

Ramsey Action Programs Head Start

Survey of Head Start parents

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Introduction

Ramsey Action Program, Inc. has been providing Head Start Services for three to five year old children and their families in Ramsey County for over 30 years. It currently serves 1,214 children and their families in its half-day program and is funded to serve 287 children in its full-day initiative with childcare centers in Ramsey County. The mission of Ramsey Action Program Head Start is “To partner with Head Start eligible families in Ramsey County and community supporters to provide comprehensive early childhood and family development services that help children and their parents reach their full potential.”

Ramsey Action Program, Inc. (RAP) Head Start contracted with the Wilder Research Center to survey a representative sample of parents who were enrolled in the half-day Head Start programs during the 1998/99 program year. The purpose of the survey is to learn about parents’ perspectives regarding key program efforts, satisfaction with the program, family strengths, and the impact of recent welfare changes. Program staff determined that this information was needed in order to improve and develop the program to meet families’ needs.

Methods

Ramsey Action Program, Inc. provided a list sample of 1,045 parents who were enrolled in the 1998/99 half-day RAP Head Start programs and whose child attended RAP Head Start for five months or more during the program year. The 25-item survey was translated, and interviews were conducted in Hmong and Spanish, as needed. The phone interviews were conducted from November, 1999 to January, 2000 with a representative sample of half-day Head Start parents. The confidence interval for these results is within (plus or minus) 5 percentage points.

Results

Two hundred ninety-eight parents completed the survey, with an overall response rate of 67 percent. The response rate includes parents in the sample (25% of the total sampled) who could not be reached due to unlisted phone numbers, disconnected phones, or were unreachable for some other reason. The results are organized into six areas; parent satisfaction with key program elements, impact of Head Start, adult working and school status, family strengths, impact of welfare changes, and personal family gains/other suggestions.

Parent satisfaction with key program elements

1. PARENT SATISFACTION (N=298)

Parent satisfaction with....	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied
How staff acted toward parent when parent had a question or concern.	46%	53%	1%
The hours that their center was open.	40%	56%	4%
The ability of the advocate to do his/her job.	45%	52%	3%
The ability of the teacher to do his/her job.	55%	42%	3%
The ability of the bus driver to do his/her job.	51%	42%	7%
How well written materials met parent's language needs.	50%	48%	2%
How well verbal information was communicated in parent's language.	48%	48%	4%
The information provided by staff regarding child and community resources.	49%	49%	3%*
The ability of Head Start to meet special needs of children with special needs diagnoses. (N=36)	61%	33%	6%

* Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Satisfaction levels reported by parents in the sample were high, with over 90 percent of parents reporting that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the key program areas. The program area with the highest satisfaction rating is teachers' job performance, with over half (55%) of parents reporting being very satisfied with the ability of the teacher to teach and work with children. The satisfaction of the job performance of bus drivers varies the most, with many parents rating satisfaction with bus driver's ability to drive safely and handle young children on the bus as high (51% very satisfied), and a few parents rating satisfaction as low (7% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).

A smaller group of parents, those with children who were diagnosed with special needs, were asked to rate their satisfaction with Head Start programs' ability to meet their child's special needs. Of the 36 parents who responded, nearly two-thirds were very satisfied, one-third was satisfied, and 6 percent were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied.

Impact of Head Start

RAP Head Start teachers sent books home with children every week to stimulate reading/looking at books in families. Nearly all parents (98%) were aware that their child

brought books home. Nearly all parents (98%) looked at the books at least once a week with their child. Nearly three-quarters of parents (74%) reported that participating in Head Start last year (1998-1999) helped “a lot” in getting their child ready for kindergarten. Attachment A lists the comments parents made related to kindergarten preparation.

**2. READING AND KINDERGARTEN PREPARATION
(N=298)**

Parents whose child brought home books: 98%

	1+/Week	1/Week	1-3/mth	Less than 1/mth
Frequency of parent looking at Head Start books with child.	72%	26%	1%	1%
	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not at All
Did Head Start prepare your child for kindergarten?	74%	20%	6%	1%

Over half of parents were involved in the classroom and slightly more (65%) were involved in non-classroom activities. Attachment B provides a listing of all the types of involvement reported by parents who participated in the survey. Parents who reported that they were involved in the Head Start classroom were primarily involved in field trips (48% of those involved) and/or helping in the classroom (25% of those involved). Some of the types of involvement reported fall into the category of “outside the classroom” involvement, such as policy counsel involvement.

Parents who reported that they were not involved in the classroom listed working (41%), having other children at home (26%), having no extra time (11%), and being in school (8%) as the primary reasons for not being involved. Parents who were not involved in Head Start non-classroom activities reported that working (35%), having other children at home (24%), having no extra time (14%), and being in school (10%) were the primary reasons for not being involved. Attachment C provides a complete listing of reasons given for lack of involvement.

Parents were also given a list of possible circumstances that may have kept them from being as involved as they would have liked to be. Figure 5 lists these reasons and the degree to which all of the parents surveyed rated the impact of each circumstance. The demands of work and school kept over half (58%) of parents surveyed from being as involved as they would have liked to be. Over one-third (36%) of parents surveyed reported that general stress in their life kept them from involvement.

**3. PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN CLASSROOM
(N=298)**

Parents who were involved in the classroom: 55%

	1+/Week	1/Week	1-3/mth	Less than 1/mth	Not Involved
Rate of involvement in classroom	5%	4%	23%	24%	45%

**4. PARENT INVOLVEMENT OUTSIDE CLASSROOM
(N=296)**

Parents who were involved outside classroom: 65%

	4+/mth	1-3/mth	Less than 1 per Month	Not Involved
Rate of involvement across activities	8%	31%	27%	34%

**5. CIRCUMSTANCES AFFECTING INVOLVEMENT
(N=298)**

	A Lot	Some	A Little	No/Not at All	Total
Demands of work or school (N=298)	43%	14%	6%	36%	100%
Too much stress in parent's life (N=298)	22%	14%	4%	60%	100%
Moving to new house/apartment (N=298)	5%	3%	2%	90%	100%
Not knowing where family will live day-to-day (N=298)	3%	2%	-	95%	100%

Adult working and school status

Nearly three-quarters of all parents surveyed report that there was at least one adult working full time or part time in the household. Sixty five percent of these households had one adult working full time. Nearly one-quarter of all parents surveyed report that there was at least one adult in school or job training fulltime or part time. Over one-half (58%) of these households had one adult in school or job training part time and over half (51%) had one adult in school or job training full time.

**6. WORKING ADULTS IN HOUSEHOLD
(N=298)**

Households with any adults working: 72%

Number of Adults (N=215)	0	1	2	3	Total
Full Time	13%	65%	21%	1%	100%
Part Time only	74%	24%	2%	-	100%

**7. ADULTS IN SCHOOL OR JOB TRAINING IN HOUSEHOLD
(N=297)**

Household with any adults in school: 23%

Number of Adults (N=69)	0	1	2	Total
Full Time	45%	51%	4%	100%
Part Time only	38%	58%	4%	100%

Family strengths

Nearly three-quarters of parents surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that their families do well in knowing where to find resources (services like housing and food, general needs, mental health services). Conversely, just over one-quarter of parents did not agree that their family had the ability to do well in finding/obtaining each of the resources listed.

**8. FAMILY ABILITY TO DO WELL
(N=298)**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
We know where to go for services.	26%	47%	13%	14%
We know how to ask for and make sure we get what we need.	28%	44%	12%	16%
We know how to find and receive any needed mental health services.	30%	42%	9%	20%

Impact of recent welfare changes on family

Nearly one-quarter of parents surveyed reported that their family does not receive welfare assistance. Those families who received welfare assistance were asked to comment on both the good and difficult aspects of recent welfare rule changes. The most frequently made comments are listed in Figures 9 and 10. Of the parents who receive welfare

assistance, nearly one-third (31%) report no change or nothing positive as a result of the rule changes. The most positive change noted was additional help with childcare. The most negative change noted was the inadequacy of money provided and resulting financial struggles. Attachments D and E contain a complete listing of positive and negative changes.

**9. IMPACT OF RECENT WELFARE CHANGES – POSITIVE
(N=298)**

No positive change	31%
Help with child care	6%
Don't know	6%
Job readiness-help preparing	4%
Generally helpful	4%
Increased independence	4%
Don't receive welfare assistance	22%

**10. IMPACT OF RECENT WELFARE CHANGES – NEGATIVE
(N=298)**

No negative change	21%
Financial struggles – not enough money	6%
Don't know	6%
Lack of child care that is affordable, reliable	5%
Forced to work	5%
Language barriers	5%
Hard to find decent job	5%
Increased stress	4%

Personal gains from program and comments.

Nearly one-quarter of parents surveyed were unable to identify personal gains from Head Start participation, for either their children or themselves. Gains that were reported for parents include increased knowledge (11%), improved parenting skills (9%), better relationship with child (4%), and personal enjoyment (4%). Parents see children gaining comfort with kindergarten (10%), and getting encouragement to learn (7%). A complete listing of gains is in Attachment F. General comments about Head Start can be found in Attachment G.

**11. PERSONAL GAINS FROM HEAD START PARTICIPATION
(N=298)**

No gains reported	23%
Knowledge, information, referrals	11%
Child is more comfortable about kindergarten	10%
Parent improved parenting skills	9%
Child was encouraged to learn	7%
Parent has better relationship with child	4%
Personal enjoyment for parent	4%

Lessons learned

Parents gave high satisfaction ratings to each of the key program components listed in the survey. Parent feedback also provides evidence that two goals of RAP Head Start – kindergarten preparation and increasing reading at home – are being addressed. Nearly all parents believe their children are more prepared for kindergarten, and nearly all used the Head Start books at least weekly with their children.

Another goal for RAP Head Start, parent involvement, has room for improvement. While more parents are involved in Head Start than not, there remains a substantial portion of parents that do not get involved. Obstacles to involvement, such as work, other children, and busy lives, present programming challenges if more parents are to be involved.

Adults in Head Start families tend to work outside the home or go to school. In addition, just over three-quarters of Head Start families receive welfare assistance. When asked to provide their perspectives on welfare rule changes (both positive and negative), the most frequent response given by parents was that there are no positive or negative changes for parents and families. These results warrant further explanation.

The results also indicate that most parents agree that their families have strengths in key areas. Families know where to go for services (73%), they know how to get what the family needs (72%), and they know how to get mental health services (72%) when needed. These strengths, reported after a year of Head Start enrollment, are important indicators of parents and children moving toward their full potential. Continued strategies to increase parental involvement and to reach parents who don't feel that they "know where to go" to find resources can be tracked with future parent surveys.

Attachments

Attachment A

Comments regarding kindergarten preparation.

	% of Total Responses (N=540)	% Total Sample (N=298)
Positive		
Peer interaction, socialization	11%	20%*
Learn ABC's	11%	20%
General learning	10%	19%
Learn colors	9%	16%
Prepares child in general	8%	15%
Learn English	7%	13%
Learn to write	6%	11%
Learn numbers, counting	6%	11%
Child likes school now	3%	6%
Child's listening improved	3%	5%
Child improving verbal communication	3%	5%
Other (e.g., matured, learn to ride bus, toileting, gets attention, play alone, tell time, creativity, singing)	9%	19%
Negative		
Not much learned	2%	4%
Too much play	2%	4%
Other (more organization, language barrier)	2%	4%
Other		
Teachers do a good job, parent observes progress	6%	11%

* Total percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses per parent.

Attachment B

If you were involved, how were you involved?

Parent involvement in classroom	% of Total Responses (N=265)	% Total Sample* (N=165)
Field trips	48%	78%**
In classroom, unspecified	25%	39%
Meetings	5%	8%
Food preparation, serving	5%	7%
Parent meetings	5%	7%
Volunteer, unspecified	4%	6%
Helping with art	3%	6%
Helping with reading	2%	3%
Other (helped on bus, policy council, family night, library aide)	4%	7%

* Those who reported classroom involvement.

** Total percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses per parent.

Attachment C

If not involved, why not?

Reasons for lack of parent involvement in classroom	% of Total Responses (N=157)	% Total Sample (N=135)
Working	41%	47%*
Have other children at home	26%	30%
No time	11%	13%
Parent in school	8%	10%
Significant other involved	3%	4%
Poor health	3%	4%
No transportation	3%	3%
Other reasons (don't speak English, disabled/caring for disabled partner, lack of notice/information, foster parent, want child to be there without parent present, no reason)	6%	5%
Reasons for lack of parent involvement outside classroom	(N=131)	(N=102)
Working	35%	45%
Have other children at home	24%	30%
No time	14%	18%
Parent in school	10%	13%
Lack of interest	5%	7%
Poor health	3%	4%
No transportation	2%	2%
Disabled/caring for disabled partner	2%	2%
Lack of notice/information	2%	2%
Other reasons (e.g., don't speak English, want child to be there without parent present, foster parent)	5%	5%

* Total percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses per parent.

Attachment D

Positive changes due to welfare rule changes	% of Total Responses (N=321)	% Total Sample (N=294)
Not applicable – not on welfare	24%	26%*
Nothing	21%	23%
No effect on family/no change	10%	11%
Help with child care	6%	7%
Don't know	6%	6%
Help finding job	4%	4%
Helped in general	4%	4%
Increased independence	4%	4%
Help paying for child care	3%	3%
Motivation/encouragement	3%	3%
Food/food stamps	3%	3%
Increased income	2%	2%
Able to work due to increased help	2%	2%
Able to go to school/finish education	2%	2%
Medical assistance/health insurance/medical bills	2%	2%
Got off welfare	2%	2%
Other changes (e.g., job readiness, job retention, specific job training, budgeting assistance, got housing/help with rent, help finding child care, stabilize family/"get back on feet"/back up support, help me spend time with my children, being with others (adults) in same situation, emergency cash assistance, less stressful, have not used/taken advantage of any changes)	6%	7%

* Total percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses per parent.

Attachment E

Difficulties due to welfare role changes	% of Total Responses (N=380)	% Total Sample (N=298)
Nothing	17%	21%*
Not on welfare	16%	20%
Don't give enough money	6%	7%
Don't know	6%	7%
No effect on family	6%	7%
Forced to work/look for work despite reasons not to	5%	7%
Lack of child care	5%	7%
Language barrier	5%	7%
Hard to find decent job	5%	7%
Unfair rules	4%	5%
Increased stress	4%	5%
Loss/decrease in healthcare	3%	4%
Lack of education	3%	4%
Can't stay at home to care for child(ren)	3%	4%
Transportation problems	2%	2%
Other difficulties (e.g., worker lacks knowledge/skills, too much paperwork, too complicated, rules are confusing or unclear, increase in one benefit causes decrease, income guidelines too high, housing problem, lost assistance/reduced benefits, income fluctuates too much to plan, disability, need budgeting skills, worried about lack of safety net, single parent, make transition slowly, job search requirements are difficult, concern about time limit)	12%	14%

* Total percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses per parent.

Attachment F

Personal gains from Head Start participation

Nothing	16%
Knowledge, info, referrals, unspecified	11%
Comfortable about kindergarten	10%
Don't know	9%
Parenting skills	9%
Encourage child to learn	7%
Nothing, since did not participate in activities	7%
Better relationship with child	4%
Personal enjoyment	4%
More involved in child's education	3%
Improved communication skills	3%
Gained confidence as a parent	2%
Time alone	2%
Other (e.g., Head Start helps me get services, learn how to navigate social services, interest in own heritage, realized need to spend more time with child, how to keep child's confidence up, how to make a child-safe home, learned to be patient with child/to be role model, age appropriate development, nutrition information, can borrow books and toys, desire to help, meeting other parents, seeing child interact/learn, meeting teachers (school staff), learned to be teacher's aide, learned English, got a job, community involvement, don't have to pay for day care)	16%

Attachment G

General comments

Good program, helped	30%
Have it all day	11%
Good teachers	4%
No/higher income eligibility	4%
Keep the program	3%
Better writing preparation	3%
Better written communication from program	3%
More focus on education (less play)	2%
Better teachers	2%
Have training for parent teachers in the evening	2%
Need translator	2%
Poor bus driver (played loud music, forgot children on bus)	2%
Need more transportation for children	2%
Different start time (earlier, later)	1%
Start at earlier age	1%
More openings for children	1%
More teachers	1%
Child care for other children	1%
Improve program, unspecified	1%
Child is safe there	1%
Good advocate	1%
Good communication	1%
Good meal program	1%
Helped with emergency assistance	1%
More days per week	1%
More locations	1%
More computers needed	1%
Proved classes for adults	1%
Need Hmong staff	1%

Attachment G (Continued)

General comments

Better recognition for advocates	1%
Different classroom/teacher for returning students	1%
Same classroom/teacher for returning students	1%
Child needs help putting on clothes	1%
More books available	1%
Quarterly conferences	1%
Have meetings right after school	1%
More in home meetings	1%
Monitor lice better	1%
Too many in home visits	1%
Trouble with a student	1%
Bus safety (seat belt, monitor)	1%
Great bus driver	1%
Provide transportation for parents	1%
Provide lunch to parents assisting with program	1%
Talk to parents before calling child protection	1%
Provide clothing assistance (hats, gloves, coats)	1%
Separate by ability not age	1%
Celebrate all holidays (Hmong New Year, Christmas, Kwanza, etc.)	1%
Good parental involvement	1%
Need medical insurance	1%
Need ESL class	1%
Need transportation	1%
Forced to work	1%
Wants counseling	1%
Wants low income Y2K assistance	1%
Curious about why we called	1%
Wants information about high schools in other counties	1%