

2018-2023 Strategic Plan



Background

Sweetwater is the largest county in Wyoming, it covers an area slightly less than the size of Massachusetts in Southwest Wyoming. The Union Pacific railroad spurred early development and runs parallel to the Interstate 80 corridor, passing through two major communities. Green River, the county seat lies west along I-80 with Rock Springs, Wyoming to the east. Two School Districts are served by Sweetwater Head Start, but Sweetwater County School District #1 is the grantee.

The community's economic base has depended on minerals extraction, most recently natural gas in both Sweetwater and Sublette Counties and has experienced boom and bust cycles. The 2015 average salary for the minerals industry was \$77, 488 (datausa.io) Slightly more than 20% of the working population was employed in mining. According to Data USA, this number combined with other industries related to extraction is unusually high in comparison with other counties in Wyoming. The Head Start program must be responsive and ready for economic changes in employment and family financial stability. (Economic data is attached at the end of this report from the Federal Reserve Economic Data and United State Census.

21.4% of the adult population have Bachelor's Degrees, however only 7% have degrees in Elementary Education and a much smaller % have coursework in early education. (Data USA. IO) This affects the ability of Sweetwater Head Start to recruit qualified management staff and teachers who are required to meet early childhood coursework through Bachelor degree programs.

Population of the county was 43, 806 in 2010 census and estimated by the Census Bureau as 45, 810 in 2017. The population of children under 5 was 8.4% in 2010 and 7% in 2016. Poverty estimate in 2017 was 9.8% (Small Area Income and Poverty Estimate, 2016) Estimate. In 2015, poverty was estimated at 11.5% (<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/sweetwater-county-wy/>)

Sweetwater Federal Data-Program Information Report (PIR, 2017)

The cumulative Head Start student population consists of 82 four-year old's and 32 three-year old's, with 13 homeless children, 3 foster children, 1 TANF/SSI, and all income eligible at 100% of federal poverty level. Of these, 72 children will be transitioning to kindergarten in 2018, representing approximately ¼ of the kindergarten population. Most of the children are English speakers, but almost 21% come from Spanish speaking homes. This requires development of a dual language curriculum and program. Children with disabilities are also served with 12% on IEP's, dually served by Head Start and Region 7 Child Development Services. 75 children were also provided transportation out of an eligible enrollment of 100 children.

Families

Eighty-four families in Sweetwater County Head Start are single parents, 65 are Single Mothers, 18 are Single Fathers, and 1 grandparent. 25% of the parents have less than a high school diploma. 94% are not in a job training program, 1 parent is on active duty, 3 others are retired military. By end of year, 55% of families were receiving SNAP. 52% of the families required crisis intervention for food, shelter, and clothing.

Over 30 representatives from stakeholder groups met in November 2017 to develop a Strategic Plan and Community Assessment overview to guide the Five-Year Grant plan. This group represented Policy Council, School District Administration, Head Start Administration and staff, current and former parents and community members meeting in Sweetwater County Head Start facility. Initial Discussion from the group focused on Head Start families and students and the impacts of poverty, including increased homelessness and single parent families. This discussion provided feedback for assessing the community on issues impacting Head Start children and families.

Key Issues affecting children in Head Start:

- Abuse/Molestation
- Gross neglect
- Long term-brain impact/anxiety
- High % of FAS/FAE
- Nutrition/ Food insecurity
- Attendance

Key Issues affecting Head Start families:

- Transiency combined with lack of family support
- Poverty and low wages, unemployment
- Single parent families
- Teen pregnancy
- Limited family support/Fear of judgment by other parents
- Homeless
- Addiction-opiates/meth
- Domestic Violence
- Substandard housing
- Gap in assistance
- Instability-economic cliff
- Lack of child care
- Health and safety

Strengths of Community Engagement in supporting Head Start families:

- Small community
- Solid and responsive community organizations
- CLIMB
- Sweetwater Public School Foundation
- Positive Community Support for Head Start
- K Readiness
- Fire and Safety
- Lunch and Learn budgeting, nutrition
- Learning through Play
- County Tripartite Board
- Support in CDC
- Nutrition Fruit and Veggies
- Trio at Western Wyoming College

Strengths of Head Start in supporting Child and Family Services:

- CDA
- Play Therapy
- Backpack with High School
- Love and Logic
- Successful transitions
- Reputation with K Teachers
- Parents as Leaders/Policy Council-carry over
- Confident parents/strong relationships
- Alignment with district curriculum
- High math scores

Opportunities to improve community support to children and families:

- Dental
- Eye Doctor
- Reduced Turnover in pediatric services-mental health and medical
- Child care with sliding scale and facility needs for expansion
- Need for low-income housing
- Need for public transportation
- Medical support (CHIPS/Medicaid)
- Legal Aid
- Mental Health

Opportunities to support Head Start staff:

- Competitive salaries
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Training needs-Orientation/PDP/College Coursework
- Team process for change management
- Communication processes
- Mental health training/screening

When asked about successes attributed to Head Start's leadership, they had many. Head Start in Sweetwater County School District #1 is a leader in the community in supporting services for children and families in their program and in the wider community. Many of the participants credited the leadership of June Privitt, retiring Director of the program, who has designed and implemented Head Start to the highest early childhood quality of the Office of Head Start Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) since 1995.

Head Start began as the brainchild of one Principal, Joe Patrone, who had a vision of early childhood Head Start preschool serving the children in poverty within the school district. To this day, Sweetwater County School District #1 is the only school district to be the grantee for Head Start in Wyoming. Sweetwater County School District continues to also lead as the only seamless Head Start preschool through 12th grade system in Wyoming, serving the needs of students at highest risk of failure with innovative and successful programming.

Strengths

Leadership

Staff

Kindergarten Success

School District Support

Weaknesses

Loss of Leadership

Staff
Compensation/Turnover

Funding

Data Systems

Opportunities

Community Partners Expanded

Public Relations for Increased Awareness of Needs

Outreach to support Reciprocal Agreements for Services

School District Engagement in Leadership

Threats

Increased Poverty

Higher Risk families

Low Wages/Unemployment

Inadequate Housing

Sweetwater School District #1 Mission:

As an innovative district, united with our community, we empower and inspire all students to academic excellence in pursuit of their interests and passions.

Sweetwater Head Start Theory of Change:

By improving quality of programs for children and families, through sustained partnership with community agencies, Sweetwater County Head Start will reduce impacts of poverty and prepare children and families for success.

The following goals were developed during the community-wide planning session. The goals are intended to serve as a guide for the five-year grant to be submitted in 2018. As part of the planning process, Sweetwater County School District #1 and Head Start will develop annual measurable objectives and grant outcomes reported to Region 8 Office of Head Start while monitoring the progress of its efforts to sustain the compliance and quality of the past 22 years.

Mission: HEAD START is committed to empowering families by providing opportunities for early childhood development, family partnerships and community involvement through quality, confidential services.

SWEETWATER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER ONE will cultivate an environment of learning and education that will benefit the quality of life in our communities by supporting and promoting Head Start.

HEAD START will engage and collaborate with Community Agencies serving Head Start children and families to strengthen success and build additional partnerships to share and support sustainability of Head Start.

HEAD START will increase opportunities for families based on individualized plans to respond to family needs, increase self sufficiency, stabilize safe and healthy environments, and support leadership and advocacy for their children's success.

HEAD START will support recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified staff to meet Head Start requirements and identify professional development, continuing education and opportunities for ongoing mentoring and coaching.

HEAD START will continue to build a data management system that ensures accuracy, protects confidentiality, secures access to PII, and makes data available for shared analysis and decisions to support and improve quality of services.

HEAD START will develop a system of health and wellness for staff, parents, and children.