

# Kansas Head Start Collaboration Office

## 2021 Needs Assessment Summary

The Kansas Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO), funded through a grant from the Department for Health and Human Services/Administration of Children and Families (DHHS/ACF), conducts a required annual needs assessment to identify gaps in collaboration between Kansas Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) grantees, their partners, and other service providers. For the 2021 Needs Assessment, the Kansas HSCO invited the input and participation of Kansas HS/EHS grantees through an online survey and two focus group sessions in September 2021. Twenty-nine (29) participants in one or both activities represented 21 Kansas HS/EHS grantees.

The Kansas HSCO recognizes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Kansas HS/EHS grantees, staff, families, children, and communities. While most HS/EHS programs across Kansas have returned to pre-pandemic service levels, they continue to balance and address traditional HS/EHS programming and partnership challenges with emerging and exacerbated challenges resulting from the pandemic. Two prevalent findings emerged during the 2021 Needs Assessment:

- **Child care access** is a significant challenge for Head Start and Early Head Start families.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start programs** are experiencing heightened workforce and staffing challenges.

Additionally, Kansas HS/EHS grantees described the following common experiences:

- A range of pandemic related impacts for both HS/EHS families and staff members contribute to the current child care access and workforce challenges. The challenges are interconnected.
- Community partners have provided critical supports for HS/EHS children and families during the past year, but the reality of operating HS/EHS programs during the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many of these partnerships in a variety of ways.
- Communication and purposeful information sharing are critical to all community partnerships, but HS/EHS grantees find these strategies particularly critical to strengthening collaboration and coordination with school districts.
- Kansas HS/EHS programs have responded with creativity and flexibility in providing services to children and families during the past year.

As part of the 2021 Needs Assessment process, Kansas HS/EHS programs shared their accomplishments and expressed their desire for their communities to know and understand the impact of HS/EHS for children, families, and communities. As one program director shared, *“The strength of our system has been evident as we have navigated operations throughout a pandemic.”*

Based on the 2021 Needs Assessment findings, the Kansas HSCO will focus on continuing its engagement in efforts to strengthen the Kansas early childhood workforce; representing and responding to child care access concerns and challenges in coordination with child care licensing; facilitating and strengthening partnership across sectors; and providing coordination support and resources with Local Education Agencies to support seamless kindergarten transitions.