

Self-Assessment Program Improvement Plan

The 2023-2024 Self-Assessment was conducted by the management team, which consists of three Education Coordinators, who work with the teachers of the three to five-year-olds, one Early Education Coordinator who works with the teachers of the birth to three-year-olds, one ERSEA/Family Coordinator, and one Health and Nutrition Lead Coordinator, and the Assistant Director. The Self-Assessment process was facilitated by the Project Director, Sarah Mattson.

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

<i>May 2024</i>	<p>Each staff member was sent a survey at the end of the year. Staff were asked to reflect on the 2023-2024 academic year. Staff were asked to record what went well, what could be improved, and changes they would like to see.</p> <p>Surveys were sent to the following to continue gathering data for the 2023-2024 Self-Assessment: Board of Directors, Policy Council members, and parents in the program.</p> <p>All entities were educated on the purpose of the Self-Assessment and the process of determining the Self-Assessment.</p>
<i>June and July 2024</i>	The Self-Assessment process was thoroughly reviewed with the management team.
<i>August 2024</i>	Present results to staff at Pre-Service training

In May of 2024, we began the process by educating the stakeholders, which included staff, Policy Council representatives, parents, the Board of Directors, and community partners on the Self-Assessment process. We sent out surveys to all stakeholders to reflect on the previous school year and identify strengths and areas of improvement. Surveys sent in May are critical for gathering data because the past school year was fresh in all stakeholders' minds. The data was collected and aggregated. The next step involved bringing our management team together to review the data, identify trends, and reflect on findings.

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STAFF DATA

At our initial meeting, the management team worked to identify the overall program strengths and areas of need. While reviewing the data, the committee noticed trends within the staff surveys.

Overall Program
<p>Strengths: <i>Teamwork, being supportive of one another, and relationships with children</i></p> <p>This year was a challenging year and the strength that our staff saw the most was that we were able to work together as team when times were challenging. Our staff were supportive of each and helped when we were struggling. As a program we all focus on the most important thing, providing positive relationships with the children.</p>
<p>Areas of Need: <i>Staff attendance, classroom support, and training on special needs and behaviors</i></p> <p>Lack of staffing was a struggle due to the staffing crisis across the country and in our community. Our program struggled to fill support positions this school year. All staff were utilized at times to help fill in classrooms with teachers, which led to supervisors being stretched thin and not being able to provide adequate support in the classrooms. Our classrooms are diverse in their needs, and we need to provide more training on disabilities and behaviors. As a program we are limited on the number of days that we can provide training. We need more time as a program to be able to provide adequate training opportunities. Program administration is actively recruiting both staff and training opportunities on an ongoing basis.</p>

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Below you will find the overall component area strengths and identified areas of need.

Education Component
<p>Strengths: <i>Staff provided a safe learning environment and had great teamwork with each other</i></p> <p>One of the top identified strengths of the Education component was that our staff were able to provide a safe learning environment for their children. This was based on the fact that our classroom teaching teams worked well with each other and were able to implement new ideas with their fellow teaching teams. Teamwork between the teacher and teacher assistant is crucial to running an efficient classroom.</p>
<p>Areas of Need: <i>More support when it comes to behaviors and planning time</i></p> <p>We struggled to fill our support positions due to a lack of staffing. All staff were utilized at times to help fill in classrooms with teachers, which led to supervisors being stretched thin and not being able to provide adequate support in the classrooms. Our classrooms are diverse in their needs, and we need to provide more training on disabilities and behaviors. Staff attendance was challenging, many days we had several people out at the same time. We have not been able to find a good list of dedicated substitute staff for a few years. This staffing shortage interfered with our model of providing planning time for teachers and allowing extra staff to help with challenging behaviors.</p>

Health & Nutrition Services
<p>Strengths: <i>Community Partners and dental care for children</i></p> <p>One of the identified strengths was our community partners and providing dental care for our children. The ongoing partnerships include Family Health Care Mobile Dental Unit who provided dental exams and treatment, North Dakota State University Extension who provided monthly talks on nutrition in all our classrooms, and Sanford who provided on-site well-child exams along with influenza and COVID-19 immunizations. Family Health Care Mobile Dental Unit makes recurring visits to our children in the fall and spring.</p>

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Areas of Need: *Variety of meals and adequate food portions*

It was also noted that there should be more options for fresh vegetables, fewer starches, and more options for children with special diets. Menus are reviewed and updated yearly by our food service staff who make changes accordingly. Menus are approved by a CACFP-registered dietician. Education is also needed for all staff on what the meal requirements and food portions are from the CACFP.

ERSEA (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance) & Family Services

Strengths: *Communication with parents*

Staff noted that we have great communication with our parents. Our family support staff work with families closely to help them with their ongoing needs. Communication with families is in person, by phone, and through our parent communication app, SeeSaw.

Areas of Need: *Family engagement and participation in activities and child attendance*

As a program we struggle to get parents involved in their child's day-to-day activities, parent committee events, and active members on our Policy Council. We also saw an increase in families not bringing their children to school for extended periods, and tardiness at drop-off and pick-up times.

Mental Health & Disability Services

Strengths: *Hiring a full time Mental Health/Disabilities Coordinator*

Staff felt support from our Mental Health/Disabilities Coordinator, Shelby Blair, who is actively involved with our Brigance and ASQ:SE screenings. Shelby was hired on as a full time, 9-month employee to fulfill the role. She reached out and connected with teachers, listening to their needs in the classroom. We are fortunate to have good relationships with Early Childhood Special Education in all the communities in which we serve. We have other service providers who come on-site to provide services to children enrolled in our program.

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Areas of Need: *Behavior Support Plan process and challenging behaviors*

A commonly noted area of need was more support for children who have behaviors. This has been an ongoing need that has increased each year, along with the number of IEPs/IFSPs. We have not provided the proper support due to being unable to fill all positions. Teachers need more adequate training in working with the various situations that our children come into the program with. Shelby joined our team during the middle of the year, so she was still learning the Behavior Support Plan process, and wasn't able to start working on Behavior Support Plans until the middle of the school year.

Human Resources, Program Management, & Governance

Strengths: *Active presence at sites and boosting morale*

With the amount of staff absences, our management team helped across at all sites, helping in various roles. As a management team we worked to increase staff morale with recognizing them, providing attendance incentives, and having our Policy Council advocate for them. South Eastern North Dakota Community Action Agency went through a strategic planning process to help staff understand the mission of our program and to see what areas needed to be improved in the entire agency. Goals and action steps were set to help these improvements.

Areas of Need: *Staffing attendance and training needs*

As a program we need to take note of staff attendance trends and efficiently address them when we notice an issue of consistent absenteeism. As a program we need to make efficiently training in new staff a priority before placing them in a classroom.

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FAMILY DATA

Family data had positive feedback as well. Families gave us high ratings in our health, family, and education component areas.

Education Component
<p>Strengths:</p> <p>Our families spoke highly of our teaching staff. They said our teachers provided opportunities for their child to try new things, paid attention to specific needs, were creative, and are good role models. Most of all they spoke of how caring our teachers and all of our staff were to them and their families. They appreciated the work our teachers did with teaching academics such as writing, counting, and learning their letters.</p>
<p>Areas of Need:</p> <p>One area of improvement our families would like to see was to have adequate, consistent staffing in order to provide more one on one preparation for kindergarten.</p>

Family Component
<p>Strengths:</p> <p>In our family component, families appreciated the flexibility we had during drop off and pickup, the engagement we provided, and the communication through the Seesaw app.</p>
<p>Areas of Need:</p> <p>Families stated they needed more support with finding reliable transportation, weekend opportunities for their families, and provide more information on various resources in the community.</p>

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Health Component
<p>Strengths:</p> <p>In our health component families said that it was helpful to have reminders about the health requirements around well child exams, dentist visits, and immunizations. They said they saw our health screenings beneficial and that we provided good meals throughout the day for their children.</p>
<p>Areas of Need:</p> <p>Families felt that we also needed more variation to our meals, that we should have meals reflecting our different cultures, and provide special meals such as breakfast with mom or dad more frequently throughout the year. Parents would like more education on why we require doctor's notes regarding certain illnesses and medications.</p>

Program
<p>Strengths:</p> <p>They felt that our staff were personal and professional, and that we as whole provided a caring environment for our children and families.</p>
<p>Areas of Need:</p> <p>As a program, families would like to see us helping them find care when we aren't in session, longer hours, and providing full day care instead of half day care.</p>

Comments included: *"I think there are so many things that this program does well. I honestly can't think of anything that isn't good. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication to the families and all the littles you help grow."* and *"The kindness and how involved you are with families is amazing."*

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POLICY COUNCIL AND SENDCAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Strengths:

Our Policy Council and SENDCAA Board of Directors felt that we were very transparent about our program and provided communication about what was happening in the program. They said that we were good about adapting and changing to meet the needs of our staff and children. We worked well with the community to best help our children and families.

Areas of Need:

Our Board and Policy Council also felt that we needed to find creative ways to retain staff, and have lower turnover rates, and preventing staff burn out.

Our Board of Directors and Policy Council felt strongly that we needed to ensure we have supportive supervisors who follow our policies and procedures in order to build safety and trust with our staff. They felt that going through a Change in Scope with lowering the number of children and providing more staff planning days would help with our areas of need.

RESULTS AND ACTION PLAN

A key strength that was noted in our survey data was the teamwork that all our staff and sites pull together when the days get challenging. Staff rely on their teaching teams and support staff at all sites to help cover when we are short on staff or may need an extra hand at another site. This teamwork is the heart of our program and shows how dedicated our staff are. Comments that our staff had included, *“Teamwork was great. People were willing to work together and help each other out, when needed,” “Sense a shared mission/goal, flexibility, teamwork,”* and *“Amazing children! We had everything we needed to do our jobs. Support from coworkers.”*

Throughout the surveys, there were concerns about attendance from children and staff, family engagement, staff retention, staff support, nutrition, and training around Mental Health/Disabilities.

As a team, we felt it was important to focus on staff retention and providing consistency in coming to work each day. More staff are needed to help our classrooms and sites function and to help our

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children and families thrive within the program. Also, we felt that better classroom support and communication are needed to promote staff retention and encourage staff to come to work consistently. Child attendance and tardiness during pick up and drop off were also seen as a need. Our staff understand that having a child consistently at school every day will help them to build relationships with their peers and teachers and to grow socially/emotionally and academically. This was a focus area from last year that we decided to focus on again to better meet the needs of our staff, children, and families.

Another area noted by the management team that needed attention was for the program to train staff on Mental Health/Disabilities with the increased numbers of challenging behaviors and disabilities that we saw from the 2022-2023 school year to the 2023-2024 school year. Staff felt they needed more training and support. This was a focus area from last year's self-assessment, and we felt that as a program there was continued work to do to improve our Mental Health/Disability services.

We also found that our staff need to learn more about the rules regarding nutrition and meals from the CACFP. Staff felt that we might not be providing enough for our children to eat, when we are actually following the guidelines presented to us. As a program we wanted to provide more education regarding meals and nutrition to our staff.

On Page 10, the 2023-2024 Self-Assessment Program Improvement Plan can be found which was written based on overall findings.