

2023-2024 Duluth Public Schools Head Start Self Assessment Report

Purpose of Self Assessment

Head Start Performance Standard §1302.102(b)(2)(i) indicates that a program must effectively oversee progress towards program goals on an ongoing basis and annually must conduct a self-assessment that uses program data, and professional development and parent and family engagement data as appropriate, to evaluate the program's progress towards meeting program goals, compliance with program performance standards throughout the program year and the effectiveness of the professional development and family engagement systems in promoting school readiness.

Head Start Performance Standard §1302.102(c)(2)(iv) indicates that a program must use information from ongoing monitoring and the annual self-assessment, and program data on teaching practice, staffing and professional development, child-level assessments, family needs assessments, and comprehensive services, to identify program needs, and develop and implement plans for program improvement.

Questions that helped guide the process were:

- Is our program meeting the Head Start Performance Standards?
- Are our services responding to the changing needs of children and families?
- Are we doing what we need to do, or are we just doing things the way we have always done them?
- Are we achieving the goals we intended?

Duluth Head Start used a process for the self assessment that involved teams to determine success in the following areas:

1. High Quality Inclusive Classrooms: Navigating Trauma
2. Responding to the Unique Needs of our Community
3. Fostering Resilience with a Focus on Health and Wellness
4. Program Management and Quality Improvement
5. Family Engagement and Enrollment

Program Strengths

Duluth Head Start is a school based program with a mission to create a strong learning community in order to achieve success in the classroom and beyond. Currently located in eight of the nine elementary schools in Duluth, MN, we are spread across this 27 mile long city along the shores of Lake Superior.

We have been in our public schools since 1965 and are staffed with teachers and paraprofessionals who are part of the school district bargaining units. Being compensated as public school employees means we have very low staff turnover, and many of our teaching staff have advanced degrees. Being within a public school also gives us the opportunity to work together with our school district to align initiatives and collaborate with schools directly in finding the best ways to support children and families.

Some of the challenges of this arrangement is that we don't always fit perfectly within the K-12 model. Elements of the union contract need to be viewed differently when looking at early childhood programs. Despite this challenge, our

program does exceptional work preparing children for kindergarten, and helping to make sure kindergarten is ready for young children.

Methodology

The management team developed a self assessment plan with tasks and timelines. Self Assessment teams analyzed 5 areas:

1. High Quality Inclusive Classrooms
2. Responding to the Unique Needs of our Community
3. Fostering Resilience with a Focus on Health and Wellness
4. Program Management and Quality Improvement
5. Parent, Family, and Community Engagement; Enrollment; Transportation

Until receiving our Notice of Competition, we believed we had entered the final year of this grant, and approached Self Assessment differently. We wanted to celebrate our accomplishments, identify challenges, and articulate which practices to include in our service delivery moving forward.

Each team included coordinators, a parent, a teacher, and various partners with specialized knowledge of the content area. All staff and the entire Parent Policy Council were invited to attend any portion of the Self Assessment.

Grant Goals and Key Insights

High Quality Inclusive Classrooms involved partnering with Early Childhood Special Education in a more collaborative relationship than previously done. We shared professional development, our staff newsletter, and goals.

The Pyramid Model was introduced to our program in 2017.

This implementation has been very successful and we find the approach vital to classroom success.

Collecting Behavior Incident Reports allows us to have greater insight into the challenges being faced in individual classrooms. Physical aggression, elopement, uncontrolled tantruming, self harm, and withdrawal are behaviors teachers are required to document. 42% of Behavior Incidents Reports in 2023-24 were for aggressive behavior.

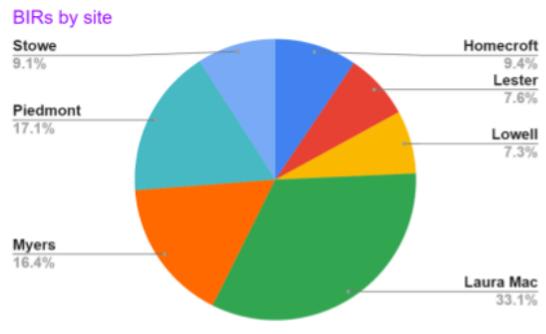
Documentation on these mandatory categories allow us to see not only which children are exhibiting behaviors, but also to identify any patterns of behavior that may be useful in identifying reasons why and appropriate interventions to assist children in gaining necessary skills to decrease the number of behavior incidents.

This data informs the Preschool Support Team, which works with classroom teams to discuss, model, and coach interventions to fidelity. The Preschool Support Team includes the Mental Health Coordinator, Inclusion Coordinator, Education Coordinator, Program Director, and Early Childhood Special Education teacher if the child is on an Individualized Education Plan. This team continues to support and make necessary adjustments to the plan, as needed, to assure the child has what is needed to experience success.

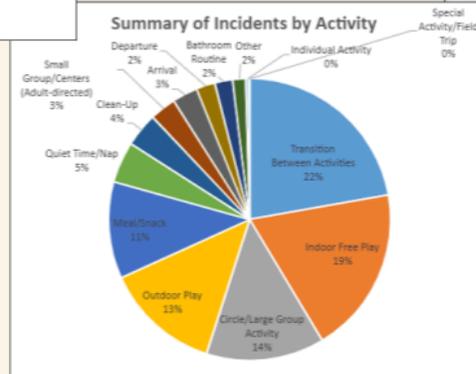
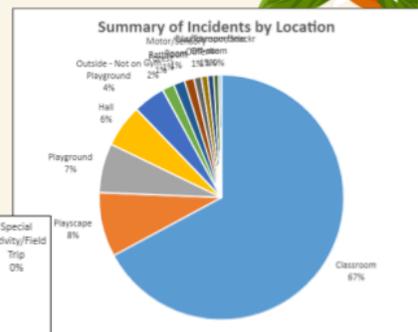
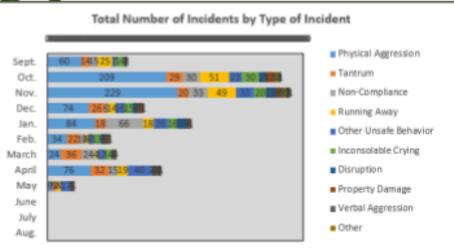
Since this data collection did not exist prior to this grant goal, we are pleased to have such data to guide an unbiased account of how children are doing. When dealing with challenging behaviors, it can be difficult to see changes, as they rarely occur as quickly as teams would like them to.

Behavior Incident Reports

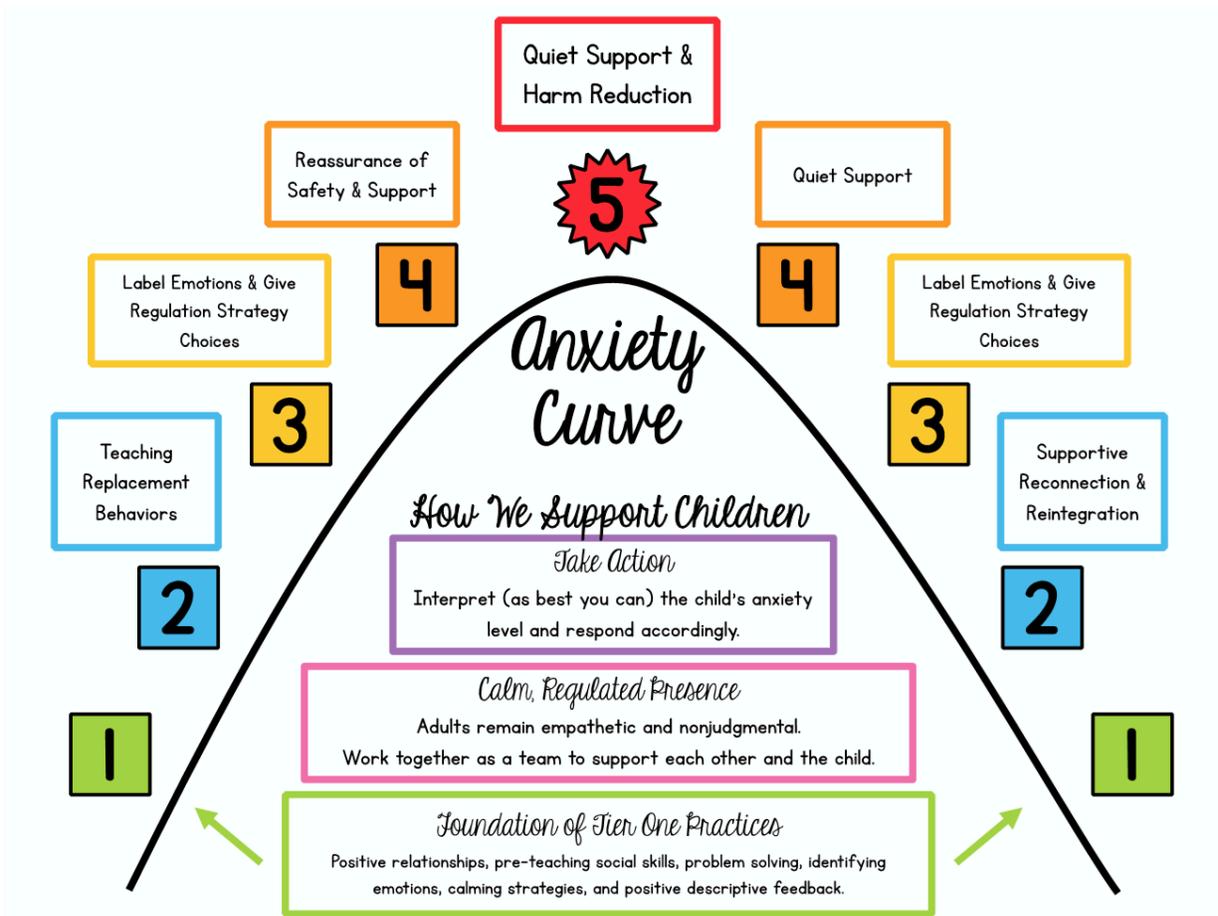
	Total Number of Incidents Reported each Month	Number of Children with Reported Incidents each Month
September	141	29
October	411	50
November	428	57
December	170	31
January	253	42
February	111	23
March	122	34
April	200	28
May	49	18
June		
July		
August		
Grand Total	1885	



Behavior Incident Reports



Physical aggression is the behavior we targeted in professional development, and staff received powerful, effective training on how to respond to dysregulated children based on the Anxiety Curve.



This professional development, along with another topic: Teaching Replacement Behaviors were enthusiastically received by our staff. This PD was designed by staff within our program and will be used as an annual training for how to support children who are dysregulated.

Responding to the Unique Needs of Our Community

Working with families experiencing poverty means that our students come to school not having had similar experiences available to peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This can impact vocabulary, background knowledge, and various aspects of child development. We call this an opportunity gap.

Our program works to close opportunity gaps. Some examples of this are:

- **Nature based programming:** Nature based preschool programs are some of the fastest growing preschool program types in MN and the US. During

the course of this grant, we built 3 Nature Playscapes at schools with the highest concentration of poverty in the Duluth Public Schools.

In addition to the playscapes, we provide children with high quality outdoor gear so they can feel comfortable outside in any weather.

- **Oshki-Inwewin:** This bicultural preschool incorporates Ojibwe language and culture into programming. It draws families from across the city who are interested in having this experience for their children. It is located in an elementary school that houses an Ojibwe language immersion program. Interest in this program continues to grow. Currently, we have more than twice as many families accepted into the program at this time of year than ever before. People from across the city are getting their children to Oshki.
- **Artist in Residence Program:** We partner with the Duluth Art Institute to provide an artist in residence program for full day classrooms. Artists provide an art lesson for 9 weeks and then have an art showcase at the end of the experience. We plan to continue this going forward.
- **Scholarships:** Our program partners with various community partners offering enrichment opportunities for children and families. Several of these have streamlined scholarship applications so that families' participation in Head Start indicates eligibility taking the burden of proof of the family.

Fostering Resilience with a Focus on Health and Wellness

YMCA Partnership:

Our partnership with the YMCA provides:

- 4 full day classrooms to attend a six week Safety Around Water class during the school day.

- Day passes for every Head Start staff and family
- In spring of 2025, we will add a swim class for Head Start parents - a result of last year's self assessment. This will include childcare. We currently have 7 parents signed up to attend this class.

Health and Wellness for Staff:

Our Health and Wellness Committee provides opportunities for staff to gather outside of work time and participate in wellness challenges and monthly prize drawings.

Noticing Good Work:

After administering Gallup's Employee Engagement questionnaire to all staff we found some areas that provide our program with opportunities for growth. The measure "In the past 7 days I have received recognition or praise for good work" scored a 48%. The measure "In the past 6 months, someone has talked to me about my progress" scored 46%. These measures remind us how important it is for all of us to notice good things when we see them, and how important it is to provide meaningful feedback to employees.

Reflective Practice: In analyzing the effectiveness of our Professional Learning Communities, PLC Activators discussed how helpful it was to start PLC meetings with a period of peer reflection. Participants would share what current struggles they were having and peers would offer constructive feedback, even though it may have been outside the focus of the PLC. Reflective Practice such as this, is a common Early Childhood process that helps staff feel supported and seen by peers. We feel this practice has mental health benefits for staff.

School Readiness

Ultimately, Head Start is a school readiness program.

Rather than target a blanket end of year goal, we establish goals for enrolled children to achieve a certain percentage of growth for each of the developmental domains.

We expect children to make the following gains from fall to spring:

- 25% growth in Approaches to Learning
- 30% growth in Social Emotional Development
- 25% growth in Language and Literacy
- 35% growth in Cognitive Development
- 35% growth in Physical Development

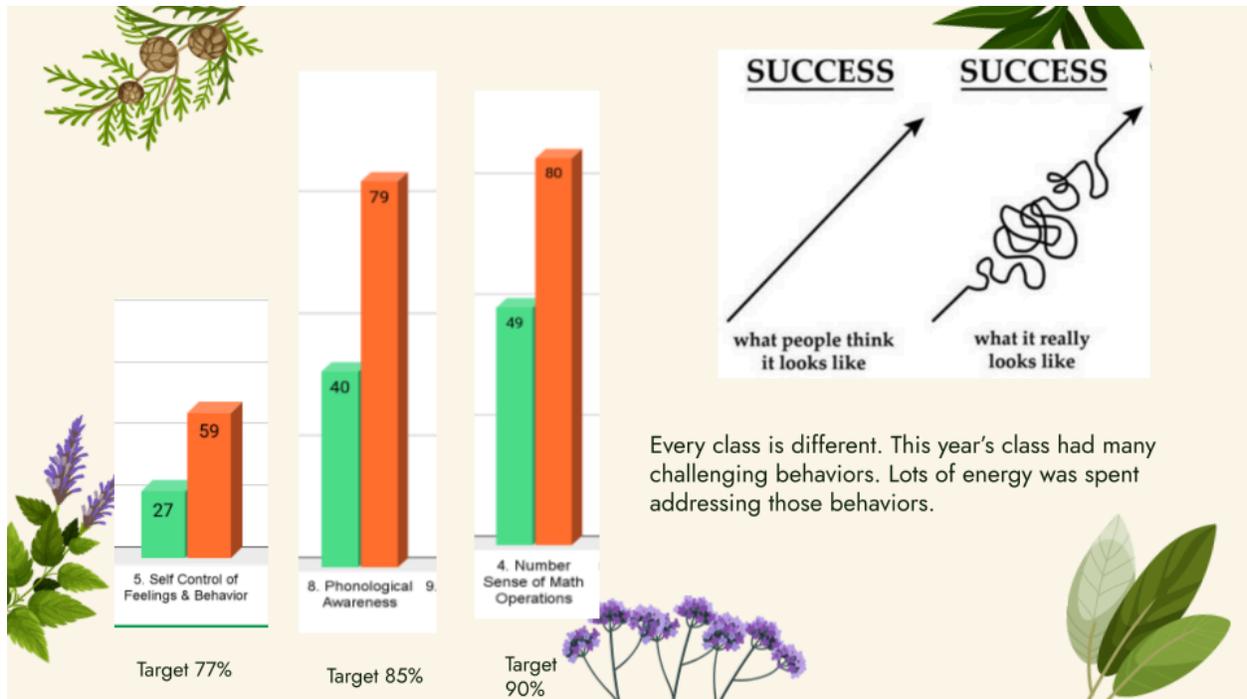
Percent of Growth from Fall to Spring in 23-24	Approaches to Learning	Social Emotional Dev.	Language and Literacy	Cognitive Dev.	Physical Dev.
Half Days	44%	60%	57%	52%	65%
Full Days	61%	55%	68%	65%	72%

Growth in each area ranges from 44-72%

These measures can be further broken down to objectives. Our program also sets goals for the lowest scoring objectives in Approaches to Learning, Language and Literacy, and Cognitive Development. These targets more easily align with established district-wide goals.

*These are end goal targets that do not consider where children are at as they enter our program.

We fell short of these goals in 23-24.



Program Management and Quality Improvement

Federal Monitoring: We were monitored by the Office of Head Start in the spring of 2024. There was one finding that was corrected regarding Oral Health Determination. Several program strengths were noted including:

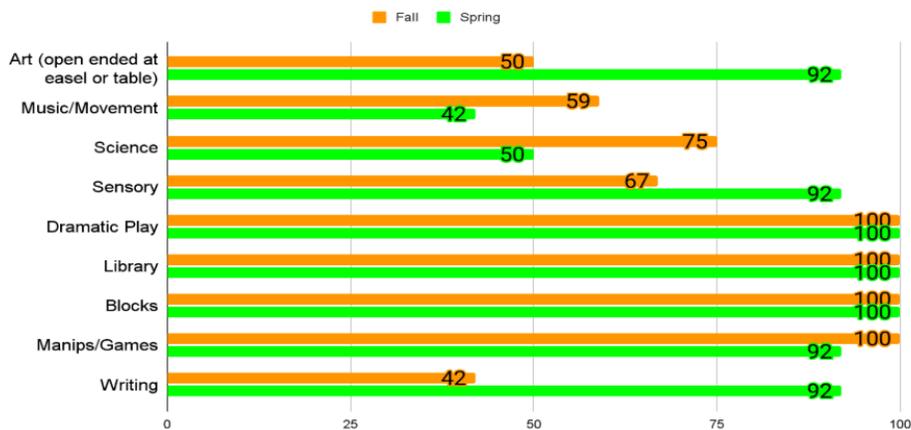
- Formal systems that remove barriers for policy council member participation
- Use of ongoing program data to innovate in the classroom based on needs of individual or subgroups of students
- Regularly offering families information or activities designed to support families' mental health and wellness
- Solicits and uses inputs from families to improve programming
- Provides economic mobility support to help families with pathways out of poverty
- Continuously evaluates the success of recruitment strategies and adjusts strategies as appropriate
- Provides targeted support for children and families who are at risk of low attendance

Internal Monitoring: We monitor classrooms twice per year: in the fall and spring. We monitor to see the following:

- Pyramid Model practices are in place
- Evidence of curriculum fidelity
- Active Supervision procedures are in place
- Meals are being served family style

We will add a portion to Internal Monitoring that includes a staff interview, as there are some items not seen simply because of the time of day the monitoring has occurred.

Curriculum Fidelity-12 Classrooms



1302.32 (2) A program must support staff to effectively implement curricula and at a minimum monitor curriculum implementation and fidelity, and provide support, feedback, and supervision for continuous improvement of its implementation through the system of training and professional development.

Transportation Internal Monitoring: Transportation is monitored three times per year, at the beginning of the school year, after the winter break, and in April following Spring break

We look to see upon arrival at school that

- Bus vests are being used
- Children are not released until teachers are present
- Staff are maintaining active supervision as they walk children to the classroom
- Drivers have current Release To information

- Drivers are in possession of a current route sheet

At home drop off stops we look to see that

- Parents are going up to the bus to pick children up

When a child is returned to school because an adult was not present, that provides evidence that our plan is being followed.

Bus Concern Forms are used when staff or families have concerns about a parent, driver, or child's behaviors. This form is sent to our Enrollment Coordinator who follows up with them. 42 Bus Concern forms were completed in 2023-24. These were all followed up with by our Transportation Coordinator.

Enrollment and Family Engagement

We were identified in 2023 as being chronically under enrolled. This was due, in large part, to us limiting enrollment in classrooms struggling with challenging student behavior. Some behaviors made it difficult to keep classrooms safe.

We have since created systems of support to increase the capacity of teaching teams to navigate these challenges.

We have maintained the required full enrollment for the 2024-25 school year.

We also took a hard look at our enrollment process and made improvements where we could. We continue to review our enrollment process annually and have created an action plan to address any concerns that are identified.

A quarterly Office Flow Meeting has been established to create pathways for talking through changes, challenges, and celebrations.

Finally, we have created a recruitment team that meets 2-3 times per year to look at sites that may need strategic recruitment, along with a recruitment timeline to keep us on track with the many tasks involved in launching a new program year.

Family Engagement at the site level has not recovered from the pandemic. Parent Committee meetings at sites have had low attendance (1-2 families), with the exception of the very first one of the year: the Ice Cream Social, held in early October, which had 8-17 families in attendance across all sites.

We have seen success in bringing families together when we invite them from across the city to meet at community sites like the zoo, aquarium, or YMCA. Attendance has ranged from 21- 107. Attendance at many of these events seems to be influenced by the weather.

Attendance at city wide events feels satisfying for family advocates and pleasurable for families, though it does not seem to result in changes to engagement at the site level.

Connecting families to their school site will be a focus moving forward. This needs to be a program wide initiative.

Noteworthy Additions

The program director will be leaving their position at the end of the year. There is a \$225,000 budget deficit due to increased cost of salary and fringe benefits that will need to be addressed this year.

Our grant will open for competition sometime the second half of the year due to 2 deficiencies we had post-Covid in our program. Competition allows us an opportunity to redefine how our program responds to identified community needs.

Recommendations

The following program wide recommendations are recommended for continuous quality improvement.

1. Plan and prepare for a smooth transition to a new Head Start director.
2. Begin a process of visualizing an ideal Head Start program in preparation for competition that both meets current community needs and the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

3. Continue to Internal Monitoring, adding a staff interview to determine if any elements are happening at times other than during the walkthrough.
4. Encourage and capture data regarding Family Engagement at the site level.

By signing below, this report has been approved by the Governing Board and Head Start Policy Council.

_____ Kelly Durick-Eder, School Board Chair

_____ Date

_____ Kristi Meyer-Fladwell, Policy Council Chair

_____ Date