

Overview: Preschool Services was the lead agency providing services during the COVID 19 Pandemic using virtual learning, virtual home visiting and providing meals, diapers, and wipes.

Challenge: In times of physical distancing and stay at home orders, Preschool Services was challenged to provide comprehensive services to children and families, school readiness instruction, technology support, meals, diapers, and wipes to the preschool children enrolled in Head Start.

Solution: Due to an immediate response, Preschool Services was the lead agency to use online platforms such as Zoom to provide educational instruction to the children and to maintain connections with families to ensure their needs were met. The Information and Technology staff provided repurposed tablets with simple instructions for use by families without available hardware for Zoom meetings. Staff also used Khan Academy Kids to provide school readiness activities for children. Additionally, Food Service Workers distributed shelf-stable, “grab and go” bagged lunches to our enrolled children using a drive through option. Diapers and wipes were distributed to families enrolled in the Early Head Start program. Supplies for hands-on activities were provided to keep children engaged at home. Staff used several technologies to connect with Parents such as Zoom, Face Time, Learning Genie, text, and phone calls. Lesson Plans were created by Teachers to ensure tracking of individualization and progress on goals for the children. Letters, emails, and texts were frequently sent to parents to keep them informed of the changes and the options for participating.

Innovation: Preschool Services paved the way for other agencies based on actions that we took early and systems that were developed specifically to support children and families in a virtual setting. As a regional pioneer in establishing a robust platform to support virtual learning, PSD was sought out by peers from across the state for support in developing their virtual offerings. Preschool Services had to be innovative on how to provide classroom instruction without being physically in a room and to ensure children made progress towards school readiness goals. Once the virtual platform was chosen, IT staff quickly gave support to staff on how to use the program. A policy on the use of the platform was created and the staff were frequently updated on the changing circumstances through

emails sent from the Director. Comprehensive services were made available to children and families through tele-health services, tele-behavioral services, and family engagement. Staff workshops were initiated to address the ongoing stress of offering services during the pandemic. A multidisciplinary effort was needed to meet this challenge.

Results: Despite stay at home orders, PSD provided preschool activities, school readiness instruction, family engagement, comprehensive services, and parent/teacher interaction to Head Start enrolled families. The meal distribution was such a success that PSD used the streamlined process to distribute an unexpected influx of donations by Sunrise Produce to distribute much needed produce to families. Lending out tablets increased attendance in the virtual classrooms.

Replicability: This program may be replicated by other counties and by Head Start and State Preschools nationally, by providing a plan for teachers to provide distance learning activities and using applications, programs, and websites such as Zoom, Learning Genie, and Khan Academy.

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