Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Project Highlight Report: Fall 2022

NHSA's Data Design Initiative

This document is a brief update, jumping straight into the projects for which we have significant progress to share. To see a summary of the Data Design Initiative, broader context around this effort, and a full list of projects, please see our most recent Progress Update. You can also sign up to learn more here.

- **NEW PROJECT: Head Start Data Lake**
  NHSA recently secured a one-year grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to test the feasibility of and pilot a Head Start Data Lake, a central repository that will collect, store, and analyze data from Head Start programs in ways that help Head Start programs learn from each other. Our data lake has a primary goal of providing useful information back to programs.

  NHSA will take a user-centered design approach, putting the experiences and needs of the Head Start practitioner at the center of the work. At its simplest, this project rests on the belief that user-driven solutions result in more active engagement, higher quality engagement, and ultimately better outcomes than externally-developed and/or regulatorily-mandated solutions.

  We firmly believe, by driving this effort from the practitioner perspective, programs will feel safe enough to participate (meaning put their data in the lake) and engage in improvement efforts without fear. A national effort managed by NHSA will ensure this is available to all programs, no matter their size, budget, or technical capacity. This model will also allow programs to ask questions, propose additional data points and analyses, and help us continuously expand and improve the data lake to support program practice and improvement.

- **Head Start Data Analytics Playbook**
  To build the capacity of all Head Start staff, NHSA launched the Data Analytics Playbook in November 2019. The Playbook is a collection of practical data analysis and visualization examples from Head Start programs. Each play includes details on the analysis conducted, what questions it answers, and how the reader can conduct a similar analysis themselves. NHSA continues to collect and post new use cases and is regularly using feedback to adapt the tool to best meet the needs of users. NHSA seeks funding to support development, promotion, and improvement of the tool.

- **Data Training and Data Analytics Network**
  In an effort to provide increased capacity for data analytics in Head Start, NHSA and partners have launched several data training projects. The Data Literacy Credential was launched in the fall of 2020 in partnership with Acorn Evaluation, and has seen approximately 300 Head Start managers and directors complete the 15-week, 105-hour training to date. NHSA and Acorn Evaluation have also launched Data Basics and Data Essentials training, targeted at frontline staff.

In March 2021, NHSA began hosting Data Talks, a bi-weekly virtual meet-up of Head Start practitioners on the topic of data. These informal meetings bring together a community of data managers (and those in similar roles) to identify and work on common problems, solutions, and opportunities. Information on joining Data Talks is available to NHSA members on The Block.

- **Better, Simpler Child Assessments**
  Good assessments are essential to effective early learning programs. Widespread concerns exist about the amount of time required for training and conducting screenings and child assessments, as well as the fidelity of implementation, accuracy of results, and validity of some assessment tools. NHSA published the Better, Simpler Assessment Challenge, highlighting the features of a good child assessment. In January and February 2022, NHSA and partners hosted a four-part webinar series for Head Start practitioners on Child Assessments and released a self-reflection worksheet on the same topic. This webinar series was followed-up with an all-day conference track at the 2022 National Head Start Conference. NHSA has contributed to other child assessment efforts and continues to work on identifying next steps in this area.

- **Harvesting Greater Insights from Head Start Data**
  NHSA has connected with Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College to work with groups of graduate students to conduct capstone projects using Head Start data. One such project is to combine multiple years of Program Information Report (PIR) data into one database to allow for analysis of trends and other patterns. We expect the PIR tool to be available by the end of 2022, and intend to continue to enhance this project moving forward.

- **Expanding the Value of the Community Assessment**
  Community Assessments are the foundation of a Head Start program's grant application and program planning efforts, but the process is burdensome in terms of time and money, and many programs do not reap the full benefit of this effort for their own planning needs. With the help of several graduate students, NHSA has created a Community Assessment tool to reduce the burden of data collection and analysis and increase the utility of the analysis itself. NHSA is seeking feedback on how to enhance this resource and disseminate it throughout the Head Start field effectively.

- **The Junction**
  The Junction is an online consumer review platform that will help Head Start programs make more informed purchasing decisions, while also placing healthy pressure on those providing products and services to improve continually. Drawing on the lessons of Yelp, Amazon.com, and Consumer Reports, users submit reviews of the products and services they use, read reviews from peers around the country, report technical glitches, request new features, and troubleshoot. The Junction was recently migrated to a more user-friendly platform, and NHSA is preparing a formal launch of the tool.