



Northwest Community Action, Inc.

2023-2024 Head Start
Community Action Needs Assessment



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Northwest Community Action Community Assessment March 2023

Executive Summary

Northwest Community Action, Inc. (NWCA) Head Start provides comprehensive services to children and families in Marshall, Roseau, Kittson, and Lake of the Woods counties in the Northwestern corner of Minnesota. This needs assessment was conducted to help inform Head Start's current programming and future planning.

Information is gathered from state and federal government sites, nonprofit organizations, and school districts, as well as ongoing feedback from Head Start parents, Head Start Policy Council, community partners, and responses to surveys. Responses indicate that Head Start is well regarded in the community and one of NWCA's most well-known programs. As poverty and related complications from it continue to be prevalent in our counties, the need for Head Start continues to be and becomes even more critical for children and parents/caregivers.

Mission Statement

Northwest Head Start seeks to assist children to achieve appropriate physical and developmental growth, increasing self-confidence, and improving and expanding each child's ability to think, reason, and communicate with others. Northwest Head Start also seeks to assist parents and families to improve their parenting skills, self-sufficiency, and the conditions in which they live, learn, and work.

Demographics

Our service area is bounded west by North Dakota and north by Canada (Manitoba and Ontario). This vast rural service area covers 6,500 square miles, in which over 32,000 people reside. Our communities range in size from 50 to 2,700 people. According to the United States Census Bureau, the population in all four counties have continued to decrease while the rest of the state population is on the rise.

Population

Report Area	2010 Population	2020 Population	2021 Population	2010-2021 Population percent change
Kittson	4,552	4,207	4,157	-8.68%
Lake of the Woods	4,045	3,763	3,828	-5.36%
Marshall	9,439	9,040	9,012	-4.52%
Roseau	15,629	15,331	15,268	-2.31%
Minnesota	5,303,925	5,706,494	5,742,036	7.63%

Data source: US Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts> and [data.census.gov](https://www.census.gov) <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/2020-population-and-housing-state-data.html> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/MN>
<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/>

Work Force

Historically, this area has depended primarily on agriculture as the primary economic base. Largely this remains true, but the number of people directly involved in farming has dropped significantly as farms grow larger (Minnesota Extension Service). During the last 25 years, the growth of large world recognized industrial employers has been dramatic in our geographical area. Marvin ~~Windows and Doors~~, Polaris, Inc.,



Central Boiler, ANI Pharmaceuticals Inc., and Mattracks Inc. all employ thousands of full and part-time people on swing shifts. The impact of the Seven Clans Resort and Casino, as well as the Lake of the Woods fishing and resort industry, has also had an impact on employment. Both the large companies and area small businesses are hiring; however, the large companies have begun bringing in out of town contracted workers to fill open jobs, or are not able to offer full-time work due to shortage in the supply chain.

Many of the jobs, particularly the Casino and resorts are lower paying, part-time or seasonal jobs. When available, other area entry level job rates are often as low as \$12/hr., and at the casino and resorts starting pay is even lower. Many of these entry level jobs are part-time. Due to the education level of many of the families we serve, they are increasingly those that are laid off, or working part-time.

Our area’s unemployment rate is close to that of the state average in part because the large companies are not laying off staff when there is a lull in supply or production, employees are simply not offered the hours to work. The majority of our families have both parents working, or if a single parent household that parent is working.

Children living in families lacking secure parental employment are vulnerable. Children are more likely to fall into poverty without at least one parent employed full time. Yet too many parents who want full-time work are forced to piece together part-time or temporary jobs that do not provide sufficient or stable income; some lack the education and skills needed to secure a good job. Even a full-time job at low wages does not necessarily lift a family out of poverty.

Unemployment

Report Area	Unemployment Rate 2021	Unemployment Rate 2022	Unemployment Claims in 2021	Unemployment Claims in 2022
Kittson	2.1%	3.2%	128	130
Lake of the Woods	3.1%	3.7%	297	201
Marshall	3.2%	5.6%	687	371
Roseau	2.2%	3.0%	963	1,090
Minnesota	2.2%	3.0%	344,283	214,421

Data source: MN Employment and Economic Development- www.mn.gov/deed/data- County Unemployment Rate Local Area Unemployment Statistics- <https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/lmi/ui/Results.aspx?area=R01000&date=202111> County Unemployment Rate- <https://mn.gov/deed/data/current-econ-highlights/county-unemployment.jsp> <https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/unemployment-insurance-statistics/uimonthly.jsp>

Quality education from pre-kindergarten through adulthood is one of the best tools for moving individuals out of poverty and toward self-sufficiency. Research has shown that a quality education has benefits for both the individual and community.

Service Area Education Levels

Education level	Service Area
No HS Grad or GED	7.4%
HS Grad, GED,	36.7%
Some college, Vocational, or AA	35.46%
Bachelors or higher	20.5%

Data Source: <https://factfinder.census.gov>- American community survey- Education



NWCA is also aware children living in poverty experience a wide variety of risk factors, ranging from health concerns to increased difficulties at school. Research shows that on average, families require a household income of about twice federal poverty guidelines to cover basic expenses.

Transportation

Many teens and young adults have said they never intend to get a license. The reasons are complex, but as with every other significant social shift, economic factors play a dominant role.

The most recent Federal Highway Administration data shows that just over a quarter (25.6 percent) of 16-year-olds became licensed drivers in 2018, and only 61 percent of teens had their licenses by age 18.

Poverty also contributes to the ability to own and utilize a vehicle for employment. Only 13 % of persons age 16 and older, within poverty guidelines up to 149% owned a vehicle. The cost of buying an additional vehicle is too much for many families. Even sharing a single vehicle carries substantial financial burdens in the form of insurance, gas, and maintenance costs.

Data: <https://api.census.gov/data/2018/acs/ars5>

For victims of domestic violence, a driver's license is a necessity, not a luxury. Victims need a license to get a restraining order against their abuser, get a job, drive their kids to medical appointments or school, and access city and state resources. Having a driver's license and/or a vehicle provides choices and options to change a domestic situation.

Due to our rural service area, the need for reliable transportation increases. Public transportation is not available and winter weather raises the caution for safety.

Persons in Poverty

Service Area	Percent
Kittson	9.8%
Lake of the Woods	10.4%
Marshall	16.8%
Roseau	9.9%
Minnesota	9.3%

Data Source: <https://factfinder.census.gov>- American community survey- Education

Data Source: NWCA 2022-2023 PIR Report C.34

Another factor of low-income households & extreme poverty can influence child health and cognitive child development. However, poverty does indeed impact growth from early childhood, starting with brain development and other body systems. Poverty itself can negatively affect how the body and mind develop, and economic hardship can alter the fundamental structure of the child's brain. Children who directly or indirectly experience risk factors associated with poverty have higher odds of experiencing poor health problems as adults such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, obesity, certain cancers, and even a shorter life expectancy.

Data Source: <https://www.all4kids.org/news/blog/poverty-and-its-effects-on-children/>

Childcare

Approximately 61% of our families use at least part-time childcare, but much of that is furnished by other family members or friends. The cost of childcare in our area is relatively low compared to the Minnesota average of areas at approximately \$710 a month for one child, per Kids Count data center. Although the cost may seem low we are continuing to experience a childcare shortage in our area, so even if families



could afford childcare or qualify for childcare assistance they are not likely to find many options. This is especially the case for children aged 2 and under. We find that in families with infants, the mothers are less likely to work outside the home for the first couple of years of the child’s life (HSPiR). Families are also reluctant to change childcare arrangements unless there is evidence of poor, insufficient care. Also impacting families is relatively low sliding-fee childcare assistance, our families with two working parents do not qualify for the childcare assistance program. There is one childcare center in our extended EHS service area. All other childcare is in family childcare homes. These factors speak to our reliance on center-based options, and fewer home visits in our 3-5-year-old program. With fewer parents at home, providing added center time, continuing with full days where space is available, and adding days assists the parents by reducing their childcare and transportation costs (2021-2022 HS Survey).

Licensed Family-Based Childcare

Location	2018	2019	2020	2021
Kittson	15	16	13	15
Lake of the Woods	10	8	5	9
Marshall	62	56	55	52
Roseau	53	56	51	44
Minnesota	7,947	7,636	7,383	6,666

Data Source: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/customreports/3861,3865,3871,3894/any>

Family-Based Childcare Willing to Accept or Accepting Child Care Assistance Program

Location	2018	2019	2020	2021
Kittson	10	10	8	15
Lake of the Woods	8	6	3	4
Marshall	45	41	39	39
Roseau	36	36	32	34
Minnesota	4,494	4,237	3,965	3,595

Data Source: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/customreports/3861,3865,3871,3894/any>

Local Community Design Needs

With those trends continuing, Northwest continues to provide center time for Head Start children that meet both children’s and parents’ needs. Northwest’s Head Start costs remain stable since the added time is in classrooms contributed by each school district. However, as school districts ramp up their preschool programs by adding more classes or longer sessions, additional facility space for Head Start to increase classroom days for our children may be limited depending on building plans.

Our locally designed option waiver in Roseau was implemented in part because of limited space and high numbers of eligible students. Another locally designed option waiver is also needed in the Marshall County Central School District. The classroom space is shared between Head Start and the public school’s School Readiness program.

Given the overall low numbers of children in our services area and enrollment projected to continue to remain low, it is important to continue to build on our efforts of sharing programming, staff, training, and other services. Flexible solutions for each community will be necessary. Those solutions may need to include specific local combinations that address the need for services for a small number of participants in conjunction with the local school partner



While there are no major changes in the demographic statistics in our communities Roseau County continues to be our most populated area with the highest number of income eligible families. Due to local manufacturing needs at Polaris Industries in Roseau, MN there has been an influx of Spanish speaking families from Puerto Rico. These families generally have one parent working and may qualify for Head Start and Early Head Start services. Recruitment materials have been translated into Spanish and outreach has been made to Polaris, Roseau County Social Services, and the Roseau School District.

There is strong community support for local education. Our communities support their local, small school consistently in tax matters as well as good programming. Within each of the 11 school districts in our Head Start service area, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) services are provided, but not in each community. The two additional school districts in our Early Head Start service area provide similar services. The focus in most of our school districts is on providing School Readiness (state funded preschool) for 4-year-olds, so there is very little opportunity for the parents of infants and toddlers. There are 13 school buildings present in Northwest’s service area but there are no comprehensive 0-2 programs in our communities and only one childcare center in our extended EHS service area. The two additional EHS schools provide services for children, ages 0 to 5, and their families but those opportunities are few. Approximately 50% of our enrolled families participate in their school district’s program.

Medically Underserved

The Grygla and Badger community schools continue to present enrollment concerns. After several years of declining population, the number of available eligible 3 and 4-year old has declined to the point that providing a program can present challenges. We serve these communities under Section 645(a)(2) [42 U.S.C. 9840] regarding participation in Head Start programs. These communities have fewer than 1000 people, have no other preschool program, are in a designated medically underserved area, and are geographically isolated from other preschool programs. The nearest alternative available is more than 20 miles away with no public transportation available. Northwest will continue to work with these communities to meet their children and family needs.

Designated Rural, Primary Care, and Medically Underserved Areas (MUA)

Service Area Name	Designation Type	County	Status	Rural Status	Designation Date
ROSEAU SERVICE AREA	MUA	Roseau County	Designated	Rural	03/25/1982
Marshall County	MUA	Marshall County	Designated	Rural	11/01/1978
Low Income - Lake of the Woods County	MUA	Lake of the Woods County	Designated	Rural	08/30/2013
KITTSON SERVICE AREA	MUA	Kittson County	Designated	Rural	12/08/1997

Data Source: <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/mua-find>

Rural Dental Health and Early Prevention

Children on Medicaid are not receiving enough dental treatment. Only 50% of the children between the ages of 3 and 17 on Medicaid have had a dental appointment within the past year (2019), the ADA Health Policy Institute reports. Also, one fifth of the adolescents in the country have untreated dental decay, with most of those African-American or Hispanic or from low-income households, according to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.

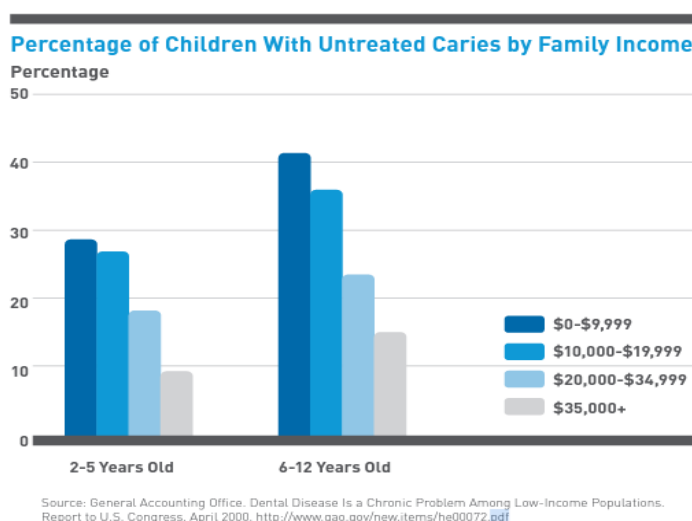


There is a common lack of awareness among those on Medicaid in regards to dental benefits. The ADA Health Policy Institute (HPI) reports that 31.3% of people enrolled in Medicaid were unsure of their dental benefits while on Medicaid.

The second challenge is the insufficient number of dentists who accept Medicaid. In 2018, 38% or about 75,000 of the 200,000 licensed dentists in the United States accepted Medicaid, according to the ADA. Many dentists who responded to a survey by The Wealthy Dentist are reluctant to accept Medicaid patients because Medicaid typically pays as little as half of what private insurance pays for the same procedures.

Early childhood caries, or tooth decay, is the most common chronic disease among children in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information on caries (tooth decay and crumbling of a tooth or bone). Early childhood caries is an infectious disease that can begin as early as teeth appear (usually around six months) and spreads quickly. This type of decay can cause severe pain to the child and can affect talking, speech, eating, sleeping, learning and playing.

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) report, more than one-third of children have early childhood caries by the time they enter kindergarten. Many children with this type of decay require operations to treat the disease that may range anywhere from \$2,000 to \$5,000 per child per year. And even though the disease is common and expensive to treat, it is preventable.



BY THE AGE OF 3

5-10%
of U.S. children have oral health issues

BY AGE 5

ABOUT 60%
of U.S. children will have had caries at some point, including the 40 percent of children who have it when they enter kindergarten.

While completing a search for a dentist on *ADA Find-a-Dentist* site, for Roseau, Kittson and Marshall county; 5 dentists in Grand Forks, North Dakota (averaging over 100 miles) showed as accepting Medicaid. The search for Baudette in Lake of the Woods county, 1 dentist showing Medicaid as a payment source in International Falls, MN (average 70 miles).

Rural areas need flexibility and resources to develop innovative solutions that meet their specific needs. Prevention needs to be at the front line of rural oral health care, with systematic approaches that cross health professions and health sectors.

<https://www.dentistrytoday.com/a-lack-of-awareness-impacts-the-care-of-medicaid-dental-patients>
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/oralhealth/programs/healthybaby.html>
<https://findadentist.ada.org/>



Eligibility

The estimated number of children income eligible/other eligible for our programs is under 500, (MN Dept of Ed, School Census, Agency/CDF). Data tends to show more eligible children in the 0-2 age range than in the 3 to 4-year old's group. Our recruiting continues to focus on finding and serving the relatively low numbers of ethnic minorities as well as children in poverty. The poverty rate in our service area is similar to that of the state with our local rate being roughly 10%, with children in poverty rates running slightly higher.

Population by Ethnicity/Race Composition	Service Area Percentage	Head Start/Early Head Start Percentages
Caucasian	95.12%	79%
American Indian	1.0%	5%
Asian	1.4%	0%
Black	.65%	1%
Hispanic/Latino	2.6%	4%
Bi-Racial	1.78%	11%

Data source: NWCA PIR 2022-2023 PIR Report A.25 and <https://factfinder.census.gov>- American community survey <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts>
 Data Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MN>

Homeschool

Meeting the families where they are, is a cornerstone of Head Start. During COVID-19, families choosing to homeschool increased, and continues to be a choice for families in our area. Parents of homeschooled students ages 5 through 17 with a grade equivalent of kindergarten through 12th grade were asked to identify all reasons that applied to their decision to homeschool their child in 2019. More than two-thirds of homeschooled students had parents who selected one or more of the following as a reason for homeschooling: a concern about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure (80 percent); a desire to provide moral instruction (75 percent); emphasis on family life together (75 percent); and dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools (73 percent). In addition, parents of homeschooled students were asked to identify the single most important reason to homeschool their child in 2019. The most common was a concern about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure (25 percent). Fifteen percent of homeschooled students had parents who reported that the most important reason was dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools. Thirteen percent had parents who reported that the most important reason was a desire to provide religious instruction.

Data: NCE.ed.gov

Childhood Special Needs

Each school district also provides Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) to those children that qualify. In each instance, Northwest collaborates with the school districts or other partners' programs and staff to meet the individual unique needs of each child. Participation in the region's Interagency Early Intervention program for children 0-4 has been useful for Northwest and other participants in developing, and carrying out child and family service plans. It also provides networking and sharing opportunities with other service providers. Continued support and cooperation with other partnering agencies are necessary for optimum services and efficiency. The goal of these collaborations is an integrated, mainstreamed center with staff from each agency providing services as much as possible within the classroom setting.

Special Needs children per school district (IEP, IFSP)	School District	Head Start/ Early Head Start
Kittson County	112	4



Lake of the Woods County	55	1
Marshall County	525	5
Roseau County	480	25
Total	1,172	32

Data source: NWCA 2022-2023 PIR Report C.25, C.27; National Center for Education Statistics <https://nces.ed.gov>, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data>

The primary disabilities our enrollees qualify for IEPs/IFSPs are speech impairments, language impairments, hearing impairments, autism, and developmental delays.

Mental Health continues to be a growing need for our children and family members. Northwest has contracted with partners to assist with information, consultations, and referrals. Our main contracted partner, Alluma, will continue meeting with each classroom’s staff team to help with mental health strategies to use with students, as well as with EHS home visitors to guide them in the use of strategies to help teach parents.

The full implementation of Conscious Discipline (CD); an evidence-based, trauma-informed approach to social-emotional learning, began this year with a week-long training for an implementation team. A presenter re-introduced CD to all staff at the preservice. This was followed up with the focus of monthly staff meeting training being CD focused; including our early childhood instructional coach focusing that month’s group coaching sessions on the CD topic. This program will be utilized with HS/ EHS children and parents on home visits and in the classroom. Further implementation of CD will happen next program year with the introduction of the Policy Council-approved family engagement curriculum.

Northwest’s partnerships also include each county’s Nursing Service/Public Health. By contracting with them for health screenings for all enrollees, Northwest can utilize this community resource and its information. This relationship assists Northwest in understanding community health goals and needs. The information collected from all sources indicates that children and families are accessing necessary supports such as Free and Reduced Meals, the SNAP program, WIC, and local food pantries so that their nutritional needs can be met.

Report Area	Total Students	Students on Free/Reduced Lunch	HS/EHS students on SNAP
Kittson	597	236	7
Lake of the Woods	443	202	17
Marshall	1296	519	11
Roseau	2676	896	27
Total	5012	1853	62

Data Source: MN Dept of Health <https://mndatamaps.web.health.state.mn.us/interactive/frpl.html> Free & Reduced-Price Lunch data map; nces.ed.gov

Nutrition/Food Support

A survey in the fall of 2021 indicates that too often families continue to make choices about their food that are not considered to be healthy and nutritious. Our efforts in family support and outreach will continue. A continued topic at parent meetings is nutrition. Northwest will continue to contract with a Dietician for the 22-23 school year who helps to give added training to staff about the importance of nutrition so that they are better equipped to teach parents. Efforts have been made to include information about the weekly healthy snack provided at centers to parents. The health screening tool used provides each family’s account of their eating and nutrition patterns gain. Families are reporting adequate nutrition. However, other



providers; such as dietitians; are seeing the need for healthier choices and further nutrition education. School districts are also seeing the need to further nutrition for their students, and three of our districts continue to offer the back-pack food program sending nutritious food home over the weekends to those children in need. Schools continue to work to meet nutritional needs and have gotten funding from the government to offer free meals to all students.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Children with families accessing (SNAP)	Kittson	Lake of the Woods	Marshall	Roseau
Under 1 year old	6	5	9	18
1 year old	10	10	20	49
2-year old	12	11	22	46
3-year old	18	11	26	45
4-year old	18	10	29	64
5-year old	20	14	29	59

Data Source: <https://public.education.mn.gov/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=514>.

Head Start Eligible Children and Families

Program	Head Start		Early Head Start	
	2021	2022	2021	2022
Family composition				
Single adult household	36%	40%	30%	36%
Two adult household	64%	60%	70%	67%

Data source: NWCA 2022-2023 PIR Report C.43

By raising the income threshold, we can ensure that low-income families burdened by high expenses, such as childcare and medical expenses, can put food on their tables and we can make Minnesota a healthier place for all who live in it. SNAP Income Limit Increase to 200% in the Fall of 2022.

Children living in food-insecure households face myriad challenges to their well-being. We found negligible impacts of food insecurity transitions on first-grade academic achievement. However, we found consistent negative impacts of the transitions on teachers’ reports of children’s externalizing behaviors, self-control, and interpersonal skills and on parents’ reports of children’s overall health status. Taken together, our findings underline the importance of food security for children’s healthy development.

Data Source: HealthAffairs.org

Housing

Local Schools, county Social Services, county Nursing Services/Public Health, and all other community partners assist Northwest with referrals and ongoing support. They also are active recipients of Northwest’s referrals, including referrals for the children in the foster care systems within our service area. Within the 2022-2023 school year, there were 7 Head Start children in foster care and 35 children who were homeless (NWCA 2022-2023 PIR A.13.c). Community partners that provide family social services participate with Northwest on County Collaborative Committees, and through their input have been able to better Family Outcomes. Building these relationships is important for helping our families smoothly access services. It will remain a goal to continue and build on these effective partnerships as the input from community partners, staff members, parents, and Policy Council members has provided information regarding the needs of families in our area and what responses could be effective.

Northwest’s housing services include advocacy for families to help find their housing through the Family Self-Sufficiency program (FSS), as well as utilizing the Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Family



Homeless and Prevention Assistance Program (FHPAP), Transitional Housing Program (THP), Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YDH), COVID housing assistance program (CHAP), and FEMA housing program (ESGI). There continues to be a strong need for affordable housing in our service area. Due to this, new families to our service area and programs will continue to have housing needs. Northwest also participates in new initiatives that arise for funding affordable housing.

Children in Out of Home Placement

County	2018	2019	2020
Kittson	15	10	11
Lake of the Woods	6	11	7
Marshall	19	16	10
Roseau	23	43	30
Minnesota	16,488	15,297	13,442

Data Source: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

The population of children was placed in care before age 5. Children in care had 57% greater odds of being in the lowest 10% in at least one developmental area (*physical well-being, social competence, communication and general knowledge, emotional maturity, language, and cognitive development*). While children placed in the care of Child Protective Services before age 5 were significantly less ready for school on each specific developmental Early Development Index domain, the biggest odds ratio was seen for emotional maturity, while the smallest odds ratio was for language and cognitive development.

Data Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/>

Community Input

Parents, staff, and community partners were spot-surveyed in the spring of 2022 to gain their input on needs regarding education, health, nutrition, and social service needs. All feel strongly about maximizing center time for Head Start age children both for developmental reasons and costly childcare. Additionally, also identified a continued and growing need for full child and family services for children 0-2 and their families along with employment options, affordable housing, and nutrition/food education.

Key Findings

In summary, information, data collection, and informal and formal surveys; there is a consistent theme of needs. And when the needs can be supported with services, collaboration, creative ideas, and community: the betterment of our families and children can be maximized. The effort and investment in meeting these needs have long lasting positive implications for changing the trajectory and legacy of our families and communities.

Additional Community Needs

Access to resources	Community Engagement	Mental Health Services
Pride to utilize resources	Family services/supports	Parenting Education
Food Banks and access to food banks	Employee/Employment match	Specialty services

Data Source: School Administration