

region 19 educational services center

El Paso, Texas

Overview

Region 19 Educational Services Center administers Head Start and Early Head Start in 35 urban and rural communities along the portion of the Rio Grande that separates Texas from Chihuahua, Mexico. There are approximately 211,000 households in the counties served, and Spanish is spoken in 73% of them. More than 95% of the families participating are Hispanic or Latino, and more than half use Spanish as their primary language. Most employees—65%—are the parents of formerly enrolled children.

Head Start and Early Head Start became part of Region 19 Educational Services Center in 1986. Today, the two programs serve more than 4000 children, 8% of whom are in full-day care. Of the families served, nearly 75% earn less than \$15,000 annually, 70% use WIC, 56% are on Medicaid, and 43% are single-parent.

Literature describes the mission of these Head Start and Early Head Start programs in this way: "... to empower children, families, and staff through life-long learning, thus making a positive impact on ourselves and the people around us. We are a dynamic organization that works closely with the surrounding community and believes in adhering to high principles and in cultivating the social, emotional, linguistic, educational, physical, and mental development of those we serve."

The programs are managed partly on-site and partly from a central headquarters and training facility. The main offices face a playground for one of the program sites.

Profile

Staffing

- Childcare: 52
- Non-child direct services: 261
- Family support: 62
- Management/administration: 45
- Other: 270

- Total: 690

Children & Families Served

- Head Start:: 3808
- Early Head Start: 213
- Total children: 4021

Budget

\$25 million

Per child: \$6,285

Services Provided On-Site

- Cancer awareness
- Computer training
- Crisis management and support
- Drug and alcohol awareness
- ESL
- Family support
- Fatherhood Initiative
- GED
- Home visits
- Life skills

How the Program Builds Protective Factors

Region 19 Educational Services Center's Head Start and Early Head Start programs build five key protective factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. Programs, services, and characteristics contributing to each protective factor are listed below:

Parental Resilience

- Bilingual Staff & Translation
- Parent Education
- Parent Leadership
- Volunteer Recognition

Social Connections

- Family Development Center
- Fatherhood Initiative
- Field Trips
- Parent Education
- Parent Leadership Opportunities
- Parent Volunteerism
- Special Events and Holiday Celebrations
- Sports Activities

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Child Abuse Awareness Presentations
- Family Development Center
- Family Partnership Agreement Plan
- Fatherhood Initiative
- Home Projects
- Home Visits
- Love Your Child Campaign
- Parenting Sessions

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Communication with Public Schools
- Crisis Intervention & Case Management
- Family Development Centers
- Resource and Referral
- Say No to Drugs Campaign
- Staff Training

- Nutrition
- Parent education: child development, nutrition, mental health, CPR, and first aid
- Referral
- Social and community services
- Teen parent services

Partners

- Battered women's shelter
- El Paso del Norte Health Foundation
- Faith-Based Organizational Collaborative
- High schools
- Homelessness coalition and shelters
- Public school districts (12)
- Substance abuse centers Texas Dept. of Child Protective Services
- Texas Children's Court Model
- Texas Dept. of Regulatory. and Protective Services

Response Protocol

If a staff member is concerned about a family:

- He or she brings concerns to the child's teacher, always the first point of contact
- Administrative staff are notified
- Parents are consulted, with teacher in the lead and other staff with relationships with the family included
- Community Outreach and Referral Technician (CORT—social worker / health care professional) supports family if needed
- Decisions as to the best course of action are made by whole team, including family

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Developmental Screening
- Teaching Approach & Curricula

Key Program Features

Cultural Responsiveness

All staff are trained to support each child's home language, culture, race, religion, and ethnicity and the composition of his or her family. All communication to parents about their children is in the primary language of the parent. The program uses a multicultural, bilingual curriculum in every classroom, and all teachers are bilingual. The predominance of the Spanish language in the El Paso area has made it unusually easy to find completely bilingual staff.

Materials for parents are all bi-lingual, including manuals and training materials. Policy council and other parent meetings are almost always conducted in two languages; when they are not, parents receive simultaneous translation. It has been important for families that parent education and fatherhood activities deal with the cultural aspects of issues such as male roles in the family, child discipline, myths that may be barriers to children's success, and asking for and receiving assistance outside of the family.

Developmental Screening

Infants and toddlers are screened every other month by caregivers and parents together using the Ages and Stages tool, and parents are given advice on helping their children develop emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually.

Family Development Center

These centers are present at several sites. They offer adult education and GED, ESL, computer, nutrition, and life skills classes. Job skills training is available: Parents can get commercial drivers' licenses and become bus drivers or learn computer skills and become administrative / clerical workers. Another

If staff suspect child abuse or neglect:

- Head Start reporting and documentation protocols are followed
- Parents are consulted and incident report is filed by a mandated reporter
- Family specialist for child's center receives incident report within 48 hours
- CORTs, teachers, and other staff work with family as needed after report

Staff Resources

Staff receive the following supports in working with issues of child abuse and neglect:

- All staff, including bus drivers and cafeteria staff, observe children
- In-service training helps recognize and address potential problems
- Open collegiality and informal communication modeled by managerial staff
- Case staffings of multi-disciplinary teams (twice weekly or as convened by CORTs)

Staffing policies that promote staff and child well-being:

- Training in positive child discipline and guidance for all staff
- All staff sign acknowledgement of protocols of positive discipline
- Teacher training in stress management and self-reflection
- Educational facilitators monitor classrooms and help teachers deal with frustrating behaviors

course enables parents to prepare for a career in childcare by learning about nutrition, child development, mental health, CPR, first aid, and setting up a home childcare business. A graduation ceremony for parents is conducted yearly for those who complete training or achieve certification.

Fatherhood Initiative

At four sites, staff develop activities for fathers and reach out to them in settings that are comfortable to them. Support groups cover manhood, values, communication, nutrition, self-exploration, and cultural forces affecting men's behavior and roles. The group format promotes sharing information and feelings. Materials and instructions for home projects, including literacy activities, are distributed monthly to encourage men's connections with their families at home. A monthly fathers' night out allows dads to become comfortable interacting with their children without their mothers present. A Male of the Month award is given at each of the four sites.

The Fatherhood Initiative has had many positive effects. It has enabled the largely female staff to gain experience working as partners with fathers. Fathers have become regular volunteers in classrooms and accompany children on field trips. Mothers view their partners differently and see that they can be trusted to care for children and take nurturing roles in the family. Fathers who have participated in the initiative are taking leadership roles in the community as well as in the children's programs. The younger generation of men in the community have more positive attitudes toward children and fatherhood, which has changed the focus of the initiative over time.

IntelliZeum

When the executive director asked a team of staff and parents to design a place where young children could learn creatively and access technology and the arts, they conceived of a hands-on children's museum. Architects, designers, and builders then collaborated to create the IntelliZeum adjacent to one of the Head Start centers. Here, children can buckle their seat belts

- All staff in contact with children are monitored by multiple staff
- Windows and glass walls in every classroom facilitate monitoring and observation

Licensing and Accreditation

Licensed by the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services

Three centers are NAEYC-accredited; others are in process

National/Federal Projects

- Head Start Fatherhood Initiative
- Reading Is Fundamental

What People Say

"In the end, they're all our children."

—Blanca E. Enriquez, Executive Director

"No one feels alone here."
—Staff member

"There are so many people doing so many things for your children. It's like they love your children as much as you do. It gives you a chance to learn and give back yourself. It also shows the children how to give back."
—Parent

"If you know there's hope, you can make it through. [The staff] represent hope for a lot of people."
—Parent

"Being here has made us so aware of our responsibility as parents, [of] what a big responsibility that is. It's very hard. You can lose it. The big

in a “space ship” or travel to a rain forest, the Arctic, an underwater reef, the moon, or a dinosaur habitat.

They can develop and broadcast their own stories in a real broadcast studio. They can practice health care skills and “see” the insides of their bodies. The IntelliZeum has its own bus, painted the same purple as the building, which picks up children from all over the two-county area. The community takes great pride in this unique project.

Interagency Partnerships

The Youth Initiative offers high school students an opportunity to learn and practice skills required for careers in health care and child and family programs while making a real contribution to the community. Students from a magnet school promoting health care skills provide health screenings to Head Start and Early Head Start children, augmenting their rotation at El Paso County Hospital. Students also can enroll in clown school, where older students teach them how to be a clown; Head Start provides the materials for costumes and props, and the interns entertain the young children.

Communication and collaboration among school districts eases the transition of children from Head Start into school. All superintendents meet four times each year to ensure collaboration; each year, they sign a new agreement for their work together. Teachers from Head Start and kindergarten teachers from the schools exchange information and visit each other’s classrooms to facilitate the alignment of their curricula. Families visit the schools that their children will attend as part of Head Start field trips.

The local battered women’s shelter and child protective services agency refer families to Head Start and Early Head Start. Teachers and other staff work closely with these two agencies to meet families’ specific needs after referral. Foster families are also welcome in the programs.

thing in my life to learn is that ... I can get help. I learned that here. It completely turned my life around.”
—Parent

“The day I walked in and met [the site manager], my life changed completely. We didn’t interact with anyone except our family. Now, all of home is about school: T-ball, the picnic at the end of the year, meetings here. My husband changes his schedule to be at T-ball. My child was so shy. Now she’s a social butterfly.”
—Parent

“The Fatherhood Initiative completed our circle of life. I grew up in a home where mom was mom and dad was dad. I don’t even remember dad until a certain age.”
—Father

“My husband ... doesn’t know how to participate, so he leaves it up to me. The [fatherhood] program gives men a chance to see other men are involved. He can be involved, too.”
—Mother

“The program shows you that you can find a way to be a positive power in your child’s life. They can steer you in the right direction. I do fail, but there is hope. I am not alone.”
—Head Start mother

“How can you make a policy or procedure without even knowing what a [staff member’s] day is like?”
—Blanca E. Enriquez, Executive Director

Parent Education

A program manager, four parent facilitators, and a parent educator provide educational programs for parents. Regular sessions cover change, discipline, temperament, spanking, harmful words, directions, modeling, and family building. Sessions are conducted in a group setting so that parents can share with, learn about, learn from, and identify with other families.

Parent Involvement in Education

Teachers take many opportunities to involve parents in their children's education, including interaction during pick-up and drop-off, biannual home visits, and formal parent-teacher conferences. In each of these settings, teachers greet and build a relationship with the parents and discuss with them their children's progress and any concerns. Parents are welcome in the classrooms and in all activities in which their children participate.

Parent Leadership

At each site, parents can join an executive parent committee, participate in decision making at monthly parent meetings, and take leadership roles as policy council members, classroom volunteers, and members of several committees. Parents regularly provide the program with ideas on activities that will enhance the educational development of their children. Site managers and assistant managers are directly responsible for planning and promoting parent leadership activities in their sites. A parent leadership facilitator helps coordinate and implement activities.

Sports Activities

Families play organized sports —T-ball and soccer— with pre-season presentations and training sessions on parenting and relevant community topics. A cook-out at the end of the season draws 600 people and promotes social connections among families.

Staff Training

Staff training is ongoing and extensive. Formal training is offered through:

- In-service training one full day each month for all staff, focusing on stress reduction for staff as well as families
- Individualized job-related training provided by the program or external agencies
- Daily technical assistance for all staff by specialists in different content areas
- College courses and credit for staff working toward an associate's degree in child development

Informal staff development occurs every day on-site. Because it responds to specific staff needs, it is believed to be the most effective learning tool. The educational facilitator (who is the equivalent to the mental health coordinators of other Head Start programs) offers support and suggestions to teachers on how to observe children more closely, understand their behavior, respond effectively, and work with parents. The facilitator may bring in other teachers, disabilities specialists, and others. Teachers seek input from educational facilitators informally, asking, "Do you see this? What do you think?" Site managers are also "walking resources," offering staff ideas and assistance daily. Assistant site managers have recently been added to each site to offer additional observation and more contact with parents.

Staff training is critical in building all staff capacities, including the ability to identify and respond to children and families in need. All Community Outreach and Referral Specialists (CORTs) and teachers receive training in identification of children and families at risk. Both of these groups are also trained in community resources that offer emotional and concrete support. Many staff at all levels report that the executive director has given them personal encouragement to reach beyond their jobs and professional comfort levels to challenge themselves to do more, better.

They say her philosophy that change is to be expected and embraced keeps the entire organization from getting too comfortable or complacent.

Staffing

Multidisciplinary teams ensure that staff of each site are accountable for anything that happens at their site; this is reflected in job descriptions and on performance appraisals. Staff always seek to solve problems within their teams before taking them to higher management. The teams promote better observation and immediate response to difficult situations.

Implementation of the teams followed a two-year period of “team effectiveness development” that started with cross-training for all staff. Staff in each area came to understand the policies and procedures of all other areas, so that they could work together and share accountability. Staff were exposed to Total Quality Management, Steven Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and other integrated conceptual models as a way of helping them create a new norm.

The role of the CORTs is key. These specialists work closely with teachers on issues facing children in their classes. They observe on-site when a child or family seems to be out of sorts. They are particularly sensitive when they know that families are under stress, and they respond by providing crisis intervention and case management. CORTs hold regular case staffings with the whole team twice each week so that every issue is addressed within 48 hours. CORTs can also call the interdisciplinary team to meet on an emergency basis at any time. The team works together on the best way to approach a family if a problem comes to their attention.

All staff members are vital to achieving the goal of an excellent program. At various times, administrative staff have “walked in the shoes” of direct service staff: Administrators have ridden along with bus drivers,

cooked with cafeteria staff, worked with the maintenance crew, and interacted with teachers and specialists.

Teaching Approach & Curricula

Teachers provide children with activities and materials that promote their self-esteem. They focus on self-help skills and use the *I Am Special* curriculum. Teachers make a point of nurturing children through praise, encouragement, positive discipline, and guidance. They promote social skills through classroom rules, cooperative games, and the teaching of manners. Socialization is taught as a part of all routines. Children build their resilience through the use of two curricula: *Nuestro Mundo/Our World and I Am Amazing*. Children are helped to develop their own resolutions to problems that come up in the classroom. They work with kitchen staff to decorate their birthday cakes as part of a monthly birthday celebration.

Challenges

Developmental Disabilities

Most families in the communities served do not have many sources of support regarding developmental disabilities, which can lead them to avoid early screening. Once families are connected to Early Head Start or Head Start, a supportive relationship with a teacher or other staff member makes the screening process much easier.

Qualifications

It is difficult to find qualified applicants for Community Outreach and Referral Technician positions, because they require knowledge of both family services and health care.