



2023  
2024



# Florida State University Early Head Start Program



**FSU EARLY HEAD START**  
Empowering Families in Gadsden since 1996

## Annual Report



# FSU Early Head Start Program At a Glance

***The mission of the FSU Early Head Start Program is to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy family functioning.***

The FSU Early Head Start Program is funded through the federal **Office of Head Start** to serve **68 infants, toddlers, and pregnant women**. The Office of Head Start is part of the Administration for Children and Families, which falls under the Department of Health and Human Services.

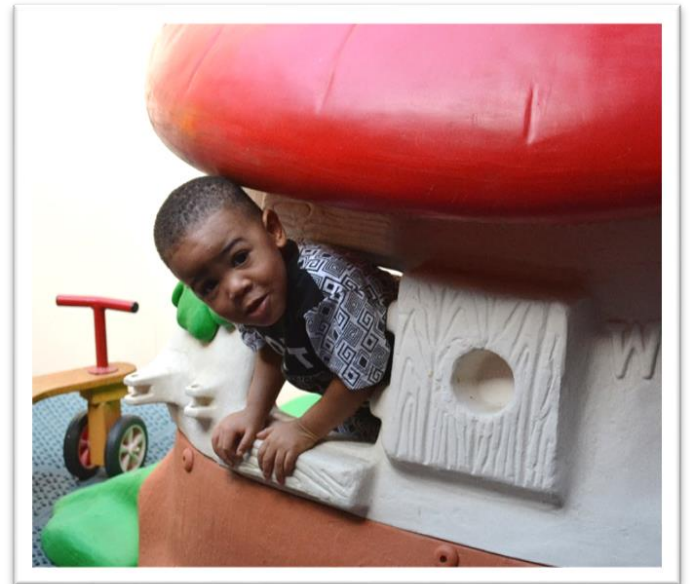
**To be eligible for services**, an expectant mother or family with a child under three years old must be **living in Gadsden County, Florida** and **earn less than the federal poverty guidelines**. There are a few enrollment opportunities for families who earn more, but have **significant risk factors**. At least **10%** of enrollment slots are reserved for **children with delays or disabilities**.

Services are provided **year-round** to meet the **health, developmental, educational, and social service** needs of young children and families through **weekly home visits**.

**Services are offered to families through home visiting:**

- ❖ **Weekly 90 minute home visits** focus on prenatal and parenting education, child development activities, health and safety, and family goal setting.
- ❖ **Group Socializations** or “Play Groups” held at least twice a month provide families with opportunities to interact in fun, educational activities and strengthen the parent-child relationship as well as their peer networks of support.

During the 2023-24 program year in-person home visits and group socializations continued to be implemented. Virtual visits were offered to families who had been exposed to COVID-19 or those who were isolated due to medical issues when home visits were deemed a health risk. Families without phone or internet service continued to be offered iPads to enable participation in Early Head Start services, governance meetings and telehealth appointments as needed.



# Early Head Start Staff

Early Head Start prioritizes recruiting and maintaining a multi-disciplinary staff of passionate professionals to work with children and families. The program employs a Director and a management team to ensure all Performance Standards are properly implemented in the areas of Program Administration, Health Services, Education and Disabilities Services, Family and Community Engagement, and Enrollment and Data Management. In addition, the Home Based Coordinator, provides reflective supervision to seven Home Visitors, one of whom is a Home Visitor/Counselor able to provide consultation on infant and maternal mental health concerns and mental health services to families as requested under the supervision of the Director, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Two Bilingual Spanish speaking Home Visitors primarily serve families with limited English skills. The program contracts with a registered dietician/licensed nutritionist to provide consultation on nutrition services, as needed. The program also employs current or former parents on a part time basis to assist in the recruitment of new families.

## The Role of Home Visitors:

**Promote** positive birth outcomes by providing information and support to pregnant women.

**Inspire** confidence and competence in parents by highlighting their strengths and encouraging the parent-child attachment.

**Encourage** healthy habits and safe environments by providing information on health and safety issues and assisting families with accessing preventative health care.

**Coach** parents to be their child's first teacher by educating them about what to expect during a child's first three years of development.

**Demonstrate** how parents can enrich their child's development and school readiness by providing weekly skill-building play activities that parents can replicate with their children using common materials found around the home.

**Assist** families to identify their strengths and setting goals for the future for themselves and their children by being a consistent positive support to families and linking them with other community resources.

**Empower** rural, isolated families to build a stronger network of support by hosting play groups where parents can connect with their children and other families in a fun atmosphere of learning.

# A Little Bit About Our Children...

During the **2023-24** program year, FSU EHS served

**44** infants,



**37** one-year olds,



**26** two-year-olds,



and **17** pregnant women, for



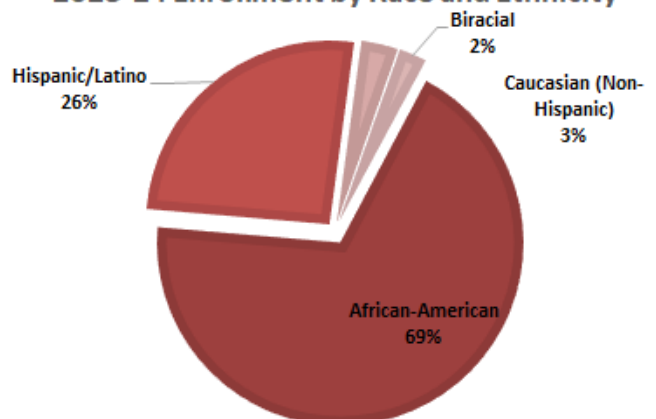
a total of **124** participants.

This represents only **4.8%** of the **eligible population** in Gadsden County; a county where approximately **75%** of **children 0-5** are **eligible for Medicaid\***.

Of the **124** participants served

- **25** children were enrolled in their **second year**
- **25** children were enrolled in a **third year**
- The 2023-24 average monthly enrollment was **100%** of funded capacity
- Only **8 over-income** children or pregnant women participated

2023-24 Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity



\* Agency for Health Care Administration. Number of Medicaid Eligibles by Age By County as of 12/31/23. December 2023. [https://ahca.myflorida.com/content/download/23866/file/age\\_cnty\\_2023-12-31.pdf](https://ahca.myflorida.com/content/download/23866/file/age_cnty_2023-12-31.pdf)  
Florida CHARTS, 2023 Population by Year by County . [https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/FLQUERY\\_New/Population/Count](https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/FLQUERY_New/Population/Count)

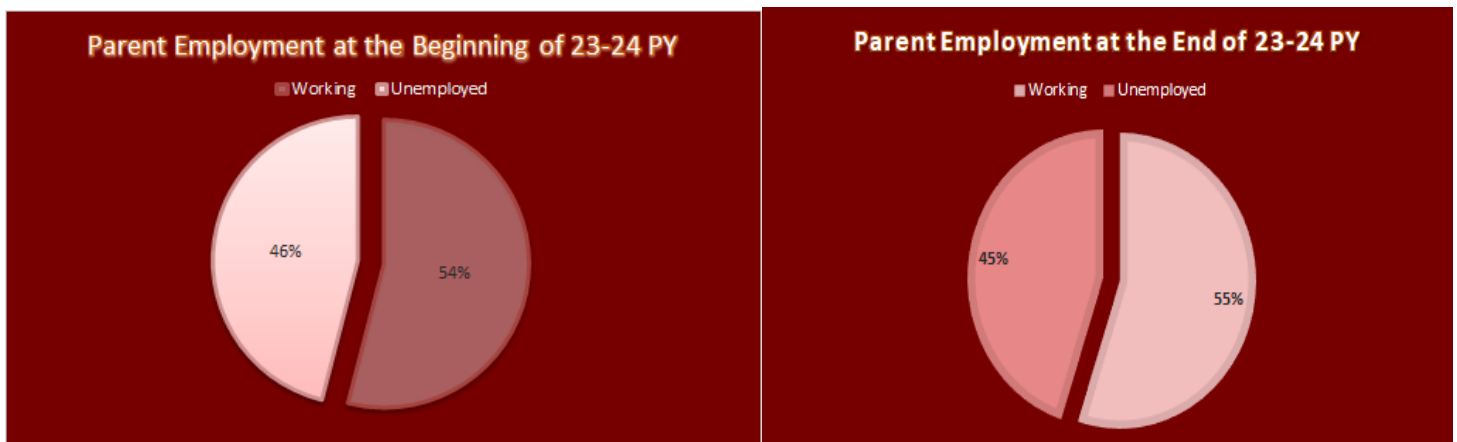
# And Our Families...

## *Of the 84 families served by Early Head Start during FY 2023-2024...*

- **38%** Were confirmed to earn less than or between 100-130% of the federal poverty guideline (\$31,200 for a family of four)
- **87%** Were categorically eligible (SNAP, SSI, TANF, homeless or in foster care)
- **87%** Participated in WIC (Supplemental Foods Program)
- **77%** Received SNAP benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps)

*\*In April 2022, the Office of Head Start expanded the definition of categorical eligibility to include participation in SNAP as a form of income verification.*

**49%** of Early Head Start families were single-parent families and **51%** had two parents living in the household.



## ***Family Education Level***

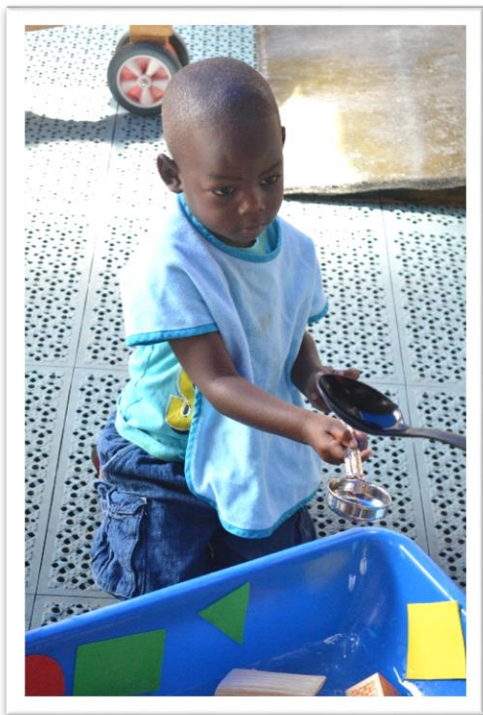
- **60%** of parents completed high school or GED
- **17%** completed some college or obtained a college degree or certification
- **1%** were enrolled in school or job training during the program year



# School Readiness

**The FSU Early Head Start Program has developed readiness goals for all children in the five essential domains of child development: social and emotional, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, cognitive and general knowledge, and language and literacy.**

The goals are posted throughout the program office and are shared with all families. School readiness goals are woven into multiple areas of the program's services, from staff training and professional development to budget planning.



## Measuring Progress

Progress toward school readiness goals is measured through child assessment data collected at three different time points during the program year. Other sources of information are also considered, such as parent surveys, child health records, and home visit completion rates. This data is then aggregated and analyzed along with other sources of child data to improve program effectiveness.

During the 2023-24 Program Year, the program collected child assessment data with the program's assessment tool, the Learning Accomplishment Profile, Birth to Kindergarten (LAP B-K), for the entirety of the program year. The program collected this

information in an online database to assist with data accuracy and provide expanded options to analyze school readiness data. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire continues to be used for screening purposes within the first 45 days of a child's enrollment.

# School Readiness Data Trends

***Analysis of child assessment data during the 2023-2024 program year yielded some important findings. Data for children who participated in all three assessment periods were included in the results below:***

- All children made progress in each of the five essential domains of child development throughout the year.
- In the 2023-24 program year all three assessment dates were completed in-person. Dual language learners were also assessed at these three data points. During this period, **98%** of the total children enrolled for the full program year participated in all three assessments, which is an increase of 5% from the prior year.
- Children made the greatest gains in the areas of gross motor and social and emotional development. Historically, the high gains seen in self-help and social emotional development reflect the priorities of parents during infancy and toddler hood. Staff observations of parent goal setting indicate parents are most comfortable observing and encouraging these types of skills. The foundational social and emotional skills of infancy and toddler hood, trust and autonomy, are crucial to future learning in all other areas.
- Compared to last years data analysis, children made greater gains in fine motor and language development within the course of this program year. Although there was progress, cognitive and language development continue to be program priorities. Historically these have been areas where fewer children have excelled at or above their age level compared to other areas of development.
- In summary, assessments showed that children entering the program had more skills in self help and social emotional development. Children present with fewer skills in language, fine motor and cognitive domains for their developmental age. As compared to children in a high-quality daycare environment, there is often lack of access and opportunity for home based children to develop these skills. Plans to continue targeting these areas during groups, weekly visits are in progress for 2024-25.

## Recommendations for Next Year:

Based on staff discussion surrounding school readiness data, the program will provide parents with activity ideas to support the skills children had the most difficulty mastering during the program year. Some of these skills include fine motor and pre-writing tasks, social play skills, cognitive skills and some self-help skills, such as independent toilet use. Children are not often provided the same frequency and consistency of opportunities to develop these skills at home as they might in high quality childcare so the program will help make parents aware of how they can encourage these skills at home.





# FSU Early Head Start Program

## School Readiness Goals

### 2023-2024

#### APPROACHES TO LEARNING

**#1: Children will be interested in discovery and able to engage in learning about the world around them, including the developmentally appropriate use of technology.**

#### SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**#2: Children will develop positive relationships with others and begin learning how to express and manage their feelings.**

#### LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

**#3: Children will communicate with others, become familiar with books and writing materials, and begin connecting pictures, sounds, and symbols.**

#### COGNITION

**#4: Children will demonstrate increasing knowledge and problem solving skills gained through exploration and participation in everyday routines and interactions.**

#### PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

**#5: Children will demonstrate increasing coordination and control of their senses, large muscle and small muscle groups.**

**#6: Children will develop healthy practices and habits.**



	CENTRAL DOMAINS				
	APPROACHES TO LEARNING	SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	COGNITION	PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
▲ INFANT/TODDLER DOMAINS	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
● PRESCHOOLER DOMAINS	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communication Literacy	Mathematics Development Scientific Reasoning	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development





# Child Screening & Disability Services

Early, high-quality child development services are critical to prevention and identification of physical, cognitive, social, and language delays in young children.



All children receive developmental and sensory screenings within 45 days of enrollment to determine if they are “on target” or may need additional support from early intervention services.

Early Head Start programs set aside 10% of their funded enrollment slots for children with special needs and developmental delays. Children with diagnosed delays may be referred to Early Head Start, or they may be identified after enrollment

and receiving ongoing observation and assessment in the program.

- **15% of children** enrolled in Early Head Start during **2023-24** had an **Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP)** through the **Early Steps** Early Intervention program due to a diagnosed disability or developmental delay. Due to limited availability of certified professionals and staff turnover, timely evaluations and consistent services for children with disabilities in the program service area were an ongoing area of concern.
- **FSU Early Head Start** partners with **community partners, the FSU College of Medicine and Dance Marathon** to offer hearing and vision screenings at events in Gadsden County.
- Local Early Intervention providers offered a combination of telehealth services and modified in-person services during this program year as developmental services continue to fully resume following the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Health & Nutrition Services

**Health services** are a central focus of Early Head Start because a child's health can support or limit their typical developmental path. Early Head Start staff become knowledgeable about the health of enrolled children and help families understand the importance of developing an ongoing relationship with a consistent health care provider.

**The program assisted all families enrolled during the 2023-2024 program year in establishing a "medical home" for all routine health care.** Dental services are limited in the Gadsden community, but services are available to all children and pregnant women through the local federally qualified health center. All program children turning three are referred for a dental exam. **Florida's dental EPDST schedule requires a child's first dental visit at age 3.** This is included for all program children that are transitioning out of Early Head Start. Program staff all program children that are leaving Early Head Start to access dental care.



**FSU Early Head Start enrolls children and provides services year round.**

*In August 2024 at the end of the program year:*

**88%** of children had a well-child physical exam

**84%** had current immunizations.

**\*Several children were enrolled in the last 2 months of the program year so their health services are not included in these numbers, but in the following year's data**

**100%** of families received Hurricane Preparedness kits to teach families about safety during a natural disaster and provide them with basic supplies. These kits included weather radios, fans, portable battery chargers, bag cooler and first aid kits.

Program staff spend time preparing parents for what to expect when they take their child to the doctor or dentist. They also focus on developing healthy habits at home, like hand washing and tooth brushing. Medical and dental providers in the community are not consistent and families have a difficult time accessing convenient, ongoing medical care. Also there continued to be difficulties accessing Medicaid transportation and some families expressed concerns about long-term impacts of immunizations, as well as routine medical testing.

Home Visitors provide information to families on nutrition about beginning solid foods, appropriate portion sizes for children, and how to read ingredient labels. **All families are referred to the county's Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC)** for additional assistance on nutrition and breast feeding. Healthy food choices are provided at all program events.

# Services to Pregnant Women

A healthy pregnancy has a lasting impact on a baby's potential for healthy growth and development. The FSU Early Head Start program strives to enroll women as early during pregnancy as possible, and assist women with navigating the prenatal and post-partum system of care.



Pregnant women receive weekly home visits and are provided education on fetal development, benefits of breastfeeding, maternal nutrition, maternal depression, substance use and abuse during pregnancy, labor and delivery, and understanding routine prenatal and postpartum care. Other topics discussed during weekly visits may include managing stress, newborn care and safety, intimate partner issues, budgeting, goal setting, and adjusting to life with baby. All of this information is provided using the FSU Partners for a Healthy Baby Home Visiting Curriculum, a unique, research based resource developed right here at the FSU Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy.

## *Of the 17 pregnant women served by Early Head Start during FY 2023-2024...*

- **53%** *Enrolled in Early Head Start before the beginning of their 3rd trimester*
- **100%** *Enrolled in Medicaid*



# Family Engagement

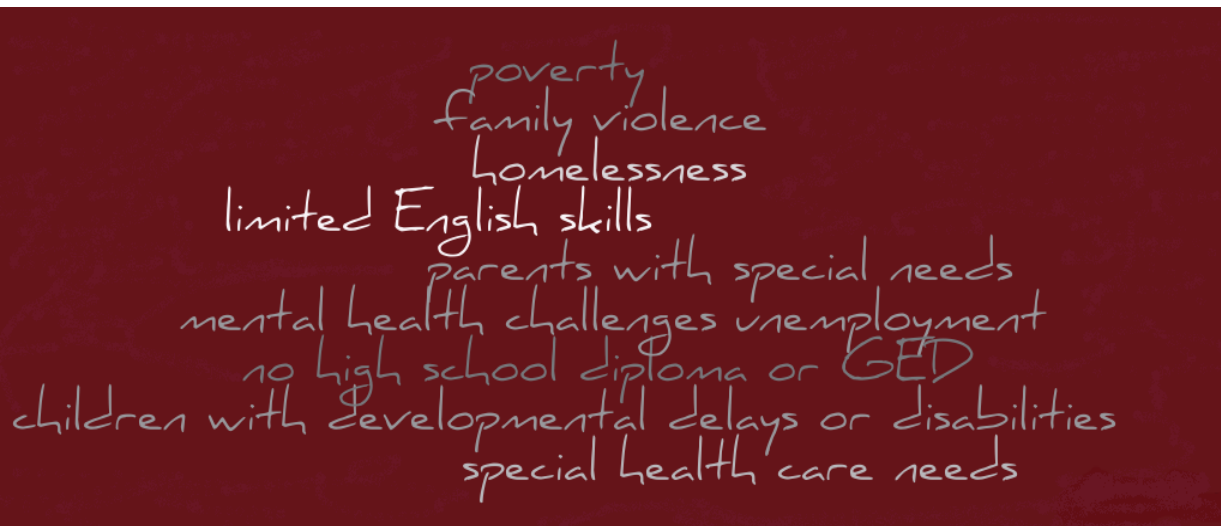


In addition to enhancing child development, Early Head Start programs are designed to strengthen families and empower parents to set and achieve goals. To this end, families are actively involved in goal-setting for their children and families, planning and decision-making about program services. Family engagement activities include:

- ★ Home visits
- ★ Setting goals for their child's educational plan
- ★ Setting goals for their own education and family development
- ★ Leadership activities, through Parent Committee and the Policy Council (in-person and virtually due to COVID-19)

**100%** of families in the program were provided emergency or crisis services (emergency food, diapers, formula, or clothing) due to the increased need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Some of the many challenges faced by families in Early Head Start last year include:**



# A History of Excellent Service

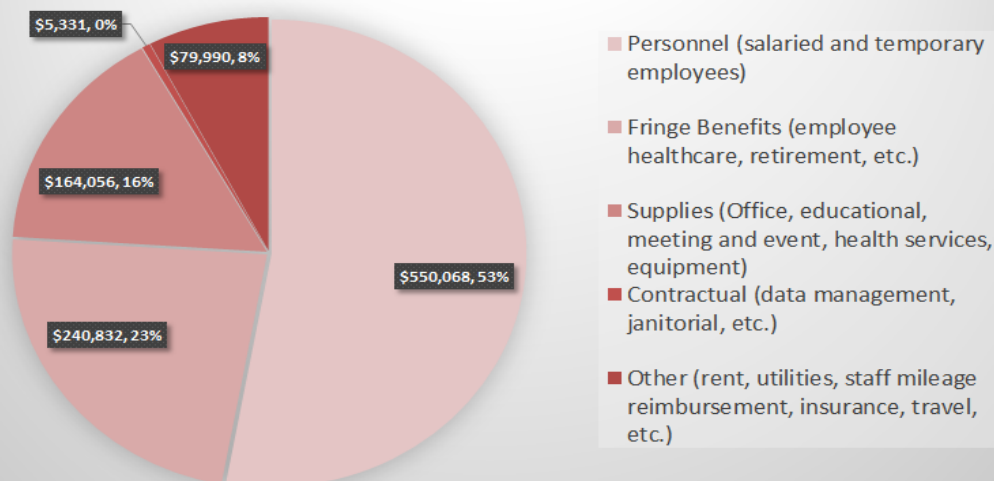
## Federal Standards Compliance Review

All Head Start and Early Head Start Programs receive an on-site audit through a federal monitoring system to determine how well the program is doing in meeting a volume of Federal regulations which ensure program quality. The most recent review (Focus Area One) of the FSU Early Head Start program was conducted in July 2022. During that review, the reviews found no areas of non-compliance for the FSU Early Head Start program. The program is scheduled for a Focus Area Two review in the 2023-24 Program Year.

## Annual Financial Audits

The FSU Early Head Start Program is funded by the federal Office of Head Start, under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Funding received by Florida State University to operate the Early Head Start program is audited annually through the State of Florida Comptroller's audit of compliance and internal controls over financial reporting and Federal awards. The audit is conducted in accordance with the Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996, and related guidance provided by OMB Circular A-133. In more than 25 years of operation, the FSU Early Head Start program has never received a finding from the annual audit of Florida State University.

**FY 2023-24 Actual Early Head Start Budget**



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