those children were under 5 years old.
- Harrison County ranked number 1 in the state in total suspected overdose deaths at 67 in 2020.
- Seventy-three adults were reported hospitalized for substance use disorders.
- Adults reporting depressive disorders – 22%.
- Almost 27% of adults in Harrison County report being current smokers.

- Adults reporting alcohol use in the past 30 days in Harrison County – 47.4%.
- As of April 2021, Harrison County had 303 deaths from COVID-19, with 17,596 total cases.
- Harrison County ranks above the state and national averages in self-harm and interpersonal violence mortality.

Disability Information:

In Harrison County, there are 220 children, birth to three, receiving Early Intervention services. Early Head Start has five children who have an IFSP (Individual Family Service Plan) and one child with an IFSP. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, there are 45 children in the Biloxi School District receiving disability services, 29 children in Gulfport School District receiving disability services, 46 children in Harrison County School, and 19 children in Pass Christian School District are receiving disability services. During FY 2020, a total of 4,082 children, about 4% of Mississippi’s children under the age of three, are receiving First Steps services. According to the Census, there are 13,546 children under five with a diagnosed disability.

Head Start Eligible Children and Families

Using census data, we applied the child poverty rate in Harrison County to the age-eligible population of children to estimate there are 2,875 income-eligible EHS infants and toddlers and 1,812 income-eligible preschool aged Head Start children in our service area. By applying the birth rate to the ratio of low-income women, we estimate that at least 320 income eligible pregnant women live in Harrison County.

Eligibility by zip code/age:

	< 1 yr	1 yr	2 yrs	3 yrs	4 yrs
39501 (<i>Gulfport</i>)	225	216	231	213	188
39503 (<i>Gulfport</i>)	213	229	225	202	229
39507 (<i>Gulfport</i>)	67	57	68	65	59
39530 (<i>Biloxi</i>)	75	83	78	80	77
39531 (<i>Biloxi</i>)	145	137	139	137	128
39532 (<i>Biloxi</i>)	131	135	133	127	117
39540 (<i>D'Iberville</i>)	5	5	5	5	6
39571 (<i>Cuevas</i>)	54	50	54	50	50
39574 (<i>Airey</i>)	37	37	41	43	37
Total (<i>By Age</i>)	951	950	975	920	892
Total (<i>By Program</i>)	EHS	2,875		HS	1,812

Head Start Services Snapshot 2020-2021

There are three Head Start centers that MSU-Extension has oversight of: East Biloxi Head Start, Gilbert Mason Head Start, and Gaston Point Head Start. In addition, we have a partnership with one of the local school districts, Gulfport School District where we have 8 pre-K classrooms; 2 classrooms that are housed at 4 different elementary schools. East Biloxi Head Start is currently housed at Gorenflo Elementary in Biloxi, MS with the region serving families in the Biloxi Public School District. Gilbert Mason is located in D'Iberville within the Harrison County School District. Gaston Point Head Start is located in Gulfport, and along with the partnership program, serves families in the Gulfport School District.

Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, there were 194 enrolled children that were non-Hispanic while 40 were Hispanic. There are a variety of primary languages spoken among the children.

- 210 spoke English,
- 22 were Spanish speaking, and
- 2 spoke Vietnamese.

There were 140 children served by our program that were income eligible. The number of families served by the program that are over income >130% is 32; and 19 children are over income of 101%-130%. Twenty-four children benefit from public assistance. There are 7 foster children and 12 homeless children that have been served by our program this past school year.

There were 21 children who had an active IEP:

- 11 who are diagnosed with a speech or language disturbance,
- 8 who have a non-categorical/developmental delay,
- 1 who has multiple disabilities, and
- 1 other who has emotional disturbances.

Currently, all children with IEPs are serviced through our active partnership with our Local Education Agency (LEA).

Location	Children Served	Families Served	Physical Exams	%	Dental Exams	%
East Biloxi Elementary (October 2019 opening)	130	119	103	79%	100	76%
Gaston Point (November 2019 opening)	118	108	68	49%	74	63%
Dr. Gilbert Mason (December 2019 opening)	140	128	90	64%	93	66%
Total Head Start	388	355	261	67%	267	69%
Linda Lyons (EHS) (July 2020 opening)	23	20				

Access to other early childhood education programs

Parents in Harrison County have limited access to affordable childcare and no simple system that organizes the accountability of caregivers. Between Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Payment Program (CCPP), and public pre-k, public assistance programs in the state meet some low-income parents' needs. The CCPP, which is funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), serves children in households earning up to 85% of the state median income and, of course, Head Start income eligibility relies on poverty status. In 2018, just over 43% of children were enrolled in preschool or nursery programs, which is under the state average of almost 52%. Of the 54 licensed childcare facilities in Harrison County, 38 have capabilities to care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and 16 have provisions for toddlers and preschool only. Together with CCDF and public schools, only about 1,000 children under five are being served in Harrison County, a fraction of those eligible. Including Head Start, 35% of all three- and four-year-old in Harrison County were enrolled in school in 2016. Unsurprisingly, some of the areas with the lowest enrollment overlap areas of highest economic need.

Head Start Staff

With the onset of the pandemic, our agency was particularly concerned about not only our children and families, but also the staff who worked with our vulnerable populations. Our staff are in a unique position. In many cases, they were expected to change their entire approach to teaching and family engagement; but they were also dealing with the effects of the chaos personally. Those with children were responsible for non-traditional virtual instruction or balancing life with family at home, or isolation from a larger network of support. Many had family members who lost jobs, in some cases, some lost family members. We reached out to staff on a consistent basis to provide mental health support and to address food insecurity.

The majority of our staff are highly educated with a Bachelor's Degree or higher in their field or related area of Early Childhood Education, but in surveys, we found that over half of our staff had worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more. Some of our staff stated that the food they bought didn't last and they didn't have money to get more. Many worried about grocery stores running out of cleaning or disinfectant supplies, cold and flu medicine and water. Our organization worked with other local agencies and organizations to provide food to the families we served, and also staff. In addition, leaders made a conscious effort to check in regularly with staff to ensure that they had what they need physically and mentally. We continued to have all staff to work through the pandemic on an alternate schedule (virtual/at-home/limited office or classroom) and are working through the crisis without terminating or laying off any of our staff.

Community Input

Our partner, the East Biloxi Community Collaborative (EBCC) conducted a comprehensive needs assessment that considered all aspects of the area between March 2019 to September 2019 where they met with stakeholders from the community to draw on multiple perspectives and confirm trends from multiple data sources including partner programmatic data, resident surveys, community forums, and focus groups. EBCC was founded in 2012 as an organization that offers residents and community-based groups a platform to develop and implement change strategies to improve the lives of children and families in East Biloxi. EBCC's data analysis from 305 surveys and 3 focus groups revealed the top five priorities for the East Biloxi community are: access to healthy foods, health/healthcare, employment, affordable quality housing, and improvements to public infrastructure. Each priority area was then compared with "needs" based on findings from the data.

The EBCC Community Needs Assessment – 2019 identified the following top five priority areas: access to healthy foods; health/healthcare; employment/jobs; affordable quality housing; and public infrastructure. For each priority area, the report provides an overview of current relevant research; an analysis of the current structure; specific areas for improvement; and detailed recommendations to achieve improvement. When asked to select the top five priorities in the East Biloxi community, the top five responses included (1) Access to healthy foods and grocery stores; (2) Employment; (3) Health/Healthcare; (4) Improving Roads and Streets; and (5) Affordable Quality Housing. When asked "What needs to be done to improve the quality of life in East Biloxi?", the top five responses included (1) More Programs for Youth; (2) Higher Paying Jobs; (3) Affordable Quality Housing; (4) Affordable Quality Healthcare; and (5) More Jobs.

Specific information regarding the five priority areas is as follows:

Priority 1: Access to Healthy Foods

Access to foods that support healthy eating patterns is a key social determinant of health and contributes to an individual's health throughout life. Eighty-one residents identified access to healthy foods and grocery stores as the number one priority for the area. Strong negative opinions were expressed regarding accessibility to healthy foods and grocery stores in East Biloxi. The theme of "access to healthy foods" encompassed low food quality, high price, limited access to fresh food, store cleanliness, limited selection of food items, and difficulty accessing additional stores as major concerns.

Participating focus group residents stated that existing stores are often not clean and the food quality (not fresh) is low. Additionally, residents shared that due to having a limited number of stores in the East Biloxi area they often have to travel across the Bay to D'Iberville to access quality foods and grocery stores with more options as well as restaurants. Furthermore, for those who do not have access to a car or public transportation, the cost of travel time to find healthier options in addition to out-of-pocket expenses further exacerbate the disparity.

A lack of basic amenities in East Biloxi makes it harder for struggling families. The

Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service identifies two food deserts in East Biloxi, meaning that access to a supermarket or to a large grocery store is extremely limited. Vulnerable populations suffer the brunt of these lacking resources. One in five residents living in low-food access areas are also low income. One-quarter of the population with low food access is ages 0-17 and 18 percent are elderly, ages 65 or older. Effects of distressed economic conditions lead to other barriers in accessing resources. About 17 percent of the food desert population lives in households without a vehicle and public transportation routes are very limited in East Biloxi."

Strong negative opinions were expressed regarding accessibility to healthy foods and grocery stores. Participants in the focus groups expressed low food quality, limited access to fresh food, cleanliness, limited selection of food items, and difficulty accessing additional stores as major concerns. Several strategies have also been proposed to encourage more equitable access to healthy food choices, such as, "attracting and opening supermarkets in underserved neighborhoods, selling healthy foods at reduced prices, and limiting the total number of per capita fast food restaurants in a community."

Priority 2: Employment/Jobs

Broad economic conditions are outside of an individual's control but directly influence their immediate circumstance. This is most pronounced in lower income neighborhoods. Unemployment levels in East Biloxi surpass citywide levels and more than double national rates, reaching more than 18 percent in some neighborhoods. Areas in Biloxi where unemployment is highest also experience the highest poverty rates, the highest concentration of single mothers and the highest rate of adults without a high school diploma. Lower educational attainment hinders East Biloxians' employment options, with seven in 10 residents over 25 years old lacking education beyond high school.

Almost one in every four full-time workers in Biloxi is struggling to make ends meet. With a poverty rate of 23%, workers in Biloxi are more likely to live in poverty when compared to the poverty level of the state (19.7%), or the nation (12.3%) as a whole (Data USA, 2018). One focus group participant stated, Economic insecurity often forces workers and their families to choose between critical household expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and healthcare. There are multiple aspects of employment including job security, the quality of the work environment, financial compensation, and job demand which may affect the economic stability of a workers and ultimately the stability of the community.

Approximately 80 of responses from the survey indicated that employment and jobs in East Biloxi was both a priority and a pressing need. Areas in Biloxi where unemployment is highest also experience the highest poverty rates, the highest concentration of single mothers and the highest rate of adults without a high school diploma. Lower educational attainment hinders East Biloxians' employment options, with seven in 10 residents over 25 years old lacking education beyond high school. Survey responses from individuals who live in East Biloxi suggest more jobs that provided a living wage and benefits was of most importance, followed by affordable childcare during work hours. Additionally, residents shared that decreasing barriers

to obtaining a job for individuals with criminal records is needed.

Responses were also gathered from individuals who work in East Biloxi. Again, more jobs that provided a livable wage was identified as the most pressing employment need, with other responses mirroring that of East Biloxi residents. When looking at the data by race, “more jobs that provide a living wage and benefit” was highest rated category for Whites and Hispanics; whereas “assistance obtaining employment due to criminal record, conviction, and/or arrest” was for Black/African Americans; and “training and certification programs are too expensive” was the top rated category for Asians

Increasingly, securing a job that pays a family-sustaining wage requires some additional education beyond high school. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2018) 22% of jobs in the Biloxi region in 2018 required at least a bachelor’s degree. There is also a growing number of jobs that don’t require a bachelor’s degree some type of industry-recognized training or certification is necessary. In fact, over half of all jobs in the South are middle-skill jobs which require some education or training beyond high school but not a four-year college degree. These trends present a challenge for youth in Biloxi’s Opportunity Zones, particularly youth of color, that are less likely to have completed secondary education beyond high school.

Priority 3: Health/Healthcare

The third highest rated priority (78 responses) for East Biloxi was related to health and healthcare. Many residents described their interactions with the healthcare systems as “complicated and slow.” The Biloxi area has a relatively diverse immigrant population who often experience translation barriers when accessing care, thus making health literacy a concern. The theme of health and healthcare also encompassed concerns about the affordability of services, not providing enough services, and general lack of understanding about other available health resources within the community. When asked about the most pressing needs concerning the health care system: affordability, financial assistance to pay for services (dental, vision, health, etc.) and more mental health services. East Biloxi is located in Harrison County, MS. Harrison County is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA). The factors that determine HPSA are population to provider ratio; poverty levels; infant mortality/low birth weight, and; insufficient access to physicians within thirty (30) minutes. Coastal Family Health Center (CFHC) is the only comprehensive health care provider serving the low-income residents of East Biloxi. Additionally, the Coastal Family Health Center mobile unit is the only clinic in Biloxi that offers prenatal care for low-income residents.

When considering race, “access to affordable health care” was the top-rated category among Asians, Black/African Americans, and Whites. While “financial assistance paying for medical, dental, or vision bills” was the top pressing need for Hispanics. Responses from the focus groups also affirmed the need for a focus on providing more mental health services to get individuals into the proper setting for treatment. One participant shared, *“There needs to be more help with mental health outreach. There is only one worker the association. I call her and sometimes she is hard to reach. She is still referring people to a facility that is*

closed.” More service providers would help alleviate the heavy use of emergency rooms and the burden of incarcerating individuals. Affordable quality health care would greatly improve the quality of life of residents and attract reputable business to the area.

Priority 4: Affordable/Quality Housing

Housing affordability and employment are intricately tied determinants. Hurricane Katrina greatly impacted the quality of housing available in the East Biloxi area. Housing instability is also caused by a limited rental market with few affordable vacancies, in which individuals with the lowest incomes may be forced to rent substandard housing that exposes them to health and safety risks such as vermin, mold, water leaks, and inadequate heating or cooling systems. Affordable/Quality housing was rated as the fourth priority among survey respondents. When asked to consider the most pressing need related to this priority, affordable quality housing, grants to help purchase homes and assist with utilities such as electricity, gas, and water were noted. Additionally, residents felt that there needed to be more programs to provide with home repairs among other needs.

Many residents feel that the rent is too high for houses that are not in prime condition. Focus group responses and notes from the Kick-off event also suggest that there is a great need for housing for the homeless population, affordable loans that would assist with rebuilding vacant lots and existing properties. Poor-quality housing is associated with various negative health outcomes, including chronic disease and injury and poor mental health. Improvements in policies related to accessibility and quality of housing is needed.

Priority 5: Public Infrastructure

Poor health outcomes are often made worse by the interaction between individuals and their social and physical environment. The fifth priority area regards the public infrastructure of the area and focuses primarily on the built environment. Emergent themes from the focus groups highlight a major concern with the roads and streets in the neighborhoods of East Biloxi. Residents stated that the amount and duration of road and street construction created transportation, economic and social hardships, and creating sentiments of unfairness as East Biloxi is a minority community. In addition to feeling targeted by construction efforts, improvements are needed to the local bus system which include expanding its routes beyond those catering to tourist and/or the casino area. Transportation was also viewed as a multi-dimensional problem including such areas as a public transportation system that does not serve the needs of local residents. Continuous road construction has severely restricted access to the public transportation system limiting the ability to access everything from grocery stores, employment, and social services.

The theme of public safety also included residents' thoughts on the need to decrease crime in the area. Exposure to violence in a community can be experienced at various levels, including victimization, directly witnessing acts of violence, or hearing about events from other community members. Renovating dilapidated buildings, providing more opportunities for youth and young adults, was noted as potential ways to help to change the climate and reduce areas of frequent

criminal activity.

While exhibiting a relatively small geographic footprint, the East Biloxi community contains a plethora of physical and structural resources and amenities ranging from parks, marinas, churches, museums, community centers, and multi-dimensional businesses such as the local casinos with their various amenities. The pictures taken by youth during the photo voice activity display a wide variety of assets and issues existing in the local community. The story emerging from this theme is the need for the community to better utilize, and build upon, its existing assets.