

Community Assessment Updates

Denton ISD Head Start Program

(November 2020)

Executive Summary

Our Comprehensive Community Assessment was conducted December of 2018. For the 2020-2021 school year, each Program Manager reviewed their areas and provided updates during November 2020. The most significant change noted in our community since our last update, has been the Covid-19 Pandemic. This event has affected many aspects of our community, including but not limited to, health & well-being, safety measures, community resources, financial hardship, program enrollment and education services. As you read through the categories below, you will be able to see the changes/trends that were found to have the greatest impact on our community and service area.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND SERVICE AREA DATA:

The City Population increased approximately 21.7% from 2010-2019. The estimated population is 141,541. Families considered to be within or below the poverty line has remained the same at 17.7%. There was a slight increase to 5.6% persons under 5 years of age. DISD currently has 611 students identified under McKinney Vento (Pre-K to 12th grade) which is a decrease from previous year count of 793. Out of the 611 students, 527 are identified as McKinney Vento and 84 are students in Foster Care. Our campus currently serves 8 students that are McKinney Vento and 4 students that are in Foster Care placements. The city's population that speaks a language other than English in the home remains at 22.8% with the most common spoken language other than English is Spanish. There was a slight decrease in persons 16 years and older in the labor force moving from 72.3% to 67.5%.

DISD has a current enrollment of 30,332 Students compared to last year's 30,206. While majority of these students are attending Face-to-Face instruction, many of them are participating in Virtual Connected Learning or Remote Access learning modes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. DISD is ranked #1 for annual house closing

in the DFW area. Denton ISD had 2,841 closings and a future prediction of 34,539 new homes which will increase enrollment. With Health and Safety protocols in place to limit visitors in the building, we do predict that this will negatively affect our volunteer counts this school year. We have a plan to use other means for meeting our in-kind match for our Head Start program.

EDUCATION:

Significant changes for the education area was the shut-down of the schools after Spring Break in 2019-2020 school year. Due to the pandemic, our district started by extending Spring Break another week and then went to virtual learning for the remainder of the school year starting March 23, 2020. This was a challenge for both teachers and students as it was something we had never done before. Our teachers were already using the See Saw platform to stay connected with families communicating their child's progress in school, and it proved to be a valuable resource for us to stay connected with our families during the shutdown and virtual learning. Our district offered free breakfast and lunch meals for all our district's families during the shut-down. At first, they were delivering meals by buses and providing drive-through pick-ups at several locations throughout the district area. Distributions then went to a hands-free drive through service only when higher restrictions went into effect statewide. Our parent curriculum, Ready Rosie, also provided our students with items to use at home while learning virtually. We were able to distribute transition boxes for our graduating students through a drive-through service.

Before the pandemic, our district saw the need to provide services to more preschool children in our area, adding 5 additional general education Pre-K classes and 1 Communication Special Education class on our elementary campuses. Many of the area daycares were affected by the pandemic. Governmental restrictions had caused some to reduce staff and/or close their centers and many in-home caregivers closed.

For our 2020-21 school year, Governmental restrictions made districts statewide look at alternatives to face-to-face learning. Denton County Superintendents met frequently brainstorming ways to provide learning safely to students they serve. Our District changed the academic calendar pushing our student's start date back 3 weeks. This allowed students more time to stay at home and our teachers were able to use that time to assess the needs of our families for connected learning and to prepare lessons. Aligning with state recommendations of ratios of

students per class, our program started with lower numbers and offered the option for virtual learning. We applied for Covid-19 one-time funds to provide parents with devices, hot spots that they could check out, individual student classroom supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE). When we started purchasing items, many were on backorder or suppliers limited the number of items you could purchase at one time. The Texas Education Agency also provided districts with funds to help purchase PPE. The pandemic has also affected the wrap-around services we provide. Our wrap-around care was cut in half due to the restrictions of number of students who can be transported at a time. Due to safety protocols, parents and visitors are not allowed on campus. This created a need to explore new ways to build personal relationships with the families that we serve. Surprisingly, our teachers and parents are transitioning to the new “norm” relying on meeting virtually or conducting parent conferences over the phone very well. Our teachers are being innovative with connecting with the virtual learners and providing opportunities for allowing them to interact with the face-to-face learners.

FAMILY SOCIAL SERVICES/ERSEA:

As in all other communities, COVID-19 has brought unintended stressors to our community which have devastating results including domestic violence, shortage of commodities such as toilet paper, an increase in unemployment, families needing food, and low school enrollment.

Children and their mothers are experiencing domestic violence during this pandemic, and home is not a safe place for them. Denton Police Department reported to the Denton Record-Chronicle that domestic violence calls fluctuated during the time of stay-at-home orders. Compared to last year, domestic violence calls in Denton were up 61% moving from 115 calls in 2019 to 185 calls in 2020. To strengthen and bridge the gap for this vulnerable population, Denton Friends of the Family established a text message line to access help.

Although there is no statistical data to provide, the City of Denton citizens experienced a shortage of paper goods, bleach, gloves, Lysol spray, and other disinfectants due to public anxiety, and no supply resource issue. People wanted to ensure that their essentials needs were taken care of and did their best to prepare for the worst.

According to the Harvard study (The Impact of Coronavirus on Households with Children), 6 in 10 USA households with children (60%) reported having lost their jobs, lost their businesses, been furloughed, or had wages or hours reduced since the start of the outbreak and (76%) are facing serious financial problems. Families are depleting household savings, and have problems paying credit card bills, and affording medical care. The government stimulus checks, and unemployment compensation did provide some relief.

In Texas, 36,200 people filed for unemployment during the last week of October. The data is not out yet about the unemployment rates in Denton, but the social service agencies like United Way are working to provide relief through the CARES Act to help curb the surge of evictions because we already have a high population experiencing homelessness in our county. The City of Denton created an online information referral system. Due to unemployment, forty-five nonprofits agencies are allocating funds to families in need of rent, utility assistance and food.

Food insecurity increased during COVID. It is estimated that 60% were first-time recipients to receive food from pantries. Denton Community Food Center reports that the center served 2,461 people (1,459 adults and 1,002 children). Denton ISD developed the program Table to Trunk. This program (a corona relief initiative) provided free nutritious breakfasts and lunches to Denton ISD students during school closures.

Enrollment during COVID is a concern for many parents and school districts. Denton ISD, like other school districts, developed plans on how to safely reopen schools. Enrollment procedures were modified to go virtual. Programs such as Laserfiche, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams helped collect information needed for enrollment. Families have the option to decide whether to do connected learning or face-to-face instruction. When students are sick, they can participate in remote learning synchronous and asynchronous activities that are designed to keep the student engaged in the learning process while they are out and allows them to earn credit for attendance.

Enrollment into our Head Start program has slowed for two reasons. First, parents are afraid of their children getting sick from COVID. Second, Denton ISD expanded the pre-k program for 4-year-old children. As a result, enrollment of 3-year-old

children increased in the DISD Head Start program because parents preferred to enroll their 4-year old child with his/her older siblings at an Elementary campus.

PARENT, FAMILY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Parent, Family, Community Engagement is planning for and looking at a different type of year than it has in previous years. Out of an abundance of caution for the health of others and the well-being of our families, the PFCE specialist has moved to minimize face-to-face interaction between parent volunteers and staff members. We have moved to a virtual format using programs and apps such as Google, Seesaw, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams for parent orientations, parenting classes, Policy Council, PTA, and Parent Committee meetings. We have also continued communication support through phone calls, Remind 101, newsletters, and flyers.

Parents volunteering during COVID has presented some real challenges for our program. Parents are verbally committing to roles and responsibilities but are having a difficult time meeting their obligations due to additional stressors. They are unavailable by phone, email, and other forms of communications at times.

We are still offering our parenting classes and notifying parents through numerous outlets. After the parents completed the family needs assessment and interest survey, we aligned our top 5 parenting classes to coincide with the family goals. Local businesses throughout the community have donated gift cards to help purchase supplies for special school activities. We have included connected learners by scheduling time for parents to pick up goodie bags that their in-person peers received on-site. We are exploring new creative alternatives to our regularly scheduled annual events. To try to improve parent attendance we are planning to schedule some of our parenting classes in the evenings and/or weekends.

HEALTH/NUTRITION:

One remarkable change has happened this year, COVID-19. When this assessment was written the state of Texas had 1.11 million confirmed cases and 20,278 deaths due to COVID. Texans have filed 3.8 million unemployment claims during this pandemic, with an unemployment rate of 8.3 %, which has increased by almost 4% since COVID started. Although these numbers are just for Texas, globally, everyone has been affected by this virus.

I have had many families express that it has been difficult for them to get doctors' appointments, childcare, and get or keep a job due to COVID this year. Due to job insecurity it has been difficult for some families to take any time off work for sick children or have enough money to properly feed and clothe their family. We still work with "Food for Kids" which sends food home to families in need. During the pandemic while schools were closed (March 17-August 11) Denton ISD served 625,000 meals to students. We also have a clothes closet, that has donated clothes from the community to help children in need. To help our families get doctors' appointments, our staff reached out to the local Health Department and other small clinics in the area to help families obtain doctor appointments for their children. Through these actions we collaborated to help our community and assisted families in obtaining/maintaining compliance with state immunization requirements.

Although COVID has made life difficult for much of the population some things have still been unaffected by the virus, such as obesity. With obesity rates still on the rise in the U.S. at 13.9% we understand the importance of tracking BMI. From last year 2019-2020 to this year 2020-2021 we have seen a decrease in underweight (down by 9.1%) and overweight (down by 3.8%) returning students. However there has been a major increase in obese (increased by 10.2%) returning students. We also noticed a trend, that bilingual classes have a slightly higher obesity rates but also have slightly lower underweight rates. We do encourage healthy eating and activity through a variety of different ways. Any students who fall into the underweight, overweight, or obese category will be given a referral. We also send our Nutrition Specialist the list of students who are in an unhealthy BMI range for review. We strongly encourage parents to visit their PCP for these referral concerns. If a student is identified to be moving towards an unhealthy BMI, the nurse will call parent/guardian to personally discuss healthy eating habits and identify any barriers the family might have.

DISABILITIES:

Information was obtained from the Denton ISD Special Education software program to determine the number of children served with a disability within the district's attendance area and on the two early childhood campuses. Results of the analysis indicated of the district's total special education population served in the

preschool setting to be 270. Services are provided on 15 of the district’s 24 elementary campuses and the district’s two early childhood centers. One of the early childhood centers, Ann Windle School for Young Children, houses the district’s Head Start Program. Both the Ann Windle School for Young Children campus and the Gonzalez Early Childhood Center along with six of the elementary campuses also house early childhood special education classes. Two of the elementary campus house classes that implement specially designed curriculum which focuses on the development of communication skills. The same class is also provided at the Gonzalez Early Childhood Center. Additionally, the Ann Windle School for Young Children campus houses the Denton Regional Day School Program for the Deaf Preschool Program.

An analysis was also conducted to determine the disabilities served in this population and the percentage of the school population this comprised. This analysis is presented in the table below.

PRIMARY DISABILITY	SUM	PERCENT
Other Health Impairment	21	7.78%
Auditory Impairment	10	3.70%
Visual Impairment	3	1.11%
Emotional Disturbance	0	0.00%
Speech Impaired	172	63.70%
Autistic	26	9.63%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.00%
Noncategorical Early Childhood	38	14.07%
TOTAL	270	100.00%

Within the community, numerous home health agencies provide services to children. Ten agencies were identified as providing speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy to preschool aged children. Criteria for these services are based on medical eligibility criteria whereas services in the school setting are based on disability criteria. Four offices providing applied behavior analysis therapy to children within the Denton area were also identified. Both the home health and ABA therapy programs have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and their ability to provide direct services in a face-to-face format. Telehealth practices have

been implemented by most home-health agencies. Some ABA therapy services are reported to provide only parent training support during this time.

Both the University of North Texas and Texas Woman's University offer low cost speech and hearing therapy. Both universities utilized a telehealth approach during the Spring of 2020 when their campuses were closed to face-to-face interactions. Clinics are currently open with strict guidelines for client and service provider's safety.

MENTAL HEALTH:

Mental health is identified as an area of concern on the Denton County United Way website. The United Way Agency publishes a community assessment every five years. In their last community assessment conducted in 2017, United Way of Denton Country reported "an estimated 19.8% of Denton County Residents will experience mental illness in a year." The report further stated that mental illness in children is on the rise in Denton County from 6.4% to 7.7% in the 2015 year. The webpage for Denton County United Way states that one in five Denton County residents will experience mental illness in a year.

The Denton County Child Health Summit last conducted a survey in 2016 with reports from the survey sample of 1,970. 41% of respondents reported ease in finding mental health support. A review of licensed mental health counselors in Denton indicated only one that reported to work with children under four years of age.

Both local universities offer counseling services on a sliding scale. Counseling services are provided by student clinicians under the supervision of a faculty member who has the appropriate credentials. Both universities have transitioned to telehealth services to deliver counseling services. These services, however, do not include counseling for young children.

Both universities also offer play therapy as a service for upper-aged young children, but not younger children. With the impact of COVID-19 on face-to-face play therapy sessions, the University of North Texas has developed and implemented an outdoor play therapy setting. Through an outdoor playroom, which debuted in September, play therapists were able to offer in-person services in a safer environment during the pandemic while adhering to CDC guidelines for sanitation and social distancing. Since UNT play therapy students will not be able to come into the public school

buildings due to Covid-19 safety protocols, Denton ISD is working to provide these services to students in need through DISD trained counselors and LSSP staff.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the availability of mental health services was also explored beyond services at the local universities. The Children's Advocacy Center of Denton County indicated increased numbers of abuse cases reported by hospitals in the spring but then a decrease due to abuse going unaddressed.

Lack of in-person counseling services currently being offered and longer wait times to see a counselor and psychiatrist due to increased levels of depression and anxiety across all ages lead to the development and implementation of the COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line through Texas Health and Human Resources. Those with mental health concerns can call a toll-free number and speak with a mental health professional for help dealing with anxiety, depression, stress, grief or worry 24/7.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

The pandemic caused a lot of the local businesses to shut down or to limit capacity at one time. This made it difficult for families to get the help, supplies, or care that they needed. The "Essential" businesses were the main ones that were able to stay open. However, many of these were still harder to reach to get appointments, etc. City transportation services were also limited due to many Uber services ceasing to operate and public transportation closing some routes or limiting passenger capacity. With virtual services on the rise, many of our families realized they were lacking in devices and connectivity options. These limitations put a strain on many of our families.

PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT UPDATES:

Our program uses the information from our Community Assessment Updates to help to plan our program's direction. It helps us to plan our focus/vision for the new year in a way to work toward meeting the current needs of our families in our service area. As we interview families upon entry into our program, we collect data to see what our families' greatest needs are. We then look to our community to identify the needed resources for our families in need.