

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



April 2022

Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County,
Inc.



Community Assessment

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AGENCY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, INC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EOA PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County, Inc. (EOA) is a non-profit Community Action Agency dedicated to serving children and families primarily in Washington County, Arkansas. EOA provides a variety of programming to support the children and families in Washington County, as well as home visiting services in Benton, Madison, and Carroll Counties. These programs are central to EOA achieving its mission and include: EOA Children's House, Head Start/Early Head Start, SafeCare Arkansas, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, Weatherization Assistance, Water Assistance, Rental Assistance, Emergency Food Assistance, and the Individual Development Account (IDA) savings account program.

SERVICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

The total population in Washington County is 232,289. Over the past three years, the population in Arkansas has been increasing, as has the population in Washington County.

Washington County residents are predominantly non-Hispanic and White (over 76%) or African American (15%); the primary language of individuals in the county is English. Within Washington County, racial and ethnic diversity varies significantly by community. For example, ethnic diversity is greatest in Springdale, where 40% of the population of zip code 72764 and 23% of zip code 72762 is Hispanic or Latino, followed by Siloam Springs (72761), where approximately 20% of the population is Hispanic or Latino. In terms of racial diversity, Summers (72769) has a comparatively large Asian population (23%); two Springdale zip codes (72762 and 72764, as above) indicate that 15-20% of their population is "some other race".

While the poverty rate in Washington County (18%) is lower than the statewide rate for Arkansas (23.7%), there are racial disparities in the poverty rate. Black or African American individuals and Hispanic individuals experience poverty rates as high as 39% and 27%, respectively. EOA serves a population with greater racial and ethnic diversity than the general population in Washington County and the state, including the population of children enrolled in its Head Start/Early Head Start program, which identify as 62% White, 38% all other races, and 37% Hispanic.

In addition to those living below the federal poverty level in Washington County, another 27% were Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, or ALICE. These households earn above the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but not enough to afford basic household necessities. In Washington County, the number of households living below the FPL and to the number of ALICE households together make up 44% of all households. The largest number of households living below the ALICE threshold in Washington County are in Fayetteville, Springdale, Farmington, and Prairie Grove.

In Washington County, most children live with their biological, step, or adopted parents. However, in certain communities within the county, high percentages of children live with other relatives or grandparents. There are also many single-parent households in Arkansas (37%). In the 2020-2021 program year, 64% of children served in the EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program were living in single-parent families. Head Start/Early Head Start is providing a vital resource to these families.

NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MEET NEEDS

There is great diversity of need in Washington County. Some families have few needs, while other families experience many of the factors that contribute to the cycle of poverty within their communities.

Educational attainment is high in Washington County and high school graduation rates in the service area are strong, above the statewide rate in a majority of the county. Yet, disparities exist when looking at subgroups of the student population. Graduation rates are generally lower among economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities. Notably, graduation rates are low in Springdale, which also has the highest percentage of students that are English Learners (35%).

With regard to health factors in the community, Washington County is ranked among the healthiest county statewide, in the highest 75-100% of the state. For many health benchmarks, Washington County indicates positive outcomes, though mental health remains more of a challenge for residents. EOA has strong partnerships to provide health services to families and helps families to maintain access to health services. Some service area residents, however, may experience challenges accessing health care (e.g., dental care, mental health services). Transportation and knowledge of the services that are available present barriers to obtaining needed care. Furthermore, when this Community Assessment was conducted in 2022, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic was impacting the health and wellbeing of communities across the nation, including Arkansas.

Washington County also has strengths when considering infant and maternal health. And yet, disparities remain with regard to health factors and health outcomes. On average, 68% of pregnant women accessed prenatal care in Washington County and the rate of teen pregnancy is slightly lower than the state rate. However, northwest and western Arkansas report the highest rates of infants without early prenatal care in the state. The March of Dimes gave Arkansas “pre-term birth grade” of “F” as more than 11% of mothers gave birth to their babies preterm in 2021, with further elevated rates for some racial groups (as high as 15.5% among Black mothers). The rate of preterm births is slightly lower in Washington County, though higher for certain subgroups of the population.

Obesity is a challenge among young children in Arkansas and among families served by the Head Start/Early Head Start program. Indicators from the EOA 2020-2021 Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) show that 12.1% were classified as overweight and 13.6% classified as obese, a combined overweight and obesity rate of 25.7%.

Considering nutrition needs, Washington County has a lower rate of food insecurity (14%) than the state (17%), though six food deserts are identified in the County. Additionally, data show that food insecurity has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Washington County, more than 57% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, which is below the state rate of 65.6%. However, Springdale (60.5%) and Greenland (57.5%) have the highest rates in the county, indicating greater need in communities served by these school districts. The number of children participating in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program

(9,090) is strong and recent data show that in Washington County, over 50% of the more than 24,500 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients are children.

Social and economic data for Washington County show that factors such as median home value and median household income are above the state rate, but the rate of income inequality is also greater, indicating greater division between the top and bottom earners in the County.

Further, there is racial disparity in the crime rate in Arkansas. African American youth make up just 20% of population in the state, but are overrepresented in the youth detention population (46%), while White youth are underrepresented (77% of the population, but 45% of detentions.)

In Washington County, the percentage of the population in the labor force is 65% and many young children have all parents in the labor force (64.6%). Washington County unemployment rates tend to be lower than the statewide rate, though families may experience barriers to stable employment due to citizenship status.

There are many social services available to meet the needs of families in Washington County, including subsidized child care, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and WIC. Workforce training and education opportunities are available to service area residents, though public transportation is somewhat limited within the county. Low-income families may face barriers accessing available resources, reflected upon further in Community Assessment survey results.

ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

EOA programs have various income eligibility requirements. Specific to Head Start/Early Head Start, in Washington County, there are a total of 3,443 children who are eligible for services based on family income at or below the federal poverty level. Over 95% of children who are income-eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start in Washington County reside in Springdale and Fayetteville. Data also shows approximately 448 children birth to age five in Washington County who are eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start services based on receipt of public assistance (TANF and SSI). There are also an estimated 708 income-eligible pregnant women countywide.

Data on homelessness show high rates of students experiencing homelessness. The state rate of students experiencing homelessness is 2.5%, and is much higher in Greenland School District (12.9%) and Lincoln School District (3.1%).

In Washington County, approximately 214 children age 0-5 years old would be categorically eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start due to their foster care status. The most recent data on child abuse and neglect show substantial declines in reporting of suspected abuse and numbers of children served by child welfare agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting underreporting due to pandemic mitigation efforts.

Further, Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) require that at least 10% of program enrollment be children eligible for services under IDEA (i.e., early intervention and preschool special education). A majority of school districts in Washington County have rates of students with disabilities that are greater than the statewide rate. Most recent data publicly reported from the Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (NAESC) reflect 977 infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services in the state, though county level data is not readily available. It is estimated that there are at least 393 children birth to age five, and likely more, in Washington County receiving preschool special education services.

AGENCIES SERVING ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

In EOA's service area, the total capacity of the 115 licensed child care centers and registered family child care homes is 8,003 children. A vast majority of these are in center-based programs. Countywide, 66% of child care centers are licensed to serve infants/toddlers. Licensed capacity does not necessarily reflect the number of children that a program would typically have enrolled. Other factors, such as class size limits, may impact the number of children served at any given time. It is also important to note that total capacity includes school age care, and is available for families of all income levels, reducing the number of slots available for children birth to five from low-income families.

The number of children under five in the service area (15,804 children) far exceeds total child care capacity, which includes school age (8,003 slots). This does not necessarily reflect unmet need, as children may be served in other settings and not all families with young children will need or want care. On a local level, in all the communities in Washington County, child care capacity is less than the number of children under age five.

Countywide, approximately 81% of child care centers and family child care homes are participating in Better Beginnings, the state's three-star quality rating and improvement system. The largest percent of participating providers have one star, followed by three stars and two stars. All of EOA Head Start/Early Head Start programs are rated at the highest quality level (three stars) and receive funding to support furthering the program quality due to their participation in the Better Beginnings program.

EOA administers SafeCare Arkansas, with 216 families currently enrolled, for a weekly home visiting program for families of children ages birth to five. The goal of this program is to help families prevent and identify common childhood illnesses or injuries, determine when a child should go to the doctor, keep their homes safe, and increase positive interactions with their child. This program helps to prevent the removal of children from the home and the re-occurrence of child maltreatment. Additionally, pregnant mothers and new parents in Arkansas are eligible to access home visiting services through Arkansas' Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program through five evidence-based models: Following Baby Back Home (Promising Approach), Healthy Families America (HFA), Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Parents as Teachers (PAT).

In Arkansas, public preschool programs serve three- and four-year-old children, through the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program. Arkansas' public preschool program served 20,197 children statewide in 2020. Publicly funded preschool is also implemented in community-based sites and is included in licensed child care capacity data. In 2021-2022, Washington County had twenty-eight ABC programs with an enrollment of 1,199 children; at least an additional 1,002 children were enrolled in public school PreK programs.

FAMILY, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY INSIGHT

In February 2022, EOA conducted a survey to learn more about individuals' experiences and ideas related to EOA Programs. Three types of surveys were implemented including a Family Survey, an EOA Staff Survey, and a Community Provider Survey.

Families. A total of 131 parents/caregivers that receive a variety of EOA services responded to the Family Survey (65.5% response rate). An overwhelming majority of families responding to the survey indicated that the EOA program locations meet their needs (94.35%), while approximately 79% of families responding to the survey indicated the program schedule meets their needs. When asked how the program schedule could better meet their needs, later hours or provision of after-care was the top response, followed by provision of a summer program, earlier hours, and transportation. Families are largely satisfied with the services provided by EOA (87.1%). Nearly all Head Start/Early Head Start families responding to the survey agree that they are satisfied with the services they receive from the program and that the program is helping their child get ready for school.

Over two thirds of families noted that they have a “large” problem with having enough money to pay for monthly bills and home utilities (e.g., heat, electricity, etc.), while almost half report a not having enough money to buy food as a “large” problem. Another third of respondents noted having difficulty getting help (financial, medical, transportation, child care) or having enough room in the house for the people that live there. About a third of families who have difficulty accessing help say that they do not know what services are available.

The five largest stressors for families are financial, COVID-19, work/life balance, access to child care, and housing. Additionally, families indicated other stressors, some of the most frequent being access to dental care, food insecurity, and mental health.

Staff. A total of 76 staff completed the Staff Survey (54% response rate). EOA staff were asked to reflect on the locations and schedules of EOA programs. Staff members live in, or near, the EOA service area, with most staff reporting that they live in Springdale, followed by Fayetteville.

When reflecting on the EOA programs, three quarters of respondents think the locations meet the needs of families, while about two-thirds of staff members believe the program schedules meet the needs of families. More than three quarters of staff think that later hours would help better meet the needs of families, followed by a summer program (41.18%), transportation (38.24%), and earlier hours (14.71%). Additionally, a number of staff also indicated that families would have additional access to EOA programs (more specifically HS/EHS) if there were more services in rural areas, on the western and southern side of Washington County, and specifically in western Springdale.

When asked about families' biggest stressors, more than three quarters of staff cited financial, and more than half reported employment, housing, food insecurity, transportation, and their child's behavior. Staff indicated they believe families most need or want services in child care, parenting support, affordable housing, housing/rental assistance, and food assistance. When asked what barriers the staff think the families face, the top responses included limited knowledge of what resources are available and fear/reluctance to access services, followed by affordability of needed services, language, and availability of needed services.

A majority of staff believe that EOA's strengths include the ability to connect families with resources, establishing relationships with families, bilingual staffing, and the level of staff experience and expertise. Nearly half of staff believe that the provision of culturally aligned services is a strength in EOA programs.

Community Providers. A total of 23 individuals responded to the Community Provider Survey from Washington County, representing community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, the private and public sector, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and child care providers. Collectively, the respondents to the Community Provider Survey reported observing increases in job availability in the community; the number of families contacting their agency, transportation needs, homelessness and drug abuse in the community. Many respondents also indicated observing a decrease in housing availability, the number of licensed child care providers, and average household incomes, which aligns closely with concerns the families reported in the family survey.

When asked about the most common barriers to low-income families accessing resources, the top responses from community providers included lack of bilingual staff at point of service, limited knowledge of what resources are available, language barriers, affordability of needed resources, fear or reluctance to access services, access to technology/devices and to the internet/Wi-Fi. Respondents to the Community Provider Survey report they believe low-income families' biggest stressors are financial, housing, food insecurity, mental health, COVID-19, and how to manage their child's challenging behavior.

REFLECTIONS

Washington County performs very well on key benchmarks related to education, health, and social services. However, as described throughout the Community Assessment report, there is great diversity of need in the county. It is when reviewing local data, within Washington County, that diversity of need becomes most evident. By targeting services to areas with high rates of child poverty and serving low-income families, EOA is providing services to the children and families most in need.

Drawing from the data and findings of the EOA 2022 Community Assessment, and observations from leadership team members, the following reflections capture key takeaways.

Reflection 1: EOA HS/EHS Program Design. EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program regularly engages in the best practice of reviewing slot allocations in the context of community-wide trends (e.g., availability of publicly funded pre-kindergarten, demand for infant/toddler care, and wait list data) to explore strategies that support full enrollment across the program. Continue this practice in order to respond to changes in community needs when they arise. Continue to explore updates to program schedules to ensure the needs of working families are met.

Reflection 2: Expansion of Birth to Age Five Program. Consider leveraging EOA's history, expertise, and successes to provide early childhood services to additional children and families, including the Head Start and Early Head Start program, EOA Children's House Program, and SafeCare Arkansas. Explore opportunities to expand services to additional eligible children and families, or neighboring service areas to meet the demand in the community. Additionally, seek expansion in the provision of services to children living in ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), that are over income eligibility requirements. These families struggle to meet basic needs, such as access to affordable early education programming. A potential opportunity includes United Way grant funding to support 18 children in a Fayetteville Head Start program.

Additionally, EOA will continue to explore updates to program schedules to ensure the needs of working families are met and will review the location where children and families live that are in need of programming (e.g., northwest area of Washington County, specifically, west of Interstate 49).

Reflection 3: Staff Professional Development, Training and Retention. Continue to communicate with staff regarding their professional development and training needs to support them in meeting their professional goals. Review staff's interest in management/leadership training more closely and leverage this interest to support staff members' professional growth within the agency.

Review staff workloads and schedules to identify more flexible staffing patterns (while maintaining adult-child ratios) to support the work/life balance of staff. This may include rotating schedules, job shares, and/or longer days with shorter weeks.

Conduct an updated wage and benefits comparability study to analyze EOA program's employee compensation system compared to other community programs serving individuals with a similar demographic (e.g., public schools, local child care centers etc.). To continue to implement high quality programming, EOA must remain competitive in attracting and maintaining qualified personnel.

Establish more robust and intentional mental health supports for children, families, and staff. Integrate resources from national, regional, and statewide projects to enhance social and emotional supports in each center-based setting. Continue to build a program-wide culture that incorporates and embraces an understanding of ACEs and trauma-informed care for children, families, and staff.

Reflection 4: Parent Training and Employment. Continue to leverage community partnerships with current partners and formalize access to internal resources related to employment skill building and job search. Explore new strategies, including partnerships, to provide educational counseling, job training, and resources to families. Collaborate with community partners and local employers to address specific barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment (e.g., child care, transportation, work history, issues with a background check etc.). Continuously evaluate current programming to ensure strong outcomes and increase effectiveness, such as the innovative EOA Step Up Case Management Program, which assists individuals and families transition out of poverty by setting attainable goals to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of economic stability and self-sufficiency.

Reflection 5: Continued efforts toward bilingual supports and cultural alignment. Seek to help expand families' access to bilingual, culturally sensitive resource providers in the community, and collaborate with community agencies to address language barriers that families may face when accessing EOA resources and supports. Continue to make bilingual services available to families in the community that are interested in EOA programs and help to identify bilingual service providers to meet enrolled children's needs. One particular focus will be to continue to meet the language and cultural needs of the Marshallese population to expand access to, and understanding of, the EOA programs available.

Reflection 6: Affordable Housing and Homelessness. Continue to advocate for, and provide support to, families experiencing homelessness and those on the brink of homelessness (e.g., provision of rental assistance funds to support housing deposit and first month's rent). Use Community Assessment data and updated data sources to understand the locations with high rates of homelessness in the service area. Ensure that families are aware of, and understand, the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and how it impacts eligibility for

and services available from EOA, including the Head Start/Early Head start program. Continue to explore and address housing needs and homelessness in partnership with community partners.

Reflection 7: Impact of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an extended impact on communities in the EOA service area. Regularly reviewing community data to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 on families will continue to benefit families served by EOA. Data such as unemployment, child welfare, food insecurity, substance abuse, mental health, timely preventive and primary care, and homelessness may be considered. Continuing to leverage partnerships and community resources will help EOA to better support vulnerable families, including those on the verge of homelessness, single parents, bilingual families, and grandparents or other relatives raising young children.

Reflection 8: Building and Strengthening Partnerships. Ensure EOA representatives continue to participate on local task forces with community partners to address evolving challenges and develop strategic plans for partnerships. Focus of such committees may include housing, job training/availability, child welfare/foster care, mental health, and substance misuse, among others. Identify possible advocacy action steps each partner can take, as appropriate. Coordinate communication and strategic planning efforts of EOA task force members to ensure community-wide efforts impact programming for families with the greatest needs in the community.

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INTRODUCTION

Agency Overview



The Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County, Inc. (EOA) is a non-profit Community Action Agency dedicated to helping low-income families achieve economic stability. The Agency was incorporated in 1965 and has developed multiple community development initiatives that address existing and emerging community needs.

The Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County's mission is empowering children and families to learn, connect and succeed. To achieve this mission, EOA directs a number of programs in Washington County, including: EOA Children's House, Head Start/Early Head Start, SafeCare Arkansas, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, Weatherization Assistance, Water Assistance, Rental Assistance, Emergency Food Assistance and the Individual Development Account (IDA) savings account program.

The Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County's vision is of Northwest Arkansas as a resilient community where children and families experiencing adverse circumstances have the opportunity to thrive, become self-sufficient, and live an improved quality of life.

In addition to maintaining a qualified workforce to implement its high-quality programming, EOA also benefits from approximately 25,248 volunteer hours annually.ⁱ

Service Area

The primary service area for EOA is Washington County in northwest Arkansas; the SafeCare program also serves families in home-based services in Benton, Washington, Madison, and Carroll Counties. The EOA Children's House is located in Washington County, and may serve children and families from neighboring counties.

For future strategic planning purposes and for points of comparison, this community assessment also captures key data points for neighboring communities of interest, including Benton, Carroll, and Madison Counties.

Washington County is approximately 942 square miles, which is approximately 1.8% of the total land area in the state of Arkansas.ⁱⁱ The county is primarily urban and suburban, with a population per square mile of 215.6. The county is the 3rd most populated in the state and has a significantly greater population density than the statewide population of 56 people per square mile.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the surrounding counties, Benton County is the largest at 847 square miles, followed by Madison County (834 square miles) and Carroll County (630 square miles). Benton County is slightly more densely populated than Washington County, at 261.2 people per square mile. Carroll County is more rural, 43.6 people per square mile, followed by Madison County with only 18.8 people per square mile.^{iv}

Program Summaries

EOA Emergency Assistance Programs

The Rental Assistance Program provides rental assistance to households experiencing financial hardship due to loss of income, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, including those with past due rent or facing eviction.

The Water Assistance Program allows a one-time payment of up to \$100 to be made toward a past-due water utility bill for low-income customers (below 125% FPL) who may be at risk of lacking access to water.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance program helps low-income households with winter and summer energy costs as part of the federal Low Income Home Energy Program.

In partnership with the Bread of Life in Springdale and LifeSource in Fayetteville, the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) distributes U. S. Department of Agriculture donated foods to organizations to provide nutritious foods to low-income households. Commodities help support healthy, independent living for vulnerable populations.

Individual Development Account (IDA) Savings Account Program

EOA helps eligible families create an Individual Development Account (IDA). This bank account helps individuals build assets and achieve financial stability and long-term self-sufficiency. Generally, funds are saved for the purposes of furthering education, the purchase of a first home, or to start a business.

EOA Children's House

EOA Children's House was founded in 1978 to provide services and care to children under the age of five who have been abused, neglected, or face adverse childhood experiences. EOA Children's House is one of the nation's largest long-term programs for child abuse prevention and treatment and the only program of its kind in Arkansas. The current funded enrollment of the program supports 22 center-based slots (18 PreK and 4 Toddlers). The EOA Children's House is located in Washington County and may serve children and families in neighboring counties.

Children who have been abused or neglected typically have delayed development of approximately 18-months, depending on the severity of their trauma. The goal at EOA Children's House is to work with each child to achieve age-appropriate developmental milestones so that when they enter Kindergarten, they are at the same developmental level as their peers. The program is designed to address trauma through a multigenerational approach. This whole-family model partners parents or guardians with a trained Family Advocate who meets individually with families on a routine basis to set goals related to self-sufficiency and connect families to supportive services and resources. In addition, this program coordinates with community partners to address health services and therapy needs. (Additional information regarding the EOA Children's House program can be found in the Foster Care section).

SafeCare Arkansas

SafeCare Arkansas is a weekly home visiting program for families of children ages birth to five with a goal to help parents prevent and identify common childhood illnesses or injuries, determine when a child should go to the doctor, aid parents in keeping their homes safe, and increase positive interactions with their child. This program helps to prevent the removal of children from the home and the re-occurrence of child maltreatment. The SafeCare program serves Benton, Washington, Madison, and Carroll Counties. The current 2022 funded enrollment provides services for 216 families/year in home-based services. (Additional information regarding the SafeCare Arkansas program can be found in the Home Visiting section).

Head Start/Early Head Start Program

EOA is funded to serve 329 children in its Head Start/Early Head Start program in Washington County. Early Head Start includes center-based and home-based program options, with home-based services also available to pregnant women. All Head Start slots are center based.

A summary of EOA Head Start and Early Head Start funded slots program type and location is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. EOA Head Start and Early Head Start Slots by Location and Program Type (Washington County)^v

Program	Full-Day Center-Based	Home Based	Total Children
Ivory Conley	24		24
Oak Avenue	24		24
Pat Walker	32		32
Springdale Airport	24		24
West Washington County	18		18
Early Head Start	112	10	122
Ellen Smith	16	0	16
North Street	24	0	24
Old Farmington Road	16	0	16
Early Head Start - Expansion	56	0	56
Ellen Smith	36	0	36
Pat Walker	32	0	32
Ivory Conley	17	0	17
Oak Avenue	17	0	17
Springdale Airport	15	0	15
West Washington County	17	0	17
Old Farmington Road	17	0	17
Head Start	151	0	151
Total	319	10	329

Community Assessment

EOA completed its last community assessments in 2017. These reports, *EOA of Washington County Inc. Community Needs Assessment* and *2016-2017 Community Assessment EOA of Washington County, Inc. Head Start and Early Head Start* identified needs of children and families in the service area (e.g., employment, health, economic support) and highlighted the important role of EOA programs and community resource providers in helping to meet families' needs.



The primary purpose of this community assessment is to provide data and information to support EOA's programs, including Head Start/Early Head Start program planning, and to look closely at the availability of resources and services for young children and their families. This assessment explores the needs of children birth to age five within Benton, Washington, Madison, and Carroll Counties.

In addition, this community assessment serves to meet the requirements for Community Action Agencies to determine the underlying causes and conditions of poverty within the community they serve and identify the available resources to address the unmet needs of the community's most vulnerable residents.

METHODOLOGY

Community Services Block Grant Organizational Standards

Required data includes:

- 1) The department demonstrates low-income individuals' participation in its activities.
- 2) The department analyzes information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.
- 3) The department utilizes information gathered from key sectors of the community in assessing needs and resources, during the community assessment process or other times. These sectors would include at minimum: community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, and educational institutions.
- 4) The department documents the number of volunteers and hours mobilized in support of its activities.
- 5) The department conducted a community assessment and issued a report within the past 3 years.
- 6) As part of the community assessment, the department collects and includes current data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for their service area(s).
- 7) The department collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area(s) in the community assessment.
- 8) The community assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.
- 9) The tripartite board/advisory body formally accepts the completed community assessment.
- 10) Customer satisfaction data and customer input, collected as part of the community assessment, is included in the strategic planning process, or comparable planning process.

Head Start Program Performance Standards

Community assessment is a central aspect of any Community Action Agency and Head Start or Early Head Start program, serving as a tool for program planning and implementation. The recently revised Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), Section 1302.11, *Determining community strengths, needs, and resources*, requires that programs complete a community assessment once during each five-year grant period and must review and update the community assessment annually.^{vi}

Data from this update community assessment will be used by the agency, in collaboration with the Governing Board and Policy Council, to determine immediate and longer-term goals and objectives for the program.

Per the HSPPS, Section 1302.11^{vii}, required data presented in the 2021 Community Assessment includes:

- 1) The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak, including:
 - a) Children experiencing homelessness in collaboration with, to the extent possible, McKinney-Vento Local Education Agency Liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432 (6)(A));
 - b) Children in foster care;
 - c) Children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies;
- 2) The education, health, nutrition and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
- 3) Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
- 4) Other child-development, child-care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served;
- 5) Resources available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and
- 6) Strengths of the community.

Process and Data Collection Methods

The EOA 2022 Community Assessment was conducted in early 2022 under the leadership of Delia Anderson Farmer, EOA Executive Director, and Lance Johnson, EOA Director of Children's Services. EOA contracted with Foundations for Families, a consulting, training, and technical assistance company, to conduct the community assessment with input and guidance from EOA leadership team members.

Data collection methods included:

- Review of program operations, challenges and observed trends with agency staff;
- Program-level data from the EOA programs, including the Head Start/Early Head Start program;
- Needs assessments and reports gathered from county departments and community agencies;
- Information gathered from publicly available data sources (e.g., U.S. Census, state departments, federal agencies, state and national organizations); and
- Data from surveys of Head Start/Early Head Start families, staff, and community providers.

Data Analysis: An Equity Perspective

When conducting the EOA 2022 Community Assessment, data were analyzed from an equity perspective to determine if there are certain types of families that are accessing or could benefit from EOA Programs, including Head Start/Early Head Start, more than other families. In doing so, Foundations for Families explored layers of data to uncover disparities among subgroups within the service area and among children and families served. By taking the additional step to identify disparities, EOA will be able to target its strategies to address the most pressing service area needs through its programs, including the Head Start/Early Head Start program. This is a method to continuously improve program implementation while monitoring specific data for trends indicating whether outcomes are improving for the children and families most in need.

Limitations of 2022 Community Assessment

EOA's geographic service area lends itself to county-level information; a substantial amount of data at the county level was used to inform the agency's community assessment. State level data are provided for comparison to service area counties when county data are not available, or to set the context for Arkansas' communities within the national landscape. School district, zip code, municipal, and census tract-level information are provided for key data points and to illustrate unique and specific needs in local communities.

Throughout the report, when relevant or required data points could not be obtained to inform the community assessment, this is indicated in the text. Anecdotal information is provided, where possible, to balance statewide, county, and local data with observations and reflections about the experiences of children and families in EOA's service area.

U.S. Census Bureau data in this report is reported from the American Community Survey (ACS),^{viii} an annual survey that is provided to help determine how more than \$675 billion in federal and state funds are distributed each year. On March 17, 2022, the Census Bureau released the 2016-2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates, after multiple delays due to quality and response issues for 2020 data collection.

Analyses of the quality of the 2020 Census counts indicated that certain demographic groups were undercounted.^{ix} The Black or African American population, American Indian or Alaska Native population living on a reservation, the Hispanic or Latino population, and people who report being of "some other race" were all undercounted in the 2020 census. Adding to the challenge, many of the groups that were undercounted are the same groups that have been historically undercounted.

Additionally, young children (birth to age 4) have historically been undercounted in the Census. In 2020, U.S. Census Bureau reported the largest undercount of young children since the 1970 Census.^x This is attributable, in part, to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to disrupted living arrangements and the closure of settings (e.g., child care, community organizations) where communications campaigns might reach families.

When examining U.S. Census data tables, the margins of errors for data on communities with small populations may be higher than communities with large populations. Zip code level data provided in the U.S. Census is a representation of the U.S. Postal Service zip code service area as a "ZIP Code Tabulation Area."^{xi} Zip codes are used by the Postal Service for mail delivery routes, and these boundaries may cross county, school district, or other geographic boundaries. A sum of zip code level data for a county will not necessarily total the county level data.

Growing and Changing Community Need Due to COVID-19

In December 2019, COVID-19 emerged as a new infectious disease in Wuhan, China. COVID-19 quickly spread throughout the world, and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic.^{xii} Across the service area and across the U.S., COVID-19 is impacting the health and wellbeing of communities. As of January 18, 2022, there were 684,776 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the State of Arkansas and more than 10,000 deaths statewide from the disease.

This 2022 Community Assessment will provide an essential snapshot into the immediate impacts of COVID-19. Short-term impacts of COVID-19 are described throughout this report, including reflections from EOA's leadership team members who describe the health and economic impacts on families and the community. Long-term impacts of COVID-19 are developing, and it will continue to be a factor in the overall health of communities and will influence the needs of children and families in the service area.

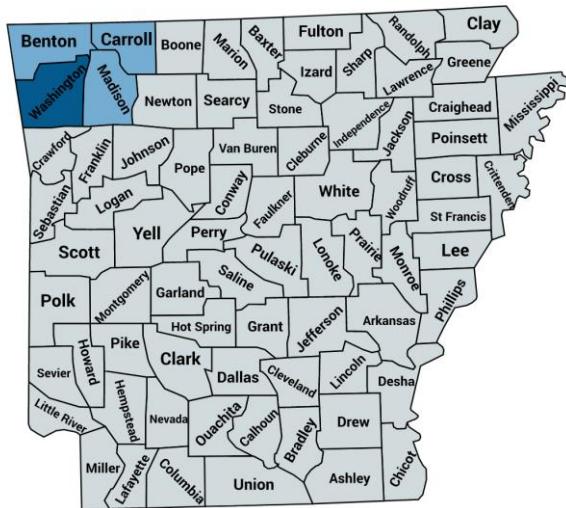
COVID-19 data is highlighted throughout the report.

OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREA

Geographic Boundaries

EOA primarily serves children and families in Washington County, Arkansas, which is located in the northwestern part of the state and borders four counties. Two of EOA's programs provide services for families in additional counties. The SafeCare Arkansas program serves Benton, Carroll, Madison, and Washington Counties. (Figure 1). The EOA Children's House provides services in Washington County and may also serve children and families from neighboring counties.

Figure 1. EOA Head Start/Early Head Start Service Area^{xiii}



This report explores data in primarily in Washington County. Additional data in Benton, Madison, and Carroll County is provided in order to contextualize and explore trends regarding the greatest needs of the children and families residing in Northwest Arkansas.

County and Local Government and Economics

There are 75 counties in the state of Arkansas. All areas in Arkansas have existing county governments. The county governing body is the quorum or levying court, which consists of the justices of the peace and the county judge. Counties oversee and implement services such as tax collection, courts, public health, parks, roadways, and other programs to support the welfare of community members. Municipal governments operate at the local level.^{xiv}

EOA's service area includes six federally designated Opportunity Zones (designed to increase economic development by providing investors with tax benefits). Qualified opportunity zone census tracts include: ^{xv}

- 05143010200 (Springdale)
- 05143010301 (Springdale)
- 05143010302 (Springdale)
- 05143011200 (Springdale)
- 05143010600 (Fayetteville)
- 05143011101 (Fayetteville)

Service Area Demographics

Population

The population in the Washington County is 236,198. Over the past three years, the population in Arkansas and Washington County has been increasing (Table 2). In the last 20 years, there has been tremendous growth in Benton and Washington Counties, while Carroll and Madison Counties have had more modest growth. All counties have growth rates greater than the statewide rate (Table 3).

Table 2. Population by Geographic Area and Year (2017-2019)^{xvi}

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	Three-Year Trend
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>258,980</i>	<i>265,759</i>	<i>273,510</i>	<i>Increasing</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>27,887</i>	<i>27,965</i>	<i>28,062</i>	<i>Increasing</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>16,076</i>	<i>16,211</i>	<i>16,393</i>	<i>Increasing</i>
Washington County	228,529	232,289	236,198	Increasing
Arkansas	2,990,671	2,999,370	3,011,873	Increasing

Table 3. Population Growth by Geographic Area 2000-2020^{xvii, 1}

Geographic Area	Population growth since 2000
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>82.1%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>12%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>16.5%</i>
Washington County	51.6%
Arkansas	7.4%

The percent of Veterans in Washington County is slightly below the statewide and the national rates; Carroll County is the only county above the statewide rate (Table 4). Table 5 shows the largest Veteran population in Washington County is 35-54 (potentially aligning with service in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars (2002/2003)). In Arkansas as a whole, the largest Veteran population is over 65 (potentially aligning with service in the Vietnam War).

Table 4. Veteran Population (and Percent of Population) Age 18 and Over by Gender and Geographic Area (2020)^{xviii, 2}

Geographic Area	Veteran Population			Veterans as % of Total Population		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>13,400</i>	<i>1,185</i>	<i>14,585</i>	<i>14.0%</i>	<i>1.2%</i>	<i>7.2%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>2,329</i>	<i>251</i>	<i>2,572</i>	<i>21.5%</i>	<i>2.3%</i>	<i>11.7%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>887</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>938</i>	<i>14.4%</i>	<i>0.8%</i>	<i>7.5%</i>
Washington County	10,828	849	11,677	12.5%	1.0%	6.5%
Arkansas	177,257	14,529	191,786	16.0%	1.2%	8.3%
United States	16,207,488	1,627,968	17,835,456	13.2%	1.3%	7.1%

Table 5. Veteran Population by Age and Gender (2020)^{xix}

Geographic Area	Males				Females			
	18-34	35-54	55-64	Over 65	18-34	35-54	55-64	Over 65
Washington County	1,166	2,810	1,515	5,337	174	271	192	212
Arkansas	13,046	39,276	32,748	92,187	2,327	5,942	3,279	2,981
United States	1,286,895	3,531,981	2,796,648	8,591,964	282,027	642,744	379,972	323,225

¹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

² Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Over the past three years, the birth rate has been decreasing statewide and in Washington, Madison, and Benton Counties. The only county reflecting an increase in the birth rate is Madison (Table 6).

Table 6. Number of Live Births and Birth Rate by Year by Geographic Area (2020) ^{xx xxi,3}

Geographic Area	Birth Rate per 1,000	Three-Year Birth Rate Trend
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>12.68</i>	<i>Decreasing</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>Decreasing</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>14.8</i>	<i>Increasing</i>
Washington County	12.69	Decreasing
Arkansas	12.3	Decreasing

A majority of pregnant women with births in the last twelve months in Washington County identified as White (68.1%), followed by “some other race” (12.8%) and Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander (7.8%); approximately 22% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or of Latino Origin. There is greater racial and ethnic diversity in this population in Washington County, as compared to neighboring counties. However, in Arkansas as a whole, there was a higher percentage of births to women that identify as Black or African American.

Table 7. Women with Births in the Last 12 Months (age 15-50), by Race and Ethnicity by Geographic Area (2020) ^{xxii, 4}

Geographic Area	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaskan Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races	Hispanic or Latino Origin	Total Births
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>3,361 (85.3%)</i>	<i>91 (2.3%)</i>	<i>41 (1.0%)</i>	<i>147 (3.7%)</i>	<i>72 (1.8%)</i>	<i>51 (1.3%)</i>	<i>175 (4.4%)</i>	<i>606 (15.4%)</i>	<i>3,938 (100.0%)</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>73 (100.0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>73 (100.0%)</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>230 (82.1%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>9 (3.2%)</i>	<i>41 (14.6%)</i>	<i>0 (0%)</i>	<i>45 (16.1%)</i>	<i>280 (100.0%)</i>
Washington County	2,027 (68.1%)	97 (3.3%)	12 (0.4%)	164 (5.5%)	232 (7.8%)	380 (12.8%)	64 (2.2%)	666 (22.4%)	2,976 (100.0%)
Arkansas	26,576 (69.0%)	7,748 (20.1%)	255 (0.7%)	918 (2.4%)	918 (2.4%)	328 (0.9%)	1,170 (3.0%)	3,503 (9.1%)	38,542 (100.0%)

The median age in Washington County is higher than the statewide rate, and a significant portion of the population is over age 65. The percent of the population that is under age five is less than the statewide rate (Table 8). The median age in all counties vary from approximately 32 to 45, with the largest population under age five in Benton County.

Table 8. Median Age by Geographic Area (2020) ^{xxiii,5}

Geographic Area	Median Age	Percent of Population Under Age 5	Percent of Population Over Age 65
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>35.5</i>	<i>7.0%</i>	<i>13.5%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>44.8</i>	<i>5.5%</i>	<i>23.0%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>41.0</i>	<i>6.7%</i>	<i>19.0%</i>
Washington County	32.2	6.7%	11.7%
Arkansas	38.3	6.3%	16.9%

³ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

The race and ethnicity of the service area population by zip code are reflected in Tables 9 and 10. With the exception of Springdale and Summers, most communities in Washington County are less diverse than Arkansas as a whole. Racial diversity is greatest in zip codes 72762 (Springdale), 72764 (Springdale), and 72769 (Summers).

Table 9. Population (and Percentage of Population) by Race and Geographic Area (2020)^{xxiv,6}

Geographic Area	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaskan Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races
<i>Benton County</i>	224,196 (82.0%)	4,257 (1.6%)	3,289 (1.2%)	10,884 (4.0%)	1,826 (0.7%)	7,870 (2.9%)	21,188 (7.7%)
<i>Carroll County</i>	25,059 (89.3%)	251 (0.9%)	338 (1.2%)	384 (1.4%)	277 (1.0%)	477 (1.7%)	1,276 (4.5%)
<i>Madison County</i>	15,152 (92.4%)	17 (0.1%)	132 (0.8%)	126 (0.8%)	102 (0.6%)	231 (1.4%)	633 (3.9%)
72701 (Fayetteville)	36,540 (80.5%)	2,324 (5.1%)	484 (1.1%)	1,106 (2.4%)	63 (0.1%)	2,316 (5.1%)	2,563 (5.6%)
72703 (Fayetteville)	27,256 (82.0%)	1,525 (4.6%)	162 (0.5%)	1,333 (4.0%)	109 (0.3%)	949 (2.9%)	1,889 (5.7%)
72704 (Fayetteville)	22,287 (84.2%)	1,412 (5.3%)	122 (0.5%)	437 (1.7%)	0 (0.0%)	997 (3.8%)	1,225 (4.6%)
72717 (Canehill)	999 (98.5%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (0.8%)
72727 (Elkins)	5,880 (91.0%)	15 (0.2%)	34 (0.5%)	43 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	278 (4.3%)	210 (3.3%)
72729 (Evansville)	96 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
72730 (Farmington)	7,850 (91.0%)	0 (0.0%)	181 (2.1%)	52 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	394 (4.6%)	147 (1.7%)
72738 (Hindsville)	2,256 (87.7%)	0 (0.0%)	90 (3.5%)	116 (4.5%)	0 (0.0%)	108 (4.2%)	3 (0.1%)
72744 (Lincoln)	4,661 (88.1%)	14 (0.3%)	76 (1.4%)	71 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	251 (4.7%)	218 (4.1%)
72749 (Morrow)	498 (97.3%)	1 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (2.5%)
72753 (Prairie Grove)	8,592 (86.9%)	39 (0.4%)	10 (0.1%)	36 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	142 (1.4%)	1,066 (10.8%)
72761 (Siloam Springs)	17,120 (75.8%)	212 (0.9%)	1,103 (4.9%)	582 (2.6%)	12 (0.1%)	1,005 (4.4%)	2,557 (11.3%)
72762 (Springdale)	30,241 (72.6%)	831 (2.0%)	351 (0.8%)	1,249 (3.0%)	842 (2.0%)	4,998 (12.0%)	3,157 (7.6%)
72764 (Springdale)	31,167 (54.1%)	2,131 (3.7%)	544 (0.9%)	1,533 (2.7%)	5,973 (10.4%)	11,882 (20.6%)	4,331 (7.5%)
72769 (Summers)	1,024 (63.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	441 (27.4%)	1 (0.1%)	73 (4.5%)	72 (4.5%)
72774 (West Fork)	5,921 (94.0%)	1 (0.0%)	66 (1.0%)	84 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (0.2%)	216 (3.4%)
72959 (Winslow)	2,863 (94.5%)	7 (0.2%)	100 (3.3%)	21 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	39 (1.3%)
Washington County	177,522 (75.2%)	8,080 (3.4%)	1,918 (0.8%)	6,262 (2.7%)	6,243 (2.6%)	21,724 (9.2%)	14,449 (6.1%)
Arkansas	2,269,959 (75.4%)	457,840 (15.2%)	19,146 (0.6%)	46,130 (1.5%)	10,455 (0.3%)	88,363 (2.9%)	119,980 (4.0%)

⁶ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

In Washington County, ethnic diversity is greatest in zip code 72764 (Springdale), where 41.8% of the population is Hispanic or Latino, followed by 72762 (Springdale), 22.3% and 72761 (Siloam Spring), 19.1%. All counties except Madison have more than double the ethnic diversity of the state (Table 10).

Table 10. Ethnicity as a Percentage of the Population by Geographic Area (2020)^{xxv,7}

Geographic Area	Hispanic or Latino Origin (of any race)	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Mexican	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Puerto Rican	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Cuban	Hispanic or Latino Origin: Other
<i>Benton County</i>	16.8%	11.7%	0.4%	0.2%	4.5%
<i>Carroll County</i>	15.1%	9.8%	0.5%	0.1%	4.6%
<i>Madison County</i>	5.8%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
72701 (Fayetteville)	9.1%	7.2%	0.2%	0.0%	1.7%
72703 (Fayetteville)	6.1%	4.4%	0.1%	0.1%	1.6%
72704 (Fayetteville)	6.2%	4.5%	0.2%	0.4%	1.1%
72717 (Canehill)	1.6%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72727 (Elkins)	5.1%	3.9%	0.4%	0.0%	0.8%
72729 (Evansville)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72730 (Farmington)	4.9%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72738 (Hindsville)	7.3%	6.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%
72744 (Lincoln)	7.6%	5.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
72749 (Morrow)	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72753 (Prairie Grove)	3.1%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	19.1%	11.0%	0.5%	0.0%	7.6%
72762 (Springdale)	22.3%	15.2%	1.0%	0.1%	6.0%
72764 (Springdale)	41.8%	29.2%	2.0%	0.0%	10.5%
72769 (Summers)	3.1%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%
72774 (West Fork)	4.1%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
72959 (Winslow)	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Washington County	16.9%	12.1%	0.7%	0.1%	4.1%
Arkansas	7.6%	5.6%	0.3%	0.1%	1.7%

Poverty

The poverty rate for all counties compared to the state of Arkansas is provided in Table 11. Poverty rates are lower in Washington and Benton Counties compared to the statewide rate and have been decreasing in the service area in recent years. Poverty rates are fluctuating in Carroll County and in Madison County, where the poverty rate has been slightly above the rate for Arkansas for the past two years.

Table 11. Poverty Rate by Geographic Area and Year^{xxvi,8}

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020	Three-Year Trend
<i>Benton County</i>	9.9	9.4	8.6	<i>Decreasing</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	15	14.8	15.2	<i>Fluctuating</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	16.8	17.4	17.3	<i>Fluctuating</i>
Washington County	16.8	16.4	16.0	Decreasing
Arkansas	17.6	17	16.1	Decreasing

Across the service area, there is disparity with regard to poverty rates by race. In comparison to individuals identifying as “White,” poverty rates are higher among individuals in all other race categories. As reflected in Table 12, the greatest number of individuals that are below the poverty level in Washington County identify

⁷ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

⁸ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders (24%), individuals of two or more races (23.9%), and Black or African American individuals (21.9%)

Similarly, in Washington County, the poverty rate among individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin is higher than that of individuals who are White alone (Table 13).

Disparities also exist in poverty rates based on the age of the individual and are highest for 18–34-year-old individuals, which might suggest the importance of job training opportunities in the service area (Table 14).

Table 12. Number (and Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Race and Geographic Area (2020)^{xxvii,9}

County	White	Black or African American	American Indian & Alaskan Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races
<i>Benton County</i>	18,775 (8.5%)	429 (10.6%)	661 (20.4%)	590 (5.4%)	411 (22.8%)	568 (7.3%)	1,721 (8.1%)
<i>Carroll County</i>	3,304 (13.3%)	89 (39.7%)	163 (48.2%)	32 (8.3%)	227 (81.9%)	81 (17.1%)	320 (25.1%)
<i>Madison County</i>	2,644 (17.6%)	n/a	104 (78.8%)	2 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (7.4%)	52 (8.2%)
Washington County	24,367 (14.2%)	1,543 (21.9%)	319 (17.7%)	942 (15.6%)	1,492 (24.0%)	4,430 (20.4%)	3,364 (23.9%)
Arkansas	290,243 (13.1%)	124,695 (28.6%)	3,917 (21.2%)	5,232 (11.5%)	2,713 (26.3%)	21,295 (24.5%)	22,095 (19.0%)

Table 13. Number (and Percent) of Individuals Below Poverty Level by Ethnicity and Geographic Area (2020)^{xxviii,10}

Geographic Area	Hispanic or Latino Origin	Non-Hispanic or Latino Origin, White Alone
<i>Benton County</i>	5,726 (12.6%)	14,694 (7.8%)
<i>Carroll County</i>	955 (22.6%)	2,569 (11.8%)
<i>Madison County</i>	183 (19.2%)	2,507 (17.4%)
Washington County	9,113 (23.0%)	20,706 (13.1%)
Arkansas	50,515 (22.4%)	266,935 (12.7%)

Table 14. Percent of Individuals in Poverty by Age and Geographic Area (2020)^{xxix,11}

Geographic Area	Under 5	5-17 years	18-34 years	35-64 years	65 years and older
<i>Benton County</i>	12.8%	11.0%	9.9%	6.3%	7.0%
<i>Carroll County</i>	27.5%	16.4%	20.4%	13.6%	9.9%
<i>Madison County</i>	27.4%	28.4%	17.2%	15.3%	8.1%
72701 (Fayetteville)	28.4%	14.4%	45.8%	15.2%	8.8%
72703 (Fayetteville)	23.8%	17.0%	29.1%	13.5%	5.9%
72704 (Fayetteville)	5.5%	8.9%	16.8%	4.3%	4.4%
72717 (Canehill)	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	20.5%	0.0%
72727 (Elkins)	0.0%	2.2%	7.0%	13.9%	4.8%
72729 (Evansville)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72730 (Farmington)	0.0%	2.3%	2.5%	4.6%	14.2%
72738 (Hindsville)	35.7%	8.2%	17.7%	8.1%	4.8%
72744 (Lincoln)	14.3%	9.5%	10.6%	13.7%	12.4%
72749 (Morrow)	86.0%	0.0%	58.2%	1.0%	0.0
72753 (Prairie Grove)	28.3%	13.7%	19.1%	14.6%	6.8%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	25.5%	28.2%	19.2%	6.8%	8.7%

⁹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

¹⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

¹¹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Geographic Area	Under 5	5-17 years	18-34 years	35-64 years	65 years and older
72762 (Springdale)	17.5%	16.8%	10.6%	8.3%	5.8%
72764 (Springdale)	29.7%	22.9%	19.7%	11.2%	10.5%
72769 (Summers)	0.0%	0.0%	5.8%	2.1%	12.8%
72774 (West Fork)	14.2%	4.9%	4.8%	4.3%	9.8%
72959 (Winslow)	4.1%	21.0%	9.6%	20.3%	7.3%
Washington County	21.8%	15.4%	25.1%	10.6%	7.7%
Arkansas	25.8%	20.6%	20.0%	13.0%	9.8%

There are also disparities with regard to single-parent and two-parent families with young children. In families with a female head of household (no husband present), the poverty rate is substantially higher than married-couple families (Table 15).^{xxx} In 2020, the poverty rate of this population in Washington County decreased 8% from the year prior.

When reporting poverty thresholds, census data considers a household's earning, but also other cash benefits, such as unemployment benefits. Due to the impact of the pandemic, benefits were available to those that may not have previously qualified and were also supplemented through the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program.^{xxxi}

The rate of single-parent households in Arkansas is 37%.^{xxxii} In the EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program, 64% of children served in the 2020-2021 program year were living in single-parent families, well above the statewide rate.^{xxxiii} Head Start/Early Head Start is providing a vital resource to these families.

Table 15. Poverty Status of Families in the Past 12 Months by Geographic Area (2020)^{xxxiv, 12}

Geographic Area	All Families with Related Children Under Age five	Married-couple Families with Related Children Under Age five	Families with Female Householder, No Spouse Present, with Related Children Under Age five
<i>Benton County</i>	9.2%	5.5%	32.1%
<i>Carroll County</i>	18.9%	4.7%	53.0%
<i>Madison County</i>	14.6%	0.0%	51.9%
Washington County	15.5%	3.7%	53.3%
Arkansas	20.4%	7.7%	48.0%

It is relevant to note that young women/mothers disproportionately left the workforce during the start of the pandemic, possibly due to the increase in childcare responsibilities, offering female householders, with no husband present, fewer options to remain employed.^{xxxv}

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 1,149,900 (39.4%) of the population in Arkansas lived below 200% of the federal poverty level in 2019, including 339,000 children (49.0%).^{xxxvi} In 2020 in Washington County, the number of individuals at 100-125% of the federal poverty level decreased from the year prior and is below the statewide rate (Table 16).

¹² Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 16. Percentage of Individuals at 100%-125% FPL by Geographic Area (2020) ^{xxxvii,13,14}

Geographic Area	% of Population 2019	% of Population 2020
<i>Benton County</i>	4.1%	3.2%
<i>Carroll County</i>	*	*
<i>Madison County</i>	*	*
Washington County	5.2%	4.3%
Arkansas	5.9%	5.4%

* Data not reported.

Further in 2018, 46% of Arkansas households struggled to afford basic household necessities. While 17% of households were living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), an additional 29% identified as “ALICE,” Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. These households earn above the FPL, but not enough to meet a Household Survival Budget, which reflects the bare minimum necessary to “live and work in the modern economy and includes housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology (a smartphone plan), and taxes.” ^{xxxviii}

In Washington County, 27% of households were considered ALICE in 2018; 33% of households in Carroll and Madison Counties were also ALICE. This is above the state rate of 29%.^{xxxix} In Washington County, the number of households living below the FPL and ALICE households makes up 44% of all households. Both types of households are struggling to afford basic needs and were likely more heavily impacted by the pandemic.^{xl}

Table 17. Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) Households by Geographic Area (2018) ^{xli, 15}

Geographic Area	ALICE Households	Households in Poverty
<i>Benton County</i>	24%	8%
<i>Carroll County</i>	33%	15%
<i>Madison County</i>	33%	17%
Washington County	27%	17%
Arkansas	29%	17%

In Washington County, the number of ALICE families has been increasing since 2014.^{xlii} The largest number of total households living below the ALICE threshold in Washington County are in Fayetteville township (34,480), Springdale township (25,033), Farmington township (2,676), and Prairie Grove township (2,556). EOA Administrators report receiving feedback from families that would indicate many struggling families are above 100% FPL in Farmington and Prairie Grove townships, and do not meet eligibility thresholds, which is supported by the data in Table 18.

Table 18. Top Townships, by County, for Percent Below ALICE Threshold, by County ^{xliii}

Geographic Area	County Subdivision	Total Households	Percent Below ALICE Threshold
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>Township 5</i>	5,542	60%
	<i>Township 11</i>	4,902	48%
	<i>Township 12</i>	5,388	48%
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>Kings' River township</i>	307	71%
	<i>Osage township</i>	169	71%
	<i>Omega township</i>	131	64%
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>Boston township</i>	234	76%
	<i>Marble township</i>	185	69%

¹³ Calculated by subtracting the percentage of individuals living below the FPL from the percentage of individuals living below 125% of the poverty level.

¹⁴ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

¹⁵ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Geographic Area	County Subdivision	Total Households	Percent Below ALICE Threshold
	<i>Valley township</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>67%</i>
Washington County	Fayetteville township	34,480	51%
	Springdale township	25,033	44%
	Farmington township	2,676	34%
	Prairie Grove township	2,556	35%
	Prairie township	1,875	28%
	Johnson township	1,617	31%
	West Fork township	1,367	34%
	Tontitown township	1,319	29%
	Brush Creek township	1,205	36%
	Greenland township	1,129	43%
	Elkins township	1,076	35%
	Goshen township	1,073	26%
	Lincoln township	927	69%
	Elm Springs township	861	37%
	Litteral township	804	27%
	Center township	723	22%
	Starr Hill township	695	56%
	Wheeler township	638	19%
	Winslow township	610	65%
	Valley township	513	34%
	Cane Hill township	471	47%
	Harmon township	402	22%
	White River township	394	35%
	Cove Creek township	375	50%
	Crawford township	337	44%
	Durham township	329	47%
	Richland township	316	17%
	Rheas Mill township	288	27%
	Marrs Hill township	283	39%
	Lees Creek township	265	43%
	Wyman township	248	52%
	Morrow township	192	42%
	Illinois township	185	37%
	Wedington township	165	10%
	Dutch Mills township	139	18%
	Vineyard township	126	76%
	Reed township	118	71%

Household Composition and Family Characteristics

In Washington County, most children live with their biological, step, or adopted parents. However, high percentages of children live with other relatives in certain communities within the county, such as in Canehill, where 20.7% of children live with a grandparent, up from 10.4% in 2019.

Additionally, in Morrow, an exceptionally high percentage of children live with relatives other than a parent or grandparent (27.4% in 2020, a large decrease from 2019 when 58.5% reported living with a relative) (Table 19). Census data indicate a very small population for the town of Morrow (512 individuals); small shifts in the population may reflect as large shifts in percentage. EOA staff report high numbers of families experiencing substance abuse challenges in Morrow, resulting in children living in the care of grandparents

and/or other relatives. In Madison County, 12.3% of children live with a grandparent, above the statewide rate of 9.2%.

Table 19. Percent of Children (ages 0 to 18-years-old) by Relationship to Householder and Geographic Area (2020) ^{xliv, 16}

Geographic Area	Own child (biological, step, or adopted)	Grandchild	Other relatives	Foster child or other unrelated child
<i>Benton County</i>	92.1%	5.2%	1.3%	1.4%
<i>Carroll County</i>	91.0%	6.6%	1.7%	0.8%
<i>Madison County</i>	85.7%	12.3%	0.8%	1.3%
72701 (Fayetteville)	93.3%	4.1%	1.3%	1.3%
72703 (Fayetteville)	98.7%	0.1%	0.0%	1.3%
72704 (Fayetteville)	94.9%	1.7%	2.6%	0.8%
72717 (Canehill)	71.4%	20.7%	7.9%	0.0%
72727 (Elkins)	91.2%	6.5%	0.0%	2.3%
72729 (Evansville)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
72730 (Farmington)	95.1%	4.7%	0.2%	0.0%
72738 (Hindsville)	97.1%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%
72744 (Lincoln)	89.0%	4.4%	6.4%	0.2%
72749 (Morrow)	72.6%	0.0%	27.4%	0.0%
72753 (Prairie Grove)	89.4%	4.5%	6.1%	0.0%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	91.3%	6.9%	0.2%	1.5%
72762 (Springdale)	92.2%	4.2%	2.7%	0.8%
72764 (Springdale)	89.1%	5.2%	4.1%	1.6%
72769 (Summers)	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72774 (West Fork)	87.7%	6.2%	6.2%	0.0%
72959 (Winslow)	90.9%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Washington County	92.4%	3.9%	2.7%	1.0%
Arkansas	86.6%	9.2%	2.2%	2.0%

In the Head Start/Early Head Start program, seven children enrolled in the 2020-2021 program year were in the care of grandparents and five children were in the care of other relatives.^{xlv} This may be due, in part, to factors such as parental work status, or substance abuse challenges (discussed in the sections that follow). There are also many single-parent households in the EOA service area. Over 64% of children served by the EOA Head Start/Early Head Start programs are living in single-parent families, well above the countywide rate (Table 20).^{xlvi} As described above, the poverty rate among single-parent families is very high in the service area. EOA Head Start/Early Head Start programs is providing critical, comprehensive services to single-parent families.

Table 20. Percent of Children Living in Single-Parent Families by Geographic Area and Year (2019) ^{xlvii}

Geographic Area	2019
<i>Benton County</i>	18%
<i>Carroll County</i>	15%
<i>Madison County</i>	20%
Washington County	21%
Arkansas	29%

¹⁶ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The needs of children and families in the Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County (EOA) service area are multi-faceted and interconnected. In an area where there is great diversity of need, some families experience many of the factors that contribute to the cycle of poverty within their communities. Together with other agencies, EOA strives to meet the needs of the area's most vulnerable families.

Education

In school districts in Washington County, the high school graduation rate ranges from 87.4% in Springdale to over 95.0% in Farmington. High school graduation rates are above the statewide rate in a majority of the service area, though disparities exist when looking at subgroups of the student population. Graduation rates are generally lower among economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities across the state (Table 21).



Table 21. Four-Year Graduation Rate by School District and Student Group (2020-2021)^{xlviii,17}

Geographic Area	School District	All Students	Economically Disadvantaged	Students with Disabilities	Limited English Proficient	Homeless
Benton County	Bentonville	92.8%	85.7%	82.3%	77.4%	72.9%
	Decatur	86.8%	86.5%	N<10	84.6%	>95%
	Gentry	88.4%	84.2%	83.3%	91.7%	N<10
	Gravette	87.9%	82.4%	84.2%	N<10	N<10
	Pea Ridge	>95%	92.4%	94.7%	N<10	80.0%
	Rogers	91.40%	89.7%	87.5%	88.6%	80.0%
	Siloam Springs	89.64%	85.6%	84.1%	88.5%	81.0%
Carroll County	Berryville	87.2%	82.8%	85.7%	77.3%	75.0%
	Eureka	80.0%	81.0%	N<10	N<10	N<10
	Green Forest	82.2%	82.8%	58.33%	87.9%	41.2%
Madison County	Huntsville	84.6%	82.0%	92.0	92.9%	72.2%
Washington County	Elkins	94.1%	88.4%	N<10	N<10	N<10
	Farmington	>95%	>95%	>95%	N<10	N<10
	Fayetteville	92.3%	85.8%	76.0%	89.5%	79.6%
	Greenland	95.0%	91.7%	91.7%	N<10	84.6%
	Lincoln	92.8%	90.3%	85.7%	N<10	N<10
	Prairie Grove	88.4%	80.3%	89.5%	N<10	N<10
	Springdale	87.4%	85.1%	81.3%	83.4%	63.0%
	West Fork	92.4%	87.2%	93.3%		N<10
Arkansas		88.5%	85.8%	83.1%	84.1%	76.3%

In 2021, graduation rates in Arkansas reflect disparity by race and ethnicity with regard to the percent of high school students graduating on time (within four years). The graduation rate is 77.8% for Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, 84.5% among Black or African American students, 85.42 among American Indian or Alaska Native students, 86.2% among multi-racial students, 87.1% among Hispanic students, 90.1% among White students, and 93.7% among Asian students.^{xlix}

The statewide rate of English Learner Students is 8%. Among school districts in the service area, Springdale School District has a rate more than four times higher than the state, at 35%. This aligns with demographic

¹⁷ Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.

data showing high percentages of the population where the primary language spoken at home is Spanish (18-32%).

In Benton County, Decatur (30%) and Rogers School Districts (33%) also have a fairly high rate for English Learner populations. In Carroll County, Green Forest School District also has a high rate (35%).

Table 22. Percent English Learner Students (Out of Total Enrollment) by School District (2020-2021)^{i,18}

Geographic Area	School District	% English Learners
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>Bentonville</i>	4%
	<i>Decatur</i>	30%
	<i>Gentry</i>	12%
	<i>Gravette</i>	4%
	<i>Pea Ridge</i>	2%
	<i>Rogers</i>	33%
	<i>Siloam Springs</i>	20%
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>Berryville</i>	17%
	<i>Eureka</i>	7%
	<i>Green Forest</i>	35%
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>Huntsville</i>	7%
Washington County	Elkins	1%
	Farmington	3%
	Fayetteville	8%
	Greenland	2%
	Lincoln	7%
	Prairie Grove	3%
	Springdale	35%
	West Fork	1%
Arkansas		8%

In Washington County, 14.5% of individuals do not have a high school degree, 46% of the population has a high school degree or some college. Just over 33% of the adult population (age 25 and over) has obtained a bachelor's or advanced degree, higher than the statewide rate of 23.8% (combined bachelor's and advanced degrees). Benton County has similar levels of bachelor's and advanced degrees, while Carroll and Madison County tend to have fewer individuals with these degrees (Table 23).

Table 23. Education Attainment (Ages 25 and Over) by Geographic Area (2020)ⁱⁱ

Geographic Area	Less Than 9th Grade	9th to 12th grade, no diploma	High school graduate	Some college, no degree	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree
<i>Benton County</i>	5.0%	5.4%	28.9%	19.9%	6.3%	23.1%	11.4%
<i>Carroll County</i>	7.2%	6.4%	36.0%	23.2%	6.0%	14.0%	7.2%
<i>Madison County</i>	6.5%	9.0%	49.0%	18.4%	5.0%	7.3%	4.8%
Washington County	7.0%	7.5%	26.5%	19.8%	6.0%	19.3%	13.9%
Arkansas	4.7%	8.1%	33.9%	22.0%	7.5%	15.2%	8.6%

The educational attainment among families served by EOA Head Start/Early Head Start trends towards a high school degree (53%) or less than a high school degree (20.8%). Fewer families have a bachelor's or advanced degree, while the rate of associate degrees is higher than the countywide rates (Table 24).

¹⁸ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 24. Highest Level of Education at Enrollment of Head Start/Early Head Start Families Served (Based on Cumulative Enrollment) by EOA (2020-2021)^{lii}

Education Level	Number of Families	Percent of Families
Less than a high school degree	62	20.8%
High school graduate or GED	158	53%
Associates degree, vocational school, or some college	27	9.1%
Bachelor's or advanced degree	51	17.1%
Total	298	100.0%

Veterans and Non-Veterans in Washington County have higher rates of bachelor's degrees or higher than the state and national rate (Table 25). Veterans in Benton and Carroll County also have greater rates than the statewide rate for bachelor's degrees or higher (Table 26).

Table 25. Education Attainment Ages 25 and Over by Veteran/Non-Veteran Status and Geographic Area (2020)^{liii, 19}

Geographic Area	Veterans				Non-Veterans			
	Less than high school graduate	High school graduate	Some college or associate's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher	Less than high school graduate	High school graduate	Some college or associate's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
Washington County	7.0%	29.6%	32.1%	31.3%	15.1%	26.3%	25.1%	33.4%
Arkansas	7.7%	33.8%	36.6%	21.9%	13.4%	33.9%	28.7%	24.0%
United States	5.6%	27.7%	37.3%	29.4%	12.0%	26.6%	28.2%	33.2%

Table 26. Veteran Education Attainment Ages 25 and Over by Geographic Area (2020)^{liv, 20}

Geographic Area	Less than high school graduate	High school graduate	Some college or associate's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
<i>Benton County</i>	4.8%	29.7%	37.5%	28.0%
<i>Carroll County</i>	1.9%	32.3%	32.3%	33.5%
<i>Madison County</i>	15.9%	40.7%	35.3%	8.2%
Washington County	7.0%	29.6%	32.1%	31.3%
Arkansas	7.6%	33.2%	37.0%	22.2%
United States	5.9%	28.0%	37.3%	28.8%

Table 27 describes the percent of students in grades 3 through 10 who are meeting or exceeding expectations on Literacy and Mathematics statewide assessments. In Washington County, half of the school districts are above the statewide rate and half are below for English Language Arts (ELA). For the state, Math percentages are offered in a range by grade, making comparisons by county or school district challenging.

The highest rate of students meeting or exceeding expectations in English Language Arts and Math is in Fayetteville (49.3% and 50.5%, respectively), while the lowest rate for ELA and Math is in West Fork (26.5% and 23.3%, respectively).

Table 27. Percent of Students (All Grades) Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on Literacy and Mathematics Assessment by School District (2020-2021)^{lv 21}

Geographic Area	School District	% English Language Arts ²²	Mathematics ²³
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>Bentonville</i>	58.9%	58.8%
	<i>Decatur</i>	29.9%	26.0%

¹⁹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

²⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

²¹ Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.

²² The Proficiency Rate for Federal Accountability measures the percentage of students that met or exceeded expectations on the assessments. Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.

²³ Mathematics percentages below 30% are in highlighted.

	<i>Gentry</i>	40.8%	36.2%
	<i>Gravette</i>	45.3%	49.0%
	<i>Pea Ridge</i>	41.6%	43.4%
	<i>Rogers</i>	45.2%	44.6%
	<i>Siloam Springs</i>	39.9%	43.6%
<i>Carroll Count</i>	<i>Berryville</i>	31.2%	30.6%
	<i>Eureka Springs</i>	46.0%	37.4%
	<i>Green Forest</i>	32.3%	31.2%
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>Huntsville</i>	29.1%	34.5%
Washington County	Elkins	40.2%	42.6%
	Farmington	44.5%	44.4%
	Fayetteville	49.3%	50.5%
	Greenland	28.6%	24.9%
	Lincoln	30.5%	33.8%
	Prairie Grove	38.7%	42.8%
	Springdale	35.5%	38.2%
	West Fork	26.5%	23.3%
Arkansas		36.3%	21.6 - 48.4% ²⁴

One of the most significant impacts of COVID-19 on families with school age children in the service area has been the closure of K-12 schools. Governor Asa Hutchinson ordered the mandatory closure of all Arkansas public schools through the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, and asked educators to continue to provide alternative methods of instruction (AMI) for students to engage in learning at home.^{lvi}

While the 2020-2021 academic year was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 97% of Arkansas students in grades 3-10 completed summative testing. Given the unusual circumstances for instruction and assessment, the Arkansas Department of Education warns that results should be interpreted in the context of the pandemic.

²⁴ Grades for mathematics are not provided in the aggregate for the state. The range provided represents students in grades 3-10. The percentage is highest among 3rd graders and lowest among 10th graders.

Health

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranks communities across many health and wellness factors. The rankings in health outcomes represent how healthy counties are within the state. The healthiest county in the state is ranked #1. The ranks are based on two types of measurements: how long people live and how healthy people feel while alive. The overall rankings in health factors represent what influences the health of a county. They are an estimate of the future health of counties as compared to other counties within a state and are based on four factors: health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment.

According to the most recent rankings, Washington County is ranked among the healthiest county statewide, in the highest 75-100% in the state.^{lvii} As seen in Table 28, factors related to poor health, as well as the number of physically unhealthy days are low in Washington County, while mentally unhealthy days are high, compared to the statewide rate. Carroll and Madison Counties generally indicate the least favorable health measures, with all counties with more mentally unhealthy days than the state.

Table 28. Health Outcomes Data by Geographic Area^{lviii,25}

Geographic Area	Years of Potential Life Lost Before Age 75 per 100,000 Population (2017-2019)	% Poor or Fair Health (2018)	Average Number of Physically Unhealthy Days per Month (2018)	Average Number of Mentally Unhealthy Days per Month (2018)
<i>Benton County</i>	6,100	20%	4.3	4.4
<i>Carroll County</i>	10,100	24%	5.0	4.8
<i>Madison County</i>	11,600	28%	5.5	5.4
Washington County	6,800	23%	4.4	4.8
Arkansas	9,300	23%	4.8	3.8
Top U.S. Performers	5,400	14%	3.4	5.3

Across other health-related factors, including chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, rates are also lower than the statewide rate in Washington County (Table 29).

Table 29. Adult Health Factors by Geographic Area^{lix,26}

Geographic Area	% Smokers (2018)	% Obese (2017)	% Diabetic (2017)
<i>Benton County</i>	19%	31%	10%
<i>Carroll County</i>	22%	30%	9%
<i>Madison County</i>	26%	31%	12%
Washington County	21%	32%	10%
Arkansas	24%	35%	14%
Top U.S. Performers	16%	26%	8%

²⁵ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

²⁶ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

As of January 18, 2020, Washington County represented 8.3% of total COVID-19 confirmed cases in the state, with 56,841 cases. Benton County represents a similar percentage at 8%.

Table 30. COVID-19 Cases by County (January 18, 2022)^{ix}

Geographic Area	Number of Confirmed Cases to Date	Percent of Total Cases in Arkansas
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>54,677</i>	<i>8.0%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>5,172</i>	<i>0.8%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>3,251</i>	<i>0.5%</i>
Washington County	56,841	8.3%
Arkansas	684,776	100%

In Washington County, vaccination rates are lower than the state rate for all ages and vary by age. Individuals 65 and over have highest percentage of vaccinations (81%); children 5-11 have the fewest vaccinations (57.2%). It is notable that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine was only approved for children ages 5 through 11 as of November 2, 2021.

Across all age groups in Benton, Carroll and Madison Counties, vaccination rates are lower than Washington County.

Table 31. Persons with Vaccine Course Complete, as a Percent of the Population, by County (January 21, 2022)^{ixi,ixii,27}

Geographic Area	Age 5-11	Age 12 -17	Age 18 -65	Age 65 and Over	All Ages
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>55.2%</i>	<i>59.6%</i>	<i>60.6%</i>	<i>73.5%</i>	<i>51.3%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>49%</i>	<i>53.1%</i>	<i>55.4%</i>	<i>66.2%</i>	<i>46.2%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>44.6%</i>	<i>48.5%</i>	<i>50.5%</i>	<i>67.2%</i>	<i>41.8%</i>
Washington County	57.2%	61.5%	61.8%	81%	53.4%
Arkansas	--	--	--	--	53.7%

As of January 18, 2020, Washington County represented 8.3% of total confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state, with 56,841 cases. Benton County represents a similar percentage at 8.0%.

Table 32. COVID-19 Cases by County (January 18, 2022)^{ixiii}

Geographic Area	Number of Confirmed Cases to Date	Percent of Total Cases in Arkansas
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>54,677</i>	<i>8.0%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>5,172</i>	<i>0.8%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>3,251</i>	<i>0.5%</i>
Washington County	56,841	8.3%
Arkansas	684,776	100%

COVID-19 has had an immediate and lasting impact on Arkansas residents' wellbeing. According to U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey data from January to February 2021, 37% of adults living in households with children felt nervous, anxious, or on edge for more than half of the days or nearly every day in the past two weeks. During July 2021 through October 2021, the rate remained elevated at 37%.^{ixiv}

²⁷ Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Substance Misuse

Washington County has a rate of opioid-related drug overdose deaths (42 per 100,000) that is significantly greater than the statewide and nationwide rate (14.6 per 100,000); the rate is even higher in Benton County (95 per 100,000).

Nearly 50% of drug overdose deaths in Arkansas involved opioids in 2018 and state providers wrote 93.5 opioid prescriptions for every 100 persons, compared to the average U.S. rate of 51.4 prescriptions.^{lxv}

Table 33. Drug Overdose Mortality Rate by Geographic Area, per 100,000 Individuals (2017-2019)^{lxvi,28}

Geographic Area	All
<i>Benton County</i>	95
<i>Carroll County</i>	20
<i>Madison County</i>	*
Washington County	42
Arkansas	14
United States	14.6

* Data not reported.

Further, the rate of excessive drinking in Washington and Benton County is greater than the Arkansas rate (Table 34).

Table 34. Excessive Drinking (Percentage of Adults Reporting Binge or Heavy Drinking)^{lxvii,29}

Geographic Area	% Excessive Drinking (2018)
<i>Benton County</i>	19%
<i>Carroll County</i>	17%
<i>Madison County</i>	17%
Washington County	18%
Arkansas	17%
Top U.S. Performers	15%

Table 35 reflects on the number and percent of admissions for substance abuse treatment. In Arkansas and in the counties of interest, the majority of those in treatment are 18-59 years old and identify as White.

Youth substance abuse generally centers around alcohol and marijuana (Table 36). Carroll County has the most substance abuse indicators above the state rate for youth. Drinking before the age of 15 can cause a four-fold increase in the likelihood for a person to be alcohol dependent; the earlier in life a person starts drinking alcohol, the more likely he/she will be a heavy user and/or alcohol-dependent later in life. Further, teenagers who smoke marijuana are more likely to start using other illegal drugs.^{lxviii}

Table 35. Substance Abuse Treatment by Geographic Area^{lxix}

Geographic Area	# Clients	% of State Total
<i>Benton County</i>	872	7.8%
<i>Carroll County</i>	45	0.4%
<i>Madison County</i>	48	0.43%
Washington County	714	6.37%
Arkansas	11,216	

²⁸ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

²⁹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 36. Youth Substance Use by County (2017)^{lxx,30}

Primary Drug	Youth Alcohol Use	Youth Cigarette Use	Youth Marijuana Use	Youth Heroin Use	Prescription drug use
<i>Benton County</i>	11.7%	4.0%	7.1%	0.4%	3.0%
<i>Carroll County</i>	16.3%	7.6%	7.4%	0.5%	4.2%
<i>Madison County</i>	17.4%	8.1%	7.9%	0.3%	2.4%
Washington County	9.5%	3.3%	7.3%	0.1%	2.4%
Arkansas	10.8%	5.3%	6.6%	0.3%	3.0%

The isolating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact nationally, and in Arkansas, on drug overdose deaths. From the time period of March 2020–March 2021, drug overdose deaths in the United States rose by around 30%; in Arkansas there were 535 overdose deaths, a 39.3% increase from the year prior (March 2019–2020).^{lxxi}

The CDC warns that the street drug supply has become more contaminated and more dangerous. Fentanyl — a synthetic, highly potent drug often added to street drugs — was the primary driver of the increases in overdose deaths. Additionally, a marked increase in the potency of fentanyl has fueled a 55% increase in the number of drug-overdose deaths in 2020 over 2019. CDC data suggests Fentanyl was involved in more than 60% of overdose deaths in 2020.^{lxxii}

Healthcare and Clinical Care

The rate of uninsured individuals under age 65 is moderately high in Arkansas (10%) and is above the rate of top U.S. performers (6%). Washington, Carroll, and Madison Counties have greater rates of uninsured than the state for both adults under age 65 and children under age 19 (Table 37).

Table 37. Percent of the Population that is Uninsured by Geographic Area (2018)^{lxxiii,31}

Geographic Area	Adults (Under Age 65)	Children (Under Age 19)
<i>Benton County</i>	10%	5%
<i>Carroll County</i>	13%	6%
<i>Madison County</i>	13%	6%
Washington County	12%	6%
Arkansas	10%	4%
Top U.S. Performers	6%	3%

The ratio of primary care providers, dentists, and mental health providers to individuals in the service area is described in Table 38. At the county level, data show that individuals have access to health providers. In every category, the provider ratio in Washington County is below (better than) the statewide rate. All ratios in the surrounding counties are higher (less optimal) than Washington County.

³⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³¹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 38. Ratio of Health Care Providers by Geographic Area^{lxxiv, 32}

Geographic Area	Primary Care Provider* Ratio (2018)	Dentist Ratio (2019)	Mental Health Provider Ratio (2020)
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>1,660:1</i>	<i>2,470:1</i>	<i>440:1</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>1,880:1</i>	<i>3,550:1</i>	<i>1,230:1</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>4,120:1</i>	<i>2,760:1</i>	<i>660:1</i>
Washington County	1,290:1	1,540:1	260:1
Arkansas	1,510:1	2,100:1	420:1
Top U.S. Performers	1,030:1	1,210:1	270:1

* Includes nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, and clinical nurse specialists.

In Arkansas in February 2022, 35% of adults living in households with children birth to age 17 reported that they felt nervous, anxious or on edge for more than half of the days or nearly every day in the past 14 days.^{lxxv}

EOA staff report that mental health is a heightened concern for families served in EOA programs. Since the start of the pandemic, parents have expressed additional financial and emotional struggles with daily living, with the added layer of stress the pandemic has brought to families.

Staff feel that for low-income families, who were already burdened and experiencing stress, the additional stress of the pandemic is also reaching the children in these families. EOA staff believe barriers to accessing mental health resources include reluctance or lack of parental follow-up for appointments and language barriers for non-English speakers. In addition, parents have shared having negative experiences with the largest network of mental health care providers in the service area.

Infant and Maternal Health

Prenatal Care. Child health and wellbeing begins with adequate prenatal care.

In 2019, 70% of births in Arkansas were to women who began prenatal care early, up from 56% in 2014. This makes Arkansas 42nd in the nation on this indicator and six percentage points lower than the national rate, at 76%. Counties in the state with the highest rates of infants without early prenatal care are primarily in northwest and western Arkansas.

Since 2014, rates increased steadily for all ethnicities; data on the percent of mothers with prenatal care in Arkansas show disparities by race. White mothers (73%) in Arkansas reflect higher rates of utilizing prenatal care than Black/African American mothers (65%), Hispanic mothers (61%) and Asian mothers (52%).^{lxxvi}

In Washington County, 68% of pregnant women received access to first trimester prenatal care in 2019 (Table 39). With the exception of Benton County, rates of prenatal care were lower than the statewide rate in the surrounding communities.^{lxxvii}

³² Ratios greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 39. Percent of Mothers with First Trimester Prenatal Care as a Percentage of Live Births by Geographic Area (2019)

lxxviii, 33

Geographic Area	% That Received First Trimester Prenatal Care
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>75%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>63%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>66%</i>
Washington County	68%
Arkansas	70%

Table 40. Percent of All Babies with No Prenatal Care During First Trimester (first three months), by County (2019)^{lxxix 34 35}

Geographic Area	% That Received No Prenatal Care
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>26.8%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>37.9%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>32.1%</i>
Washington County	31.2%
Arkansas	30.4%

Teen Pregnancy. Children born to teenage mothers are less likely to receive proper nutrition, health care, and cognitive and social stimulation.^{lxxx} In Arkansas, the teen birth rate (ages 11-17) is 4.9, while the rate in Washington County is slightly lower at 4.7. In the surrounding communities, rates range from 2.7 in Benton County to 5.6 in Carroll Count and 6.6 in Madison County (Table 41).

Table 41. Teen Birth Rate (Ages 11-17) by Race, per 1,000, by Geographic Area (2019)^{lxxxi,36}

Geographic Area	Teen Birth Rate per 1,000
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>2.7</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>5.6</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>6.6</i>
Washington County	4.7
Arkansas	4.9

Preterm and Low Birth Weight. In Arkansas, 11.8% of mothers gave birth to their babies preterm in 2021. The March of Dimes gave Arkansas the “pre-term birth grade” of an F, indicating a pre-term birth rate greater than or equal to 11.5.^{lxxxii}

The rate of preterm births is slightly lower in Washington County at 11.4% (Table 42), while neighboring Benton County’s rate was 9.9%. However, there are disparities by race. The rate of Arkansas mothers with preterm births is highest among Black mothers (15.5%) (Table 43).

Table 42. Percent of Mothers with Preterm Births as a Percentage of Live Births by Geographic Area (2021)^{lxxxiii}

Geographic Area	Preterm Births	Change from 2020
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>9.9%</i>	<i>Improved</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
Washington County	11.4%	No Change
Arkansas	11.8%	Slight Improvement
United States	12%	

³³ Rates lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁴ The number of births to women who initiated prenatal care during the first trimester of pregnancy (before 13 weeks gestation), expressed as a percentage of all live births. Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁵ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁶ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 43. Percent of Mothers with Preterm Births as a Percentage of Live Birth by Race/Ethnicity (2017-2019) ^{lxxxiv}

Geographic Area	All Preterm Births	White	Black	Hispanic	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander
Arkansas	11.8%	10.8%	15.5%	9.7%	10.6%	10.8%

Washington County trends below the statewide rate for babies born with a low birth weight, but above the state in infant mortalities. For Carroll and Benton Counties, rates are below the state for low birth weight and above the state for infant mortality; Madison County has a slightly higher rate of low birthweight babies, and infant mortality rates are almost double the state rate (Tables 44 and 45).

Table 44. Low Birthweight (Percent of Births) by Geographic Area (2019) ^{lxxxv,37}

Geographic Area	Percent Low Birthweight
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>8.5%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>4.8%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>9.7%</i>
Washington County	8.2%
Arkansas	9.3%
United States	8.3%

Table 45. Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 Live Births) by Geographic Area (2014-2018) ^{lxxxvi,38}

Geographic Area	Number of Infant Deaths
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>6.6</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>8.2</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>10.8</i>
Washington County	7.0
Arkansas	5.6 (2021)

Child Health and Wellbeing

Primary and Preventative Health. Data for 2020-2021 indicate that EOA programs had a low rate of children up to date on primary and preventative health care and receiving appropriate screens through Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) (Table 46). Historically, EOA's Head Start/Early Head Start programs have a significant number of children up-to-date both at enrollment and at the end of enrollment. However, EOA 2020-2021 program year enrollment occurred in July-August 2020, which coincided with a critical time in the pandemic; medical and dental facilities reduced the availability of "well-visits" and were limited to emergency health care only. As the related backlogs for preventative care continues to resolve, EOA is closely monitoring this indicator and expects the number of children with up to date preventative and primary health care to increase.

EOA has strong partnerships to provide health services to families and helps families maintain access to health services throughout the program year. EOA has partnered with the Lions Club to conduct vision screenings for all enrolled children, as well as with two dentists who provide oral health screenings and fluoride to children at no cost. EOA has held vaccination clinics (e.g., flu) in the past; the University of Arkansas Department of Nursing has conducted growth assessments and blood pressure screenings as an in-kind donation. EOA staff members report that access to health care can be limited by transportation or the financial capacity to pay the fees charged by for-profit clinics.

³⁷ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

³⁸ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 46. Percent of EOA Head Start/Early Head Start Children Up-to-Date on Age-Appropriate Preventative and Primary Health Care (EPSDT) (2020-2021)^{lxxxvii}

Program Option	At Enrollment	End of Enrollment Year
Early Head Start	0% (0 out of 136)	15.4% (21 out of 136)
Early Head Start - Expansion	61% (33 out of 54)	85.2% (46 out of 54)
Head Start	22.1% (31 out of 140)	45% (63 out of 140)

Obesity and Chronic Diseases. Indicators from the EOA 2020-2021 Head Start PIR Report show that the majority of enrolled children are at a healthy weight. Further, out of 140 Head Start children served during the 2020-2021 program year, 17 children (12.1%) were classified as overweight and 19 children (13.6%) classified as obese, a combined overweight and obesity rate of 25.7%, which is below the obesity rate among children grades K-10 in Arkansas (39.9%) and among 10–17-year-olds in the state (34%).^{lxxxviii} This highlights the importance nutrition services provided by the Head Start/Early Head Start program to help meet enrolled children’s health needs.

Since the start of the pandemic, EOA staff report serving children with an increase in childhood obesity, potentially due to the isolation, reduced healthy food options, and other limitations that the pandemic presented for children.

Table 47. Overweight and Obesity Status of EOA Head Start Children (2020-2021)^{lxxxix}

Category	Percent of Enrolled Children
Underweight	16.4% (23 out of 140)
Healthy weight	57.9% (81 out of 140)
Overweight	12.1% (17 out of 140)
Obese	13.6% (19 out of 140)

During the 2020-2021 program year, the primary chronic health conditions experienced by children enrolled in EOA Head Start and Early Head Start were asthma (6 children), hearing problems (3 children), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (1 child). ^{xc}

In Washington County, the asthma hospitalization rate among children under five is 10.5%, higher than the Arkansas rate of 9.3%. Asthma inpatient hospitalization and emergency department visit rates in the surrounding counties range from 7.5% (Carroll County) to 10.1% (Madison County).

Nationally, asthma is more common in males (8.3%) than females (6.7%). However, among adults, females (9.8%) are more likely than males (5.5%) to still have asthma. Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Natives have the highest current asthma rates compared to other races and ethnicities, while Hispanic (6.4%) and Asian (4.0%) individuals generally have lower current asthma prevalence rates than other racial and ethnic groups.^{xcii}

Table 48. Asthma Hospitalizations Among Children Under Age Five Years by Race by Geographic Area (2019)^{xcii,39}

Race/Ethnicity	Rate per 100,000 Children Under Age 5
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>9.4</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>7.5</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>10.1</i>
Washington County	10.5
Arkansas	9.3

³⁹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Nutrition

Food Insecurity and Access. Healthy nutrition is a critical factor for children's healthy development. The food insecurity rate in Washington County is 14%, lower than the state rate (Table 49).^{xciii} Washington County has a relatively low percentage (6%) of limited access to healthy foods, while neighboring Madison County has double that rate at 12%.

The Food Environment Index ranges from 0 (worst) to ten (best) and equally weights two indicators of the food environment: limited access to healthy food and food insecurity. Washington County scored a 7.6, which is better than the state index of 5.1 but still below the top U.S. performers (8.7).

Table 49. Food Access by Geographic Area (2015 - 2018)^{xciv}

Geographic Area	% Limited Access to Healthy Foods ⁴⁰	% Food Insecurity	Food Environment Index ⁴¹
<i>Benton County</i>	5%	12%*	8.1
<i>Carroll County</i>	4%	14%	7.6
<i>Madison County</i>	12%	16%	6.6
Washington County	6%	14%	7.6
Arkansas	9%	17%	5.1
Top U.S. Performers	-	-	8.7

* Lowest rate among Arkansas counties.

There are six low-income and low-access census tracts (food deserts) in Washington County.^{xcv,42} Despite food insecurity rates that are lower than the state rate, populations in these tracts in Washington County may experience food access challenges. In the surrounding counties, there are four food desserts in Benton County and two in Madison County (Table 50).

Table 50. Census Tract Food Deserts by County (2021) ^{xcvi,43}

<i>Benton County Census Tracts (total 4)</i>
1. Tract 5007021201 (Siloam Springs, Southwest County)
2. Tract 5007021101 (Siloam Springs, Southwest County)
3. Tract 5007020401 (Rogers, Central County)
4. Tract 5007020206 (Rogers, Central County)
<i>Carroll County Census Tracts (total 0)</i>
None
<i>Madison County Census Tracts (total 2)</i>
1. Tract (5087960400) (south of Rt. 412, west of Hwy 23, Southwest County)
2. Tract (5087960300) (Venus Mountains, south of Rt. 412, east of Hwy 23, Southeast County)
<i>Washington County Census Tracts (total 6)</i>
1. Tract 5143011101 (Fayetteville, Greenland)
2. Tract 5143010701 (Fayetteville)
3. Tract 5143010301 (Springdale)
4. Tract 5143010302 (Springdale)
5. Tract 5143010200 (Springdale)
6. Tract 5143011103 (east of I-540, Southeast County)

⁴⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴¹ The Food Environment Index ranges from 0 (worst) to 10 (best) and equally weights two indicators of the food environment: limited access to healthy food and food insecurity.

⁴² Low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

⁴³ Food deserts are defined as low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

Food insecurity data from a survey of EOA families show that families may not perceive themselves as experiencing food insecure, as only 12.61% surveyed reported needing or wanting food assistance. However, those wanting or needing assistance report being unable to access assistance in the community, and 15.24% report that food insecurity is their family's largest stressor. Additionally, while almost 51% of EOA enrolled families that were surveyed reported that they have enough money to purchase food, 49% indicate that this is a problem in their household, and 6% of those families indicate it is a large or very large problem. Multiple food banks and nutritional resources are available in the service area, in addition to the emergency food assistance program administered by EOA, which 3% of surveyed families indicated utilizing. Additionally, EOA partners with two food pantries in Springdale and Fayetteville to distribute commodities that EOA receives, to ensure that families have access to resources.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Food Insecurity

At the start of the pandemic, EOA received a significant increase in the number of calls/emails requesting assistance with securing additional food sources. At the start of the pandemic, EOA staff alternated schedules in order to prepare snacks to deliver to families, along with educational materials, via porch deliveries. EOA staff report that the larger cities in the service area (Springdale and Fayetteville) have an abundance of resources for families experiencing food insecurity. Families in smaller, more rural communities that struggle to access food resources, and experience higher prices at the grocery store. Anecdotally, SNAP funds are spent more quickly by families in Lincoln than families in Fayetteville.

Throughout the pandemic, EOA continues to provide families with free community food resources. Partnerships with grocery stores and other non-profit organizations provide healthy, organic foods that are donated to EOA for distribution to families at no cost.

The Northwest Arkansas Food Bank estimates more than 80,000 people in the area that are food insecure. They report that the COVID-19 pandemic brought new users to the food bank; many still need help. During the height of the pandemic, there was a fifty percent increase in community need, when compared to the prior year. Multiple food pantries in Washington County mobilized during this time, including a monthly mobile food pantry that is particularly present in rural areas, where food insecurity is high.^{xcvii}

Free and Reduced Lunch. Nutrition needs are also evident in the rates of free and reduced-price lunch in school districts in the service area. In Washington County, 57.4% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, below the state rate of 65.6% (Table 51).^{xcviii} In the surrounding counties, Carroll County has a higher rate, at 73.9%.

Table 51. Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch by Geographic Area^{xcix 44}

Geographic Area	Percent
<i>Benton County</i>	39.7%
<i>Carroll County</i>	73.9%
<i>Madison County</i>	57.4%
Washington County	57.4%
Arkansas	65.6%

⁴⁴ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began a universal free lunch program to provide free meals to all students regardless of their income level (currently extended through the 2021-22 school year).^c

Table 52 describes the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch by school district. In Washington County, the rates of free and reduced-price lunch are highest in Greenland Public School District, Springdale School District, and Lincoln School District, indicating greater need in communities served by these school districts.

In the surrounding counties, significantly high rates of eligible students are reflected in Decatur (100%) in Benton County and Green Forest in Carroll County (84.6%).

Table 52. Free and Reduced Lunch Rates by School District (2020-2021)^{ci, 45}

	School District	Total Enrollment	% Free Lunch/ Total Enrollment	% Reduced Lunch/ Total Enrollment	% Free and Reduced Lunch
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>Bentonville</i>	17,970	15.3%	4.7%	20.0%
	<i>Decatur</i>	537	100%	0%	100.0%
	<i>Gentry</i>	1,444	36.1%	12.5%	48.6%
	<i>Gravette</i>	1,860	37%	12.8%	49.8%
	<i>Pea Ridge</i>	2,216	25%	9.6%	34.6%
	<i>Rogers</i>	15,355	48.2%	11.8%	60.0%
	<i>Siloam Springs</i>	4,174	32.9%	7.3%	40.2%
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>Berryville</i>	1832	56.7%	13.5%	70.2%
	<i>Eureka</i>	572	48.8%	11.4%	60.1%
	<i>Green Forest</i>	1,366	68.4%	16.2%	84.6%
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>Huntsville</i>	2182	49.8%	7.6%	57.4%
Washington County	Elkins	1269	33.6%	11.6%	45.2%
	Farmington	2,572	27.1%	8.7%	35.8%
	Fayetteville	10,151	34.1%	6.9%	41.0%
	Greenland	743	57.5%	15.1%	72.5%
	Lincoln	1,007	53.3%	17.2%	70.5%
	Prairie Grove	2,045	35.1%	11.2%	46.3%
	Springdale	21,882	60.5%	11.5%	72.1%
	West Fork	907	32%	12%	44.0%
	Arkansas	473,004	58.1%	7.4%	65.6%

WIC and SNAP. The number of children participating in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program is provided in Table 53; data provided is prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and may not reflect the full extent of women and children's nutrition needs during the pandemic.

Table 53. Women, Infants, and Children – Clients Served Annually in the WIC Program (2019)^{cii}

Geographic Area	2019
<i>Benton County</i>	8,518
<i>Carroll County</i>	1,014
<i>Madison County</i>	834
Washington County	9,090
Arkansas	161,234

⁴⁵ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

As described in Table 54, there are 24,525 recipients of SNAP benefits in Washington County, more than half of whom are children.

Table 54. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation by Age and Geographic Area (2018)^{ciii}

Geographic Area	Adults	Children	Total
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>9,854</i>	<i>10,709</i>	<i>20,563</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>1,980</i>	<i>1,882</i>	<i>3,862</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>1,512</i>	<i>1,261</i>	<i>2,773</i>
Washington County	11,191	13,334	24,525
Arkansas	272,825	235,341	508,166

Social and Economic Factors Impacting Wellbeing

Home Value and Affordability

The median home value in Washington County was \$184,300 as compared to \$173,400 in 2019. In Washington County, median monthly owner costs averaged \$1,302 in 2020, as compared to \$1,255 in 2019; median renter costs average \$819, up from \$794, all higher than the statewide rates (Table 55).

The highest housing costs in for the neighboring counties are in Benton County. Home value and affordability vary across the bordering counties, ranging from \$116,000 in Madison County to \$192,900 in Benton County.

Table 55. Median Home Value and Costs by Geographic Area (2020)^{civ}

Geographic Area	Median Home Value ⁴⁶	Median Owner Costs ⁴⁷	Median Rent ⁴⁸
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>\$192,900</i>	<i>\$1,349</i>	<i>\$945</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>\$143,600</i>	<i>\$1,075</i>	<i>\$576</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>\$116,000</i>	<i>\$931</i>	<i>\$607</i>
Washington County	\$184,300	\$1,302	\$819
Arkansas	\$133,600	\$1,103	\$760

The rental vacancy rate in Washington County is 4.2%, and 3.5% in Benton County, lower than the state rate, indicating low housing inventory available to renters. Carroll and Madison County have vacancy rates above the statewide rate.

Likely due to inflation and a surge in demand for housing during the pandemic, all median housing values increased from 2020 to 2019.

Also described in Table 56, the rental cost burden in the service area is high. In Washington County, more than 40% of households are spending 30% or more of their monthly income on rent. A high rental cost burden can strain a family's finances and make it difficult to sustain stable housing and have enough income available to support other expenses (e.g., food, medical care).

⁴⁶ Home values lower than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴⁷ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁴⁸ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Table 56. Housing Characteristics by Geographic Area (2020)^{cv}

Geographic Area	Rental Vacancy Rate ⁴⁹	Households Spending 30-34.9% of Monthly Income on Rent ⁵⁰	Households Spending 35% or More of Monthly Income on Rent ⁵¹
<i>Benton County</i>	3.5%	5.7%	25.6%
<i>Carroll County</i>	9.7%	9.3%	23.5%
<i>Madison County</i>	8.7%	6.0%	35.5%
Washington County	4.2%	9.8%	32.5%
Arkansas	7.4%	9.0%	34.5%

Many factors impact housing stability and affordability in Arkansas. In Washington County, sixteen percent of households are experiencing a severe housing problem (overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities, or lack of plumbing facilities). In the surrounding counties, the rate is similar and ranges from 10-16% (Table 57).

Table 57. Percentage of Households with at Least 1 of 4 Housing Problems by Geographic Area (2013-2017)^{cvi,52}

Geographic Area	Percent of households experiencing at least 1 of 4: Overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen, lack of plumbing
<i>Benton County</i>	11%
<i>Carroll County</i>	16%
<i>Madison County</i>	10%
Washington County	16%
Arkansas	14%
Top U.S. Performers	9%

The EOA leadership team reported that data may vary by community. Staff members note that while affordable housing can be limited in the service area, they have had some success identifying apartment complexes in both Fayetteville and Springdale, where 83% of EOA families surveyed indicated that they reside.

Income Inequality

In 2020, Washington County had a median household income of \$52,380 (up from \$50,451 in 2019), above the statewide rate. Median household income for counties in the area range from \$41,446 in Madison County to \$71,556 in Benton County (Table 58). Median household incomes are lower in Carroll and Madison Counties, which aligns with lower rent costs, owner costs and home values.

Table 58. Median Household Income by Geographic Area (2020)^{cvi, 53}

Geographic Area	Median Household Income
<i>Benton County</i>	\$71,556
<i>Carroll County</i>	\$48,249
<i>Madison County</i>	\$41,446
Washington County	\$52,380
Arkansas	\$49,475

⁴⁹ Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵⁰ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵¹ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵² Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁵³ Rates less than the statewide rate are highlighted.

In Arkansas and nationally, income is distributed unequally as there is both great wealth and significant economic hardship. In 2018, the top 20% of Arkansas' population earned 51% of all income in the state, while the bottom quintile earned only 3%.^{cviii}

Income inequality is further described in Table 59. A higher income inequality ratio indicates greater division between the top and bottom ends of the income spectrum; inequality is high in Arkansas, compared to top U.S. performers, as well as in Washington County.

Table 59. Income Inequality by Geographic Area (2015-2019)^{cxix}

Geographic Area	80 th percentile income	20 th percentile income	Income Ratio ⁵⁴
<i>Benton County</i>	\$129,246	\$31,060	4.2
<i>Carroll County</i>	\$86,349	\$19,770	4.4
<i>Madison County</i>	\$87,420	\$17,987	4.9
Washington County	\$103,276	\$21,998	4.7
Arkansas	n/a	n/a	4.8
Top U.S. Performers	n/a	n/a	3.7

Many families depend on a wide range of social services to support their families, including subsidized child care, TANF, and WIC. Public assistance is described in the Eligible Children and Pregnant Women section.

Community Safety and Incarceration

In 2020, Arkansas recorded fifty-five domestic violence homicides, of which twenty-six were confirmed cases of intimate partner violence.^{cx} In their lifetimes, 40.8% of Arkansas women and 34.8% of Arkansas men experience intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence and/or intimate partner stalking.^{cxii}

EOA staff report that several low-income communities in the service area are impacted by violence, with the presence of gang activity in the Springdale area and also in the apartment complex where some families enrolled in EOA programs live.

Table 60 reflects the number of violent crimes and property crimes rates in Arkansas, Washington County, and the surrounding counties, while Table 61 reflects the number of Juvenile and Adult "Crime Against Persons" arrests.

Table 60. Offenses Known to Law Enforcement (2019)^{cxii}

Geographic Area	Number of Reported Violent Crimes ⁵⁵	Property Crime
<i>Benton County</i>	159	*
<i>Carroll County</i>	45	209
<i>Madison County</i>	44	169
Washington County	177	572
Arkansas	17,643	86,250

* The FBI determined that the agency's data were overreported. Consequently, those data are not included in this table.

Table 61. Number of Juvenile and Adult "Crime Against Persons Arrests" by Geographic Area (2020)^{cxiii}

Geographic Area	Number of Adult Arrests	Number of Juvenile Arrests	Total Arrests
<i>Benton County</i>	1,212	176	1,388

⁵⁴ A higher inequality ratio indicates greater division between the top and bottom ends of the income spectrum. Ratios higher than the statewide ratio are highlighted.

⁵⁵ Number of murders, rapes, robberies and aggravated assaults.

Geographic Area	Number of Adult Arrests	Number of Juvenile Arrests	Total Arrests
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>126</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>51</i>
Washington County	1,415	184 (+1 unknown age)	1,600

The number of individuals in the corrections system in Arkansas totaled 91,457 in 2019; a majority (43%) of individuals in the corrections system are in probation (Table 62).

Table 62. Number of Individuals in the Corrections System in Arkansas by Type (2019) ^{cxiv}

Geographic Area	Prison	Jail	Parole	Probation
Arkansas	17,713	9,460	25,034	39,268

Racial disparity exists in Arkansas regarding admissions to detention centers. African American youth make up 20% of the adolescent population in the state, but 46% of youth detentions, while white youth account for 77% of the population and just 44.8% of detentions (Table 63).^{cxv}

Table 63. Youth (under age 20) Admissions to Detention by Race and Geographic Area (2018) ^{cxvi}

Geographic Area	Total	White	Black or African American	Other
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>
Washington County	13	8	2	3
Arkansas	402 (100%)	180 (44.8%)	185 (46%)	37 (9.2%)

* Madison County data not reported.

EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Labor Force, Industries, and Occupations

In Washington County, the percent of the population in the labor force is 65%, and 64.6% of households with children under 6 have all parents in the family in the labor force (Table 64).

Multiple zip codes within the county have labor force participation rates greater than the countywide rate (in Fayetteville, Springdale and Summers). Also as described in Table 64, many young children have all parents in the labor force. Labor force participation rates may not capture the full extent of the workforce, as some populations, particularly undocumented individuals, are not reflected in these numbers.



Table 64. Percent of the Population in Labor Force (Age 16+) by Geographic Area (2020)^{cxvii,56}

Geographic Area	Population Age 16+	Living in Households with Children Under Age 6, All Parents in the Family in the Labor Force
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>65.1%</i>	<i>62.5%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>54.5%</i>	<i>52.7%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>53.6%</i>	<i>63.3%</i>
72701 (Fayetteville)	53.9%	64.8%
72703 (Fayetteville)	67.7%	70.8%
72704 (Fayetteville)	78.5%	74.8%
72717 (Canehill)	53.6%	0.0%
72727 (Elkins)	58.6%	48.8%
72729 (Evansville)	21.9%	n/a
72730 (Farmington)	64.8%	35.7%
72738 (Hindsville)	57.4%	30.9%
72744 (Lincoln)	52.4%	59.5%
72749 (Morrow)	83.1%	0.0%
72753 (Prairie Grove)	61.9%	78.1%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	60.7%	51.3%
72762 (Springdale)	66.6%	59.3%
72764 (Springdale)	70.4%	62.6%
72769 (Summers)	75.7%	100.0%
72774 (West Fork)	65.3%	60.3%
72959 (Winslow)	41.8%	74.7%
Washington County	65.0%	64.6%
Arkansas	58.1%	66.0%

Labor force data speaks to the need for child care services for families when many communities have high percentages of families with all parents are in the workforce. In communities like Fayetteville and Springdale, where child poverty rates are high (described in the section that follows) and labor force participation rates are high, data suggests that many families may be employed in low paying jobs. Individuals in the service area are employed in a variety of occupations and industries, and a majority of individuals are private wage and salary workers.^{cxviii}

⁵⁶ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, using Census-defined occupation categories, the top occupations in Washington County are management, business, science, and arts occupations; sales and office occupations; followed by service occupations (Table 65).

The top industries in Washington County are educational services, retail trade and manufacturing (Table 66).

Table 65. Percentage of the Employed Workforce (Age 16+) by Occupation and Geographic Area (2020) ^{cxix, 57}

Occupation	Washington County	Arkansas
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	40.7%	34.9%
Service occupations	15.5%	16.6%
Sales and office occupations	19.8%	21.2%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	9.3%	10.1
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	14.7%	17.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 66. Percentage of the Employed Workforce (Age 16+) by Industry and Geographic Area (2020) ^{cxx, 58}

Industry	Benton County	Carroll County	Madison County	Washington County	Arkansas
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.4%	7.3%	5.4%	1.0%	2.7%
Construction	7.0%	8.5%	11.4%	8.0%	6.9%
Manufacturing	13.9%	20.8%	17.2%	13.2%	13.4%
Wholesale trade	3.0%	0.1%	1.9%	2.4%	2.4%
Retail trade	21.5%	10.8%	13.3%	12.2%	13.1%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	5.2%	3.9%	7.4%	5.6%	5.9%
Information	0.8%	2.4%	1.9%	1.1%	1.4%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	4.6%	4.3%	2.9%	4.2%	4.9%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	10.2%	7.4%	5.1%	9.4%	7.7%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	17.9%	17.0%	20.8%	26.0%	24.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	7.8%	9.5%	3.8%	9.3%	7.9%
Other services, except public administration	4.5%	5.6%	4.9%	4.7%	4.8%
Public administration	2.3%	2.3%	4.1%	2.8%	4.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

⁵⁷ The top three occupations are highlighted for each geographic area.

⁵⁸ The top three industries are highlighted for each geographic area.

Top employers in the service area (Table 67) reflect the occupations and industries described in this section.

Table 67. Major Employers by Geographic Area (2022)^{cxxi}

Employer	Type
Benton County	
Total employees at top 15 companies: 40,321	
WAL-MART ASSOCIATES INC	Corporate, Subsidiary, and Regional Managing Offices
J B HUNT TRANSPORT INC	General Freight Trucking, Long-Distance, Truckload
BENTONVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT	Elementary and Secondary Schools
ROGERS SCHOOL DISTRICT #30	Elementary and Secondary Schools
MCKEE FOODS CORPORATION	Commercial Bakeries
HOLGANIX LLC	Commercial Banking
OZARK MOUNTAIN POULTRY INC	Poultry Processing
SIMMONS PREPARED FOODS	Poultry Processing
ST MARYS HOSPITAL	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
CASEYS MARKETING COMPANY	Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores
A TO Z SOLUTIONS LLC	Lawn/Garden Tractor and Home Lawn/Garden Equipment Manufacturing
NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE	Junior Colleges
OLD TOWN DRY CLEANERS	Employment Placement Agencies
GLAD MANUFACTURING COMPANY	Unlaminated Plastics Film and Sheet (except Packaging) Manufacturing
Carroll County	
Total employees at top 15 companies: 5,579	
TYSON POULTRY	Poultry Processing
WAL-MART SUPERCENTER	Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters
BERRYVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT	Elementary and Secondary Schools
GREEN FOREST SCHOOL DISTRICT	Elementary and Secondary Schools
DUCOMMUN, INC	Other Aircraft Parts and Auxiliary Equipment Manufacturing
WILSONS GUNSHOP INC	Small Arms, Ordnance, and Ordnance Accessories Manufacturing
PACKERS SANITATION SERVICES INC	Janitorial Services
THINKING OF YOU LLC	Sporting Goods Stores
P & N TECHNOLOGIES, LLC	Iron and Steel Pipe and Tube Manufacturing from Purchased Steel
MERCY HOSPITAL BERRYVILLE	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
CARROLL ELECTRIC CO-OP CORP	Electric Power Distribution
CRESCENT HOTEL & SPA INC	Hotels (except Casino Hotels) and Motels
ANSTAFF BANK	Commercial Banking
EUREKA SPRINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT	Elementary and Secondary Schools
KERUSSO ACTIVEWEAR INC	Commercial Screen Printing
TYSON POULTRY	Poultry Processing
Madison County	
Total employees at top 15 companies: 2,196	
BUTTERBALL	Poultry Processing
HUNTSVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT #1	Elementary and Secondary Schools
DUCOMMUN, INC	Other Aircraft Parts and Auxiliary Equipment Manufacturing
WAL-MART SUPERCENTER	Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters
MADISON COUNTY	Executive and Legislative Offices, Combined
LEW THOMPSON & SON INC	Specialized Freight (except Used Goods) Trucking, Local
MEADOWVIEW HEALTHCARE & REHAB	Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Facilities)
ANDERSON GAS & PROPANE INC	Fuel Dealers
MCDONALD'S	Limited-Service Restaurants
COUNTRYSIDE ASSISTED LIVING	Continuing Care Retirement Communities
JASPER SCHOOL DISTRICT NO 1	Elementary and Secondary Schools
HARPS FOOD STORE	Supermarkets and Other Grocery (except Convenience) Stores
SQUARE ONE TRUSS INC	Truss Manufacturing
KINGS RIVER COUNTRY STORE INC	Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores
BOSTON MOUNTAIN RURAL HEALTH	Offices of Physicians (except Mental Health Specialists)

Employer	Type
Washington County	
Total Employees at top 15 companies: 31,106	
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS	Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools
TYSON FOODS, INC.	General Freight Trucking, Long-Distance, Truckload
SPRINGDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT #50	Elementary and Secondary Schools
GEORGES PROCESSING INC	Poultry Processing
WASHINGTON REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
PAM TRANSPORT	General Freight Trucking, Long-Distance, Truckload
CONAGRA FOODS	Frozen Specialty Food Manufacturing
FAYETTEVILLE SCHOOL DIST #1	Elementary and Secondary Schools
FAYETTEVILLE VA MEDICAL CENTER	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
KIRKLAND'S STORES INC	Retail
CARGILL MEAT SOLUTIONS CORP	Poultry Processing
CSL PLASMA, INC.	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
NORTHWEST AR HOSPITALS LLC	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
UNIVERSITY OF AR COOP EXTENSION	Regulation of Agricultural Marketing and Commodities
ARKANSAS SUPPORT NETWORK	Services for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities

Employment

According to data on unemployment, Washington County unemployment rates tend to be lower than the statewide rate, as highlighted in Table 68. In April 2020, the pandemic had a large impact on unemployment rates, nationally and in Arkansas, with rates gradually decreasing to pre-pandemic rates in August-October 2021.

Table 68. Unemployment Rate by Geographic Area and Month/Year (2019-2020)^{cxix}

	Washington County	Arkansas
January 2020	2.8	3.7
February 2020	2.6	3.8
March 2020	2.8	3.9
April 2020	7.8	10
May 2020	6.9	8.5
June 2020	6.2	7.8
July 2020	5.8	7.1
August 2020	5.0	6.5
September 2020	4.6	5.9
October 2020	3.7	5.6
November 2020	3.6	5.3
December 2020	3.5	4.9
January 2021	3.7	4.6
February 2021	3.9	4.5
March 2021	3.5	4.4
April 2021	3.0	4.4
May 2021	3.3	4.4
June 2021	3.7	4.4
July 2021	3.3	4.3
August 2021	2.7	4.2
September 2021	2.2	4.0
October 2021	1.6	3.7
November 2021	1.5	3.4
December 2021	1.6	3.1

In Northwest Arkansas, when exploring unemployment data over time (2018-2020), Washington County and the neighboring counties have an average annual unemployment rate below the statewide rate, with the highest rates in Carroll County (Table 69).

Table 69. Average Annual Unemployment Rate by Geographic Area (2018-2020) ^{cxxiii}

Geographic Area	2018	2019	2020
<i>Benton County</i>	2.9	2.6	4.5
<i>Carroll County</i>	3.2	3.1	5.7
<i>Madison County</i>	2.8	2.5	3.9
Washington County	2.6	2.5	4.3
Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers	2.8	2.6	4.5
Arkansas	3.7	3.5	6.1

Some Head Start/Early Head Start families served by EOA are “day laborers.” These individuals are experiencing barriers to stable and steady employment due to their citizenship status and lack of social security number; they may be in the process of obtaining this requirement, or simply do not have authorization to work. The true extent of labor force participation and unemployment data may not be fully captured by the countywide data.

Further, data from EOA indicates that a majority of Head Start/Early Head Start families had at least one parent who was employed at the start of the 2020-2021 program year, but not to the same degree as the larger population. At the end of enrollment, there was an increase of families that had neither or no parent employed, in job training, or in school (Table 70), potentially due to the impacts of the pandemic on overall employment.^{cxxiv}

Table 70. Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County Head Start/ Early Head Start – Family Employment Status (2020-2021) ^{cxxv}

Program	At Enrollment	End of Enrollment
At least one parent/guardian is employed, in job training, or in school	225 out of 298 (75.5%)	189 out of 298 (63.4%)
Neither/No parent/guardian is employed, in job training, or in school	73 out of 298 (24.5%)	109 out of 298 (36.6%)

The EOA leadership noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many families enrolled in EOA programs did not have opportunities to work from home. Many were first line workers, working in poultry processing, or working in other industries that were forced to close for some amount of time in 2020. Many families lost the opportunity to work, emphasizing the continued need for the services provided by EOA.

Additionally, at the start of the pandemic, EOA experienced significant staff turnover in the Head Start/Early Head Start program. This trend in child care can be seen nationally, and results in challenges keeping full day programs available as well as impacting the ability to serve working families.

In Arkansas, the anticipated projected rate of growth in employment is 8.42% from 2018 to 2028, with the greatest gains projected in leisure and hospitality and professional and business services (Table 71).

Table 71. Arkansas Projected Employment (by Industry) (2018-2028)^{xxxvi}

Industry	Base Employment (2018)	Projected Employment (2028)	Numeric Change	% Change
Information	11,223	10,558	-665	-5.93%
Manufacturing	160,857	164,875	4,018	2.50%
Natural Resources and Mining	25,999	26,954	955	3.67%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	251,971	262,723	10,752	4.27%
Self Employed and Unpaid Family Workers	126,339	133,099	6,760	5.35%
Government	96,379	102,934	6,555	6.80%
Financial Activities	60,974	66,932	5,958	9.77%
Construction	50,771	56,738	5,967	11.75%
Other	60,130	67,209	7,079	11.77%
Education and Health Services	299,081	335,553	36,472	12.19%
Professional and Business Services	146,599	165,514	18,915	12.90%
Leisure and Hospitality	118,424	134,339	15,915	13.44%
Arkansas All Industries	1,408,747	1,527,428	118,681	8.42%

The occupations that are projected to have the most growth in coming years in Arkansas are reflected in Table 72. Of the jobs with greatest projected growth, some require some level of formal education and training, while others have minimal requirements.

In Arkansas, projections based on the number of annual openings indicate that the top occupations for individuals with a high school diploma include food preparation, personal care aides, cooks, and truck drivers. The top occupations for those with an Associate's degree or some postsecondary training include generally higher paying positions, such as a registered nurse, insurance sales, nursing assistant, vocational nurse, teaching assistant, and medical assistant.^{xxxvii}

Every educational category in Arkansas is forecasted to see net gains in jobs by 2029.^{xxxviii} In the state, occupations requiring a bachelor's degree are likely to add 29,956 jobs during the projection period. However, occupations that require a high school diploma or equivalent will have more annual job openings and more gain than any other education level, with 38,803 new jobs between 2018 and 2028. Job seekers with at least an associate's degree could see 32,757 annual job openings; jobs requiring a master's degree could see the largest percent change, with a 17.0% gain in employment over the 10-year period. This highlights an ongoing need for access to educational opportunities in the county and state.

Table 72. Top 20 Growing Occupations in Arkansas by Number of Jobs (2018-2028)^{xxxix}

Occupation	Projected Number of Jobs Added (2018-2028)	Projected Growth
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	7,508	19.5%
Personal Care Aides	6,335	33.9%
Registered Nurses	3,550	13.5%
Insurance Sales Agents	2,927	18.7%
Cooks, Restaurant	2,722	24.8%
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	2,507	6.6%
Nursing Assistants	2,417	12.9%
General and Operations Managers	2,223	10.6%

Occupation	Projected Number of Jobs Added (2018-2028)	Projected Growth
Helpers--Production Workers	2,202	20.1%
Retail Salespersons	1,998	5.0%
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	1,872	9.9%
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers	1,797	8.2%
Clergy	1,786	14.7%
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	1,628	13.2%
Waiters and Waitresses	1,584	8.4%
Management Analysts	1,463	21.3%
Home Health Aides	1,408	27.3%
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	1,333	10.8%
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	1,320	26.6%
Childcare Workers	1,267	11.1%

Education and Training

Overall, educational opportunities in the state of Arkansas are numerous. Prospective students have a wide range of institutions to choose from, ranging from two-year community and technical colleges to four-year universities. Students can also choose between public/state institutions and private or religious-based institutions. These schools offer a variety of programs, ranging from technical certificates and associate's degrees to graduate degrees. Arkansas also has several small institutions that prepare graduates for an array of occupational careers.^{xxxx} However, access to these opportunities may be limited for some individuals due to factors such as finances, scheduling, child care, and transportation.

Some Head Start/Early Head Start families may receive on the job training and also are working toward healthcare training and certifications (e.g., CNA program).

EOA staff members often obtain coursework at Northwest Arkansas Community College, and many obtain their Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) from Teachstone, an on-line professional development provider.

In Northwest Arkansas, there are multiple educational opportunities available, including community and technical schools, which provide trade training to students in the service area, and professional programs for certifications and licenses.

- Northwest Arkansas Community College (Bentonville, Springdale)
- Harding University (satellite)
- John Brown University (Siloam Springs)
- University of Arkansas (Fayetteville)
- Brightwater: Center for the Study of Food (Bentonville)
- Northwest Technical Institute (Springdale)

Transportation

Public Transportation. EOA leadership team members note that public transportation in Washington County is limited. EOA families tend to use their own transportation or rideshare.

The Ozark Regional Transit Authority offers bus routes in Springdale, Fayetteville, Bentonville, Rogers and for some communities on 1-49. Some EOA Head Start/Early Head Start centers are located near these bus routes and EOA will place families accordingly if they are interested in accessing the program with the public transportation system.

EOA also reports that a local non-profit agency will donate bicycles to families that do not have transportation, as the area has a strong bike/walking trail system. Two centers in Fayetteville are accessible to the trail systems and some families do access programs by bike or walking.

Access to Vehicles. The percent of households with no vehicle available is 5.4% in Washington County, a somewhat lower rate than in Arkansas as a whole (6.1%) (Table 73). Limited access to a personal vehicle is higher in certain communities within the county (portions of Fayetteville, Lincoln, Springdale, and Winslow). Households without a vehicle (and households with one vehicle for two working parents) have to rely more heavily on alternative transportation, such as sharing vehicles or relying on limited public transportation. With the exception of Carroll County, the surrounding counties noted in Table 73 have somewhat greater access to a vehicle than Washington County.

Table 73. Households with No Vehicle Available by Geographic Area (2020) cxxxix,⁵⁹

Geographic Area	Percent of Households with No Vehicle Available
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>2.9%</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>5.9%</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>4.3%</i>
72701 (Fayetteville)	6.4%
72703 (Fayetteville)	8.8%
72704 (Fayetteville)	3.2%
72717 (Canehill)	2.5%
72727 (Elkins)	2.0%
72729 (Evansville)	0.0%
72730 (Farmington)	4.5%
72738 (Hindsville)	4.7%
72744 (Lincoln)	5.7%
72749 (Morrow)	0.0%
72753 (Prairie Grove)	2.6%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	3.9%
72762 (Springdale)	3.0%
72764 (Springdale)	6.0%
72769 (Summers)	0.7%
72774 (West Fork)	4.6%
72959 (Winslow)	5.5%
Washington County	5.4%
Arkansas	6.1%

⁵⁹ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

Most residents in the service area drive themselves to work in their own cars (Table 74), adding to the cost of living for the area. Commute times in Washington County are approximately 21 minutes, consistent with the rate in Arkansas (Table 75), while residents of Madison County commute an average of 32 minutes, likely due to the rural nature of the area. A few zip codes in the service area have rates of carpooling, greater than the county rate (Springdale, Summers, and Lincoln). In Morrow, 31.9% of individuals walk to work.

Table 74. Transportation to Work by Geographic Area (2020) cxxxii, 60

Geographic Area	Car, truck, or van: drove alone	Car, truck, or van: carpoled	Public transportation	Walked	Other means	Worked from home
<i>Benton County</i>	83.3%	8.2%	0.1%	1.2%	0.7%	6.4%
<i>Carroll County</i>	78.9%	8.9%	0.1%	3.6%	1.3%	7.2%
<i>Madison County</i>	88.2%	6.8%	0.0%	1.0%	1.3%	2.7%
72701 (Fayetteville)	69.7%	11.7%	1.0%	5.6%	2.0%	9.9%
72703 (Fayetteville)	74.9%	15.5%	2.1%	0.6%	1.9%	5.0%
72704 (Fayetteville)	79.3%	8.2%	0.5%	0.3%	0.5%	11.2%
72717 (Canehill)	84.6%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	9.3%
72727 (Elkins)	89.1%	6.9%	0.0%	0.8%	0.4%	2.8%
72729 (Evansville)	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72730 (Farmington)	84.3%	8.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	7.1%
72738 (Hindsville)	87.5%	0.9%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%	6.4%
72744 (Lincoln)	78.1%	14.9%	0.0%	0.7%	0.9%	5.5%
72749 (Morrow)	67.6%	0.0%	0.5%	31.9%	0.0%	0.0%
72753 (Prairie Grove)	87.5%	4.9%	0.0%	3.5%	0.0%	4.0%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	83.1%	8.6%	0.0%	2.7%	0.8%	4.7%
72762 (Springdale)	75.7%	14.3%	0.5%	0.9%	0.6%	8.1%
72764 (Springdale)	78.6%	16.4%	0.0%	0.4%	1.2%	3.4%
72769 (Summers)	71.0%	11.8%	0.0%	2.9%	1.5%	12.8%
72774 (West Fork)	85.9%	7.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	4.2%
72959 (Winslow)	73.1%	17.7%	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%	8.3%
Washington County	76.9%	12.9%	0.6%	1.7%	1.2%	6.8%
Arkansas	82.3%	10.2%	0.3%	1.6%	1.1%	4.4%

Table 75. Mean Travel Time to Work by Geographic Area (2020) cxxxiii, 61

Geographic Area	Mean Travel Time to Work (Minutes)
<i>Benton County</i>	20.0
<i>Carroll County</i>	21.3
<i>Madison County</i>	32.1
Washington County	20.7
Arkansas	21.8

Availability, reliability, and affordability of vehicles and gas may be barriers to transportation for Head Start/Early Head Start families.

⁶⁰ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

⁶¹ Values greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

Work and Training Schedules



Of the families that participated in the EOA family survey, almost 80% of parents/caregivers work either full time (60%) or part time (20.16%). Additionally, 12% report that they are enrolled in school full, 5% are enrolled part time, while another 4% indicated they are participating in a training program. Another 15% of respondents indicated they are unemployed and not enrolled in training. Based on survey results, almost 66% would like later hours or provision of after-care, potentially indicating the need for extended care in order to work later hours.

While specific work and training schedules of families in the service area are not readily available, the top industries in the service area suggest a variety of schedules. With a mix of education, health, service, leisure and hospitality and manufacturing options, it can be assumed that some individuals work traditional business hours while others work second or third shift. Some work, particularly those of day laborers, may also be seasonal.

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND PREGNANT WOMEN

Children must meet an age requirement to participate in Early Head Start or Head Start. The age requirement is birth to 2 years old (up to age 3) for Early Head Start and 3 to 5 years old for Head Start. Children are eligible to receive services if they meet one or more of the Head Start/Early Head Start eligibility requirements: their family has an income at or below the federal poverty level, the family is eligible for public assistance (e.g., TANF, SSI), the child is experiencing homelessness, or the child is in foster care. At least 10% of program enrollment must be children eligible for services under IDEA (children with disabilities).

Table 76 provides estimated numbers of eligible children in the service area by primary eligibility type, as compared to the current number of children served by EOA Head Start/Early Head Start. Primary eligibility captures only one factor by which a child is eligible for services, and many children have needs that fall into multiple categories.

Table 76. Estimated Number of Children in EOA Had Start / Early Head Start Service Area (Washington County) Eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start Services Compared to the Number of Children Currently Served (2020-2021) (based on primary eligibility)⁶²

Eligibility Criteria	Estimated Number of Eligible Children in Washington County		Number of Children Served by EOA ^{cxxxiv}
	Age 0-3	Age 0-5	Age 0-5
Income-eligible children	2,006	3,443	308
Income-eligible pregnant women	708		10
Children experiencing homelessness	<12	<15	15
Children in foster care	214		2
Children receiving public assistance	~269	448	1
Other/Over income	n/a	n/a	0
Eligibility based on other type of need, but not counted above			15
Children with disabilities (10% program enrollment requirement)	<5	<393	33 (28 HS, 2 EHS, 3 EHS Expansion)

Child Poverty and Geographic Location

The number of children living in poverty in Washington County was decreasing from 2016-2019 and then slightly increased in 2020, potentially due to the impact of the pandemic. Carroll and Madison County followed a similar trend, while Benton County reflected a decreasing trend over the four-year period.

Table 77. Number of Children <5 Years Old Living in Poverty (2016-2020)^{cxxxv}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	2020	Four Year Trend
<i>Benton County</i>	2,888	2,818	2,813	2,409	Decreasing
<i>Carroll County</i>	457	377	364	423	Fluctuating
<i>Madison County</i>	217	250	223	297	Fluctuating
Washington County	3,946	3,909	3,292	3,443	Fluctuating
Arkansas	54,858	53,355	50,887	47,630	Decreasing

In Washington County, the child poverty rate is 17.2% and the poverty rate among children birth to age five is 21.8%; these rates are less than the statewide rates. However, there is a wide range of rates within Washington County. There are an estimated 3,443 children under age five living in poverty who are income-eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start, 2,066 of whom are birth to age 3 (Table 78).

Poverty rates for children in the surrounding Counties are reflected in Table 78 and align fairly closely with Washington County, though rates in Benton County are somewhat lower.

The greatest estimated numbers of children who are income-eligible for participation in Head Start/Early Head Start reside in Springdale and Fayetteville. Nearly 91% (3,133) of income-eligible children in Washington County reside in these five zip codes.

⁶² The source for each of the data points in this table is described in the sections that follow.

Table 78. Poverty Rate and Number of Children Birth to Age five Living in Poverty by Geographic Area (2020)^{xxxxvi, 63}

Geographic Area	Poverty Rate for Children 0-18	Poverty Rate for Children < 5 Years Old	Number of Children <5 Years Old	Number of Children < 5 Living in Poverty	Number of Children < 3 Living in Poverty ⁶⁴
<i>Benton County</i>	11.5%	12.8%	18,850	2,409	1,445
<i>Carroll County</i>	19.2%	27.5%	1,539	423	254
<i>Madison County</i>	28.1%	27.4%	1,082	297	178
72701 (Fayetteville)	17.5%	28.4%	1,620	460	276
72703 (Fayetteville)	19.6%	23.8%	2,683	638	383
72704 (Fayetteville)	7.8%	5.5%	1,932	106	64
72717 (Canehill)	0.0%	0.0%	105	0	0
72727 (Elkins)	1.7%	0.0%	313	0	0
72729 (Evansville)	n/a	n/a	0	0	0
72730 (Farmington)	1.9%	0.0%	423	0	0
72738 (Hindsville)	19.6%	35.7%	286	102	61
72744 (Lincoln)	10.6%	14.3%	322	46	28
72749 (Morrow)	27.4%	86.0%	86	74	44
72753 (Prairie Grove)	17.7%	28.3%	650	184	110
72761 (Siloam Springs)	27.3%	25.5%	2,020	516	310
72762 (Springdale)	17.0%	17.5%	3,026	529	317
72764 (Springdale)	24.7%	29.7%	4,710	1,400	840
72769 (Summers)	0.0%	0.0%	45	0	0
72774 (West Fork)	6.8%	14.2%	323	46	28
72959 (Winslow)	17.2%	4.1%	171	7	4
Washington County	17.2%	21.8%	15,804	3,443	2,066
Arkansas	22.0%	25.8%	184,371	47,630	28,578

In Washington County, there were 3,251 live births in 2020. While exact data on the number of pregnant women who would be income-eligible for EOA Early Head Start is not available, the number can be estimated by applying the county poverty rate for children birth to age five to the number of live births annually. There are an estimated 708 pregnant women in Washington County who are eligible for Early Head Start.

EOA serves pregnant women in the Early Head Start program. Many pregnant women are referred through friends and family or word of mouth, women are also recruited during enrollment campaigns and through targeted advertisements on social media platforms.

Table 79. Estimated Number of Income-Eligible Pregnant Women by County

Geographic Area	Total Births (2020)	Poverty Rate of Children < 5 ^{xxxxvii}	Estimated Number of Income-Eligible Pregnant Women
<i>Benton County</i>	3,880	12.8%	496
<i>Carroll County</i>	193	27.5%	53
<i>Madison County</i>	267	27.4%	76
Washington County	3,251	21.8%	708

⁶³ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

⁶⁴ Estimated by calculating 3/5 of the number of children birth to age 5 living in poverty.

Race and Ethnicity of Eligible Children in Poverty

Data for the number of young children living in poverty by race is not readily accessible from public sources. As described in the Overview of Service Area section, there are disparities with regard to poverty rate and race. Poverty rates for children in Arkansas are highest among Black or African American individuals (39%) and Hispanic individuals (27%).^{cxviii}

EOA serves a population with greater racial and ethnic diversity than the general population in Washington County and Arkansas (as reflected in Tables 9 and 10). The population of children enrolled in its Head Start/Early Head Start program identify as White (62%), All other races (38%), and Hispanic (37.4%).

Language of Eligible Children

The primary language of individuals in Washington County is English. In Springdale and Summers, fewer children speak English than the rest of the county; here, more children speak Spanish and Asian and Pacific Island languages. The surrounding counties have higher rates of English speakers than Washington County. EOA leadership note that the diversity in Summers, with an elevated rate of individuals that report Asian and Pacific Island for race, may be due the Hmong farming population in that area.

EOA programs employ bi-lingual staff across most programs. The SafeCare program is currently the only children's services program without bi-lingual staff.

Table 80. Language Spoken at Home (Age 5 and Over) by Geographic Area and Percentage of Population (2020)^{cxix, 65}

Geographic Area	English	Spanish	Other Indo-European	Asian and Pacific Island	Other
<i>Benton County</i>	86.1%	10.3%	0.8%	2.7%	0.2%
<i>Carroll County</i>	87.6%	10.6%	0.2%	1.5%	0.0%
<i>Madison County</i>	96.5%	1.9%	1.0%	0.6%	0.0%
72701 (Fayetteville)	91.8%	5.6%	1.2%	1.0%	0.5%
72703 (Fayetteville)	91.5%	3.0%	1.8%	3.1%	0.6%
72704 (Fayetteville)	94.7%	3.8%	1.2%	0.4%	0.0%
72717 (Canehill)	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72727 (Elkins)	94.2%	4.8%	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%
72729 (Evansville)	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72730 (Farmington)	94.5%	5.4%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
72738 (Hindsville)	87.9%	1.8%	9.1%	0.0%	1.2%
72744 (Lincoln)	92.5%	6.1%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%
72749 (Morrow)	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
72753 (Prairie Grove)	95.3%	3.8%	0.5%	0.4%	0.0%
72761 (Siloam Springs)	85.3%	12.5%	0.9%	1.2%	0.2%
72762 (Springdale)	77.4%	18.0%	0.6%	3.9%	0.0%
72764 (Springdale)	56.0%	32.8%	0.9%	10.3%	0.0%
72769 (Summers)	68.6%	0.0%	0.0%	31.4%	0.0%
72774 (West Fork)	98.7%	0.2%	0.5%	0.6%	0.0%
72959 (Winslow)	98.7%	0.1%	0.8%	0.4%	0.0%
Washington County	82.1%	12.8%	1.0%	3.9%	0.2%
Arkansas	92.4%	5.4%	0.7%	1.2%	0.2%

⁶⁵ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

In the EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program, a majority of children enrolled in the 2020-2021 program year speak English as their primary language at home (72%), while 25% speak Spanish, 2.36% speak a Pacific Island language, and 0.6% speak a Middle Eastern language. ^{cxl}

Cultural Trends

As shown in Table 81, the percent of the population in Washington County that is foreign born is approximately 10.8%, over double the state rate (4.9%). Within the County, Springdale has the highest rates of individuals who are foreign-born. In Springdale, there is also a high number/percentage of the foreign-born population that is not a U.S. citizen (representing 15,350 individuals).

Table 81. Foreign-Born Population by Geographic Area (2020)^{cxli, 66}

Geographic Area	Number and Percent Foreign-Born	Number and Percent of Foreign-Born Population that is non-US Citizen
<i>Benton County</i>	33,258 (12.2%)	22,551 (67.8%)
<i>Carroll County</i>	2,306 (8.2%)	1,811 (78.5%)
<i>Madison County</i>	460 (2.8%)	250 (54.3%)
72701 (Fayetteville)	2,675 (5.9%)	1,845 (69.0%)
72703 (Fayetteville)	2,072 (6.2%)	1,574 (76.0%)
72704 (Fayetteville)	933 (3.5%)	435 (46.6%)
72717 (Canehill)	0 (0.0%)	n/a
72727 (Elkins)	143 (2.2%)	66 (46.2%)
72729 (Evansville)	0 (0.0%)	n/a
72730 (Farmington)	118 (1.4%)	38 (32.2%)
72738 (Hindsville)	147 (5.7%)	25 (17.0%)
72744 (Lincoln)	232 (4.4%)	110 (47.4%)
72749 (Morrow)	1 (0.2%)	1 (100.0%)
72753 (Prairie Grove)	202 (2.0%)	153 (75.7%)
72761 (Siloam Springs)	2,145 (9.5%)	1,688 (78.7%)
72762 (Springdale)	5,286 (12.7%)	3,669 (69.4%)
72764 (Springdale)	15,195 (26.4%)	11,681 (76.9%)
72769 (Summers)	167 (10.4%)	0 (0.0%)
72774 (West Fork)	110 (1.7%)	18 (16.4%)
72959 (Winslow)	37 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Washington County	25,395 (10.8%)	18,225 (71.8%)
Arkansas	148,142 (4.9%)	98,118 (66.2%)

Children Experiencing Homelessness

In Washington County, data on the percent of homeless students by school district may provide insight into where young children experiencing homelessness reside. As described in Table 82, there are several school districts students where students are experiencing homelessness at a higher rate than the statewide rate (2.5%). This includes Greenland School District (12.9%) and Lincoln School District (3.1%) in Washington County. EOA staff suspect that the rise in the cost of living in Fayetteville may be causing a migration of families experiencing homelessness to the Greenland area in search of housing opportunities.

In Benton County, Decatur School District has the highest rate of students experiencing homelessness (10.2%); in Carroll County, Berryville School District has a homeless student population of 11.2%.

⁶⁶ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

EOA leadership members note that the Family Services Manager participates on regular calls with school district liaisons for students experiencing homelessness, and has established strong connections in the Fayetteville and Springdale School Districts. EOA regularly receives referrals from the Fayetteville district and partners with staff to exchange resources and training opportunities. Additionally, EOA collaborates with multiple agencies to support families with their housing needs, including Peace at Home, Seven Hills Homeless Center, Cooperative Emergency Outreach, Cox: Connect to Compete, Cross Compassion, Office of Human Concern, Salvation Army, Bread for Life, Fayetteville Housing Authority, as well as multiple shelters, ministries, and church-based groups.

Table 82. Number and Percent Homeless Students (Total K-12 Enrollment) by School District (2020 - 2021)^{cxl, 67}

Geographic Area	School District	Number Homeless	Total Enrollment	Percent Homeless
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>Bentonville</i>	328	17,970	1.8%
	<i>Decatur</i>	55	537	10.2%
	<i>Gentry</i>	60	1,444	4.2%
	<i>Gravette</i>	3	1,860	0.2%
	<i>Pea Ridge</i>	47	2,216	2.1%
	<i>Rogers</i>	127	15,355	0.8%
	<i>Siloam Springs</i>	41	4,174	0.98%
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>Berryville</i>	205	1,832	11.2%
	<i>Eureka</i>	13	572	2.3%
	<i>Green Forest</i>	41	1,366	3%
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>Huntsville</i>	47	2,128	2.2%
Washington County	Elkins	26	1,269	2.0%
	Farmington	13	2,572	0.5%
	Fayetteville	117	10,151	1.2%
	Greenland	96	743	12.9%
	Lincoln	31	1,007	3.1%
	Prairie Grove	0	2,045	0%
	Springdale	278	21,882	1.3%
	West Fork	13	907	1.4%
Arkansas		11,740 ⁶⁸	473,004	2.5%

⁶⁷ Rates greater than the statewide rate are highlighted.

⁶⁸ Qtr. 4180

Point in Time Data

Annually, across the country and in Arkansas, a Point in Time (PIT) count of both sheltered and unsheltered households is conducted. In Arkansas, the unsheltered PIT Count was cancelled for 2021 due to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic; only sheltered data was collected.^{cxliii}

Due to the pandemic and varying data collection methods, the number of homeless individuals in each county in 2021 may be an undercount and must be interpreted with a note of caution; data from 2020 and 2021 is generally not comparable to data collected in previous years.

In Northwest Arkansas, a limited Point-in-Time count for sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness occurred on January 28, 2021 and identified 157 individuals experiencing homelessness.⁶⁹ Racial identities include White (125), African American (20), Other (12); gender identities include Male (83), Female (73), and Gender Non-Conforming (1). The Point in Time count also revealed 14 Veterans (1 Female, 13 Male), of which 11 were White, 1 was African American, and 2 identified as “Other.” Of the fourteen, 13 were living in an Emergency Shelter (Fayetteville 6, Bentonville 2, Rogers 5) and 1 in a Transitional Shelter (Fayetteville).

Table 83: Count of Adults in NW Arkansas Experiencing Homelessness – Limited Point in Time Count (1/2021)^{cxliv}

	2019	2020 (1/23/20)	2021
Sheltered Count	387	167	157
Sheltered and Unsheltered Count	529	369	n/a

Table 84: Count of Veterans in NW Arkansas Experiencing Sheltered Homelessness – Limited Point in Time Count (1/2021)^{cxlv}

	2019	2020 (1/23/20)	2021
Sheltered Count	57	38	14
Sheltered and Unsheltered Count	13	11	n/a

Table 85: Location of Adults Experiencing Homelessness – Limited Point in Time Count (1/2021)^{cxlvi}

Geographic Location	Number of Students
Benton County (42 individuals)	
Rogers	23
Bentonville	19
Washington County (114 individuals)	
Fayetteville	61
Springdale	53
Total	157

Table 86: Location of K-12 Students Experiencing Homelessness – Limited Point in Time Count (1/2021)^{cxlvii}

Geographic Location	Number of Students
Fayetteville	26
Berryville	219
Rogers	180
Gentry	60
Other	62
Total	547

⁶⁹ Homeless definition according to HEARTH Act of 2012: nighttime residence was a place not meant for human habitation, emergency shelter or transitional housing.

In 2021, the K-12 population PIT count revealed 547 students experiencing homelessness by current housing type. 2020 data indicates there were 2,188 students and 2019 data indicates 2,091. This reflects an impact on data collection methods in 2021, during the pandemic.

Table 87: K-12 Students Experiencing Homelessness - Current Housing Type -Limited Point in Time Count (1/2021)^{cxlviii}

	2019	2020	2021
Doubled up	1,635	1,813	466
Living in a motel	204	189	58
Emergency Shelter	128	113	11
Unaccompanied Youth	73	50	12
Unsheltered	53	25	Not conducted
	2,093	2,188	547*

*Does not include unsheltered students

During the 2020-2021 program year, EOA Head Start/Early Head Start served 15 children who experienced homelessness at some point during the program year: 7 in Early Head Start, 5 served with Early Head Start expansion funding, and 3 in Head Start. The EOA program helps to meet the unique needs of families experiencing homelessness.^{cxlix}

Data regarding the number of children, birth to age five, experiencing homelessness by county is not readily available in Arkansas, but these children are categorically eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start services. Washington County public school data suggest the most significant populations of families experiencing homelessness are in the Fayetteville, Springdale and Greenland School Districts.

In Arkansas, eviction moratoriums put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic through the federal CARES Act eviction moratorium and CDC's Emergency Order, *Temporary Halt in Residential Evictions to Prevent the Further Spread of COVID-19* ended on summer 2021.

In Arkansas, there are two Department of Human Services programs offering rental assistance for Arkansas residents: the Arkansas Rent Relief Program and The Emergency Solutions Grant Program.^d

The Arkansas Rent Relief Program offers financial help to pay overdue and upcoming rent and utilities for eligible Arkansas renters. Landlords who have tenants unable to pay their rent because of lost income or the COVID-19 pandemic also may apply. Effective January 28, 2022, the Arkansas program paused application acceptance in order to implement changes to funding distribution. If there is funding still available, the application process will reopen.

Low-income individuals in Arkansas needing rental, homelessness prevention, or rapid re-housing assistance can apply for funds through the Emergency Solutions Grant program.

EOA administrators report that landlords were ready to swiftly evict tenants upon the expiration of the eviction moratorium. EOA also provides short-term rental assistance and experienced a high demand for these services after the eviction moratorium lifted.

As additional rental supports expire, families may have similar experiences as repayment barriers and disagreements regarding repayment schedules present challenges to maintaining affordable housing.

Children in Foster Care

EOA Children's House Program

EOA Children's House provides services and care to children under the age of five who have been abused, neglected, or face adverse childhood experiences. EOA Children's House is one of the nation's largest long-term programs for child abuse prevention and treatment and the only program of its kind in Arkansas. The current funded enrollment of the program supports 22 center-based slots (18 PreK and 4 Toddlers).

The goal at EOA Children's House is to work with each child to achieve age-appropriate developmental milestones so that when they enter Kindergarten, they are at the same developmental level as their peers. The program is designed to address trauma through a multigenerational approach, through a whole-family model that partners parents or guardians with a trained Family Advocate who meet individually with families on a routine basis to set goals related to self-sufficiency and connect families to supportive services and resources. In addition, our comprehensive program coordinates with community partners to address health services and therapy needs.

The EOA Children's House program is funded for 18 Pre-K children (2 classrooms with 9 children each) and 4 Toddlers (1 classroom). The lower ratios in this program are by design to allow children to receive additional one on one support from the staff and trauma informed care. In 2020-2021, EOA received 40 referrals from drug court and child welfare agencies and served a total of 27 children. Of these children, 15 were victims of child physical abuse/neglect, 12 experienced domestic violence and 7 experienced both types of victimization. Of the children served, 19 lived in a household with an income below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), two lived in households with incomes above 100% FPL, four were in foster care and two children experiencing homelessness.

Foster Care Children in Arkansas

Data provided by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) indicate there were 4,854 children in foster care in Arkansas in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021, a nearly 11% increase from SFY 2020 (4,391).^{cli} Forty two percent of all children in foster care in Arkansas are 5 or under (1,116 children).

In Arkansas, children two to five years of age represented the largest group of children in foster care (25%). Of the children in foster care at the end of 2021, 50% were male and 50% were female, 60% were White, 20% were Black, 12% were more than one race, 7% were Hispanic and 1% was unknown. Neglect and substance abuse (54% and 51%, respectively) were the most prevalent reasons for children entering foster care during the year.^{clii}

EOA Head Start/Early Head Start policies prioritize children in foster care through the enrollment selection criteria. EOA requires a letter from a state agency confirming that a child is in the care of the state in order to provide services. Children in foster care may also be served in the EOA Children's House therapeutic program, which serves children with past traumas or removal from the home into a foster care placement.

In 2020-2021, EOA served two children in the Head Start program who were in foster care during the program year. In Washington County, approximately 214 children, age 0-5 years old, would be categorically eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start due to their status receiving foster care (Table 89).^{cliii} This age group represents approximately 46% of all children in foster care in Washington County.

EOA leadership report a strong partnership with the Ozark Guidance Center, Children's Safety Center, United Way and with local Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) office for families with children in foster care. CASA volunteers visit children in EOA programs and work closely with the teachers and staff. Additionally, EOA partners with the Department of Human Services for children in foster care, though high staff turnover at DHS has resulted in some inconsistency and unpredictability.

Table 88. Number of Children in Foster Care by Age in Arkansas (2021) ^{cliv}

Under 1	2-5	6-9	10-13	14-17	18+	Total
17%	25%	18%	16%	18	6%	100%

Table 89. Number of Children by Age (in years), in Foster Care by Year and Geographic Area (2021) ^{clv}

Geographic Area	Total	0-5	6-11	12-14	15+
<i>Benton County</i>	321	108	89	56	68
<i>Carroll County</i>	87	39	25	11	12
<i>Madison County</i>	108	50	31	14	13
Washington County	466	214	113	58	81
NW Arkansas Four County Total	982	411	258	139	174

The statewide goal for the number of approved foster family homes is 1,800. From April 2020 to March 2021, the lowest number of approved homes was 1,475 (October 2020); at 1,512 (March 2021), the most recently reported number of homes is still 16% below the statewide goal.

The statewide goal for the ratio of foster care beds to children is 1:1. From April 2020 to March 2021, the ratio has ranged from 0.69:1 to 0.77:1; the most recently reported ratio is 0.70:1 (March 2021), indicating a shortage of foster care beds in Arkansas.

Further, the goal for the family service worker is an average of 20 cases and has been elevated since August of 2020; the most recently reported caseload (March 2021) is 23.

Conversely, during the start of the pandemic, the caseload ranged from 20.2 to 18 cases, reaching a two year low in May 2020 with 17.8 cases. Data on foster care during this time period supports the assumption that the lack of reporting during the most isolating portion/start of the pandemic led to a reduced foster care caseload in that time period. ^{clvi}

In 2021, of the substantiated reports of child maltreatment in Arkansas, 63% of children were White and 19% were Black. Children five and younger accounted for 49% of the victims, while 55% were female.

Child Maltreatment

In SFY 2021, the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline received 30,935 calls reporting child maltreatment, with an overall substantiation rate of 29%, indicating 9,960 victim children in maltreatment investigations that were found to be true, with 71% based on allegations of "neglect". This is in comparison to 34,226 calls in 2019, a 9.6% decrease, with a 5% higher substantiation rate. Arkansas' national ranking for the indicator of Child Abuse and Neglect was 34 out of 51. ^{clvii}

Experts believe that the decline in calls to child abuse and neglect hotlines generally may be due to cases going unnoticed. EOA leadership report that they also experienced some level of underreporting as well at the start of the pandemic. The pandemic heightened stress for many. School closures, loss of income, and social

isolation are all risk factors for child maltreatment. The pandemic increased these stressors for families while also limiting access to support systems (e.g., grandparent care, school nutrition programs etc.).

As the pandemic began in the U.S., the reporting of child abuse fell, as did the total number of emergency department visits related to child abuse and neglect; the percentage of such visits resulting in hospitalization increased when compared with 2019. Official reporting to child protection agencies declined across the United States by 20%-70%, during the height of the pandemic, likely due to a decrease of in-person contact between children and mandated reporters (e.g., teachers, social workers, and physicians).^{clviii}

One Benton County provider, the Children's Advocacy Center of Benton County reported fewer cases in 2020, with a 50% decline specifically in April 2020, although the numbers in the first quarter of 2021 have been similar to 2019. Despite the decrease in 2020 cases, a greater number were found to be substantiated after investigation. Many 2021 reports were received from trusted adults that children reported information to about their time in isolation at home during the pandemic.

Data is not yet available regarding the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children experiencing child abuse and neglect, however, given widespread declines in reporting, a future surge in issues related to potential trauma may be possible.

As reflected in Table 90, the number of child maltreatment investigations in Washington County that were substantiated was 22.56% in 2021.

Table 90. Number of Child Maltreatment Investigations Determined to be Substantiated by Geographic Area (2021) ^{clix}

Geographic Area	2021 Total	Number of Substantiated Cases	Substantiated Rate
<i>Benton County</i>	2,193	323	19.96%
<i>Carroll County</i>	297	66	30.07%
<i>Madison County</i>	202	42	29.02%
Washington County	2,295	383	22.56%
NW Arkansas Four County Total	4,987	814	22.11%

Children Receiving Public Assistance

Children are eligible to enroll in Head Start/Early Head Start if they are recipients of public assistance, specifically Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Data on children (0-18) who are recipients of SSI are reflected in Table 91 and 92.

Table 91. Number of Child (0-18) Recipients of TANF by Geographic Area and Year^{clx}

Geographic Area	2017	2018	2019	Three Year Trend
<i>Benton County</i>	303	244	232	<i>Decreasing</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	33	24	6	<i>Decreasing</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	29	29	41	<i>Increasing</i>
Washington County	465	499	485	Fluctuating
Arkansas	9,878	8,815	7,748	Decreasing

Table 92. Number of Child (0-18) Recipients of SSI by Geographic Area (12/2019)^{clxi}

Geographic Area	2019
<i>Benton County</i>	833
<i>Carroll County</i>	100
<i>Madison County</i>	81
Washington County	1,126
Arkansas	24,335

The number of children birth to age five receiving public assistance is not publicly available; to estimate the number of children birth to age five who are receiving TANF benefits in Washington County, birth to age 18 data can be used as a proxy. The estimated number of children, birth to age five, who are eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start based on receipt of TANF is estimated to be 135 children.⁷⁰

To estimate the number of children birth to age five who are receiving SSI benefits in Washington County, birth to age 18 data can be used as a proxy. The estimated number of children, birth to age five, who are eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start based on receipt of SSI is estimated to be 313 children.

Approximately 448 children in Washington County from families receiving public assistance (TANF or SSI) are categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services.

⁷⁰ Estimated by calculating 5/18 of the number of children birth to age 18 who are recipients of TANF benefits in Washington County (2019).

Children with Disabilities

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) require that at least 10% of program enrollment is allocated to children eligible for services under IDEA (i.e., early intervention and preschool special education). In the 2020-2021 program year, children with a diagnosed disability represented 20% of enrollment in the EOA Head Start program, 5.5% in Early Head Start expansion and 1.47% in Early Head Start.^{clxii} Historically, enrollment of children with disabilities has been highest in Head Start and more than 10% across program types. The pandemic may have had an impact on families delaying entrance into programs for young children with disabilities, in addition limiting access to services for children under three in the state.

As described in Table 93, in Washington County, rates of students with disabilities in a majority of school districts (with the exception of Springdale) are greater than the countywide rate. Lincoln and West Fork School Districts have the greatest percent of student receiving special education service in Washington County. EOA leadership note that historically, they also have also seen high rates of children with disabilities from the Lincoln School District in their programs.

Table 93. Percent Students Receiving Special Education Services (Out of Total Enrollment) by School District (2021-2022)^{clxiii, 71}

School District	% Students with Disabilities
Bentonville	11.0%
Decatur	17.0%
Gentry	13.4%
Gravette	13.1%
Pea Ridge	14.0%
Rogers	12.6%
Siloam Springs	13.7%
Benton County	12.1%
Berryville	17.1%
Eureka	13.2%
Green Forest	14.9%
Carroll County	15.7%
Huntsville	14.3%
Madison County	14.3%
Elkins	13.2%
Farmington	13.3%
Fayetteville	13.6%
Greenland	16.6%
Lincoln	18.1%
Prairie Grove	12.9%
Springdale	10.8%
West Fork	17.1%
Washington County	12.3%

Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (NAESC) provides preschool special education (ages 3-5) for all districts in Washington, Benton, and Madison Counties, which included 877 children in 2020-2021.^{clxiv} Though the number of children served is not available by county, it can be estimated based on the population of children under five living in each county. Across the three counties, there are 35,736 children under age five.^{clxv} In Washington County, there are 15,804 children under five, or 44.2%. Applying this percentage to the 877 children served by NAESC, it can be estimated that 388 children in Washington County received

⁷¹ Rates greater than the countywide rate are highlighted.

preschool special education services.⁷² Applying this percentage to the 877 children served by NAESC, it can be estimated that 388 children in Washington County received preschool special education services.

Table 94. Number of Children Receiving Preschool Special Education Services by Disability^{clxvi}

Disability Category	Number of Children
Developmental Delay	477
Speech and Language Impairment	272
Autism	108
Hearing Impairment	7
Other Health Impairment	6
Multiple Disabilities	2
Orthopedic Impairment	1
Other	4
Total	877

County level data for the number of children (0-3) receiving Early Intervention services through the state program “First Connections” are not readily publicly available.^{clxvii} In Arkansas, it is reported that 977 children receive Early Intervention services (Table 95).

Table 95. Number of Children (0-3) Recipients of Early Intervention in Arkansas (November 2020)^{clxviii}

Age	Home Based	Community Based	Other Setting	Total	Percentage
Birth to 1	147	40	8	195	19.96%
1 to 2	217	211	12	440	45.04%
2 to 3	193	140	9	342	35.01%
Total	557	391	29	977	100%

It is estimated that 388 children with disabilities are categorically eligible for Head Start services in Washington County. Additionally, as local data is not available for the provision of service to children birth to age 3 in Washington County and EOA Early Head Start served five children with disabilities in 2020-2021, it can be assumed there are at least five children with disabilities in the county and very likely many more. EOA has strong partnerships with Early Intervention (EI) and the Local Education Agency (LEA) in each school district, with particularly strong collaboration with the LEA for Pre-K children (Northwest Arkansas Educational Cooperative) and the Early Intervention coordinator for Infants/Toddlers. EOA partners with the LEAs to transition children with existing IEPs to the public school system. This is coordinated through the LEA (Northwest Arkansas Educational Cooperative). Additionally, EOA partners with the Speech Language Pathology department at the University of Arkansas to assist with developmental, receptive vocabulary, and articulation screenings for children in EOA programs. The LEAs conduct timely assessments and provide services efficiently; the pandemic had impacted service delivery, which is now resolving as in person services have resumed.

At the start of the pandemic, Early Intervention began coordinating services throughout the state by completing intake and parent meetings virtually. If a child is determined to qualify for an evaluation, the EI Coordinator contracts with local therapy providers to complete evaluations and provide services (Theraplay, Physicians Therapy Group, etc.). EOA leadership notes that the referral and provision of services for birth to three-year-old children with suspected disabilities through Early Intervention providers tends to take longer because of the contracted services by private providers. There is typically a 60-90 day wait for an initial

⁷² Among these three counties, 18,850 children under five live in Benton County (52.7%) and 1,082 children live in Madison County (3.1%).

evaluation, which can be a considerable delay for a child in need of services. EOA works to partner with these providers to ensure they are familiar with EOA programming to ensure smooth transitions for children.

EOA leadership identifies the lack of dual-language providers available for these services as an access constraint. EOA continues to focus on building relationships with providers and Early Intervention coordinators to increase the exchange of Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) information across programs.

AGENCIES SERVING ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

Child Care Centers and Family Child Care

Across the country, the child care industry has been greatly impacted as child care facilities nationwide are reporting a stark lack of staff and ability to retain existing staff. The National Association for the Education of Young Children found that four in five child care programs nationwide are understaffed, with 78% of those surveyed indicating that low wages are the main reason for the difficulty in recruiting new employees.^{clxix}

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused dramatic changes in the landscape for child care and early education programs in the United States. Historically, child care programs have provided care on thin margins and were asked to continue to do so during the pandemic, leading to extreme financial upheaval.

Additional burdens were placed on strained programs to: meet a fluctuating and unpredictable demand for child care, increase health and safety procedures (e.g., decreased ratios, more stringent cleaning procedures), and shift programming to full or partial virtual learning upon mandate. As a result of these burdens, costs for providers increased while enrollment in child care programs decreased, leaving child care programs across the county to navigate the ensuing financial consequence.^{clxx}

As of January 2022, Washington County had 115 licensed child care centers and registered family child care homes, with a total capacity to provide care for 8,003 children.

The number and capacity of licensed child care centers is described in Table 96 (97 programs with the capacity of 7,808), along with the percent of child care centers that are licensed to serve infants/toddlers.



Countywide, 66% of child care centers are licensed to serve infants/toddlers (though licensure does not mean that these programs are necessarily serving this age group). It is also important to note that licensed capacity does not necessarily reflect the number of children that a program would typically have enrolled, as other factors, such as class size limits or staffing limitations due to the pandemic, may impact the number of children served at any given time.

Table 96. Number and Capacity of Licensed Child Care Centers for Infant/Toddlers and Preschoolers (January 2022)^{clxxi,73}

Geographic Area	Number of Child Care Centers	Capacity of Child Care Centers	Number of Child Care Centers Licensed to Serve Infants/Toddlers	Percent of Child Care Centers Licensed to Serve Infants/Toddlers
<i>Benton County</i>	109 ⁷⁴	10,483	79	72.5%
<i>Carroll County</i>	10 ⁷⁵	678	6	60%
<i>Madison County</i>	6	211	3	50%
Canehill	0	0	0	0%
Elkins	3	102	1	33.3%
Elm Springs	0	0	0	0%
Evansville	0	0	0	0%
Farmington	6	321	5	83.3%
Fayetteville	42 ⁷⁶	3,928	32	76.2%
Goshen	0	0	0	0%
Greenland	0	0	0	0%
Johnson	0	0	0	0%
Lincoln	3 ⁷⁷	142	2	66.7%
Morrow	0	0	0	0%
Prairie Grove	2	112	1	50%
Springdale	37 ⁷⁸	2,894	20	54.1%
Summers	0	0	0	0%
Tontitown	0	0	0	0%
West Fork	4	309	3	75%
Washington County Total	97	7,808	64	66%

In Washington County, there are 18 licensed and registered child care family homes, with the capacity to serve 195 children. Table 97 describes the number and capacity of licensed and registered family child care homes by geographic area.

⁷³ The number and capacity of programs does not include centers licensed to serve *only school age children*. Centers may include preschools programs that take school age children in addition to children 5 and under.

⁷⁴ Includes 3 Head Start and 2 Early Head Start centers.

⁷⁵ Includes Green Forest Head Start.

⁷⁶ Includes Ellen Smith, Ivory M. Conly, Old Farmington, and North Street Head Start centers.

⁷⁷ Includes West Washington County Head Start.

⁷⁸ Includes Oak Avenue Head Start/Early Head Start, Springdale Head Start, and the Pat Walker Center for Children.

Table 97. Number and Capacity of Licensed and Registered Child Care Family Homes by Geographic Area (October 2021)^{clxxii 79 80}

Geographic Area	Number of Family Child Care Homes	Capacity of Family Child Care Homes (Birth to Age 13)
<i>Benton County</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>215</i>
<i>Carroll County</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Madison County</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>62</i>
Canehill	0	0
Elkins	1	10
Elm Springs	0	0
Evansville	0	0
Farmington	1	16
Fayetteville	8	83
Goshen	0	0
Greenland	0	0
Johnson	0	0
Lincoln	1	10
Morrow	0	0
Prairie Grove	1	16
Springdale	6	60
Summers	0	0
Tontitown	0	0
West Fork	0	0
Washington County Total	18	195

The total capacity in child care reflected above may include some portion of slots for school aged children in family child care home programs. Child care is also available for families of all income levels, reducing the number of slots available for children birth to age five from low-income families.

⁷⁹ Many Child Care Family Homes provide care for all age types, including school age children.

⁸⁰ Registered providers may care for fewer than 5 children; Licensed providers may care for 6-16 children.

Table 98. Total Number and Capacity of Child Care Programs by Geographic Area

Geographic Area	Number (Capacity) of Licensed Child Care Centers	Number (Capacity) of Licensed Child Care Family Homes	Total Number (Capacity) of Child Care Programs
<i>Benton County</i>	109 (10,483)	19 (215)	128 (10,698)
<i>Carroll County</i>	10 (678)	5 (68)	15 (746)
<i>Madison County</i>	6 (211)	5 (62)	11 (273)
Canehill	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Elkins	3 (102)	1 (10)	4 (112)
Elm Springs	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Evansville	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Farmington	6 (321)	1 (16)	7 (337)
Fayetteville	42 (3,928)	8 (83)	50 (4,011)
Goshen	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Greenland	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Johnson	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Lincoln	3 (142)	1 (10)	4 (152)
Morrow	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Prairie Grove	2 (112)	1 (16)	3 (128)
Springdale	37 (2,894)	6 (60)	43 (2,954)
Summers	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Tontitown	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
West Fork	4 (309)	0 (0)	4 (309)
Washington County Total	97 (7,808)	18 (195)	115 (8,003)

Child care program quality in Arkansas is measured by Better Beginnings, the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS); Better Beginnings distinguishes the quality of each participating child care program with a 1, 2 or 3-star rating system and is designed to improve the level of quality in childcare and early childhood education programs across the state.

In Washington County, approximately 81% of child care centers (serving children 0-72 months) and family child care homes participate in Better Beginnings (Table 99). The largest percent of participating providers have 1 star (62.4%), 22.6% have three stars and 15.1% have two stars. All EOA Head Start/Early Head Start locations participate in the Better Beginnings program and are all three-star programs. This distinction highlights the quality of the Head Start/Early Head Start program. With the highest quality ranking, EOA receives a higher reimbursement rate for children on child care vouchers and annual quality improvement funding to support the continuation in maintaining quality programming (e.g., classroom materials, playground improvements etc.)

Table 99. Number of Child Care Programs Participating in Better Beginnings by Rating and Program Type (November 2021)

Provider Type	Total	1 Stars	2 Stars	3 Stars	% of all programs participating
<i>Child Care Center (0-72 months)</i>	81	45	17	19	76.6%
<i>Family Child Care Home</i>	17	12	1	4	
<i>Benton County Total</i>	98	57 (58%)	18 (18.4%)	23 (23%)	
<i>Child Care Center (0-72 months)</i>	5	2	1	2	67%
<i>Family Child Care Home</i>	5	5	0	0	
<i>Carroll County Total</i>	10	7 (70%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	
<i>Child Care Center (0-72 months)</i>	3	0	1	2	73%
<i>Family Child Care Home</i>	5	3	1	1	
<i>Madison County Total</i>	8	3 (37.5%)	2 (25%)	3 (37.5%)	
<i>Child Care Center (0-72 months)</i>	76	45	13	18	81%
<i>Family Child Care Home</i>	17	13	1	3	
<i>Washington County Total</i>	93	58 (62.4%)	14 (15.1%)	21 (22.6%)	

The total child care capacity in Washington County is 8,003 slots, including some school age children in family child care. When compared to the number of children under five years old in Washington County (15,804) to total child care capacity (8,003 slots), which includes some school age children in family child care, the number of children under five years old far exceeds the total child care capacity (Table 100). This does not necessarily reflect unmet need, as children may be served in other settings, such as public pre-kindergarten, and not all families with young children will need or want care.

In Table 100, all communities listed have a child care capacity lower than the total number of children under age five.

Table 100. Number of Children Under 5 Years Old and Number of Children Under 5 Years Old Living Below Poverty Compared to Total Child Care Capacity

Geographic Area	Children Under 5 ^{clxxxiii}		Children Under 5 in Poverty ^{clxxxiv}		Child Care Capacity (may include School Age) ^{clxxxv}
Benton County	18,850		2,409		10,698
Carroll County	1,539		423		746
Madison County	1,082		297		273
72701 (Fayetteville)	1,620	5,235	460	1,204	4,011
72703 (Fayetteville)	2,683		638		
72704 (Fayetteville)	1,932		106		
72717 (Canehill)	105		0		0
72727 (Elkins)	313		0		112
72729 (Evansville)	0		0		0
72730 (Farmington)	423		0		337
72738 (Hindsville)	286		102		n/a
72744 (Lincoln)	322		46		152
72749 (Morrow)	86		74		0
72753 (Prairie Grove)	650		184		128
72761 (Siloam Springs)	2,020		516		n/a
72762 (Springdale)	3,026	7,736	529	1,929	2,954
72764 (Springdale)	4,710		1,400		
72769 (Summers)	45		0		0
72774 (West Fork)	323		46		309
72959 (Winslow)	171		7		n/a
Washington County	15,804		3,443		8,003

EOA is the only Head Start provider in Washington County. Arkansas Early Learning was awarded Early Head Start slots in Washington County and operates the Springdale Early Learning Academy in Springdale, which is also in Washington County.

Home Visiting

EOA SafeCare Arkansas

EOA administers SafeCare Arkansas, a weekly home visiting program for families of children ages birth to five in Benton, Washington, Madison, and Carroll Counties. The EOA SafeCare program is a home-based program for families who are referred by the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Protective Services Unit. Six SafeCare Providers make 60–90-minute home visits weekly. In 2021 DHS made 306 referrals: 51% in Washington County, followed by 33% in Benton County, 8.2% in Carroll County, and 7.5% in Madison County. Of those referred, 268 target adults and 247 target children received services in 2021; individuals were 85% non-Hispanic, 15% Hispanic; 80% White, 8.2% African American, 5.2% multiple races, 3.1%

Native American, 2.7% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 0.8% Asian. The current 2022 funded enrollment provides services for 216 families per year in home-based services.

The goal of SafeCare Arkansas is to help parents prevent and identify common childhood illnesses or injuries, determine when a child should go to the doctor, aid parents in keeping their homes safe, and increase positive interactions with their child. The program helps to prevent the removal of children from the home and the re-occurrence of child maltreatment.

Arkansas' Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program

Additionally, the Arkansas' Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program supports pregnant women and families with children through kindergarten entry. Arkansas MIECHV provides voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs for families living in communities at risk for poor maternal and child health outcomes.^{clxxvi}

In Arkansas, home visiting is implemented through five evidence-based models: Following Baby Back Home (Promising Approach), Healthy Families America (HFA), Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Parents as Teachers (PAT). MIECHV Program awardees serve populations in at-risk communities and tailor their programs to serve populations of need within their state. In Arkansas:

- 79.9% of households were low income;
- 32.5% of households included a child with developmental delays or disabilities; and
- 27.1% of households included at least one household member with low student achievement.

EOA leadership notes two prominent programs in the service area, the Family Network, Inc. and the Boston Mountain Educational Cooperative. The Family Network, Inc., is a home visiting program, implementing Healthy Families America for infants and toddlers in Benton, Madison, and Washington Counties. Boston Mountain Educational Cooperative implements HIPPY, a home-based school readiness program for parents of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children. HIPPY supports parents while providing solutions that strengthen families. Services are provided in Decatur, Elkins, Farmington, Gentry, Greenland, Huntsville, Lincoln, Prairie Grove, Siloam Springs, St. Paul, West Fork and Winslow, Arkansas.

Publicly Funded Preschool

Public preschool programs in Arkansas serve 4-year-olds and 3-year-olds and served 20,197 children statewide in 2020. Arkansas ranks 19th among states for access for 4-year-olds and 5th for 3-year-olds.^{clxxvii}

Pre-kindergarten (PreK) enrollment by school district, as reported by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), is described in Table 101. Enrollment data reflect the numbers of children served in public school classrooms. Though 99% of school districts offer this state program, the data is incomplete on the ADE website. There are at least 1,436 children enrolled in public school PreK in Washington County.^{clxxviii}

The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program is administered by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) as of the 2019-2020 school year. ABC is positioned to provide resources and supports that benefit early childhood programs across the state to ensure children are well prepared for kindergarten.

Publicly funded preschool is also implemented in community-based sites and is included in licensed child care capacity data. In 2021-2022, Washington County has 28 ABC programs with an enrollment of 1,199 (Table

101).^{clxxix} Together, in Washington County, the licensed child care programs and public school serve a minimum of 2,635 children in the PreK program.

Table 101. Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Public Pre-kindergarten Enrollment by School District (2021-2022)^{clxxx}

School District	Total Public School Pre-K Enrollment ^{clxxxi}	ABC Licensed Child Care Programs (preschool slots) ^{clxxxii}
<i>Bentonville</i>	*	1 (259)
<i>Decatur</i>	34	0
<i>Gravette</i>	48	1 (60)
<i>Lowell</i>	0	2 (266)
<i>Pea Ridge</i>	*	0
<i>Rogers</i>	32	2 (260)
<i>Siloam Springs</i>	38	4 (244)
<i>Springdale</i>	0	2 (80)
Benton County	152	12 (1,169)
<i>Berryville</i>	29	2 (223)
<i>Eureka</i>	16	1 (40)
<i>Green Forest</i>	40	2 (145)
Carroll County	85	5 (408)
<i>Huntsville</i>	62	2 (80)
<i>Saint Paul</i>	*	1 (10)
Madison County	62	3 (90)
<i>Elkins</i>	18	1 (40)
<i>Farmington</i>	*	6 (151)
<i>Fayetteville</i>	140	1 (40)
<i>Greenland</i>	*	1 (40)
<i>Lincoln</i>	*	1 (68)
<i>Prairie Grove</i>	*	1 (80)
<i>Springdale</i>	983	15 (600)
<i>West Fork</i>	1	2 (180)
Washington County	1,436	(28) 1,199

*Enrollment data not found.

EOA works closely with the public PreK programs in the service area, and particularly in Fayetteville and Springdale, where they may serve four-year-old children up to 200% FPL. Since EOA Head Start/Early Head Start serves children age 0-5 at 100% FPL, by partnering with the public schools, EOA is able to focus on serving eligible four-year-old children and three-year-old children, in order to better meet the needs of families in the community.

FAMILY, STAFF, AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Family, staff, and community input are valuable sources of data to guide program options and services and to enhance collaborations among partners. In February 2022, EOA conducted a survey of EOA Family and Staff, and a Community Provider survey. These important sources of data from EOA's primary stakeholder groups inform this Community Assessment. Responses to the surveys were collected February 10 - 24, 2022. Response rates were high for all groups, indicating high investment in program activities by all members of the EOA community.



Family Input

EOA implemented a Family Survey in February 2022 to gather information from parents and guardians about their experiences and ideas related to EOA Programs. The survey was available both electronically and in paper form, and in English and Spanish. Responses to the survey were submitted by 131 individuals who receive a variety of EOA services, including Head Start/Early Head Start (140 respondents, 88.55%), EOA Children's House (24 respondents, 18.32%), Energy Assistance (5 respondents, 3.82%), Emergency Food Assistance (4 respondents, 3.05%), Rental Assistance (4 respondents, 3.05%), Water Assistance (3 respondents, 2.29%), Weatherization Assistance (2 respondents, 1.53%), and SafeCare Arkansas (1 respondents, 0.76%).

This is a 65.5% response rate based on the approximate number of families that were sent the survey, as reported by EOA. Respondents mirrored the demographic makeup of the EOA Programs (race, ethnicity and highest educational level), including the Head Start/Early Head Start program; all program types and centers were represented.

Almost 80% of parents/caregivers that responded work either full time (77 respondents, 59.69%) or part time (26 respondents, 20.16%). Additionally, fifteen respondents (11.63%) report that they are enrolled in school full (9 respondents, 6.98%) or part time (6 respondents, 4.65%), while five responses indicated participation in a training program (3.88%). Another 19 respondents (14.73%) indicated they are unemployed and not enrolled in training. Almost 85% of the families that responded live in either Springdale (63 respondents, 48.84%) or Fayetteville (46 respondents, 35.66%).

Of the Head Start/Early Head Start respondents, 66 have one child enrolled in the EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program (62.86%); 26 respondents have two children enrolled (24.76%); 10 have three or more children enrolled (9.52%), 2 were pregnant women served through the Early Head Start programs and 1 respondent (0.95%) was not enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start. Of the 101 that identified themselves, they included 87 biological parents (86.14%), 7 guardians (6.93%), 2 adoptive/foster parents (1.98%) and 5 extended family members (4.95%). The majority of respondents' children attend Center Based Head Start (54 respondents, 53.47%) or Center Based Early Head Start (67 respondents, 66.34%), and 5.94% of individuals (6) are enrolled in Early Head Start Home Based services. All of the EOA Head Start and Early Head Start centers were represented by families that responded to the survey.

Communication with Families. Respondents indicated families are most comfortable communicating in English (101 respondents, 79.53%), while 17.32% prefer communicating in Spanish (22) and 2.36% in Marshallese (3). The majority of families prefer to receive information from EOA through direct communication channels,

such as via text message (98, 77.17%), face-to-face (86, 67.72%), email (78, 61.42%) and phone calls (69, 54.33%).

Meeting Family Needs. As part of the Family Survey, families were asked about EOA program locations and schedules. For the majority of families, the location of EOA programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start centers, meet their needs (117 respondents, 94.35%).

Most (81, 79.41%) found that the EOA program schedules meets their needs. When asked how the program schedule could better meet their needs, later hours or provision of after-care (46, 65.71%) was the top response, followed by provision of a summer program (29, 41.43%), earlier hours (8, 11.43%), and transportation (7, 10%).

Satisfaction with Services, Barriers to Participation. A majority of families (108 respondents, 87.10%) are satisfied with the services provided by EOA. Specific to Head Start/Early Head Start families, the majority (114, 91.94%) agree that they are satisfied with the services they receive and believe the program is helping their child get ready for school, while 91.13% of families (113) agree that the program gives their child a safe place to learn and 89.52% believe the program provides them opportunities to better understand how to support their child's learning at home.

Families experience some barriers to participating in EOA programs. However, for the most frequently encountered barriers, respondents indicated that they are "small or medium" problems. These include work obligations (36.67%), child care needs (30.83%), challenges with transportation (16.67%), and access to technology (computer, cell phone etc.) (14.17%).

Community Snapshot. When families were asked what is best about the community where they live, the top three areas were parks and playgrounds, safety, and availability of jobs. Alternatively, the top areas where families indicated they would like to improve their community include affordable housing, better neighborhood relationships, and safety.

A majority of Head Start/Early Head Start families of families responding to the survey agree that they are satisfied with the services they receive from the Head Start/Early Head Start program and that the program is helping their child get ready for school and provides a safe learning environment.

Access to Services; Family Difficulties. The services that families indicate they most need or want, but cannot currently find or access, include affordable housing (27.93%), dental care (18.92%), and help learning how to manage money (17.12%). With regard to the need for affordable housing, the current housing situation of the respondents include renting (71.32%), homeowner (17.83%), living with a family member and not paying rent (7.75%) and temporary housing (3.10%).

Additional issues that were reported as larger problems for more families include: having enough money to pay for monthly bills and home utilities (e.g., heat, electricity, etc.) (66.7%), having enough money to buy food (49.07%), having difficulty getting help (financial, medical, transportation, child care etc. (35.19%), having enough room in the house for the people that live there (36.11%), and finding employment (25%). When asked if each issue was a small, medium, large, or very large problem, the two issues that were ranked as the largest problems (including responses indicating "medium" to "very large") were having enough money to pay for monthly bills and home utilities (31.5%) and having enough money to buy food (20.4%). A small number of families ranked the any of the issues above as a "very large problem" (0-3.7%).

Families who have difficulty accessing financial, medical, or other help report that they do not know what services are available (38.89%), they are uncomfortable asking for help (18.52%), their immigration status is an issue (6.48%) and “other” (7.4%). Individual comments include the following themes: the hours to access services are during the work day, the application process is difficult, missed deadlines, mental health services for adults are challenging to access, needed services are too far away, finding affordable housing is a challenge, and the cost of needed services is not affordable).

Family Stressors. The five biggest personal stressors for families are financial (34.29%), COVID-19 (30.48%), work/life balance (26.67%), access to child care (22.86%), and housing (22.86%). Additional stressors include access to dental care, food insecurity, and mental health.

Additional Notes on Family Survey. In open-ended responses, families commented on the Head Start/Early Head Start Program schedule, some lack of access to additional services (dental/medical for adults, nutrition, parenting guidance), and reflected on their positive experiences with the EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program.

Access to dental care for families was ranked as a low need by EOA staff and community partners, though family survey responses indicate there is a need in the community. The need may reference dental care for adults, as children have access through AR Kids First, the state children’s health insurance program. During the pandemic access to pediatric dentists has been limited; a backlog may still exist for pediatric care. According to some families, affordable dental care is not accessible.

Though not many families (3-6%) indicated access to technology devices or the internet/Wi-Fi as a need, both the staff and community provider survey indicate that this is a barrier for families when accessing resources. Though the survey was available through a paper version and electronically, all family survey respondents utilized technology to respond to the family survey electronically. This would indicate a strong relationship between the survey respondent and access to technology. However, it also indicates is a potential underreporting, as those lacking technology or Wi-Fi access likely did not participate in the survey.

Additionally, outside of face-to-face communication, most families indicated they prefer to be contacted by text message, email, and phone. Again, assuming survey respondents have access to technology and internet/Wi-Fi, these responses may not be fully representative of all parents’ preferences. When triangulating the data from all respondent types, it is likely that the family survey may underrepresent families access to technology and internet access.

Overall, families indicated their top concerns include: lack of affordable housing, financial issues including paying their bills and affording food and the COVID -19 pandemic. Other area of some concern include access to dental care, neighborhood safety, access to health insurance and mental health services. Families also showed a strong interest in longer hours in the Head Start/Early Head Start program.

Staff Input

As part of its 2022 Community Assessment, EOA also conducted a Staff Survey. A total of 76 staff members responded to the survey; this is a 54% response rate.

Five categories of staff were represented: Instructional (36, 47.37%), Management and Administrative (23, 30.3%), Support (9, 11.84%), Social Services (5, 6.58%), and Home-Based Program (3, 3.95%).



All EOA program types and locations are represented in survey responses. The greatest response rate was from those that work at the Pat Walker Center for Children (27.63%), followed by the Head Start Central Office in Fayetteville (12%), and the Springdale Head Start Center (12%).

Program Location and Schedule. EOA staff were asked to reflect on the locations and schedules of EOA programs. Staff members live in, or near, the EOA service area, with most staff reporting that they live in Springdale (28, 36.84%) followed by Fayetteville (20, 26.32%).

Reflecting on the EOA programs, most respondents (56, 77.78%) think the locations meet the needs of families, while 63.89% of staff members (46) believe the program schedules meet the needs of families.

Of the staff respondents that do not think the schedule meets the needs of families (34 respondents), most believe that later hours would help better meet the needs of families (26, 76.47%), followed by a summer program (14, 41.18%), transportation (13, 38.24%) and earlier hours (5, 14.71%). A number of staff also suggested offering services in rural areas, in the western and southern side of Washington County, and specifically in western Springdale. Here, families would have additional access to Head Start and Early Head Start programming.

Attitudes about the Head Start/Early Head Start

Program. Staff were asked their opinion about several factors of the Head Start/Early Head Start program. Most believe Head Start/Early Head Start staff reflect the language and culture of children and families served. Just over half believe the communities in which Head Start/Early Head Start families live are safe, and most believe the neighborhood of the office or center where they work is safe. Finally, most believe the Head Start/ Early Head Start program is helping to prepare children for school.

Staff responses when asked about the biggest stressors of families enrolled in EOA programs suggest there are multiple factors impacting families' lives in the service area. The top stressful areas that emerged are financial, employment, housing, food insecurity and transportation.

Stressors for Families. In order to gain a more holistic view of the needs and interests of families in the service area, EOA staff who work closely with families are also asked to provide reflections about families.

When asked about families' biggest stressors, survey results suggest that staff are aware of multiple factors impacting families' lives. The top areas that emerged as families' biggest stressors are financial (77.27%), employment (62.12%), housing (60.61%), food insecurity (53.03%), transportation (53.03%), and their child's behavior (51.52%).

Need for Services. The services that staff indicated they believe families most need or want are child care (ranked 5th by families), parenting support (ranked 7th by families), affordable housing (ranked 1st by families), housing/rental assistance (ranked 6th by families), and food assistance (ranked 8th by parents). Less than 3% of the staff indicated that families need senior services or foster care.

Barriers for Families. When asked what barriers staff think the families face, the top responses included limited knowledge of what resources are available (69.70%), fear/reluctance to access services (62.12%), affordability of needed services (48.48%), language (48.48%) and availability of needed services (33.33%). Families reflected similar barriers; not knowing what resources were available was a top reason they had difficulty accessing help. About a quarter of family respondents also indicated they were uncomfortable asking for help, or do not ask for help due to their immigration status. It is plausible that more families who fear asking for help who did not respond to the survey at all, resulting in an underrepresentation of this less engaged population.

Personal Stressors for Staff. When asked about stressors in their personal lives, respondents indicated their biggest personal stressors are work/life balance (41.89%), financial (35.14%), and mental health (22.97%). This was followed by COVID-19/Coronavirus (18.92%) and access to medical care (16.22%).

Meeting Families' Needs. A majority of staff believe that EOA's strengths include the ability to connect families with resources (89.39%), establishing relationships with families (86.36%), bilingual staffing (63.64%), and the level of staff experience and expertise (57.58%). Another 43.94% of staff believe that the provision of culturally aligned services is a strength in EOA programs.

Further, some staff believe that the Head Start/Early Head Start program can improve services to better meet the needs of families by establishing new or improved partnerships with community agencies (53.03%), improving communication with parents/clients (43.94%), improving referrals to community service providers (40.91%), offering more and/or greater variety of services or training opportunities (37.88%), and providing a greater degree of case management support (21.21%).

In response to an open-ended question regarding how EOA could better meet the needs of children and families, responses from individual staff members included the following themes:

- increasing the knowledge level and ability of direct teaching staff to provide resource and referral information to families,
- increasing staff training regarding challenging behaviors of children in the classroom, improving communication between teachers and the Family Advocates,
- creating a single point of access for families to EOA programs and services
- having more Marshallese translators to assist that population in accessing resources.

Community Input

A Community Provider Survey gathered information from community agencies about their experiences with the service area population and their ideas for improved collaboration and coordination. Thirty respondents completed the Community Provider Survey, representing Washington, Benton, Carroll, and Madison County.

Agencies responding to the survey represent community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, the private and public sector, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and child care providers. The community respondents provide an array of services including food assistance, mental

health services, educational services, child care, dental and health care, housing and rental assistance, job search and training, substance abuse treatment support, faith-based services, therapy services, senior services, transportation supports, and immigration services.

Twenty-three respondents (76.67%) to the Community Provider Survey are current partners of EOA. Respondents primarily provide their services for free (70%) or on a sliding scale based on income.

Respondents to the Community Provider Survey indicated that their communications with families in the community trend toward traditional communication methods, including face-to-face (77.78%) and phone calls (62.96%). There is also some trending toward the use of technology, including the use of Facebook (44.4%) text messages (44.4%), and email (40.74%).

Community Snapshot. Reflecting on what they think is best about the community where their agency provides services, many respondents selected services offered by community organizations (66.67%), followed by the quality of educational institutions (55.56%), diversity (51.85%), availability of jobs (48.15%) and the parks and playgrounds and safety (both 44.44%).

Changes in Use of Community Resources. The respondents reported observing the greatest increases in their communities in the following areas in the past year:

- 74.07% observed an increase in job availability in the community;
- 70.37% observed an increase in the number of families contacting their agency;
- 66.67% observed an increase in transportation needs;
- 55.56% observed an increase in homelessness; and
- 44.44% observed an increase in drug abuse in the community.

Many respondents indicated observing a decrease in housing availability (51.85%), the number of licensed child care providers (37.04%), and average household incomes (37.04%). These items align closely with concerns the families report in the family survey.

A majority of respondents reported that they have observed no change in teen pregnancy (81.48%), the number of families slightly over the agency income guidelines that are contacting the agency (70.37%) and the number of female heads of households (62.96%).

Barriers. When asked about the most common barriers to low-income families accessing resources, the top responses from community providers included lack of bilingual staff at point of service (84%), limited knowledge of what resources are available (84%), language (76%), affordability of needed resources (72%), fear or reluctance to access services (72%), access to technology/devices (64%) and to the internet/Wi-Fi (60%).

A majority of respondents believe low-income families may not be able to find or access affordable housing (72%). Some respondents (44%) also believe low-income families may not be able to find or access internet/Wi-Fi, technology devices, child care, substance abuse treatment, help learning to manage money, legal aid, and transportation.

Stressors for Families. When asked what they believe are families' biggest stressors, community providers indicated many areas such as financial (84%), housing (68%), food insecurity (64%), mental health (64%), COVID-19 (56%), and how to manage their child's challenging behavior (56%). While staff and community

providers note that challenging behaviors are a stressor for families they observe, only 12% of families surveyed by EOA noted this as a concern.

Reflections on Local Agencies. Most respondents believe the strengths of their agency include staff experience and expertise (88%), the ability to connect families with resources (80%), bilingual staff (70%), established relationships with families (68%), and culturally aligned services (40%).

In response to open-ended questions, community providers offered several ideas for future partnerships with EOA including developing a resource day to let families know what the agencies in the area offer, continued growth of existing partnerships, and creating opportunities for the synergy of child care and employment for families.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



In EOA's service area, there are social services resources available to families in addition to those offered by the program. EOA has formal and informal partnerships that help the agency provide comprehensive services to children and connect families to resources.

Serving a diverse population of children and families, EOA strives to connect families to services and make information available to families in their primary language.

Education. Community education resources – early education, K-12, and higher education – provide a continuum of support from birth

through college. Having resources available to support child development and student achievement enhances the overall economic welfare of a community. In EOA's service area, there are many educational opportunities for children and families. Public and private higher education programs are available across the service area, as well as adult education and GED programs. Post-secondary education opportunities include four-year universities, technical colleges, and community college, in addition to educational training provided by local organizations. While opportunities are prevalent, families may face barriers accessing needed services.

EOA has formal and informal partnerships that help the agency to provide comprehensive services to children and connect families to resources.

Health. The health, mental health, oral health, and nutrition service providers and partners in Washington County and neighboring counties are essential for eligible children and families to maintain an up-to-date health status and access preventative and ongoing healthcare.

In general, health care services are widely available throughout the service area. There are rehabilitation hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, substance abuse treatment facilities, and behavioral health centers, as well as general hospitals. In Washington County, the ratios of individuals to health providers (primary, dental, mental health) are low. There may be some gaps in access, as described in the report. EOA leadership team members also report a gap in adult dental services, and some reluctance and challenges for families to connect with mental health supports.

Social Services. Across the service area, there are organizations providing social services to individuals, such as public assistance coordination and food and clothing assistance. There is state, city, and local departments supporting the public assistance needs of service area families. Families also have access to public health departments, housing authorities, and WIC providers. Survey results suggest that lack of affordable housing and transportation are among the largest challenges for families.

As highlighted in survey data, while there are many social services available, there are also barriers to accessing those resources for families enrolled in EOA programs. Challenges include finances and awareness of the available of resources. Community programs are available to connect residents to resources, but some families are not aware of them (e.g., 2-1-1 program operated by United Way directs families to local resources for utility, food, etc.).

Services for Vulnerable Populations. EOA serves a critical role in supporting vulnerable populations. Through Head Start/Early Head Start services, EOA partners with other community organizations to meet the needs of a diverse group of families through bilingual services. EOA is deeply engaged in understanding and responding to families' needs with culturally sensitive, comprehensive services.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS OF POVERTY

Assessment of the Needs of the Community



As evidenced throughout this Community Assessment, multiple challenges have a cumulative and intricate impact on some families living in the service area. EOA, together with its community partners, seeks to provide assistance and meaningful support in order to achieve its vision: Northwest Arkansas as a resilient community where children and families experiencing adverse circumstances have the opportunity to thrive, become self-sufficient, and live an improved quality of life.

The average cost of housing is \$794 per month in Washington County and consequently 34.7% of households in the county are spending more than 35% or more of their income on rent alone. Living on a fixed income or an income that is below living-wage, community members are often faced with the challenge of finding and maintaining affordable housing. The threat of potentially losing housing can destabilize all other positive efforts.

A staggering 46% of the service area population is living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). These households are unable to afford basic necessities, making the path out of poverty and into independent stability is improbable.

Though Washington County offers multiple food banks, as well as nutritional resource and food distribution efforts, food insecurity is prevalent. There are six low income, low access food tracts in the service area. Additionally, 49% of EOA family survey respondents show this need is far from met, as they report that having enough money to buy food is a problem for their household. Food and shelter are fundamental basic needs for survival. Without them, economic growth and stability are nearly impossible. Such basic insecurity also increases chronic stress for under resourced families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional stress with an overarching upheaval to families across the globe with widespread disruption to family life due to school closures, reduced access to child care, social

isolation, household crowding, economic losses and associated consequences (e.g., job loss, food insecurity etc.). During the pandemic, women are disproportionately at particular risk for leaving the workforce due to the potential increase in child care responsibilities. Overall, these social disruptions pose a significant threat to the mental health of parents and their children. The pandemic also increased the risk of poor nutrition among children, their potential for exposure to domestic violence, isolation from mandated reporters and increased anxiety and stress. In February 2022, thirty five percent of adults in Arkansas, living in households with children birth to age 17, reported that they felt nervous, anxious or on edge for more than half of the days or nearly every day in the past 14 days.^{clxxxiii}

EOA remains committed to understanding and supporting the evolving and expanding needs of the community, in partnership with other relevant community agencies, to support and increase stability and self-sufficiency for individuals and families experiencing poverty.

REFLECTIONS

As described throughout the Community Assessment report, there is great diversity of need in Washington County. When reviewing local data within Washington County, that diversity of need becomes most evident. By targeting services to areas with high rates of child poverty and serving low-income families, EOA is skilled at providing services to the children and families most in need.

Drawing from the data and findings of the EOA 2022 Community Assessment, and observations from leadership team members, the following reflections capture key takeaways.

Reflection 1: EOA HS/EHS Program Design. EOA Head Start/Early Head Start program regularly engages in the best practice of reviewing slot allocations in the context of community-wide trends (e.g., availability of publicly funded pre-kindergarten, demand for infant/toddler care, and wait list data) to explore strategies that support full enrollment across the program. Continue this practice in order to respond to changes in community needs when they arise. Continue to explore updates to program schedules to ensure the needs of working families are met.

Reflection 2: Expansion of Birth to Age Five Program. Consider leveraging EOA's history, expertise, and successes to provide early childhood services to additional children and families, including the Head Start and Early Head Start program, EOA Children's House Program, and SafeCare Arkansas. Explore opportunities to expand services to additional eligible children and families, or neighboring service areas to meet the demand in the community. Additionally, seek expansion in the provision of services to children living in ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), that are over income eligibility requirements. These families struggle to meet basic needs, such as access to affordable early education programming. A potential opportunity includes United Way grant funding to support 18 children in a Fayetteville Head Start program.

Additionally, EOA will continue to explore updates to program schedules to ensure the needs of working families are met and will review the location where children and families live that are in need of programming (e.g., northwest area of Washington County, specifically, west of Interstate 49).

Reflection 3: Staff Professional Development, Training and Retention. Continue to communicate with staff regarding their professional development and training needs to support them in meeting their professional goals. Review staff's interest in management/leadership training more closely and leverage this interest to support staff members' professional growth within the agency.

Review staff workloads and schedules to identify more flexible staffing patterns (while maintaining adult-child ratios) to support the work/life balance of staff. This may include rotating schedules, job shares, and/or longer days with shorter weeks.

Conduct an updated wage and benefits comparability study to analyze EOA program's employee compensation system compared to other community programs serving individuals with a similar demographic (e.g., public schools, local child care centers etc.). To continue to implement high quality programming, EOA must remain competitive in attracting and maintaining qualified personnel.

Establish more robust and intentional mental health supports for children, families, and staff. Integrate resources from national, regional, and statewide projects to enhance social and emotional supports in each center-based setting. Continue to build a program-wide culture that incorporates and embraces an understanding of ACEs and trauma-informed care for children, families, and staff.

Reflection 4: Parent Training and Employment. Continue to leverage community partnerships with current partners and formalize access to internal resources related to employment skill building and job search. Explore new strategies, including partnerships, to provide educational counseling, job training, and resources to families. Collaborate with community partners and local employers to address specific barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment (e.g., child care, transportation, work history, issues with a background check etc.). Continuously evaluate current programming to ensure strong outcomes and increase effectiveness, such as the innovative EOA Step Up Case Management Program, which assists individuals and families transition out of poverty by setting attainable goals to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of economic stability and self-sufficiency.

Reflection 5: Continued efforts toward bilingual supports and cultural alignment. Seek to help expand families' access to bilingual, culturally sensitive resource providers in the community, and collaborate with community agencies to address language barriers that families may face when accessing EOA resources and supports. Continue to make bilingual services available to families in the community that are interested in EOA programs and help to identify bilingual service providers to meet enrolled children's needs. One particular focus will be to continue to meet the language and cultural needs of the Marshallese population to expand access to, and understanding of, the EOA programs available.

Reflection 6: Affordable Housing and Homelessness. Continue to advocate for, and provide support to, families experiencing homelessness and those on the brink of homelessness (e.g., provision of rental assistance funds to support housing deposit and first month's rent). Use Community Assessment data and updated data sources to understand the locations with high rates of homelessness in the service area. Ensure that families are aware of, and understand, the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and how it impacts eligibility for and services available from EOA, including the Head Start/Early Head start program. Continue to explore and address housing needs and homelessness in partnership with community partners.

Reflection 7: Impact of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an extended impact on communities in the EOA service area. Regularly reviewing community data to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 on families will continue to benefit families served by EOA. Data such as unemployment, child welfare, food insecurity, substance abuse, mental health, timely preventive and primary care, and homelessness may be considered. Continuing to leverage partnerships and community resources will help EOA to better support vulnerable

families, including those on the verge of homelessness, single parents, bilingual families, and grandparents or other relatives raising young children.

Reflection 8: Building and Strengthening Partnerships. Ensure EOA representatives continue to participate on local task forces with community partners to address evolving challenges and develop strategic plans for partnerships. Focus of such committees may include housing, job training/availability, child welfare/foster care, mental health, and substance misuse, among others. Identify possible advocacy action steps each partner can take, as appropriate. Coordinate communication and strategic planning efforts of EOA task force members to ensure community-wide efforts impact programming for families with the greatest needs in the community.

LOOKING AHEAD



EOA will use the data and information emerging from the 2022 Community Assessment to support program planning in the agency's continued efforts to meet children and families' needs, in partnership with community resource providers.

The HSPPS and CSBG requirements to annually review and update the Community Assessment provides EOA with an opportunity to continuously reflect upon data and respond to community trends. With evolving data as a driving factor for understanding and meeting community needs, EOA will continue its mission to partner with families to support child and families in the county's most vulnerable communities.

Monitoring Community Data in Response to COVID-19

Due to lag times in the collection and reporting of community data, more data and information helpful for EOA program planning will become available in coming months and years. Monitoring data on a regular basis will assist the Head Start/Early Head Start program to collect and respond to evolving community needs.

It is likely that Head Start/Early Head Start providers will experience increasing demand for services as families continue to face high rates of unemployment and mounting economic challenges. Regular analysis of community data will assist EOA to adapt and respond to the most pressing needs of eligible children and families in the service area.

ⁱ EOA FY2020 CSBG Program Year (Oct. 1, 2019 – Sept. 30, 2020)

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

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