

2021

EARLY HEAD START & HEAD START ANNUAL REPORT





Casa Central – Early Learning Academy

A Start Early Head Start and Early Head Start Delegate Agency

Name of Delegate Agency:	Casa Central
Program Number:	007
Program Name:	Casa Central – Early Learning Academy
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Agency Type:	Social Service Agency / Non-Profit (Non-CAA)

Agency Description:

Since 1954, Casa Central has been transforming lives and strengthening communities, with a special focus on Hispanics. Our network of social services propels a diverse population of all ages toward self-sufficiency and a higher quality of life. The agency's Early Learning Academy provides Head Start and Early Head Start services to children, ages birth to five, and their families. The program serves 84 Head Start and 120 Early Head Start children and their families in both home- and center-based settings, and specializes in preparing children for entry into Kindergarten or Head Start with an emphasis on social-emotional development, literacy enhancement, and math comprehension.

Center-Based Early Head Start & Head Start

The Center-Based Early Head Start and Head Start program option, which includes child care collaboration, provides full-day early learning services in six classroom settings (two Early Head Start, four Head Start) for children ages two – five. All classrooms are also part of our partnership with the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative programs, which support increased staff credentialing and licensing and the maintenance of smaller teacher:child ratios to ensure high-quality, individualized services for all children.



The Center-Based program uses the research-based Creative Curriculum, which supports young children in learning and developing effectively through play. The program further uses the Teaching Strategies GOLD developmental assessment tools to support quality education and ensure that programming meets the needs of all children in the program. Each Head Start classroom has two teaching staff, with two staff who float between the classrooms, and each Early

Head Start classroom has two teaching staff, with one staff who floats between the classrooms; these teaching professionals are overseen by a Site Director and an Education Coordinator.

The Center-Based program is in the Gold Circle of Quality as part of ExceleRate Illinois. ExceleRate Illinois is a statewide quality recognition and improvement system designed to make continuous quality improvement an everyday priority among early learning providers. The program establishes standards for helping young children develop intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally. It provides a framework for early learning professionals to identify opportunities for improvement, increase their skills, and take steps to make positive changes. Gold Circle programs like Casa Central's have met the highest quality standards in three areas: learning environment and teaching quality; administrative standards; and training & education. Furthermore, the program holds Awards of Excellence in Preschool Teaching & Learning and Infant/Toddler Services.

Home-Based Early Head Start & Head Start

The Home-Based Early Head Start and Head Start program serves hard-to-reach populations (including, for example, teen parents and immigrant families) within the comfort of each family's home. The Home-Based program uses the research-based Parents as Teachers curriculum, as well as the High Scope/COR Advantage developmental assessment tools. In the Home-Based program option, families are assigned to a Parent Educator for weekly 90-minute home visits and bi-monthly group socialization activities with other participating families. The program is overseen by a Site Director and two Education Coordinators.

Early Learning Academy

Across both the Home- and Center-Based program options, the Early Learning Academy provides a safe, nurturing environment, and addresses the comprehensive content areas of Early Head Start and Head Start programming, including ERSEA (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance);

Health and Nutrition; Education; Disabilities and Wellness Promotion; and Parent, Family & Community Engagement. Led by the Head Start Director/Vice President of Children's Services, the program-wide content-area staff include an ERSEA Manager, Nurse/Health Manager, Family Development Coordinator, Disabilities & Wellness Promotion Coordinator, Wellness Promotion and Nutrition Consultants, and a Systems Manager who manages data and supports continuous quality improvement activities across program options and content areas.

In order to holistically support participating families, each family is assigned to a Family Development Specialist. Led by the Family Development Coordinator, each Specialist works closely with the family, helping families set and achieve goals, connect with community resources, and ensure that children are healthy, able to fully participate in program services, and equipped to thrive in Kindergarten and beyond. The Family Development Specialists use the evidence-based Parents as Teachers curriculum as a tool to connect with families, as well as other strategies and approaches. Specialists partner with the program's Nutrition Consultant to complete nutrition assessments and individualized nutrition plans for children identified as in need of nutritional support. Furthermore, the Family Development Specialists collaborate with families and the program's Nurse/Health Manager to ensure that children have comprehensive medical examinations including screening for lead, tuberculosis, and hemoglobin levels; are up-to-date on their immunizations; are connected with primary healthcare providers who serve as a medical home; have pediatric dental exams; and are connected with dental care providers who serve as a dental home.

The Early Learning Academy has partnerships with local healthcare providers to ensure that children have current immunizations and physical examinations and that they have had hearing and vision screenings. These partnerships do not supplant a medical or dental home, but rather provide additional supports and resources to families. The program has additional partnerships with service providers in the community in order to ensure comprehensive supports to families; these include service providers in areas such as domestic violence, housing, and financial literacy.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have profound effects on all aspects of community and family life. Its effects permeate all parts of this annual report. Hard data and numbers are not yet available on how the pandemic and subsequent economic impact has affected poverty, unemployment, child health, homelessness, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, food security and any number of other things including families' engagement with early childhood programs.

In Chicago, Black and Latino residents, including the folks that Casa Central serves, have been over-represented in the city's total number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. A recent AP-NORC poll found that about 6 in 10 Hispanic or Latino households say they are still facing the impacts of income loss from the pandemic, about 5 in 10 Black households say the same, compared to 4 in 10 white households¹.

Located in and serving communities with the highest COVID infection rates, Casa Central continued to step up during 2021 to provide social and educational services to children and families by working on the front lines to serve the most vulnerable and neediest populations.

¹ <https://apnorc.org/ap-norc-poll-many-in-us-still-face-covid-19-financial-loss/>

During the 2020-2021 program year (September 1, 2020 – August 20, 2021), Casa Central's Early Learning Academy:

- Enrolled 181 children;
- Provided comprehensive Early Head Start and Head Start services to 153 families;
- Served 39 children (22% of cumulative enrollment) with disabilities and diverse learning needs and their families;
- Provided supportive case management and information/referral services; health education; parenting education and support; and other social services to 164 parents/caregivers;
- Ensured that 170 children had medical insurance coverage;
- Ensured that 173 children had an identified medical home and 172 children were up-to-date on their immunizations;
- Aided 146 children and their families to identify a dental home, with all 146 receiving a comprehensive preventive pediatric dental exam;
- Engaged 41 fathers in program activities such as parent-teacher conferences, parent meetings, field trips, and special male involvement activities; and;
- Served healthy, delicious, culturally attuned food to our Center-Based children, including 4000 breakfasts, 4068 lunches, and 3552 snacks.



Early Learning Academy Site Locations:

Home-Based

1335 North California Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622

Center-Based

1343 North California Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622

Primary Community Areas Served:

- Hermosa
- Humboldt Park
- Logan Square
- West Town

Summary of Most Recent Community Assessment:

Each year, Start Early supports Casa Central in conducting a community assessment in order to outline the strengths and needs of the communities served by the Early Learning Academy and ensure that programming remains responsive. The update to the community assessment was published in May of

2021; it includes new data that, in accordance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, is used for program planning purposes.

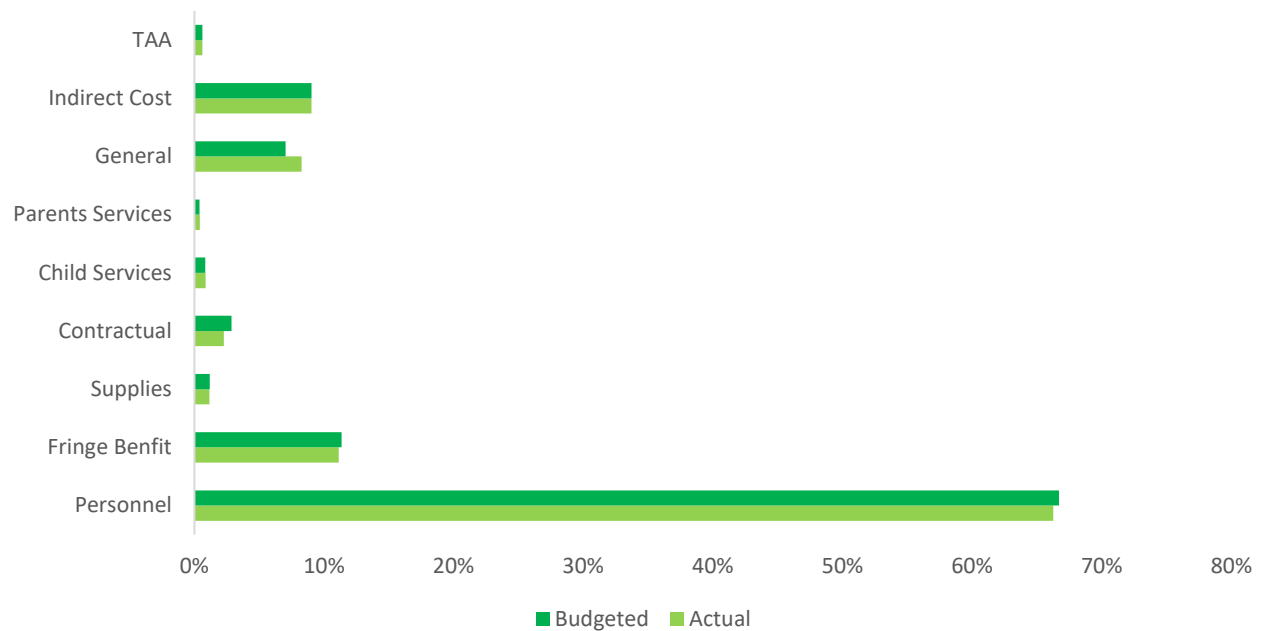
In summary, in the primary community areas served by Casa Central,

- There is a sizeable percentage of the population served with limited English proficiency, indicating continued need for Casa Central's bilingual (English/Spanish) approach.
- Pre-K expansion grants continue to ensure that more children ages 3-4 are being served by Preschool for All and Chicago Public Schools-based free preschool; this means there are fewer and fewer Head Start-eligible children in our community who are not already connected with other programming.
- Although the population of children in the Early Head Start age range decreased in Casa Central's primary community areas, there still remains very limited access to both center- and home-based Early Head start programming for income-eligible children ages birth – three.
- Screenings to identify disabilities in infants and toddlers decreased by 68% in February through September of 2020, meaning that children in need of services were not identified and connected with appropriate therapies as early as possible; in general, children with disabilities and diverse learning needs found their provision of services greatly disrupted due to the pandemic. We anticipate this will mean children enter our program with more significant developmental delays than ever before.

Overall Delegate Budget, 2021

Total Public Funds Received	
Source	Amount
Federal	2,167,560
Total	\$2,167,560

Head Start and Early Head Start Budgeted and Actual Expenditures, 2021



Children and Families Served

Casa Central, Funded Enrollment

	Head Start Enrollment	Early Head Start Enrollment
Center-Based Program Option		
a. 5 days per week		
1. Full-day enrollment	68	16
2. Part-day enrollment	0	0
b. 4 days per week		
1. Full-day enrollment	0	0
2. Part-day enrollment	0	0
Home-Based Program Option		
	12	108
Unallocated Slots	0	0
Total:	84	120

Total Children Served: 181

Total Families Served: 153

Number of Eligible Children in Casa Central's Recruitment Areas (Hermosa, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, and West Town Communities; 2019 estimates from the May 2021 Community Assessment, Table 1C for EHS and Table and Table 5C for HS)		Percentage of Eligible Children in Casa Central's Recruitment Area served by Any Head Start/Early Head Start Program	
Early Head Start, ages 0-2	Head Start, ages 3-5	Early Head Start	Head Start
1,890	2,024	17% (321 out of 1,890 eligible children)	47% (946 of 2,024 eligible children)
		<i>Prevention Initiative Programs</i>	<i>Preschool for All and Child Parent Centers</i>
		35% (663 of 1,890 eligible children)	143%* (2,901 of 2,024 eligible children)
			*Above 100% indicates that there were more funded slots in these communities than there were eligible children.

Health Services

The data on the following table was drawn from the 2020-2021 PIR (Program Information Report) and reflects key indicators related to children's health status. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is clear, with many parents and caregivers feeling fearful to take their children for routine medical and dental care during the timeframe of data collection (September 1, 2020 – July 31, 2021).

	Early Head Start	Head Start
Child has health insurance by end of program year	93.5%	100%
Child has medical home by end of program year	91.9%	100%
Child has dental home by end of program year	71.8%	100%
Child has a complete and up-to-date physical exam	26.6%	57.9%
Child has a complete and up-to-date pediatric dental exam	N/A	87.7%
Child's immunizations are up-to-date	89.5%	98.2%

Parent Education & Engagement Activities

Casa Central encourages frequent parent involvement and communication. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, parents were not able to visit classrooms during our 2020-2021 program year, but through 2-way communication via Learning Genie and other mechanisms, in-person and virtual home visits, and parent conferences to address individual child development and how parents can support learning at home, the program continued encouraging robust parent engagement.

Health & Nutrition: Parents participated in workshops with the program's dietitian during parent meetings, and were able to access 1-1 consultation with the dietitian to ask questions and discuss their family's unique health and nutrition needs. Families received information and education about health-related topics from the program's nurse, as well as from community partners, on topics including the COVID-19 vaccine.

Wellness Promotion (Mental Health): Parents received training in mental health and wellness in early childhood and how mental health can impact school readiness and success. Parents also received training and resource materials about managing stress, self-care, and tending to their own mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, parents received training and supports related to developmental screening and the referral processes to the Chicago Public Schools and Illinois Early Intervention System for children identified as needing further assessment for special needs services. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Casa Central's Mental Health/Wellness Promotion Consultants remained available and provided training and 1-1 support to families to support their wellbeing during this difficult time.

Education and Literacy: Math and literacy continue to be a primary focus for Casa Central's Early Learning Academy in order to prepare children for success in Head Start, Kindergarten and beyond. Parents receive orientation to our curricula (Creative Curriculum in Center-Based and Parents as Teachers in Home-Based), and participate in home visits and parent conferences with staff members to learn more about their children's developmental progress in these areas. Throughout the pandemic, teachers prepared individualized lesson plans for children's at-home learning to support parents with continuing to serve as their children's first and most important teachers, promoting children's continued development in spite of the incredibly challenging circumstances.

Community and Social Services: At parent meetings, held virtually throughout the 2020-2021 program year, featured speakers shared information on specific topics parents indicated as being of interest via the participant engagement survey. These speakers are from local community service providers and inform parents of resources available, how to access services, and eligibility requirements.

Parent Committee Meetings: Each program option has a Parent Committee and elects officers and representatives that take on an active role in the program's Policy Committee and the grantee's Policy Council. The program Policy Committee met monthly. This year, they participated in training on Head Start and the role of committee members in interviewing and hiring staff; fiscal management of the program, including monthly budget reviews and program amendments; reviewed the 2021 Community Needs Assessment and Selection Criteria and recommended changes; and supported the program with all aspects of implementing remote/virtual services and planning for our return to in-person/on-site services, ensuring that parent voice and perspective was represented.

Kindergarten Readiness: Kindergarten Readiness activities included a focus on literacy, language, and math skills in classrooms and virtual learning. Each program option worked with a local education advocacy group that came to the programs to talk to parents in the fall (virtually) about educational options in the Local Education Agency (LEA): program types, eligibility, and application process. They also distributed school district catalogs.



Special Efforts to Prepare Children for Kindergarten:

Children transitioning to kindergarten from our Center-Based program option are in classrooms with a certified teacher, via a partnership with the local LEA. The focus of the training for teachers from the partnership is to ensure the skills (cognitive and social-emotional) needed for kindergarten are present and acquired in the activities that the children participate in.

Each child receives regular developmental assessments utilizing the Teaching Strategies GOLD/COR Advantage assessment tool, which regularly evaluates each individual's progression regarding academic, fine and gross motor, and social emotional growth based on expectations for their age. Teaching Strategies GOLD is utilized throughout the City of Chicago as a respected tool to accurately analyze a child's preparedness for entering kindergarten based on whether they are "meeting" or "exceeding" expectations for their age level; COR Advantage is used because of its particular applicability and utility in home-based settings. Teachers and Parent Educators complete checkpoints three times a year to review each child's progression and utilize the information to engage parents in the child's learning and set individual learning goals for each child based on their strengths and areas of concentration. Checkpoint data collected throughout the year (November, February, and May) indicated that children were making significant progress developmentally.

Transition Activities to Promote Kindergarten Readiness: For children with special needs, in the past, we have worked with local schools to ensure that the parent and child have visited the school and classroom they will be placed in the fall. When possible, the Head Start teacher, Disabilities/Wellness Promotion Coordinator and/or Family Development Specialist will visit the new school, as well. For all children, a file with their most recent screenings is provided to the parents to take to the new school. The 2020-2021 school year started off very differently for children transitioning to Kindergarten, with the Chicago Public Schools starting out the year with fully remote/virtual learning. The challenges surrounding virtual learning for kindergarten students were immense, not only for children served by Casa Central, but for children across the City of Chicago. Our program worked with families of transitioning children to ensure they had resources for affordable Wi-Fi and laptops or other devices for their children to use upon beginning virtual Kindergarten in the fall of 2020. We provided hands-on technical support and assistance for families throughout the course of our time working with them remotely, increasing everyone's comfort levels with virtual service delivery platforms.



Other special gatherings or activities: Each program option hosted activities designed for parents and children, including mostly virtual events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including male involvement activities; literacy events; and seasonal celebrations. Each program option also celebrated children's transitions from Early Head Start to Head Start and Head Start to Kindergarten in August of 2021 with outdoor transition celebrations, in accordance with all COVID-related safety protocol.

Summary of Audit Findings

There were no financial audit findings at Casa Central, a delegate agency of Start Early (formerly known as the Ounce of Prevention Fund), for FY2021.

Summary of Annual Review Findings

There was no Federal Review for the Ounce of Prevention Fund/Start Early's Early/Head Start program during 2021.

Summary of Information Required by the Secretary

The Start Early Board of Directors and Policy Council received brief summaries and links to all program instructions and informational memorandums; the Head Start Committee of Casa Central's Board of Directors and the Casa Central Policy Committee, comprised of parents with children participating in programming at the Early Learning Academy, also received this information.