

Duluth Head Start Program Strength

In Duluth Head Start, our biggest strength is our staff including our 8 Minnesota Reading Corps members. They are among the most well educated, highly trained, seasoned staff in the country. All of our teachers, advocates and service area coordinators as well as some paraprofessionals, administrative support staff and Minnesota Reading Corps members are degreed and licensed in their field. Many also hold master's degrees. Duluth Head Start staff has many years of experience and see themselves as lifelong learners. This is evidenced by the dramatic changes they have embraced over the past several years as the requirements for Head Start programs have included more rigor and demanded greater tangible proof that we are providing opportunities for children and their families to meet school readiness goals.

Duluth Head Start has built a strong culture of respect, integrity, mutual support and shared responsibility to carry out our work with Head Start children and families. They understand what is at stake for families experiencing poverty. Our child outcomes show that all children can and do make gains in Duluth Head Start. Parents are engaged every step of the way as evidenced by our deeply committed Policy Council members and parent participation on all levels. This culture of mutual responsibility extends to our school district administration, school district sister early childhood programs and our partners in the greater Duluth community.

There is an old African saying that is meant to gauge the health of the community, "So how are the children?" In Duluth Head Start, the children are doing well.

Duluth Head Start Parent Institute

For the past two years, Duluth Head Start has offered a Parent Institute, essentially an opportunity for parents to take part in a workshop/conference style parent training. Each participant moved from session to session allowing them to take in all offerings.

Topics covered in the Parent Institute are determined based on parent interest and Head Start standards for parent education. The format follows adult education principles and as such is interactive, hands-on and practical.

Session Topics Year One:

~ Literacy: How can I promote my child's school readiness at home? Each parent received a literacy box with scissors, writing tools, etc. as teachers and advocates talked about how they can promote these skills at home.

~Action Learning: Parents learned about this piece of the Head Start day with the Education Coordinator and made streamers to use at home with movement exercises.

~Health: Parents put together first aid kits and were instructed in their use by the Head Start Health Coordinator.

~Nutrition: Our Nutrition Coordinator talked with parents about establishing healthy, low stress mealtimes, had a squash tasting experience and sent parents home with a squash to share with their children.

~ Routines and Discipline: The Head Start Director talked with parents about the importance of routines, being a predictable parent, bedtime strategies, what to do when you are struggling with how you parent and when discipline and punishment becomes abuse.

Session Topic Year Two:

~Get Out The Vote: Advocates passed out voter information such as how to register, find your polling place and briefed families on State amendments being proposed as well as hot topics facing Head Start families in the coming election.

~Health Care Literacy: The Head Start Health and Nutrition Coordinators trained parents on a statewide health education initiative being promoted by the Minnesota Head Start Association. Each family got a book aimed at helping them troubleshoot minor health issues at home.

~~ Routines and Discipline: The Head Start Director and both Mental Health consultants talked with parents about the importance of routines, being a predictable parent, bedtime strategies, what to do when you are struggling with how you parent and when discipline and punishment becomes abuse.

Evaluation/Feedback:

Feedback from parents who participated in both years indicated a strong preference for the type of Make and Take offerings in year one. We will use that feedback for planning for the remainder of the year and we will institute a formal evaluation at the next Parent Institute.