

# An Overview of Health Services Provided by the Worcester Head Start Program

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Population Health Clerkship  
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## Overview of Head Start

- Head Start is a national organization that provides learning, health, and family well being services to children from low-income families across the nation. It was founded in 1965 as part of the "War on Poverty" under President Lyndon B. Johnson.
- Families apply for eligibility through their local Head Start agency. Eligibility is based on family income at or below the federal poverty level, although children who are homeless, in foster care, or receiving public assistance are eligible regardless of their family's income.
- Both public and private non-profit agencies carry out the services provided by Head Start. These agencies receive grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and may receive additional funding from local, state, or federal programs.
- Head Start programs are located in community centers, schools, and child care homes. Children may stay for a half day (4 hours) or full day.
- Worcester Head Start currently provides services to 649 children and families across 4 schools.

## Objectives of the 2015 Clerkship

- Understand how Head Start services contribute to specific and population health outcomes.
- Work collaboratively with other health professional students, providers, and community leaders to develop a service project that meets a specific need within the program.
- Recognize personal reactions to people with particular health issues through guided reflections.

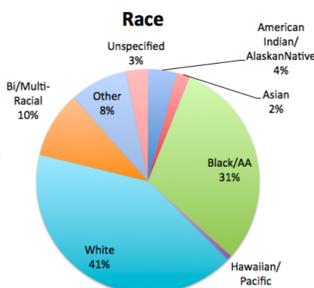
## Student and Family Demographics

### In Worcester, 2014:

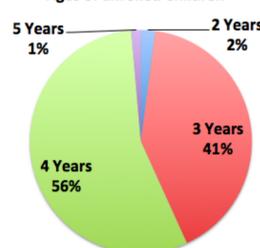
- 606 children and families were enrolled in Head Start Classes (by October deadline)
- 649 total students enrolled by the end of the academic year
- 73.3% were from low income families
- 4.5% were students with disabilities
- 62.2% were English Language Learners

### Nationally, 2013-2014::

- 884,872 children across 832,838 families
- 73% of families used at least one family service
- 12.2% with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)
- 2% were in foster care
- 4.1% were homeless at some point during the school year



### Ages of Enrolled Children



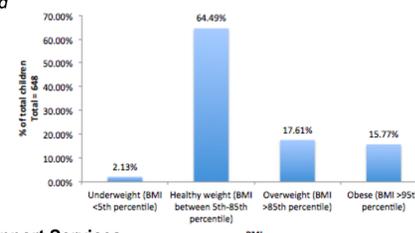
Primary Language Spoken at Home	
English	72.00%
Spanish	23.20%
East Asian Languages	1.10%
Middle Eastern or South Asian Languages	0.90%
European or Slavic Languages	0.70%
African Languages	0.70%
Unspecified Languages	0.40%
Caribbean Languages	0.30%
Pacific Island Languages	0.30%
Central American, South American, or Mexican Languages	0.20%
Other Language	0.20%
Native North American or Alaska Native Languages	0.06%

## Available Health Services

Head Start provides comprehensive Health Services to all children, covering medical, dental, nutritional, and mental health.

- Home Visits**
  - Nurses at each Head Start site conduct home visits and health assessments prior to student matriculation
  - Intake forms record all medical histories, special accommodations, and medical providers
    - In 2015, 100% of children enrolled had health insurance and an ongoing source of continuous, accessible health care
- Medical Services**
  - Immunizations**
    - In 2015, 98.86% of children enrolled were up-to-date on all immunizations appropriate for their age
  - Lead Levels**
  - Annual Physicals & Lab Work are kept up-to-date to ensure yearly check-ups**
  - Annual Health Screenings performed for every child at the school**
    - Height
    - Weight
    - Blood Pressure
    - Hearing
    - Visual Acuity & Strabismus
- Oral Health & Dental Education**
  - Oral hygienists conduct annual dental checks
  - Children receive proper dental education and practice dental hygiene at school
    - In 2015, 99.29% of children enrolled had continuous, accessible dental care provided by a dentist
- Nutrition**
  - Healthy meals are served at every Head Start site and nutritional counseling and support are provided by dietitians as needed
  - BMI's are tracked and recorded**

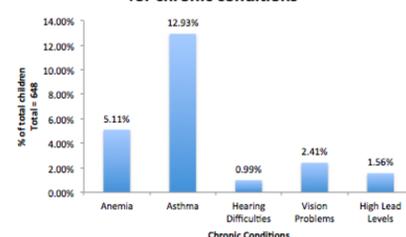
BMI's of all children at Worcester Head Start



- Special Needs Identification & Support Services**
  - Developmental screenings, evaluations, and the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans**
  - Mental health consultation, services, and support**
    - In 2015, 9.38% of children enrolled received consultations from a mental health professional and 1.42% received referrals for follow-up care

These screenings and more are critical in developing good nutritional and oral habits, maintaining annual medical checks, and identifying problems early. Any medical, developmental, or mental issues that are identified are addressed promptly, ensuring children with adequate follow-up care.

% of children receiving medical treatment for chronic conditions



## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Leanne Winchester, Lisa Marschke, and Mary Ann Rollings, as well as the nurses, staff, and particularly the students and families of Worcester Head Start for sharing your time and teachings throughout this clerkship.

## Service Project

Our role during this clerkship was to help the nursing staff at each of the three Worcester Head Start schools to provide both preventive and post hoc medical care to the students. Health screenings are a vital portion of the preventive care offered by the Head Start program, and we performed many of the height, weight, blood pressure, hearing, and vision screenings for the 704 enrolled students.

### Hearing Screening

- The hearing screening consists of a board of simple pictures and headphones with progressively softer auditory commands. If the child successfully completes the command at the 25-decibel level with each ear, he or she has passed the hearing screening. Since this task involves word comprehension, it can also be considered a language screening. For this reason, many of the children who failed the initial hearing screening are either learning English as a second language or simply too young to understand the task. In these situations, we isolated the hearing portion of the screening from the language portion to purely test the child's hearing.

### Vision Screening

- The vision screening had two major goals. For the first part, we tested the children's visual acuity by covering one eye at a time and asking them to identify shapes at a distance. The second part was a strabismus screening, where we tested the children's ability to move their eyes together to identify a hidden letter "E" on a board. Many of the children who had difficulty with the vision screening simply didn't know the names of the different shapes. However, they passed the screening if they were able to consistently use the same incorrect name for each shape.

- We also performed weekly head-checks on all of the students to look for lice. If a child had lice, we called one of the parents into the nurse's office to inform them about proper lice treatment. To prevent the spread of lice, children cannot return to school until the lice resolves.

- In addition to our screening roles we supported Head Start with their recent endeavors with the Prevention Wellness Trust Fund grant. This grant focuses on pediatric asthma and reducing school absences as a result of asthma. Our goals were to assist in establishing asthma action plans for the individual students of head start and to put together educational material for parents of asthmatic students to help them navigate their child's condition.

### Asthma Action Plans

- There are 80 students currently enrolled at Head Start with a diagnosis of asthma, each with differing levels of severity and different medication needs.

- Currently these do not have individualized asthma action plans, plans that are developed by the child's doctor to address their individual needs.

- These plans are meant to establish a guideline for how to approach the child's condition including their triggers, daily care, and what to do in emergency situations. We worked closely with the nurses at each Head Start site in Worcester to consolidate information on the students with asthma and to prepare letters to send their doctors to ensure that individual action plans are established.

### Asthma Education Project

- Our other goal was to prepare a piece of educational material that the parents of children with asthma could use as a basic resource for understanding their child's condition and how to approach emergency situations.

- We provided basic information on what asthma is, what some potential triggers of an asthma attack may be, the signs and symptoms of an asthma attack, what to do in the setting of an asthma attack, and the basics of the different types of asthma medications. This resource was designed to be easy to navigate and easy to understand with everything written in plain language at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.

- We hope that this handout will be used at the Head Start sites to provide parents with the information they need to further help them care for their child.

## Conclusions

- Head Start is a national organization that provides early education for at risk children, including children who have low income families, and children who have a physical or learning disability. They also provide a variety of health services to children and families.
- Our service project included prevention measures such as hearing, vision, weight, blood pressure, and lice screenings.
- Asthma action plans were requested from students' PCPs, and educational materials were prepared for parents of asthmatic children.
- Our work promoted early detection and prevention of childhood diseases in at-risk children. Future work should include completion of the Asthma Action Plans, training of staff on each child's individualized action plan, as well as continued screenings and prevention for hearing, vision, obesity, and pest infestation.

## References

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