Keystone Service Systems, Inc. DBA Capital Area Head Start

Community Assessment Summary 2017-2018

An examination of the information reviewed since the 2015-2016 Community Assessment update highlights the following:

- **Poverty/Demographics:** The overall numbers of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients within the CAHS service area have fluctuated slightly over the past few years, even showing a general decline from September 2015 to September 2016, but proportionally, the geographic concentrations of families receiving TANF appear to be consistent from year to year. The percentage of people living in poverty has stayed constant or increased slightly however, again in the same geographic concentrations. This indicates that many families living in poverty are likely to be the working poor, thus balancing both employment and parenting responsibilities. Attention should be given to providing adequate supports to families in light of this. CAHS has likely dedicated its slots appropriately so that our services are available to the neighborhoods that need us most.

- **Waiting List Trends:** CAHS waiting list numbers have consistently been the heaviest in the areas where the most TANF recipients reside, specifically in the City of Harrisburg, Steelton, and certain pockets of the Central Dauphin School District. New funding/expansion opportunities were always considered with respect to those particular areas. At present, the addition of 32 center based slots and 22 home based slots in 14-15 to the greater Suburban Harrisburg/Central Dauphin area appear to have greatly reduced the waiting lists in that territory. Additionally, heavy waiting lists in the West Shore area of Cumberland County appear to have been accommodated by the additional of 22 home based slots in that area. Any future expansion should be focused on accommodating children from the City of Harrisburg, which continues to present the greatest need. This may mean looking at providing more EHS services with CAHS resources, as other providers provide free preschool opportunities to 3-5 year olds. It is noted that Cumberland County is currently reported to be the fastest growing county in the State, and that the Cumberland Valley School District is looking at the ability to accommodate a growing number of families in the District. It is not known at this time if the influx is likely to be income eligible for CAHS services, however it is an area to watch.

- **New/additional preschool programming in service area:** New City School, a new preschool program in the Midtown area of Harrisburg opened in Fall 2016, and is providing PreK programming to 3 and 4 year olds at no cost to families. It served 12-15 children in its first year and plans to double in size next year. The Uptown Neighborhood United group continues to serve 3 year olds in the uptown area. They have been serving 8 preschoolers at any given time, free of charge to families. Additionally, the Joshua Learning Center also provides preschool services to children in Harrisburg at no cost to families. CAHS will continue efforts to partner with these programs in order to serve the children in those areas who do not receive services. CAHS will provide families with contact information on those programs if we are unable to serve them.

A significant change, as of February 2016, in the CAHS service area is the emergence of state funded Pre K Counts programming in some of the area school districts (Mechanicsburg, West Perry, Upper Dauphin, Williams Valley), as well as additional PKC slots in the Shippensburg Head Start program which jointly serves the
Carlisle area. Careful evaluation of CAHS waiting list numbers in those areas, and possible attrition from families choosing the PKC model over CAHS programming, will be critical to program planning. This is more likely to be anticipated in areas where CAHS provides home based services and PKC provides center based services. Stronger collaboration efforts with PKC providers are underway to ensure that all eligible families are being provided with information on the preschool opportunity that best matches their needs. Possible future strategies to consider as we continue to ensure full enrollment of all funded slots, may be shifting location of slots to areas where a greater need and less resources exist, or assessing the need for additional EHS services across the service area, and possibly requesting permission to convert Head Start slots to Early Head Start slots.

- **Central Dauphin:** A consistent waiting list in the Tri-Community area of the Central Dauphin District is indicative of the interest in Head Start programming in that area. Poor public school performance in the Central Dauphin schools in that area also indicates that the children in those neighborhoods could be at risk of academic failure, and merits the expansion of comprehensive preschool services in that district. Central Dauphin has been engaged with CAHS in conversation about additional space within the District, however at this time, no appropriate space exists.

- **Carlisle area:** An unexpected increase in the 2017-18 waiting list in the Carlisle area, despite the below information, and difficulty keeping a waiting list for West Perry, is driving the plan to transfer slots from West Perry to the Carlisle. Due to the availability of other free center based preschool programs available in the Carlisle area (primarily Shippensburg Head Start), CAHS transferred 16 of its 32 slots to the Harrisburg area as of August 2017. The remaining 16 slots in Carlisle provided families with 6 hour per day, 170 days per year programming. Additionally, CAHS’s current West Shore Home Visitors were available to serve any families who would be transitioning from CAHS’s EHS program to preschool, but who did not want or could not get a center based opportunity. The community need appears to be best met through additional preschool slots in Carlisle.

- **Newport:** As numbers of children interested in CAHS services seemed to be declining from the Newport School District, the idea of serving Greenwood School District residents, some of whom reside in Perry County, should be considered as a proactive measure to ensuring full enrollment of those 11 Home Based slots. This was approved by Newport School District officials in 2016. Additionally, CAHS will be providing center based services in Newport beginning in August 2017, in response to declining community interest in home based services and in concert with the federal Head Start direction to provide 6 hour per day center based services to children when feasible.

- **Susquenita:** Sufficient waiting lists in the Susquenita School District influenced the decision to change programing from 11 Home Based slots to 16 center based slots.

- **Steelton/Highspire and Middletown:** In April 2014, it became known that the community of Highspire was petitioning to have their children served by the Middletown Area School District, rather than the Steelton-Highspire School District, due to concerns over poor performance by the Steelton-Highspire School District. Although any change would likely be a lengthy process, this will be watched carefully as it could involve a change in slots available to each of those two districts, both of which we partner. As of February 22, 2017, it was reported that the residents of Highspire were still in a legal battle over the matter, and had recently submitted another petition to the PA Department of Education. Their goal is to have the districts’ boundaries changed by August 2018.
West Perry: Difficulties filling the 11 Combo slots in this area, as well as the presence of a center based Pre-K Counts program in the West Perry School District, drove the decision to shift those slots to an area of greater demonstrated needs.

PEER (Promoting Education to Enhance Readiness): is a locally designed option featuring two monthly home visits and two weekly class days. The small class size at PEER (8 per home visitor) allow the teacher/home visitor to provide more individualized intervention and support for the child and parent(s). This option allows us to maintain the alternative programming for children struggling in longer day center based classes.

Children with Disabilities: The trend of up to 14% of CAHS children requiring full developmental evaluations and subsequently being identified with a disability and in need of special services continues, and this year, is currently upward of 16%. As is also being seen by our Early Intervention providers, the number of children with disabilities continues to grow, and their needs are intensifying. Close collaboration and planning with the Dauphin and Cumberland/Perry Early Intervention and Capital Area Intermediate Unit should continue to ensure that CAHS is sufficiently staffed with Special Services Coordinators and Inclusion Support Specialists prepared to meet the needs, and provided with the materials and resources needed to accommodate children who participate in the CAHS program.

Health: The Pinnacle Health Lead and Healthy Homes program stopped services as of June 30, 2016. This is an area if need in the community, such as high lead levels and chronic pest and safety issues. In spring of 2017 CAHS plans to collaborate with Hamilton Health Center to help screen children for lead in head start centers. Additionally, as experienced on a national level, the opioid addiction epidemic has hit the CAHS service area. Hamilton Health, a valued CAHS partner, has become a Center of Excellence in recovery from opioid addiction, providing holistic body care, care coordination, group support sessions, and needed referrals for ongoing support, such as childcare, employment and basic needs.

Opioid Use: The Harrisburg-region counties appear to exceed the national overdose death rate. Hamilton Health Center’s Center of Excellence is funded to address this region’s alarming use of opioids, and CAHS makes it a priority to expose all families to this resource.

Behavioral Health: As continues to be seen nationally in Head Start programs, the behavioral health of Head Start children is a major priority, with special attention needed to preventing aggressive and violent behaviors. It is noted that Harrisburg is considered by one source to be the 5th most violent city in PA as of August 2015. In 2013, Harrisburg was noted to be the 25th most violent city in the US, up from #30 in 2012, and down from #20 in 2011. However, as of February 2017, reports suggest that crime is down in the city, reaching a 15-year low. Planning for strengthened behavioral supports should be prioritized in order to address the reflection of these environmental influences and decrease the number of aggressive behaviors seen in the classroom. Continued attention to addressing the psychological and environmental needs of children who exhibit challenging behaviors must be a priority. Children whose parents seek community behavioral health supports are frequently delayed in receiving the recommended services, or are not prescribed a service sufficient to meeting the child’s needs within the preschool classroom. CAHS must continue its focus on building in effective supports in order to address this gap in service, and to address the behavioral issues while children are being served in our classrooms. There should continue to be a focus on partnering with community BH agencies to provide easily accessible services that meet the child and family’s need, as well as provide appropriate support for classrooms.
PBIS: CAHS has continued to engage in the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) approach across the program. PBIS is essentially a proactive strategy for teaching and supporting children’s social-emotional development, in hopes of building strong school readiness skills. It is a process of planning and problem solving that includes direct teaching of social behaviors, just like academics. The basic PBIS approach is to use proactive, research-based strategies to teach clearly defined behavioral expectations. Most importantly, it establishes ongoing behavior supports that can be used by ALL students, staff, volunteers, parents and community members. Several partnering school districts also use this approach in some of their buildings. This sets up the opportunity for seamless transition of expectations from preschool to Kindergarten for some children and families.

All CAHS programming is focused on the tier one provision of forming Nurturing Relationships and creating Supportive Environments, and on engaging families in the social-emotional development of their children. Additional Tier 2 supports are also an expectation in each classroom, so that additional tools are readily available to children as they work through challenges with peers and classroom expectations. Parents were provided with basic information on program-wide agency practices, and tools to transfer the PBIS approach to home.

The shift to put social-emotional support in the hands of all, instead of the hands of a specialized few, was not without growing pain. Priority needs to be given to supports that need to be available to staff until all staff skills and classroom communities function at a level that effectively supports the needs of all children. In 17-18, CAHS added two additional Behavioral Health Advocates, bringing the total to 8, as well as an additional PBIS Specialist, bringing that total to 6. Supervision of the BHAs and Coaches were again separated between Behavioral Health and Education, to better ensure a more systemic approach to PBIS best practices. Additionally, efforts continue to be made to have sufficient quantities of teaching staff available to support all classrooms so that teachers can focus on individualizing for the social-emotional needs of children. Analysis continues regarding the best program structure for supporting and strengthening classrooms and staff, as well as providing individualized supports for children.

Parenting: Continued efforts to partner with providers in the community who offer evidenced-based parenting opportunities should be a focus. As it has been difficult to get strong participation by having families go out to parenting opportunities, even when provided on site where their child goes to school, consideration should be given to using another median for delivery evidenced based parenting information, i.e. through on-line or texting opportunities. New Head Start performance standards now require programs to provide evidence based parenting opportunities to all families. Strong partnerships with agencies that provide, for example, Triple P, Incredible Years, and Parent Child Interaction Therapy, should be forged to ensure efficient access for CAHS families. Additionally, CAHS will implement the Ready Rose parenting program as a way for all families to have access to key information on child development, parenting tips, and school readiness.

Childcare: Childcare providers appear to be adequate in number across the 3 county area. Several large childcare providers in the 3 counties reported no waiting lists for Infants, Toddlers or Preschoolers. Although waiting lists for childcare subsidies do exist in Cumberland and Dauphin counties, the wait time and numbers are reportedly less than in previous years. Any future growth at CAHS should continue to be focused on increasing availability of services to the families who do not necessarily
need full time care. Additionally, with so many providers potentially caring for Head Start enrolled children, efforts should be put into forming tighter partnerships with these community providers.

- **Incarceration/Crime**: Incarceration Supports continue to be needed based on the recent number of enrolled families who experienced an incarceration at some point during the last program year. Providing training at the 18-19 staff pre-service so that all staff have a trauma-informed approach to supporting those children in their classrooms should be pursued. The City of Harrisburg specifically is troubled by crime and incarceration, and program services need to continue to be tailored to the unique needs of families experiencing incarceration.

- **Housing/Homelessness**: Housing and homelessness surfaces as a major issue for the CAHS service area. Hefty numbers of families who experienced housing issues and homelessness indicate that this needs to be a continued area of support for families and strengthening of community resources. Stagnant waiting lists for housing and increased homelessness have increased the “doubled-up” population. The decrease in the population within the city of Harrisburg is likely reflective of people moving out of the city limits in search of better housing. Attention should be given to the suburban areas of Harrisburg that are likely absorbing these low-income families.

- **Male Involvement**: There is a program-wide focus on providing fathers with early encouragement and support geared toward maintaining strong involvement in the lives of their children, more work and community partnering is needed to bring about the presence and strength of male involvement in school, home, and community. CAHS has focused efforts on partnership opportunities with community leaders who have expertise in this area, and programs that may have successful fatherhood programming in place, and continue internal efforts geared toward increasing male participation, and providing more enriching opportunities for dads/significant male figures. Consideration should be given to contracting with an individual who has experience/motivational skills at engaging men in the lives of young children and in early learning experiences, in order to supplement the efforts currently in place among CAHS staff.

- **Culture/Ethnicity/DLL**: The growing number of families for who English is not their first language merits an increased awareness of the needs of Dual Language Learners. Continuous efforts to support whatever language needs families present, and to provide opportunities for additional staff training, are key. A notable presence of Nepali and Arabic families within the CAHS service area, dictates that CAHS focus on partnering with other providers serving those families, and find effective, targeted outreach in order to attract families who may be eligible for HS/EHS services. Additional consideration must be given to supporting the DLL needs of those families if enrolled. Intentional efforts should be made to recruit staff who also speak those languages.

It is noteworthy that as of March 2017, the Latino population in Harrisburg is reportedly being more tightly monitored by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Patriot New, March 5, 2017, “ICE Raids in city put Latinos on edge”). Although ICE states that they have been targeting immigrants wanted on warrants, they are also detaining immigrants who are undocumented but have committed no other crime. This is already having an impact on families, as it often means that the breadwinner in the family is detained, leaving the rest of the family without income.
and a means to survive. Reaching out to the children impacted by these circumstances should be a CAHS focus, with an emphasis on building trusting relationships with the families. This social phenomenon could also lead to a decline in the Latino community, making the mid-state a less desirable place to live.

- **Additional Considerations:** As CAHS engages in planning for the lengthening of program days as is directed by new Head Start Performance Standards, it must continue to seek and acquire additional space in the areas of greatest need, as the spaces currently used to accommodate both AM and PM classes will only be available for one session of class per day. Although some new space was acquired for 16-17, more needs to be found in order to continue efforts to bring all center based programming to 6 hours per day, 170 days per year. Leveraging community partnerships, as well as seeking to forge new ones, will be critical in this effort. Additionally, ensuring that enough staff support is available to support the increased number of hours that children are in service needs to be a program-wide priority.