



2022-2023 Community Assessment

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I. Executive Summary

Highlights your methods of data collection and analysis, major finding, and recommendations.

The purpose of this community assessment is to provide a needs assessment of the West River Head Start Service (WRHS) area in the state of North Dakota in order to develop program goals for the 2023-2027 grant years and ensure goals developed match WRHS mission statement: **WRHS is committed to giving children and families the opportunity to grow within their communities by providing quality education and family services.**

The community assessment report begins with an overview of the state of the grantee and history of West River Head Start's location of program sites, staffing patterns, and other general information to include a map of the service area.

The methodology section describes the planning process, data collection, and data analysis used to complete the community assessment. In addition to gathering statistical data from online sources (e.g., US 2020 Census Bureau, DataUSA, World Population Review North Dakota KIDS Count Data Center, Child Care Aware, etc.), a survey shared with community partners, WRHS staff, and parents was compiled to identify and prioritize perceptual needs. A total of 87 responded (23 from community members, 24 from WRHS staff, and 40 from parents). Analysis of the survey results identified the following community needs ranked from highest to lowest: childcare/after school care, affordable youth activities, transportation, options for children and families experiencing homelessness or domestic violence, service for dual language learners, safe and affordable housing, availability of local community health care, availability of jobs, and low-income assistance programs. The effects of these needs are described in the identified needs section of the community assessment.

Demographic features of the WRHS' service area revealed an increase in overall population growth. Like North Dakota, two of the four counties WRHS serves are getting

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younger (Morton and Oliver). All four counties displayed higher numbers of potentially eligible 0-4 year olds living in poverty, validating the need for Head Start services in their communities. Along with the population increase, North Dakota and WRHS's service area is becoming more racially diverse. The percentage of minorities served by WRHS is more than North Dakota as a whole. WRHS is serving more Dual Language Learners with Spanish/English as the most prominent need.

The community resources and strengths section includes specific child development programs, service options, and community resource availability. The observation and recommendation section compiled the findings in the community assessment and aided the program with making decisions to identify trends in the service area and develop the five-year grant goals. Three broad program goals to include school readiness were recommended:

- WRHS will support ongoing learning and development of staff.
- WRHS will continue to become more efficient in the services provided to children and families.
- Children will adapt to new situations by exhibiting self-regulation strategies including impulse control and problem solving while expressing concern for self and care of others, maintaining focus, and attending to tasks creatively throughout their learning environment.

II. Overview of the State of the Grantee

Summarizes the history, location of the program sites, staffing patterns, and other general information. A map may be included to show the service and recruitment areas as well as the program locations.

1983-1986: West River Head Start (aka Mandan Head Start) was established in 1983 as a home-based option through Community Action Partnership (CAP) in Mandan, North Dakota. It served 42 families residing in the Mandan, North Dakota. CAP relinquished the Head Start Grant to Mandan public schools at the end of the grant year in 1986.

1986-1990: Mandan Public school served as the grantee until 1990. The scope of service changed from home-based option to center-based services in Mandan. Mandan Public School established three classrooms continuing to serve 42 Head Start children and families. Mandan Public school relinquished the grant to HIT, Inc in 1990.

1990-1992: HIT, Inc became the grantee of Mandan Head Start in 1990. Due to increased need for services, HIT expanded the program increasing services from three center classrooms to four in Mandan. In 1991 the grant was expanded to include a home-base program that provided Head Start services to children in rural Morton County in addition to the Mandan center without any additional funding. In 1992 a community survey indicated a need to provide Head Start as a center-based option rather than home based. The first New Salem center started with 20 children in the basement of the city auditorium. HIT also expanded the Mandan Center to 5 classrooms totaling 100 Morton County children and their families.

From 1993-1997, Mandan Head Start remained at six classrooms, five in Mandan and one in New Salem. Five of the classrooms held morning sessions, and one classroom in Mandan held both a morning and afternoon session. The program in New Salem moved three times before residing in the New Salem Public Schools. During this time, 100 children and families continued to be served by West River Head Start and the program employed 20 staff members.

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1998: On March 26, 1998, the HIT, Inc Board of Directors approved the name change to West River Head Start, which promoted ownership for all communities served. “West River” is a common name for services, agencies and businesses on the west side of the Missouri River. On June 1, 1998, two new classrooms were opened in Grant County: one in Elgin and one in Carson. Each classroom had 17 children increasing WRHS’s service to 134 children and families.

In 2000, WRHS expanded opening a center in Hebron serving western Morton County with a classroom located in the Hebron Public School. Four staff members were hired, increasing services to 152 children and families with 5 centers and 9 classrooms.

In 2003, WRHS expanded to Mercer County opening two sites one in Beulah and one in Hazen. Five staff members were hired to serve an additional 16 children. At this time WRHS’s total enrollment increased service to 168 children and families in 11 classrooms and 7 centers spreading out over 5,354 square miles.

In 2006-2007, WRHS experienced its first funding cut of 1%. A budget committee consisting of representatives of staff, Policy Council, HIT Board of Directors, HIT fiscal and executive directors, and the WRHS director was formed. The impact on the program resulted in loss of all year-round Head Start classrooms. Over the next few years’ additional programmatic changes occurred. WRHS moved classrooms out of two standalone facilities into the local public schools in the communities of Carson (2007) and New Salem (2009). The public schools do not charge rent or any other fees for classroom use. The public-school benefit for children and parents was that they were able to transition from Head Start to the public school more easily. The benefit for WRHS was savings in rent, utilities, and maintenance—allowing the program to maintain sites despite budget cuts.

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In 2010-2011 the population of Grant County decreased to the point that it could no longer support two Head Start classrooms. One classroom in Elgin was shut down and children were transported to the Carson center for Head Start services. Program funding was not decreased, but WRHS's enrollment decreased from 168 to 160.

In 2012-2013, WRHS suffered a 5% cut in funding due to federal budget sequestration. This led to the closure of the Beulah site. Eligible children served in the Beulah area were combined with the Hazen classroom.

2013-2014: WRHS continued to serve 160 children and families in Morton, Mercer, Oliver, and Grant counties in central North Dakota. One center with five classrooms was in Mandan, and one center with one classroom each were in Carson, Hebron, Hazen and New Salem.

2014-2015: WRHS grant requested to use replaced sequester funds for staff wage increases versus reopening the Beulah classroom. Though HIT gave WRHS a 9% increase for the 2014-2015 school year, salaries were still far below competitive wages. 152 children and families in Morton, Mercer, Oliver, and Grant counties continued to be served by WRHS. Finding and retaining teaching staff continued to be difficult due to oil impact driving up the average cost of living. WRHS lost 14 staff resulting in 40% turnover. In addition to this challenge, WRHS endured an increase in transited population serving greater numbers of children and families that were with the program for only a short period of time.

2015-2016: HIT Board of Directors and Policy Council voted to close the Hebron center due to the inability to fill the vacant teaching positions. They also voted to close one of the Mandan classrooms. This reduction of slots did not affect any income-eligible families or WRHS's level of federal funding. It allowed HIT to increase staff salaries to assist with focusing

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on quality over quantity. Due to the closures WRHS decreased 5 staff positions and decreased its enrollment from 152 to 118.

2016-2017: WRHS received a duration supplement to increase school day hours in Carson and New Salem from 6 to 8 hours. Needs of the community cited difficulty with finding part-time daycare and difficulty with mid-day transportation. This need resulted in decreased enrollment of eligible families. The duration supplement increase allowed WRHS to continue to serve 118 children and families. Three rooms in Mandan and the one room in Hazen continued to provide preschool service for 6 hours a day and one room in Mandan provided preschool service for 7 hours.

2018-2019: WRHS received another duration grant to increase school hours in Hazen and one classroom in Mandan. Duration classroom hours increased from 6 to 8 hours per day. WRHS was awarded the Health & Safety Grant to purchase four new buses, a hearing machine, and a vision machine. The New Salem classroom moved from the local elementary school into the neighboring Zion Lutheran Church. It was a space issue for the elementary school.

2019-2020: Classrooms were closed on March 16, 2020 by order of Governor Burgum to allow time to 'flatten the curve' to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to prevent overwhelming the health care system. Teaching staff distributed learning packets to each child's home for the remainder of the year and used virtual platforms to stay connected with families and children. WRHS received CARES Act funding to coordinate, prepare, and respond to COVID-19.

2020-2021: WRHS received a Discretionary Grant to support COVID-19 related expenses. WRHS was able to remain open at all sites throughout the school year while following the COVID-19 plan that aligned with the state's color COVID-19 designation to guide safety measures. Though random classrooms were closed at times, WRHS remained open

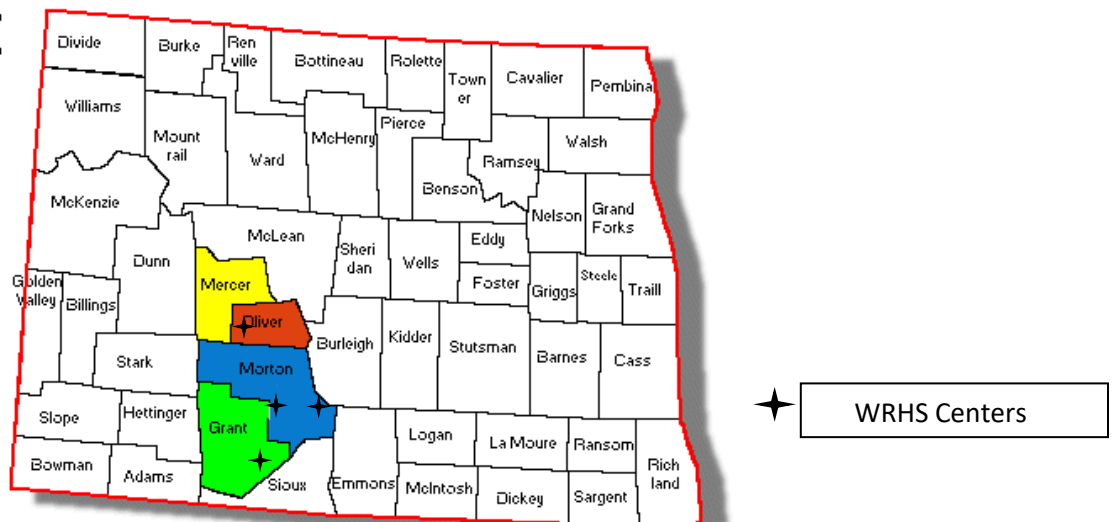
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throughout the school year with decreased enrollment (13 children per classroom in Mandan and 15 in the rural sites instead of 16-18). Despite COVID-19 absences/class closures, WRHS averaged an 89% attendance rate ranging from 82% to 98% with only one month falling below 85% (December 2020). The office of Head Start waived the 85% attendance requirement for all Head Start Programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual options were made for parents to maintain engagement with teachers during absences. Despite efforts to increase wages as a means for retaining staff, WRHS experienced a 50% turnover rate during the fiscal year July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022.

2020-2022: WRHS returned all classrooms back to full capacity and in-person classroom learning with enhanced cleaning protocols to mitigate spread of germs and sickness. WRHS aligned our COVID-19 protocols with local public schools while monitoring decisions made by the Center of Disease Control (CDC), North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services, and local health agencies. These efforts allowed WRHS to remain open at full capacity throughout the school year. WRHS averaged a 90.5% attendance rate during the 2020-2021 school year.

West River Head Start

- - Morton County
- - Grant County
- - Oliver County
- - Mercer County



III. Methodology

Describes the planning process, data collection, and data analysis.

WRHS began the community assessment process by meeting with Regional TTA staff to assist with the community assessment planning process. Together the team identified information sources, sites, and deadlines for gathering needed data. We utilized resources provided by ECLK to aid with the development of the community assessment: Community Assessment Matrix. The team developed plans for gathering statistics and determined which resources could be gathered from community partners, parents, and/or WRHS staff.

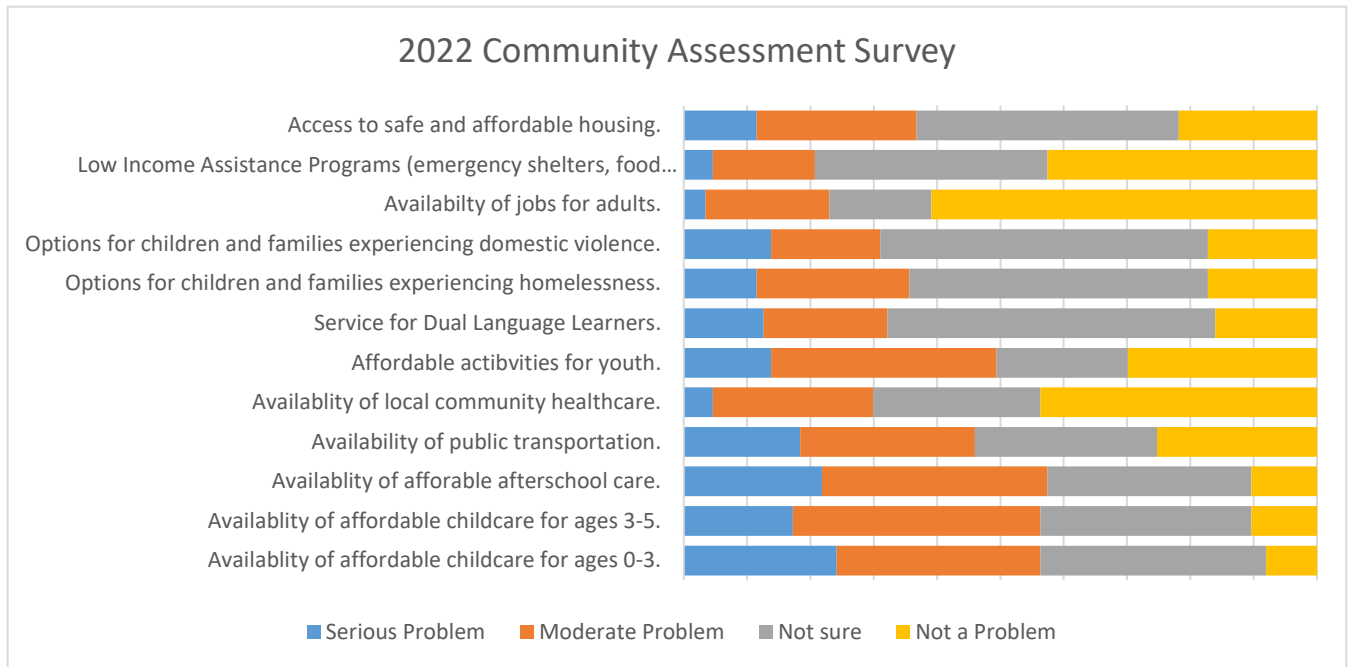
The VP of Children and Family Services, WRHS Director, and Assistant Director attended Region 8's Fall Planning and Systems Services Webinar Series (September 7, 2022 Five Year Project Planning Webinar; September 14, 2022 Nuts & Bolts of Planning Webinar; September 21, 2022; Using Data for Quality Improvement Webinar, September 28, 2022; Developing & Achieving Program Goals Webinar, October 5, 2022 Five Year Grant Applications Instructions Webinar; and October 12, 2022 Budgeting & Putting it All Together Webinar) to gather resources and support for completing the community assessment and five year grant application.

Online survey questions were developed by the WRHS director team and reviewed by the management team during a monthly MTM meeting on September 15, 2022. Questions were presented to and approved by Policy Council on October 18, 2022. Survey options were provided in hard copy and electronically to BOD members, community members, WRHS staff, and Policy Council and parents. Classroom teachers had parents complete the survey as they attended their child's parent teacher conference the week of November 7th, 2022. Returned survey numbers are displayed in the table below:

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WRHS Community Assessment Participants		
BOD	0	Community Members consisted of the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dept of Health (Cribs for Kids) • Missouri Valley Coalition for Homeless People • Libraries (Morton Mandan Public Library, Beulah Public Library) • ND Child Passenger Safety Program • Early Learning Coalition • Aid, Inc. • Bis-Man Mentor Squad • BSC Energy Club • Western Plains Public Health (aka Custer Health) • Elm Crest Manor • Ehrens Consulting • Goebel Pediatric Dentistry • New Salem Fire Department • WIC • Bronson’s Marketplace • Faith Community Church of the Nazarene • Three River’s Human Service Zone (Morton, Grant, and Sioux) • First International Bank and Trust • Grant County Extension Services • ND Housing Finance Agency • NDSU Extension Unit • West River Transit • Morton Sioux Special Education, Oliver/Mercer Special Education, Southwest Special Education Units • Beulah Public Schools, Elgin Public School, Grant County School, Fasher Public School, Carson Public School, New Salem-Almont High School, Prairie View Elementary School • Mandan Elementary Schools: Custer, Mary Stark, Lewis and Clark, Red Trail, Roosevelt
Community Members	23	
WRHS staff	24	
Parents	40	
New Salem Center Parents	13	
Hazen Center Parents	3	
Carson Center Parents	8	
Mandan Center Parents	16	

Refer to Appendix A for a sample of the community assessment survey questions distributed to community partners, WRHS staff, and parents. A visual display of the survey results is displayed in the graph below and in Appendix B:



In addition to a community assessment survey, Family Support Coaches completed portions of the Community Assessment Matrix that related to information they gather from families when identifying specific family needs, goals, and demographic data. Various online data gathering sites were used to gather state and county data: North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services Fast Facts, North Dakota KIDS Count Data Center, 2019 Statewide Housing Needs Assessment, Community Commons Health Needs Assessment, United States Census Bureau, Child Care Resource and Referral, City Data, Child Care Aware, etc. All data sites are referenced within the narrative.

WRHS Program Information Reports (PIR’s) were used to support data for demographics and services of preschool aged children served by WRHS throughout the community assessment.

On November 2 and 3, 2022, the WRHS management team met with Jasmine Hart, Region 8 Program Specialist, and Lorine Horvath, Early Childhood Specialist with TTA, for

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support with developing the program goals needed for the next Five-Year Head Start Grant.

Suggested goals developed as part of this teamwork are found in the Observation and Recommendation section of this Community Assessment. The Community Assessment summary and prospective goals and objectives were presented for input and approval to Policy Council (PC) on March 29, 2023 and to HIT's Board of Directors (BOD) on April 5, 2023.

Refer to PC and BOD minutes for documented discussions. Suggested goals were approved by both parties with no change.

IV. Service Area Data

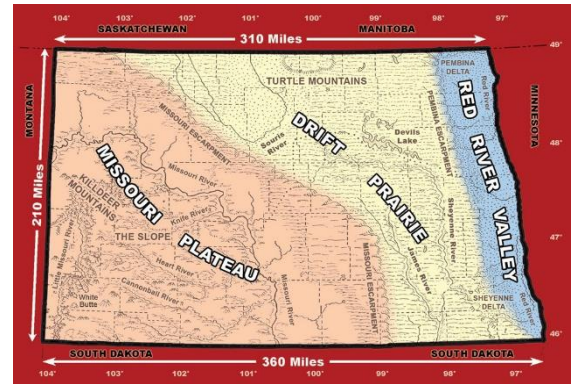
Includes basic geographic, economic, and demographic features—includes required data on number of eligible children, and expectant mother, children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, and children with disabilities.

HIT, Inc is a private, non-profit organization that provides a wide variety of service in western North Dakota. The main office is located in Mandan, North Dakota and is the grantee for West River Head Start (WRHS). Established in 1979 by a group of parents who wanted better services for their children with disabilities, HIT, Inc. is the 5th largest employer in Morton County (kxnet.com) and the 11th largest employer in the Bismarck-Mandan area (Bismarck-Mandan Chamber of Commerce).

HIT, Inc's mission states "HIT supports people with disabilities through self-directed services that promote independence, dignity, and respect." Services and/or programs provided by HIT are designed for people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and/or physical disabilities, people with acquired brain injuries, children with developmental delays, and low-income families. There are 6 program categories and service types administered by HIT, Inc: Residential Services for People with ID, Day and Vocational Services for People with ID, Services for Children with Developmental Delays (KIDS Program and Right Track), Support Services, Brain Injury Services, and Services for Low-Income Families (West River Head Start).

Geographic, Population Demographics, and Economics

North Dakota: The geography of North Dakota consists of three major geographic regions: in the east is the Red River Valley, west of this, the Drift Prairie (Great Plains), and the central-southwestern part of North Dakota is covered by the Missouri Plateau, accentuated by the Badlands. West River Head Start counties all fall within the Missouri Plateau.

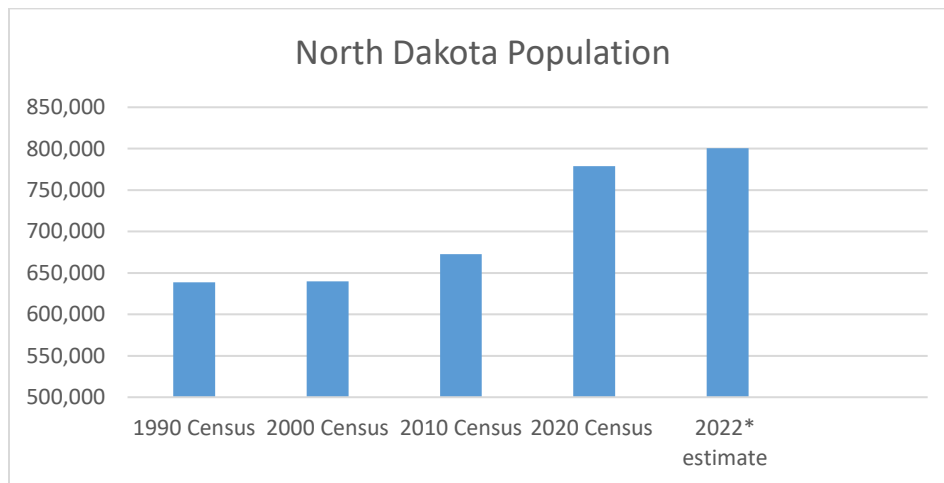


According to the 2020 United States census review population estimates, North Dakota hit a record high of 779,094 residents on April 1, 2020, and that the state had the fourth-highest growth rate in the nation by percentage, growing by 15.8% from 2010-2020. The World Population Review estimates the 2022 population of North Dakota at 800,394. Though the current growth rate is an astounding 1.35%, which ranks 2nd in the nation, North Dakota fluctuates between the 3rd-5th least populous state in the country. In order to visualize the ruralness of the state and the population density in relation to land area, the whole state of North Dakota equates a city about the size of Seattle, Washington (762,687). North Dakota has a surface area of 70,700 square miles (183,272 square kilometers), and for every square mile of land, there is an average of around 11.3 people. Washington State has a surface area of 71,300 square miles, there is an average of 115.9 people.

Overall, the figures combine to make North Dakota only the 47th most densely populated state in the entire country. North Dakota is considered the most rural state, as over 90% of its land is used for farming—although petroleum, food processing, and technology are also major industries. In 2016 North Dakota had the lowest unemployment rate (3.2%) in the entire country. An oil boom in the Bakken fields in the far western edge of the state made North

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Dakota the fastest-growing state in 2012. Young families moved into the state in search of employment opportunities. Though the oil production has slowed, many families chose to stay. Currently, North Dakota has been averaging within the 2.2-2.3% unemployment rate ranking at 10 lowest unemployment states in America.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, www.quickfacts.gov

Counties Served by WRHS

All population demographic information below is conglomerated from the following sites: DataUSA, National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families, North Dakota KIDS Count, North Dakota's Labor Market Information Center, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Cities Factsheet, Statistical Atlas, and World Population Review. According to the World Population Review, a total of 46,957 people live in the 5,350.88 square mile report area defined for this assessment. The population density for this area, estimated at 8.77 persons per square mile, is less than the national average population density of 94 persons per square mile (U.S. Cities Factsheet).

Morton County

Of the four counties served by WRHS, Morton County has the largest population-estimate base of 34,455, showing a 25.42% growth since 2010 and is located in central North Dakota. Morton County is the 7th-most populous county in North Dakota by population (World Population Review 2022). The towns of Mandan, New Salem, Almont, Glen Ullin, Hebron, and Flasher are located in Morton County with Mandan, New Salem and Hebron as the highest populated communities in the county. Current WRHS centers are located in Mandan and New Salem. The July 1, 2021 United States Census Bureau estimates Mandan’s population at 24,447 up 1.1% from the April 1, 2020 census count of 24,206. Mandan is the largest city/town in Morton County and is located opposite the Missouri River from Bismarck, the state capital—population estimate is 74,138, also up .7% from the July 1, 2020 census count of 73,622. Though Bismarck and Mandan are separate cities, they are often combined and commonly known as the Bismarck-Mandan area. Outside of Mandan, Morton County meets the “Medically Underserved Area” criteria as established by Public Health Service Act. The remaining 9,164 Morton County residents live in approximately 1,900 square miles of Morton County, which equals 4.8 people per square mile. According to North Dakota’s Labor Market Information Center, Mandan’s largest employers are 1) Educational Services (Mandan Public Schools), 2) Professional and Technical Services (National Information Solutions Cooperative), 3) Food Manufacturing (Cloverdale Foods Company), 4) Nursing and Residential Care Facilities (Good Samaritan Center), and 5) Social Assistance (HIT, Inc.). However, Morton county’s top five industries include Healthcare (18.9%), Retail (10.9%), Construction (9.2%), Government (7.9%), and Education (6.8%) (Statistical Atlas).

Grant County

Grant County is located south of Morton County and north of the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation. Carson and Elgin are the only towns located in Grant County and only Carson has a WRHS classroom. According to the World Population Review, the total estimated population of Grant County is 2,283 (down 4.64% from 2010) and spreads out over 1,659 square miles with a total of 1.3 people per square mile. All of Grant County meets the “Medically Underserved Area” criteria as established by the Public Health Service Act. According to Statistical Atlas, the top five industries providing employment in Grant County include agriculture (30.1%), Healthcare (17.3%), Education (8.1%), Retail (7.2%), and Transportation (5.1%).

Oliver County

Oliver County is located north of Morton County, south and east of Mercer County and is bordered on the east by the Missouri River. Center is the only town in Oliver County, and there are no WRHS classrooms in Oliver County. Services are provided when parents transport their children to the other centers in Mercer or Morton County. All of Oliver County meets the “Medically Underserved Area” criteria as established by Public Health Service Act. According to the World Population Review (2022), Oliver County has an estimated population of 1,883 (up 2% from 2010) and spreads out over 722 square miles with an average of 2.6 people per square mile. According to Statistical Atlas, the top five industries providing employment in Oliver County include Agriculture (15.6%), Construction (12.3%), Government (10.8%), Healthcare (10.3%), and Utilities (7.2%).

Mercer County

Mercer County is located north of Oliver County and borders Lake Sakakawea and part of the Missouri River on its eastern most boundary. Beulah, Hazen, Stanton, Zap, Riverdale and

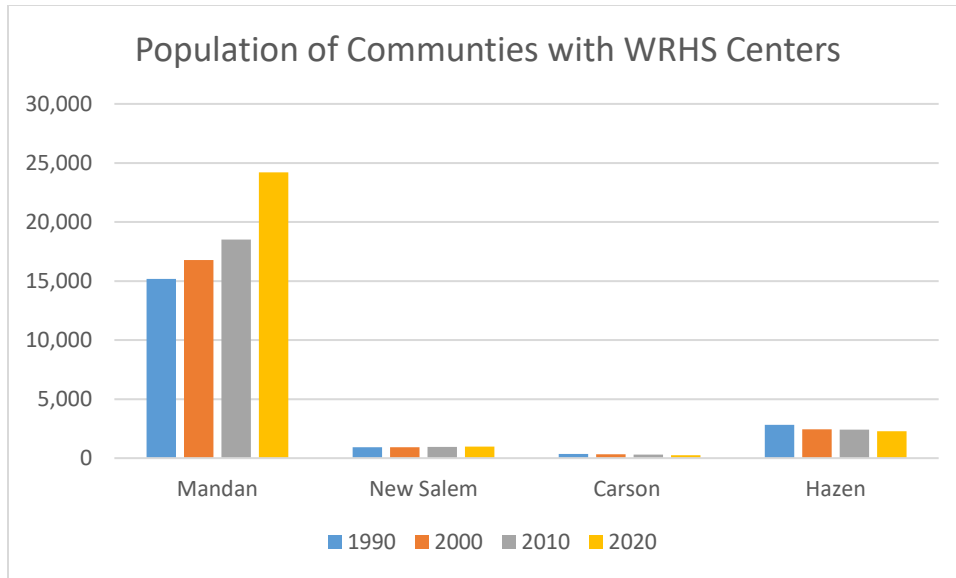
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Pick City are located in Mercer County, which has one WRHS classroom in Hazen. The western one-third of Mercer County meets the “Medically Underserved Area” criteria as established by the Public Health Service Act. According to the World Population Review (2022), Mercer County has an estimated population of 8,338 (down 1.04% from 2010). Mercer County spreads out over 1,042 square miles with an average of 8.00 people per square mile. According to Statistical Atlas, the top five industries providing employment in Mercer County include Utilities (12.3%), Oil, Gas, and Mining 11.3%), Healthcare (11.3%), Retail 11.0%) and Construction (9.9%).

Demographics

As a state, North Dakota’s overall population has been increasing steadily since 2000. The World Population Review estimates North Dakota’s has grown 1.35% from 2020 to 2022 moving the population up to 800,394 (21,300 more than the 2020 US Census report record above). Of the communities served by WRHS, the population increase is less than North Dakota’s average with the exception of the city of Mandan in Morton County. The bar graph below provides a visual representation of WRHS communities (Mandan, Carson, New Salem, and Hazen) from 1990 to the US Census for 2020. Population comparison trends between WRHS communities and North Dakota as a state can be viewed by comparing the bar graph “Population of Communities with WRHS Centers” below and the bar graph titled “North Dakota Population” on page 15.

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Source: 2020 U.S. Census Bureau and Biggestuscities.com

According to the World Population Review 2022, North Dakota ranks number two out of all 50 states for the highest birth rate. Though the proportion of children is increasing in many of the larger communities of North Dakota, the elderly continues to remain high in smaller communities. For years North Dakota’s population was referred to as the “Graying of North Dakota.” North Dakota’s young people were leaving the state. However, with the oil boom (2006-2012) bringing jobs and young families back to the state and the job market opportunities and low unemployment rates ranking North Dakota 3rd (US Bureau of Labor Statistics November 2022) in comparison to other states, young families have chosen to stay in the state, which has shifted North Dakota as a whole to be getting younger. North Dakota was recognized as the only state in the United States growing younger in the decade 2010 to 2018. North Dakota’s median age dropped from 37 in 2010 to 35.2 in 2020 unlike the nation whose median age continues to rise. North Dakota’s decreasing median age ranks it as the 4th youngest state in the nation. Only

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Utah (31.1), Alaska (34.1) and Texas (34.8) are estimated to be younger than North Dakota (Statistical Atlas).

Counties served by WRHS have a higher median age than the state with Morton County at 37.6, Grant County at 48.2, Oliver county at 48, and Mercer county at 45.1 (2020 DataUSA). Grant County is the only county that decreased its mean age from 53.3 to 48.2 in 2020, but it is still quite bit older than North Dakota's mean average.

Along with younger families moving to North Dakota, the state, like the nation, is becoming more racially diverse. North Dakota saw the most increase in diversity, growing by 12 percentage points over the past decade (2010-2020). North Dakota's increase in diversity was fueled by its decreasing the white population. As of 2020, 82% of residents identify as "white alone", down from 89% in 2010. North Dakota's non-white population saw less dramatic change. The American Indian and Alaska Native population – North Dakota's second-largest demographic group – decreased by just 1 percentage point from 2010, making up 5% of the state population in 2020. Meanwhile, the population that identified as Hispanic or Latino grew by 2 percentage points in 2020 and now makes up 4% of the total population (U.S. News, 2021).

WRHS recognizes that race and ethnicity have important implications for culture, identify, and overall well-being for children. Children of different races and ethnicities often show large variation in well-being including, health, motility, school performance, and access to family resources. As North Dakota continues to expand its racial diversity, efforts to meet the specific needs of minority residents may become a greater need. Comparing the percentage of racially diverse children served by WRHS to the state population numbers, WRHS serves a higher percentage of racially diverse children (see chart below). This evidence coincides with the

2022 KIDS Count Data Book that continues to “identify racial and ethnic disparities that persist in America today”. Some of their examples include:

- “17% of children of all backgrounds live in poverty compared to 32% of African American children and 31% of American Indian children.
- 27% of all kids have parents who lack secure employment; this rate rockets to 44% for American Indian children and 41% of African American children
- Latino children, when compared to white peers, are also more likely to grow up in poverty and have parents who aren’t securely employed.” (The Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2022 KIDS Count Data Book).

	% African American	% White	% American Indian or Alaska Native	% Bi-Racial Multi-Racial	% Hispanic
Morton County*	1.7%	87.5%	4.5%	2.1%	4.3%
Grant County*	.3%	95%	1.8%	1.9%	1.2%
Mercer County*	.7%	91.9%	3%	1.8%	2.7%
Oliver County*	.5%	93.6%	3%	.9%	1.9%
North Dakota*	3.5%	83.2%	5.7%	2.4%	4.4%
WRHS 2021-2022 Cumulative Total**	3.7%	69.4%	9.7%	6.7%	10.4%

*Source census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/northdakota 2020

**Source WRHS cumulative totals from 2021-2022 Program Information Report

Though white (non-Hispanic) racial/ethnicity continues to dominate the population in the counties served by WRHS, Morton, Grant, and Mercer counties showed the most growth of Hispanic/Latino population between 2010 and 2021. However, Morton County is the only county that is more diverse than it was in 2010. In 2021, Morton county’s white (non-Hispanic) group made up 87.5% of the population compared with 92.8% in 2010. Between 2010 and 2021, the share of the population that is Hispanic/Latino grew the most, increasing 2.8 percentage points to 4.3% whereas the white (non-Hispanic) population had the largest decrease dropping 5.3

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percentage points to 87.5%. Mercer County's Hispanic/Latino population increased by 93 from 128 in 2010 to 221 in 2021. In Grant County, the Hispanic/Latino population increased by 19 from 8 in 2010 to 27 in 2021. Oliver County increased its growth in the American Indian/Alaska Native (non-Hispanic) population by 27 from 26 in 2010 to 53 in 2021 (USA Facts 2021).

Except for Native Americans, the North Dakota population has a lesser percentage of minorities than in the nation as a whole, but, like the national trend, the percentage of minorities in the state is growing each year. Since detailed analysis of the United States Census Bureau for 2020 is still recovering from the COVID-19 disrupting data collection and analysis, specific data regarding Hispanic children was gathered from the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families. According to the October 4, 2017, Research Publication on Hispanic Children and Families, there were around 18 million Hispanic born, accounting for one quarter the overall child population. Although 94% of these children have been born in the United States, only half of them have at least one parent who was born outside of the country. In North Dakota, as of 2018, approximately 61.9% of the nation's Hispanic population were of Mexican origin. Another 15.1% were of Puerto Rican origin, and with about 3.9% each of Cuban and Salvadoran and about 3.5% Dominican origins (DataUSA). In Morton County, the 3rd top employer, Cloverdale Foods, recruits' employees from American Territories to include Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, Guam, etc., which brings workers along with their families to the region. WRHS continues to feel the effects of increased Spanish speaking (dual language) families, especially in the Mandan community.

Though WRHS serves a relative proportionate number of children according to race/ethnicity when compared to the percentages within the state and service area, the percentage of minorities served is greater than the percentage totals for North Dakota's child population

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(ages 0-18). WRHS serves a greater percent of African American, American Indian, and Hispanic minorities than North Dakota as a whole. (Refer to table display above for Racial/Ethnic makeup). Like much of North Dakota, WRHS is serving more Dual Language Learners. Though one teaching staff is bilingual and often assists with Spanish interpretation, the task is daunting and tiresome. According to the 2021-2022 PIR, WRHS recorded that 6 of the 134 students spoke a language other than English. Five of those students' primary language spoken in the home was Spanish. Support for Dual Language Learners, specifically the Spanish population is a continued concern and was noted as a need on the community assessment survey (see graph under Methodology on page 12).

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention 2021 and America's Health Rankings for North Dakota teen births (2020), North Dakota mirrors the nation with continued decreases in all racial/ethnicity teen births. Despite these improvements, the teen birth rate is still substantially higher for minority youth than for white youth in North Dakota. See teen pregnancy numbers under Expectant Mothers.

Eligible Children and Families

According to the Poverty Guidelines published by the Federal Government, children, ages 3-5 with low income, are eligible for Head Start services, and pregnant woman and children ages 0 through 2 with low income are eligible for Early Head Start. Children in foster care, homeless children, and children from families receiving public assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, SNAP or Supplemental Security Income) are categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services regardless of income. Head Start programs may enroll up to 10 percent of children from families that have incomes above the Poverty Guidelines. Programs may also serve up to an additional 35 percent of children from families whose incomes are above

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the Poverty Guidelines, but below 130 percent of the poverty line if the program can ensure that certain conditions have been met.

The extent of a family's poverty is defined according to a percent ranking. Poverty is measured at 100% of the Federal poverty guidelines. Near-poverty families earn between 100% and 150% of the Federal poverty guidelines. Families in extreme poverty are defined as earning less than 50% of the Federal poverty guidelines.

Poverty falls disproportionately on the backs of young children, but research has proven that poverty creates barriers to access health services, healthy food, and other necessities that contribute to poor health status. According to the 2022 KIDS Count Data Book, the national trend for overall economic well-being of children, which measures children in poverty; parents who lack secure employment; live in households with high housing cost burden, and teens not in school and not working, is getting better when comparing data from 2004-2012 to data gathered from 2016-2020. However, researchers at Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy report, 'the monthly child poverty rate increased from 12.1 percent in December 2021 to 17 percent in January 2022, the highest rate since the end of 2020. The 4.9 percentage point (41 percent) increase in poverty represents 3.7 million more children in poverty due to the expiration of the monthly Child Tax Credit payments.'" The KIDS Count Data Book, ranked North Dakota first in the nation for child economic well-being in June of 2021, falling to second to Nebraska in 2022. However, North Dakota's overall child well-being rank moved from 12th in 2021 to 11th in 2022 when comparing one state to another.

Similar to the nation's census data, North Dakota's child poverty is declining. North Dakota's child poverty rate lowered from 14% in 2015 to 11.1% in 2020. Despite the lowering percentages from 2016-2020, younger children in the state still have a higher poverty rate. The

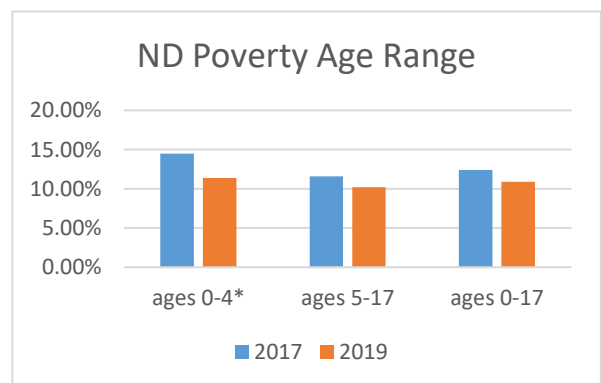
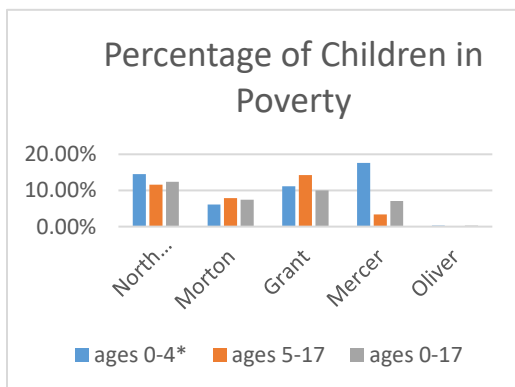
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average percentage of children in poverty ages birth through 4 is higher than older children (i.e., ages 0 through 4 is 12.5% whereas ages 5 through 17 is 10.5%) (2022 KIDS Count Data Book).

Data to display North Dakota's County poverty age range comparisons for ages 0-4 are only available from 2017 as reported in the North Dakota Fact Book 2019. Based on the 2017 data, counties served by WRHS show lower 0-4 year olds living in poverty in 3 out of 4 counties.

Mercer county displays a higher percentage of 0-4 year olds living in poverty. County percentages of children 0-4 living in poverty in 2017 are displayed in bar graph titled "Percentage of Children in Poverty" below.

Though COVID-19 interrupted the data analysis process to break out the 0-4 poverty age range for North Dakota counties in 2020, the 0-4 year olds in poverty across the state is available (refer to table titled "Percentage of Children in Poverty" below). North Dakota county numbers of children in poverty can be broken down to reflect the increase the 0-4 year olds have on the overall total of children in poverty by comparing the total of 0-17 year olds with 5-17 year olds (refer to table titled "Poverty Age Range" below). Visual representation of those total numbers suggests a suspected higher percentage of 0-4 year olds living in poverty in Morton and Mercer counties, similar to actual data numbers gathered in 2015.



Sources: KIDS Count Data Center North Dakota 2022 <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#ND/2/0/char/0>
North Dakota Fact Book 2019 <https://ndkids.windfall.tools/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/North-Dakota-Factbook-2019.pdf>

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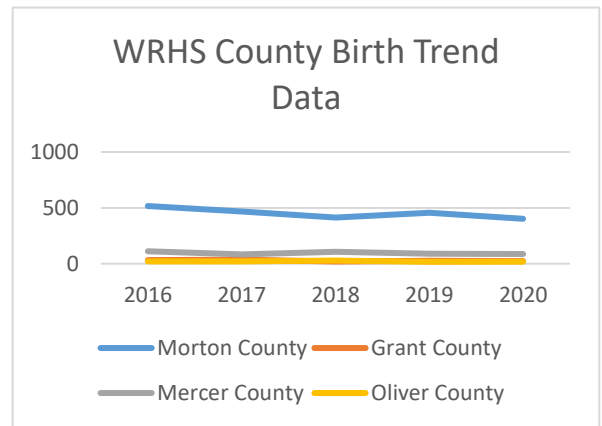
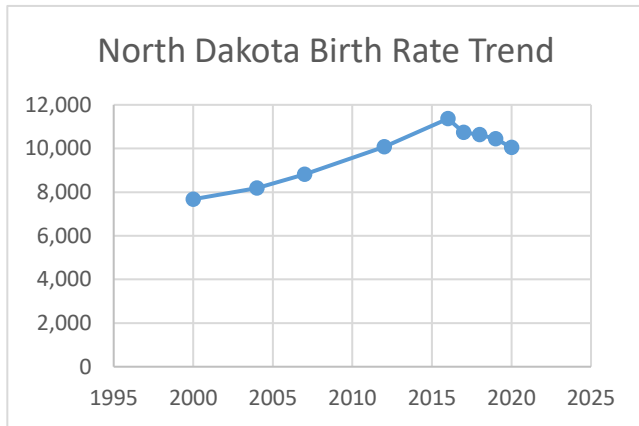
“Despite continued improvement in the child poverty rate, significant disparities exist in North Dakota with respect to age, race and ethnicity, family type, and place. Younger children are more likely than older children to live in families struggling to cover basic expenses for housing, food, transportation, health care, and childcare (15% and 12%, respectively). Hispanic and racial minority youth are 2 to 6 times more likely than white children to live in poverty. Children living with a single parent are eight times more likely to live in poverty than children living with married parents (34% and 4%, respectively)” (North Dakota Factbook 2019).

In all counties except Mercer, the percentage of eligible children residing in WRHS’ service area is lower than North Dakota’s average according to the North Dakota 2019 KIDS Count data; however, looking at the North Dakota Factbook 2019 KIDS Count data, a total of 215 children ages 0-4 would meet eligibility for Head Start services in WRHS’ service area. Assuming they all applied for Head Start, 97 children would go unserved and/or be on the waiting list for an opening in one of the 118 available slots.

According to WRHS 2021-2022 PIR data; 57% of WRHS preschoolers (77 children) were eligible due to meeting 100% of the Federal government poverty guideline, 16% (21 children) were eligible at 130% of the poverty guideline, 15% (20 children) were categorically eligible due to being in Foster Care, classified as homeless or receiving TANF or SSI, and 15% (20 children) were over income. In order to serve children in communities located in medically underserved areas with a population of less than 1,000 and no other preschool options in area, WRHS applies for qualification to serve up to 50% over-income children in areas that meet the Gravel Amendment of the Head Start Act (New Salem and Carson)--chart in Appendix C.

Expectant Mothers

After decades of decline, North Dakota’s birth rate increases along with the population increase. From 2002-2016, North Dakota witnessed a yearly increase in births ranging from 7,755 births in 2002 to 11,364 in 2016. Though there was a slight decrease from 2017 (10,738) to 2019 (10,447), recent research on birth rates in the United States ranks North Dakota as one of the highest birth rates in the country. According to 2022 North Dakota KIDS Count Data Book, Morton County is the closest to modeling North Dakota’s trend with births. The outlying areas appear to be maintaining their birth rate with slight yearly differences (see Birth Trend bar graphs below).



Source: North Dakota 2022 KIDS Count data: www.ndkidscount.org

As stated above, teen births in North Dakota is decreasing along with the nation. According to data provided by North Dakota’s 2022 Power to Decide campaign to prevent unplanned pregnancy, teen pregnancy and childbearing are at historic lows and there has been impressive progress on both fronts in all 50 states.

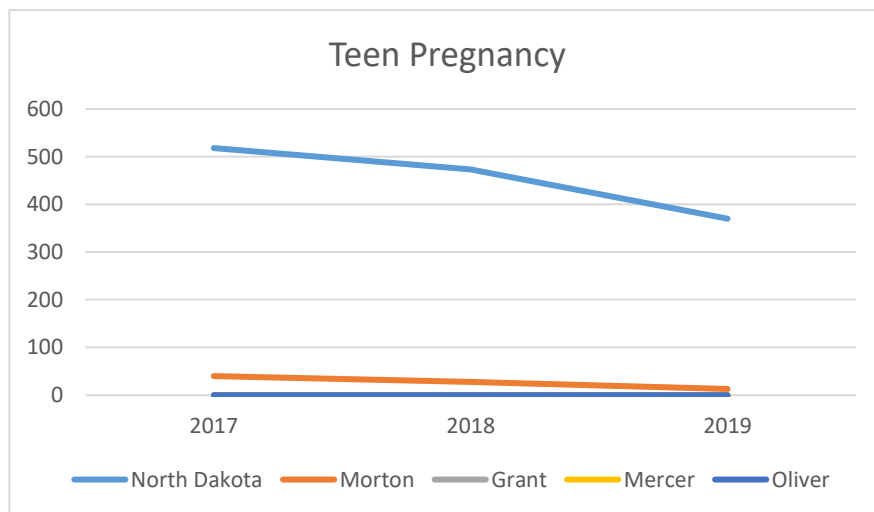
“The teen birth rate in North Dakota declined 61% between 1991 and 2020. Even so, in 2020 there were 319 births to teens, down from 370 in 2019. Most teen births in North Dakota (76%) are to older teens (age 18-19). Teen birth rates have fallen for all racial and ethnic groups,

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and in some cases the gap in teen birth rates by race/ethnicity has narrowed, but disparities remain. In North Dakota, the teen birth rate is 3 to 6 times higher for racial and ethnic minority teens than for white teen” (Power to Decide and North Dakota Factbook 2019).

“Teen pregnancy has substantial health, economic, and social costs. Pregnant teenagers are more likely to experience miscarriages, maternal illness (preeclampsia, hypertension, etc.), stillbirth, and neonatal death. Teenage mothers are also more likely to drop out of school and never return to raise a child. Teen mothers, therefore, often lack a high school diploma, let alone a college degree, and will likely face unemployment and poverty. Children of teen pregnancies are sometimes forced into foster care if the mother cannot care for them, where teenage females are twice as likely to become pregnant, creating a cycle” (World Population Review 2022).

Although the state teen pregnancy data is declining more significantly, counties served by WRHS continue to be lower than the state when comparing to North Dakota’s 2019 percent of 3.4%: Morton County 2.8%, Grant 0%, Mercer no percent calculated, and Oliver 0%.



Source: North Dakota Factbook 2017, 2018, 2019 <https://ndkidscount.org/state-data-book>

Children in Foster Care

According to the Child Welfare League of America, North Dakota’s Children (2022), data from 2019 shows that 940 children were in the foster care system. 68% were in non-relative foster homes, 21% were placed with family relatives, and 11% were in a group home or institution. Counties served by WRHS account for 65 children in foster care residing in family homes as of November 1, 2022. Oliver and Mercer counties had 11 children in foster care, Morton County reported 40 children in foster care, and Grant County reported 14 children in foster care.

In 2021, 106 children were in foster care in Morton County (82), Oliver/Mercer Counties (9), and Grant County (15). According to PIR data for 2021-2022 school year, WRHS served 12 children who were placed in foster care: 5 in Hazen, 0 in Carson, 2 in New Salem, and 5 in Mandan. Foster care children identified upon 2022-2023 fall enrollment consisted of 2 in Hazen, 1 in Carson, 0 in New Salem, and 3 in Mandan. Suspected increase in foster care children served (displayed in table below) could be related to more foster parents in WRHS’s 4 counties, so children outside the region/county were placed with those families.

WRHS Yearly PIR	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Children Foster Care	3	3	12	10	12

“About 2 percent of North Dakota children received foster care services in 2018 (2,738 children). The majority of children in foster care are in a family home (86% in 2018), which is up from 76% in 2010. Nationally, 86% of foster children were placed in families in 2017. Parental drug abuse is the leading reason for a child's placement in North Dakota foster care (36% of cases in 2018)” (North Dakota Factbook 2019).

Children Experiencing Homelessness

The definition for children experiencing homelessness is defined differently than for adults. The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987, which defines a homeless child as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence," is designed to provide access to enrollment in school districts as well as educational stability for homeless children and youth. North Dakota KIDS Count data indicates 1,788 (1.4%) students K-12 as homeless in 2020-2021 down from the median of 2,298 students in the past 10 years 2011-2021. There is no data for homeless children 0-5, but WRHS's historical data also reflects a decline in homeless children enrolled. WRHS PIR for 2021-2022 recorded 2 children who experienced homelessness during the enrollment year. Homeless children identified upon 2022-2023 fall enrollment consisted of 0 Hazen, 0 in Carson, 1 in New Salem, and 0 in Mandan.

WRHS Yearly PIR	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Families Experiencing Homelessness	6	4	Info not available	1	2
Children Experiencing Homelessness	8	5	Info not available	1	2
Families who acquired housing during school year	3	1	Info not available	1	2

Children with Disabilities

North Dakota's special education enrollments have increased along with the population with a trend hovering around 14% of the total public-school enrollment. In 1996-1997, 12,985 children were enrolled in special education, representing 11% of total public-school enrollment in the state. By 2002-2003, special education enrollment increased to 13,901 or 13.4% of total

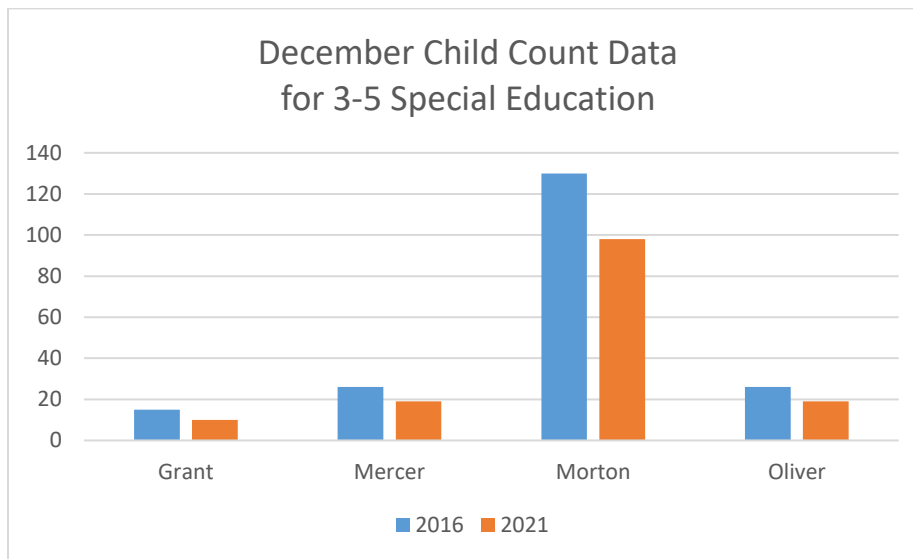
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enrollment. During the 2006-2007 school year, 13,825 children were enrolled in special education services, or 13.8% of total enrollment; an increase of 0.4%. By 2009, 14% (13,261) of children ages 3 to 21 were enrolled in special education in public schools. The 2019 North Dakota KIDS Count data, listed 15,881 students as enrolled in special education from the ages 3-21 (14%). A higher percent is listed for children ages 3-5 (14.7%) with the highest percent served for students ages 6-11 (42.7%) and ages 12-17 (38.%).

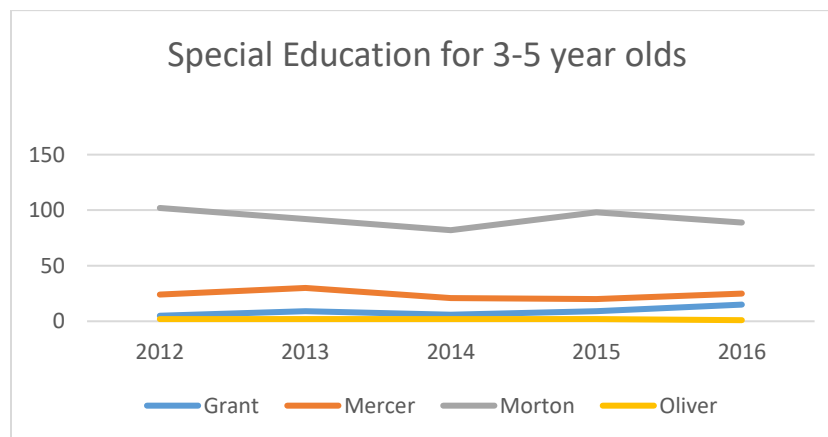
Statistics indicate children with identified disabilities are among the population of children at greatest risk. Bismarck Early Childhood Education Program (BECEP) and HIT, Inc's KIDS Program provide early intervention services for infants and toddlers with identified disabilities (Part C of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)) in WRHS's service area. A regional Right Track program (ND's Part C child find for infants and toddlers) screens potentially eligible children in all four counties served by WRHS and refers those identified with developmental concerns to Part C early intervention for eligibility evaluation. According to West Central Human Service Center as of January 2023, Morton County is serving 94 infants and toddlers with identified disabilities; Mercer County has 18; Oliver County has 3; and Grant County has 2. Of the children in the four counties who turned 3 during the 2021-2022 school year, only 16 did not qualify for early childhood special education (Part B) services, (Morton = 10; Oliver = 1; Mercer = 5). As of January 2023, HIT, Inc's KIDS Program serves Region 7 children in the counties of Morton (34), Mercer (18), Oliver (3), and Grant (2) but also serves children in Burleigh and McLean counties. The bulk of HIT, Inc's KIDS Program serves children residing in Region 8 in the counties of Adam, Billings, Bowman, Dunn, Golden Valley, Hettinger, Slope and Stark.

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Part B—619 (IDEA preschool special needs age 3 -5) special education units serving the four-county area report that a total of 98 children were enrolled as of December 2019 North Dakota Child Count down 32 from 2016. Oliver – Mercer Special Education – 19; Morton-Sioux Special Education – 69; Southwest Special Education (Grant County) –10.



WRHS typically gathered trend data from ND Kids Count to display a picture of the special education ebb and flow per county. However, due to COVID, detailed numbers per county were not available as they have been in previous years. Historically, some special education units were progressively serving more children, but there was still variability from year to year unlike North Dakota as a whole.



Source: North Dakota 2016 KIDS Count data: www.ndkidscount.org

WRHS began the 2021-2022 school year with 12 of 118 (10%) children enrolled with identified disabilities. By May 1, 2022, an additional 19 children were identified totaling 31 (26%) children identified with disabilities within the school year. The total amount of students enrolled throughout the year was 134 (this includes students that withdrew). The ability to find and identify children with disabilities is an enormous tribute to the collaboration between WRHS and the three special education units in the four counties and it also is an indicator of the expert skills and knowledge of the WRHS staff.

V. Identified Needs

The education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and their families – including prevalent social and economic factors that impact their well-being.

Community partners, WRHS staff, and parents enrolled in WRHS identified four predominant themes when completing the CA survey: Affordable Childcare for 0-3, Affordable Childcare for 3-5, Affordable Afterschool Care, and Availability of Public Transportation.

Child Care

North Dakota's economy continues to thrive, with parents working in the labor force. In 2017, 80% of North Dakota mothers were in the labor force, the seventh largest percentage among state. In addition from 2017-2021, 77.9% of children lived in situations where all parents in the household were in the work force (8th largest percentage among states). The World Population Review for 2022 indicates North Dakota has the fourth highest proportion of working adults in the nation (68.8% in 2022, down from 80% in 2017). Statistical Research Department (September 2022), reports North Dakota spiked from an all-time low unemployment rate in 2019 (2.1%) to an all-time high (5.1%) most likely due to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. AS of January 2023, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ranks North Dakota as number one for unemployment rates dropping back to (2.1%) since the pandemic—seasonally adjusted. With

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most parents working, reliable and affordable childcare can help provide parent with greater opportunity to be productive at work and school. In addition, high-quality childcare nurtures, stimulates, and support children as they build the confidence and critical capacities they need to thrive in school and in live. Child Care Aware of North Dakota indicates a drop in the states licensed childcares meet the potential demand (44% in 2019 to 41.5% in 2021). That means licensed childcare programs in the state have the ability to only meet approximately 40% of the potential need (0-13). In the counties WRHS serves, childcare needs vary (see Child Care Needs per County chart below). Consistent with a growing population, North Dakota's childcare needs are increasing due to younger families with working parents. According to the 2020 Child Care Aware state fact sheet, North Dakota has 43,163 children under the age of 6 that have been identified as potentially needing childcare in the state. That's up nearly 9,000 from 2011.

As no surprise, childcare was the most prominent theme found in the results of the Community Survey. Affordable childcare for 0-3, 3-5, and after-school care where all in the top needs for the communities served. While all communities are thankful for the childcare options each community has, there is concern about the quality and availability to meet the childcare needs.

Childcare is an identified need in all four counties WRHS serves. The Child Care Needs per County table below outlines the specific childcare needs per county in addition to displaying the percentage difference for supply versus demand. According to 2020 Child Care Aware of North Dakota, national childcare standards recommend that state/county licensed care should meet at least 50% of potential need. None of the counties served by WRHS meet that standard.

Child Care Needs per County

<i>Child Care</i>	<i>Grant County</i>	<i>Mercer County</i>	<i>Morton County</i>	<i>Oliver County</i>
<i>% Children 0-5 needing childcare</i>	80.7%	65.1%	82.2%	63.8%
<i># of Providers</i>	5	8	51	1
<i># Capacity</i>	87	228	979	22
<i># Children 0-5</i>	186	631	2,679	152
<i># Children 0-5 needing childcare</i>	150	411	2,203	97
<i>% in which Supply meets Demand</i>	24%	23%	22%	9%

Source: www.ndchildcare.org 2020

According to North Dakota Child Care Aware 2020 the average cost for one infant in a center averages \$9,000 per year, higher than a year’s college tuition (i.e. North Dakota State University \$8,951). Unlike college tuition, families have not had years to save for childcare costs. Therefore, if the median household income in North Dakota is around \$5,300 per month, a family earning that much would spend over 14% of its income on infant care. If that family that decides to have a second child could end up spending nearly 30% of their net income on childcare.

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) helps pay a portion of the cost of childcare for working families, or families in training or education programs in North Dakota. Families with low income who meet certain eligibility criteria qualify for the program. In 2022 North Dakota increased the income level for CCAP to 85% of the state's median income so that more working families could get help with childcare costs. A family of four can earn no more than \$7,585 per month to qualify for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and in most cases, the family pays a co-payment, which goes towards the cost of care. A co-payment is determined on a sliding fee scale based on a family's income and household size. The North Dakota Department of Human Services reported that 1,824 families with low incomes took advantage of

CCAP to help offset a portion of their childcare costs – an average of \$715 per month supported care for approximately 3,063 children each month (ND Department of Human Services Quarterly Budget Insight July 2021 to December 2021). In North Dakota a single parent spends 33.8% of their income on childcare for one infant. The ruralness of North Dakota and sparse population provide for fewer job opportunities and even more difficulty in finding adequate childcare (licensed or registered).

In the state of North Dakota, 3.5% of children ages 0-13 received childcare assistance in 2019. Comparative county data is lower than the state in Oliver County at 0%, Morton County at 2.7%, and Mercer County at 1.1%, with Grant County slightly higher than the state at 4.0% (North Dakota Kids Count Fact Book).

Preschool

WRHS strives to provide comprehensive services to low-income families in the targeted service area. There are no state funded preschool programs for the working poor or for the income eligible families who remain on the Head Start waiting lists. The Hazen and Beulah communities each have one private preschool option outside of the WRHS classroom that is located in Hazen. The New Salem public school would like to start a public pre-school, but funding and affordable space present ongoing barriers. The challenge community providers report with WRHS is that Head Start is required to take income-eligible children first. This results in many over-income four-year-olds starting kindergarten without any preschool or school readiness experience. Only 33.4% of North Dakota's 3–4-year-olds are enrolled in some type of early education program (2019 ND KIDS Count Fact Book). Of those children residing in WRHS's service area: 33.3% are enrolled in Oliver County, 33.4% in Morton County, 30% in Mercer County, and 16.1% in Grant. Like New Salem, Head Start in Carson is the only pre-

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school in the area. Families with preschool-aged children living in Flasher can choose to commute their eligible children to Carson using the public-school bus or personal vehicles. In 2021, the Elgin School started up a preschool program with the Best of Class grant from the ND Department of Public Instruction, but the days and hours are very limited, so some Elgin families still send their children to WRHS in Carson. Though public school busing is an option, the time change has been an additional barrier for these small children. These three communities are caught between two time zones (Mountain and Central). The loss and gain of an hour for getting to and from school has deterred some families from participating in WRHS service despite meeting income eligibility.

WRHS collaborates with the public school busing to transport eligible children when possible. WRHS received a Duration Grant in 2016-2017 and again in 2018-2019, which helped meet some of the transportation needs of children and families residing in the rural areas. Expanding to full day classrooms in Carson, New Salem, and Hazen helped ease some of the transportation issues as children are now able to ride the public-school bus home at the end of the school day if they have an older sibling on the route. Otherwise, the family is required to meet the bus at a designated spot for pick up. WRHS transports children after school from the center in Carson to the local licensed childcares in Carson. In Hazen, WRHS transports children to and from Beulah where their parents either pick them up or the children stay at the school for Part B preschool special needs services.

In Mandan, there is no provided busing for children to attend WRHS. Although public transportation is offered, routes stop several blocks from WRHS building. Family Support Coach's work closely with families to brainstorm transportation concerns with getting their children to and from school. (See Transportation section for additional community transportation

resources/needs). Despite efforts to be creative and collaborative, parents and community members continue to report transportation as one of their top challenges in all four counties (see Appendix B. for graphed survey results).

Though the Mandan community has private preschool options in the community, many families cannot afford the private preschool cost. Preschool needs in all counties were identified as one of the top four community needs (see Appendix B. for graphed survey results).

Until April 2015, North Dakota did not provide direct funding to early childhood education. For the first time in its history, the North Dakota Congress approved a bill that would give grants to pre-K programs serving low-income children. Funding for the Early Childhood Education Grants Program was determined by the legislature on a biennial basis and award amounts varied. North Dakota expanded opportunities for parents to enroll their 4-year-olds in a new prekindergarten education program that prioritizes family engagement and skill-building by evolving the Early Childhood Education Grant Program to Best in Class. The Best in Class grant programs are intended for families to enroll their children regardless of income. Programs are not required to charge tuition, but if they do, they need to charge tuition based on a sliding scale by a family's income. Elgin is the only school district participating in this grant venture in counties served by WRHS. The North Dakota Individuals with Education Act (IDEA) Advisory Committee Year in Review reported on September 15, 2021 that there were 23 Best in Class programs in the state.

Transportation

Transportation was identified as one of the 4 top needs by our community partners, WRHS staff, and parents were surveyed (see Appendix B. for graphed survey results). Though all communities recognize transportation challenges, efforts to address the transportation needs

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are complicated primarily due to the ruralness of the state. Communities do not have the resources to fully address the transportation needs for their citizens.

The Bismarck/Mandan area has the most transportation options (bus, taxi, uber) and has had some sort of public transportation since 2004. The greatest challenge for most families is cost of public transportation. To further complicate matters, many of the systems are challenging for families to use. The CAT (Capital Area Transit) bus has only six routes. The bus stops along the routes are not heated, and during the extreme cold winters, waiting outdoors could be dangerous—especially for children who do not regulate body temperature in the same way as adults. None of the CAT routes travel to the WRHS center requiring families to walk several blocks from one of the bus stops if using the CAT as means to transport their child to school.

Bismarck/Mandan also has the “Para transit” that offers free rides covered by Medicaid, but it can only be used for medical appointments or if the rider has already set up a ride service with the company at least two days in advance. Many requested drop off/pickup locations are not approved. Taxi and Uber options are available but expensive for families living on limited means. Families classified as “homeless” can receive vouchers for taxi services through the homeless liaison, but there is a verification process and restrictions that create additional barriers for families.

Hazen has city transportation available for purchase to help commute citizens to medical appointments. There is no public transportation available in any of the other rural communities (Carson, New Salem). Although each county has some transportation available to the elderly population to get to medical appointments in Bismarck/Mandan and/or Dickinson, this does not address the needs of families with small children who need to commute for medical, mental

health, dental, or therapy treatment. This is even more challenging for children who need more frequent health/medical care such as weekly therapy sessions.

Medical, Mental Health, Dental Care

Custer Health is the public health agency that aids health care in all four counties served by WRHS. Custer Health works with WRHS to provide physicals for all children who enter the program without a medical home. They also provide smoking cessation classes free of charge to the public. WRHS and Custer Health work together to provide quality services to the children and families in the four counties. Custer Health continues to receive a Chronic Illness grant that includes some health and nutrition trainings at all WRHS sites. Custer Health will be partnering with WRHS at Family Nights or Parent Activity Hours to introduce and encourage families to try new fruits and vegetables as well as teach them how to cut up and serve unfamiliar items.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) the prevalence of obesity in the nation has increased from 17% (12.7 million) to 19.7% (14.7 million) of children and adolescents aged 2-19 years are obese (Childhood Obesity Facts, 2022), but the prevalence of obesity among children aged 2 to 5 years increased from to 9.4% in 2013-2014 to 12.%. Similar to the nation, obesity rates in North Dakota are also steadily increasing. November 2022 data from County Health Rankings reveal, North Dakota has the 11th highest adult obesity rate in the entire U.S. Around 33.9% of adult North Dakotans have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater, while almost 14% are in either poor or fair health. Poverty is a potential factor contributing to a higher obesity rate among younger people. Healthier foods that tend to be lower in calories and more nutritious are relatively more expensive and may be less affordable to low-income households. About 10.2% of children under 18 in North Dakota live in poverty, the 4th lowest share in the country. The U.S. child poverty is 16.8% North Dakota has the second

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highest rate of residents with limited access to healthy foods at 7.0% compared to 5.9% of people across the country as a whole.

WRHS monitors the BMI levels of children enrolled in Head Start by conducting BMI measurements in the fall of each year. BMI is a calculation based on a child's sex, age, height, and weight. It is used to identify possible weight problems in children. Statistics show a high BMI places a child at higher risk for developing health problems in the future. WRHS focused on increasing the healthy BMI for children in the 2017-2023 grant with great success. According to the 2021-2022 PIR data, 131 children were screened with the following results: 1 child was under weight (.8%), 92 children had BMI within normal limits (70%), 14 children were overweight or obese (11%), and 24 children were obese (18%).

WRHS Yearly PIR	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Underweight	8 (6%)	2 (2%)	*2 (2%)	*2 (2%)	1(.8%)
Healthy BMI	85 (66%)	91 (71%)	*67 (58%)	*63 (57%)	92 (70%)
Overweight/Obese	35 (27%)	36 (28%)	*47 (41%)	*45 (41%)	38 (29%)

*Covid

Accessing health and medical care for rural communities in North Dakota continues to present challenges for families. New Salem families need to travel to Bismarck/Mandan (25-30 miles) to meet any medical, dental, mental health or therapy need. Families struggling with transportation often elect to dismiss medical/health care need (see Transportation section). Like New Salem, there are no medical, dental, or mental health services in Carson or Flasher. Families try to utilize service options in Elgin, but often resort to traveling to Bismarck/Mandan (72 miles) or Dickinson (80 miles) for greater variability with treatment care options. Elgin has a hospital with emergency/trauma, one dentist, and a medical clinic that some Carson, Elgin, and Flasher families may choose to utilize. An ophthalmologist is also available 2 days a week and a

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mental health professional is available once a month. Hazen families express specific concern with the lack of female health care (e.g. obstetrics). Pregnant women travel from Beulah/Hazen have to Bismarck/Mandan for prenatal care (65-70 miles).

Mandan families have more options related to medical, dental, mental health and therapy care, but transportation to and from appointments can be challenging even in the metro area. (See Transportation section).

Though Hazen and Elgin each have one dentist, families residing in Mandan have access to dentists in both the Bismarck/Mandan area. The challenge facing all potentially eligible families is that some of the dentists do not take patients on Medicaid.

In order to prevent tooth decay, registered nurses and licensed practical nurses are now allowed to apply fluoride varnish to children's teeth. Data is maintained at the Dept. of Health to show if applying fluoride varnish is a cost-effective means to prevent tooth decay long-term. This statistical data is not yet available. As part of this effort WRHS' nurse was trained in fluoride treatment. Currently all WRHS children receive fluoride varnishes twice a year along with daily tooth brushing as part of their WRHS school day.

Morton, Grant and Mercer counties border American Indian reservations. WRHS serves children who are enrolled members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and the children are eligible for health and medical care through Indian Health Services (IHS). Some families choose to use IHS, but most receive medical/health services in the Bismarck/Mandan area. WRHS 2021-2022 PIR data reports throughout the school year 125 of the 134 children had health insurance at the time of enrollment. By the end of the school year that number increased to 134, resulting in 100% of the students having some type of health insurance. Types of insurance coverage ranged from Medicaid and/or CHIP (89/96), and private (36/38).

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In an effort to address the mental health professional shortage areas designated in Mercer, Oliver, and Grant Counties, WRHS contracts with a mental health consultant from Bismarck/Mandan to provide classroom visits. Following classroom observations, the mental health consultant meets with WRHS staff to review observations and provide recommendations. Recommendations are then provided to parents.

In addition to already being designated as a Medically Underserved Area, the reduction in medical services (medical clinic closures in outlying areas) and increase in population continues to make access to services even more challenging and difficult for WRHS children and families.

All of Grant and Oliver Counties, all of Morton County except Mandan, and the western half of Mercer County are Medically Underserved Areas. All of the four county areas, except Mandan, are both Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas and Health Professional Shortage Areas Rural Hospitals, Clinics, CHCs and RHCs. Mercer, Oliver and Grant County are Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. Grant County is a Dental Health Professional Shortage Area.

Referrals to outpatient therapy support is another resource available for children with identified delays/disabilities. However, the majority of therapy service options require families to travel to the Bismarck/Mandan area, which can make it difficult for children to obtain needed support.

Education

College opportunities are available for North Dakota citizens, but the cost of tuition continues to rise each year making it more and more difficult for parents to obtain a college education. According to the U.S. Department of Education's 2022 IPEDS survey, North Dakota

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State University's (NDSU) tuition and fee schedule (resident/undergraduate) tuition rate \$8,951 for in-state residents. This is 18% more expensive than the national average public four-year tuition of \$7,601, but 2% cheaper than the average North Dakota Tuition of \$9,117 for 4-year colleges. As more online classes are available, time management adds to the financial challenge as parents struggle to maintain a full-time job (and sometimes also a part-time additional job), manage a household and family, and attend college classes. This has an even greater impact on WRHS staff as the Head Start Act of 2007 has mandated increased educational requirements for all teaching staff.

North Dakota's high school graduation rate continues to hover in the mid to up 80th percentile. Counties served by WRHS report two counties above the state average and two counties below the state average (Four Year Cohort Numbers, ND Child Count, 2019). According to the 2019 ND KIDS Count Data Center, North Dakota's 2019 high school graduation rate is 88.0% (Four-Year Cohort). Individual county graduation rates are as follows: Grant County, 100%, Mercer County has a graduation rate of 93.5%, Oliver, ND, and Morton has an overall 81.2% graduation rate.

WRHS 2021-2022 PIR reported 13 of the 122 families had less than a high school graduate or GED education (2 in Hazen, 0 in Carson, 1 in New Salem, and 10 in Mandan). 36 % (44) of the 122 families of the parents with children enrolled in WRHS had at least a high school degree (10 in Hazen, 1 in New Salem, 1 in Carson, and 32 in Mandan). 39% (47) have at least an Associate of Arts degree or higher education (5 in Hazen, 12 in New Salem, 9 in Carson, and 21 in Mandan). 15% (18) had an advanced/baccalaureate degree (2 in Hazen, 3 in New Salem, 6 in Carson, and 7 in Mandan).

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The state of North Dakota began funding full-day, full-year (school year) kindergarten to school districts starting in the 2008-2009 school year. The implementation of full-day kindergarten has affected WRHS with the biggest impact of hiring of qualified Early Childhood Education teachers who were working as paraprofessionals/teachers at WRHS. The public school teacher starting pay in Mandan is significantly higher than Mandan's WRHS site (Mandan Public School \$49,000, WRHS \$42,184), and the contracted days are more (Mandan Public School 182 days, WRHS 190). The average base salary for area school districts (\$43,164) is also higher than WRHS' starting base pay. However, measuring starting pay comparisons is challenging as school districts tack on various stipends that elevate the starting base pay, and they are able to offer enticing retirement packages. Furthermore, WRHS is limited to licensed teacher applications as candidates have to have an early childhood education degree. This often forces WRHS to hire 2-year teachers while supporting them with continuing education. As soon as they have their Bachelor of Education, they often leave WRHS for the school system due to higher salaries and greater benefits. Additional challenges for WRHS is that the paperwork time is also significantly higher. As stated earlier, WRHS had a 50% staff turnover in 2021-2022.

North Dakota is one of the few states that does not have mandatory kindergarten, but it is highly recommended and offered in all public school districts. With the population increase, the public schools report they have had to increase the number of classrooms and are looking for highly qualified early childhood education teachers, which creates additional competition for WRHS teacher employment. During the 2021-2022 school year, WRHS lost 9 classroom teaching staff to higher compensation/benefits package in the same field. Six of those teaching staff were replaced during the year (2021-2022 PIR). Classroom space continues to be a concern for WRHS programs housed within the public-school buildings. In the fall of 2018, the New

Salem classroom had to relocate to the nearby Zion Lutheran Church as the elementary school was out of classroom space. In our Carson location we are located inside the public school which is watching its yearly enrollment dwindle. Carson school administrators have stated that if the k-12 population falls below 50 it will no longer be feasible to keep the school open.

Currently the K-12 population is 56 students.

VI. Community Resources and Strengths

Includes required information on other child development programs, resources available in the community, and strengths of the community—addresses issues of availability

Families with children identified as high-risk—those living at or near poverty and children identified with disabilities or developmental delays—are in need of supports that enhance their capacity to function in the context of their community networks. These programs work best when the children are young and parents are significantly involved in their care. West River Head Start (WRHS) has a proven track record of assisting agencies and organizations to identify children in poverty, children with disabilities, and to help families get out of poverty. Communities in all counties served by WRHS offer collaborative supports and join in efforts to help these families in need.

Expectant Mothers and Infant Toddler services

Optimal Pregnancy Outcome Program (OPOP), Right Track screening, Infant Development (Part C early intervention—BECEP and HIT Inc.'s KIDS Program) and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) are the only programs in WRHS service area's communities that are specifically designed to assist pregnant women, infants and toddlers. OPOP is a primary prevention program designed to empower pregnant women to make informed, healthy lifestyle choices to ensure that they give birth to healthy babies. OPOP is available to all pregnant women free of charge. Currently, there are only four Optimal Pregnancy Outcome Program sites in the eight regions throughout the state (Grand Forks, Lisbon, Minot, and Bismarck). The sites

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were initially chosen due to the access of healthcare professionals and their expected client load. Travel and maintaining the required monthly appointments pose challenges for families residing outside the communities with OPOP sites.

WIC, a program for pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants, and children younger than 5, is available in all counties in North Dakota. The 2020 Snapshot report for WIC in North Dakota reports WIC served 17,994 women and children with more than 50% of the infants born in North Dakota receiving benefits (5,756 infants). With an income eligibility qualification of 185% of the Federal Poverty Guideline, more families are able to utilize WIC support than those eligible for Head Start. WRHS service area reports Oliver County supported 10 WIC participants, Morton County supported 687 WIC participants, Mercer County reported 126, and Grant County reported 71 (2019 North Dakota KIDS Count Fact Book). WRHS numbers are significantly lower than ND as a whole due to lower county population numbers. Though WIC is offered in each county, for many families travel is required, and if families happen to miss a WIC appointment, they often go without until the next month.

WRHS receives referrals from BECEP and the KIDS Program for children transitioning out of Part C early intervention at age three, but there are no other services for at-risk 0-3 year olds who do not qualify for early intervention (Part C of IDEA). WRHS service area is sandwiched between two Head Start programs that offer Early Head Start services. Dickinson's Community Action program provides Early Head Start home-based and center-based services to families residing in southwest North Dakota in communities west of WRHS's service area. BECEP's Head Start offers home-based services for families residing to the east of WRHS service area. With the increased population of young children, minorities, and minimal to no service options to aid expectant mothers and infants/toddlers, WRHS recognizes this need area.

Medical care options was identified as a concern by many parents surveyed for the Community assessment. See reference to Medical/Health Care in the Identified Needs section.

Special Education

There are three special education units that collaborate with WRHS to provide services to eligible children ages 3 to 5 years in the region. In New Salem and Carson, the WRHS classrooms are the preschool special needs classrooms and special education staff either pull students out or provide support in the classroom. Hazen and Mandan have separate preschool special needs classrooms, provided by the local special education unit. Students spend half a day in Head Start and the other half of their day in the public-school special needs classroom. Collaboration with Part B special needs staff has been crucial for the success of WRHS enrolled and referred children. Coordinating services between classrooms and programs is a major component of the Education Coordinator/Disabilities' position. Qualification of suspected 3 year olds and timely receipt of Individual Education Plans were the only minor challenges noted by WRHS staff—though this has been improving over the past couple years. Suspected 3-year-olds with developmental delays/disabilities are referred to special education programs for evaluation. If determined not eligible for special education, WRHS staff continue to monitor development closely and re-refer/refer to other community resources as needed.

Pre-school Readiness

In 2011, North Dakota started special funding for the “Gearing Up for Kindergarten” program. Created by the North Dakota State University Extension Service in collaboration with statewide Parent Resource Centers, the program helps with the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Sites participating throughout the state continue to ebb and flow. Though there are 57 sites across the state, only 973 families participated in 2014-2015 school year. Despite the

state's best effort, there are still children starting school with no preschool readiness experiences. To emphasize the perspective, the state's Early Head Start and Head Start programs enrolled 4,192 students as of 2013 according to the National KIDS Count data.

North Dakota expanded opportunities for parents to enroll their 4-year-olds in a new prekindergarten education program that prioritizes family engagement and skill-building by evolving the Early Childhood Education Grant Program to Best in Class.

Social-Emotional Learning—Mental Health

Leaders of North Dakota's early childhood programs have been working to develop a state-wide social-emotional system for all providers of early childhood (daycares, preschool programs, Head Starts, special education, therapists, physicians etc.) to follow in order to enhance positive social-emotional learning. The state has joined the nation in recognizing that social and emotional learning (SEL) plays a critical role in the promotion of positive mental health and the prevention of mental health disorders among children and youth. Recognizing that mental health is not a static state that exists within a child, but is influenced by the interactions between the child and his or her environment, this effort plans to integrate SEL into teaching practices that create safe and supportive environments in which all children feel they belong, reduce the stigma of mental health difficulties, and encourage help-seeking when children need it, in order to promote health mental well-being in all children.

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) created an Office of Early Learning in 2016-2017, which resulted in moving the Head Start Collaboration office from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Despite this effort to create a more cohesive early childhood system, early childhood providers are taxed with the challenge of working together across departments and systems (e.g., DPI, DHS, private entities).

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In December 2017, leaders from DPI, DHS (early intervention), Head Start, Child Care Resource and Referral, and Child Care Aware met to address system development for social-emotional learning (SEL) in the state working diligently to collaborate and cost share. The group agreed the key focus of SEL is to promote positive development through the fostering of social and emotional skills that form the foundation of mental well-being and success in life. Skills such as understanding and managing emotions and behaviors, solving personal and interpersonal problems, building healthy coping strategies, and developing self-esteem and confidence, help children cope with difficulties and build positive relationships, increasing their resilience so that they are better able to deal with life's challenges. These efforts led to the development of an early childhood division, moving the Head Start Collaboration Office back over the Department of Human Services. The state also combined the Department of Human Services with the Department of Health to form a new Department of Health and Human Services. North Dakota launched the Early Childhood Division in July 2021 as part of HB 1416 to align and focus programs and resources on a key department priority: supporting quality early childhood experiences for children zero to five. The new Early Childhood Division includes childcare licensing, provider training and technical assistance, the workforce registry and quality rating and improvement systems, family support and engagement, the Best in Class program, administration of the Child Care Development Fund, and coordination of several data systems related to early childhood. The ND Head Start Collaboration Office, Early Childhood Special Education services (Part B-619.), Waterford UPStart, Four your old Program approval are located under Family Support and Engagement and work closely with the Child Care Assistance Program.

Housing

During much of the past decade, North Dakota experienced dynamic changes in the demographic and socio-economic conditions throughout the state. The last assessment was conducted in 2016 when the demographics and economy of the state were readjusting to the declining energy development in western North Dakota. According to a condensed version of the 2020-2025 Statewide Housing Needs Assessment, along with a rising population, there are some trends for housing on the rise. Barring another shift in the economy that might alter migration patterns, North Dakota's population is projected to show moderate growth by 2025, increasing by 1.3% or about 10,000 people. The homeownership rate in North Dakota has decreased and the rental occupancy increased from 33% in 2010 to 38% in 2020. Based on estimated change in population by age and the state's current housing inventory, the state would need to add an additional 9,285 housing units by 2025 to meet the potential need, a 3% increase from 2020. The strongest need for housing is projected for Region V and VII. WRHS counties reside in Region VII. The Statewide Housing Needs Assessment projects Morton county will see an increase of 17%, Mercer County 6.7 %, and Oliver County an increase of 4.8% between the years of 2014 and 2029. The number of housing units needed in Grant County is projected to decline from 6.7 to 14.6%. Extremely low-income households (below 30 percent of the mean family income (MFI)) and very low-income households (3-5- percent of MFI) will see increases nearly double that of moderate and upper income households. Anticipated renter households are also expected to increase: Oliver 19.7%, Morton 18.1%, Mercer 17.9%, with the exception of Grant County—which is projected to lose renters.

Morton County Housing Authority (MCHA) provides services to all four counties served by WRHS. There are no specific low-income housing units in Morton, Grant, Oliver, or Mercer counties. MCHA provides vouchers to those who apply and qualify for housing assistance.

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Those individuals seeking assistance are responsible for locating a home/apartment to live. People are allowed to choose to live where their housing voucher goes further. Housing financing is also available through Morton County Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, and housing loans through the Veterans Administration and First Time Home Owners.

The Welcome House in Bismarck is a homeless shelter established provide temporary housing for females with children. WRHS has a formal agreement with the Welcome House to help families jointly served. Bismarck also has a homeless shelter for males and is available through the Ruth Meier's Hospitality House. North Dakota Head Start Association typically assigns one Director to represent Head Start at the North Dakota Homeless Coalition meetings. (See Homelessness section under Demographics specifics related to WRHS region).

Affordable and adequate housing may be more available in the rural areas, but the cost of gas to drive 120 or more miles daily to and from work is not affordable. This dilemma forces many families to make the difficult choices between housing and financial needs.

The primary goal of WRHS' Family Support Coach (FSC) is to work directly with parents to help them move out of poverty and helping them obtain housing is one indicator of financial stability. Refer to Homeless demographics for additional homeless information.

Social Services

The North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services and local Human Service Zones have a variety of assistance programs designed to help qualified North Dakotans meet their basic needs. Family Support Coaches assist with making referrals and identify potential needs for families enrolled in WRHS. Referrals to these programs help many low-income families who are working toward self-sufficiency. Because much of the economy of the region is tied to agriculture, many farm families have near-poor incomes. Non-farm employment in

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Morton, Grant, Mercer and Oliver Counties often tend to be service related, part-time with minimum wage pay.

The concept of a “living wage” is the amount it takes for a family to meet minimum monthly costs – including housing, food, and transportation – but not costs like entertainment or gifts. Historically North Dakota has been known for its low cost of living compared to other states. According to Sterling’s Best places, North Dakota’s cost of living scores 100.6 based on the United States average of 100 (an amount below 100 means North Dakota is cheaper than the US average, and a cost-of-living index above 100 means North Dakota is more expensive). The 2019 North Dakota KIDS Count estimated the median income for North Dakota families with children to be \$79,077. All four counties served by WRHS rank higher than the ND average: Oliver County \$101,765, Morton County \$95,507, Mercer County \$101,184, and Grant \$79,135. In order to make a living wage in North Dakota, the rate per hour changes depending on the number of adults and children residing in the home. When working a job that pays minimum wage, even a single person with no children would be unable to afford the most basic standard of living in the state. The common entry level pay of \$15.53 would only be considered a living wage for single adults, or for two adults both working with only one or two children. Single parents and families where one parent stays home would need to make substantially more than minimum wage to survive without aid in North Dakota. The poverty wage for 1 adult with 1 children equates to \$7.00, which is 25 cents less than the minimum wage (\$7.25/hour). That same family meets 100% of the federal poverty guideline when making more than minimum wage (e.g., \$9.00/hour or \$360.00 a week). Therefore, many North Dakotan’s end up holding multiple jobs to make ends meet, which elevates the overall median wage earned, but increases the assistance needed. Though the specific reasons for multiple job holding is varied, most of the

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time multiple job earners are working part-time/seasonal for low wages with limited benefits. During the 2021-2022 school year, WRHS had 58 single parent families and 64 two parent families. 45 of the 58 single-parent families were living only with the mother, 5 were living with the father, and 3 were living with a grandparent and 2 were living with a family member other than a grandparent.

The impact of North Dakota families living on minimum wage jobs increases the number of working poor in our communities, thereby increasing the waiting list of children to get into WRHS. As of December 2022, all centers and classrooms have maintained full enrollment with wait lists ready to fill any potential opening. As referenced above, due the WRHS' rural nature and vast areas of medically unserved areas, many of the "over income" children are representative of the working poor. There continues to be need for quality preschool services for families who earn too much for Head Start eligibility, but whose families do not earn a living wage.

TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) is a resource Family Support Coaches assist family with obtaining if they are not already receiving support at the time of enrollment. TANF is a federally-funded program run by states that provides limited cash assistance to extremely low-income parents and their children. Children ages 0-19 receiving TANF in North Dakota make up around 2.2% of the child population. Those break outs per county include Oliver (.8%), Morton (1.5%), Mercer (1.4%) and Grant (1.1%) (2019 North Dakota KIDS Count Fact Book).

The number of children receiving free and reduced meals are an indicator of the poverty levels of families with school-aged children. North Dakota communities also participate in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) designed to ensure low-income children continue to

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receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. North Dakota reports 31.3% of students qualified for free and reduced meals. Two out of the four counties served by WRHS report higher percentages than the state (Oliver County reports 35.4% and Grant County reports 46.8%). Morton County reports 27.8% and Mercer County reports 18.4%. (2019 North Dakota KIDS Count Fact Book).

Health and Safety

Statistics indicate that providing children with safe and secure environment free from abuse and neglect improves the likelihood of positive educational, emotional, and social outcomes that extend into adulthood. North Dakota ranked 6th in the nation for personal and resident safety and 2nd for financial safety. North Dakota's crime (2020 State of North Dakota). North Dakota's violent crime rate went down in 2022, with 2.6 incidents per 1,000 people compared to last year's 3.3. The state's property crime rate increased from 21.2 per 1,000 people to 21.9. North Dakota's DUI arrests decreased again, down 2% between 2010 and 2019 (Safehome.org). Arrests for drug/narcotic violations also decreased 1.4% from 2020 to 2021(Bureau of Criminal Investigation Crime in North Dakota, 2021).

The federal Department of Health and Human Services notified North Dakota's Governor Doug Burgum that it is awarding \$2 million to the North Dakota Department of Human Services to reduce and prevent opioid abuse and overdose deaths. All states received a State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis grant to address the crisis. In 2020, opioid overdoses were at their highest ever in the country, according to the CDC, and in some of North Dakota's biggest cities. CHI St. Alexius hospital reports overdoses show up in the ER almost every day. Specific data related to children affected by opioid abuse was not available; however, national data displays a

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direct correlation between opioid abuse and increased younger children placed in foster care. 2020 Kaiser Family State Health Facts reports 71 opioid overdose deaths (16 ages 0-24, 27 ages 25-34, and 13 ages 35-44). North Dakota's age group most affected opioid deaths were 25-35 year olds—those in the height of child bearing years.

Crime involving children is primarily measured by social service (human service zone) abuse neglect reports. In 2021 there were 16, 907 reports children suspected of being abused or neglected with only 1,349 found to be victim of child abuse or neglect. Number of reports have increased, but the child victims have decreased, according to the FFY 2021 NCANDS report. Victims in cases where services are required in counties served by WRHS: Grant (15); Mercer (NA); Morton (111); Oliver (NA).

Family stress factors that lead to abuse and neglect reporting includes economic conditions and is led by insufficient income then transient or unstable living conditions. Job related problems were the 3rd leading cause of family stress factors followed by social isolation and inadequate housing.

The percent of North Dakota child abuse and neglect victims, by age, have remained relatively close to the national trends. As children progress in age, the incidence of victimization decreases. Unfortunately along with the increased population, North Dakota's confirmed maltreatment numbers have steadily increased from 22.7% in 2012 to 29.3% 2021 according to the ND KIDS Count Data Center.

Knowing that many times child abuse and neglect goes unreported, WRHS provides training to parents on preventing child abuse at Parent Orientation and again at Family Nights (Parent Committee meetings). Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota and the Dakota Children's

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Advocacy Center collaborate with WRHS and offers training to Head Starts children, parents and staff.

WRHS has developed partnerships with organizations such as the Kiwanis where uniformed officers come into the WRHS classrooms and read to the children; ambulance, fire, and police officers set up equipment for the children and families to explore during the Fall Safety Family Nights (Parent Committees as per Head Start Performance Standards); and to purposefully make available other non-threatening law-enforcement opportunities for families and children. It is WRHS's intent to provide positive interactive experiences between law enforcement officials and families.

Additional Dental Care Options

“Bridging the Dental Gap (BDG)”, a non-profit 501(c)3 community dental clinic with a mission to improve access to dental care for Medicaid, uninsured, under-insured, and low income members of the community was established in 2004 to assist people with limited income in the Bismarck/Mandan area. BDG attempted to fill the unmet dental health need in the 100 mile radius of the Bismarck-Mandan area. Two outreach programs were established in 2012. Efforts to collaborate with WRHS classrooms in conjunction with local schools were attempted, but due to the number of required participants and cost to families, this service has not been utilized to bridge the gap for WRHS families.

Community Partners

West River Head Start has numerous community partners who have “adopted” families or centers to provide gifts during the holiday season. Agencies will put up “angel” trees with specific child age and size information to provide needed winter outerwear such as snow pants,

winter coats, boots, hats and mittens. Community partners around all WRHS sites are good to the children and families – especially during the holiday season.

Additional Family Support

Parenting classes are available to the general public through the North Dakota State University Extension agency. WRHS distributes information on the classes they provide and encourages families to attend.

WRHS Family Support Coaches develop relationships with community partners to coordinate needed referrals for families. Examples of some of the partners are Right Track, Coats for Kids, Lions Club, Kiwanis Club, Shriner's, Autism Society, Barnes & Noble and Custer Health. Although those community relationships are important, it is the parent relationships that lie at the root of impacting healthy social-emotional and school readiness development of children. WRHS serves as a conduit of information for families by providing information on services within the community – such as Al-Anon, Alcohol Anonymous, car seat safety checkups, free concerts in the park, smoking cessation classes, library availability, healthy lifestyles, nutrition, dental health, and parenting classes. Family Support Coaches inform parents verbally and/or in writing, based on parental request or as general information through weekly, communication on private social media sites.

In the 2020-2021 school year, WRHS started its own food pantry to be able to provide food and hygiene and /or cleaning supplies to our families. Sustaining availability of options within food pantries across the state has become a concern with the increased population and family need. There has been a reduction in food availability throughout the state--especially in the smaller, more rural food pantries. The difficult choices that are affecting food pantries

include elderly people struggling to pay for medication, infants who need diapers or formula, and working people trying to pay for gas to get to work.

VII. Observations and Recommendations

Uses the findings in the community assessment to make decisions about the program and to identify trends in the service area. Five-year goals can be included in this section.

West River Head Start continues to assess and alter its service delivery to meet the needs of each community, retain staff, and fiscally manage the program. That effort has resulted in various changes to include closing centers, decreasing classrooms, expanding classroom hours, and increasing staff salary. The first question posed after reviewing the results of the community assessment was to ask, “Is WRHS serving the right children?”

After reviewing all of the programmatic changes from the past seven years (closing 3 sites—Elgin, Hebron, and Beulah—and one classroom in Mandan; decreasing the number of children served from 168-118; increasing salaries to retain staff; and increasing school day hours in New Salem, Carson, Hazen and one Mandan classroom to meet community child care and transportation needs), and recognizing the continued need for preschool services in the WRHS area, confirmation of sustaining sites in Mandan, New Salem, Carson, and Hazen are recommended.

As a state, North Dakota’s population has been increasing steadily since 2000. North Dakota continues to be recognized as one of the youngest states in the nation. Though North Dakota’s child poverty is declining, the highest percent of poverty continues to fall on young children ages 0-4. The percentage of eligible children residing in WRHS’s service area is lower than North Dakota’s average in all but one county (Mercer). These are the children who will need Head Start support over the next five years. Increased population and younger families staying in North Dakota support WRHS’s current service number and sites.

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Like North Dakota, WRHS students are reflecting greater racial/ethnic diversity. The percentage of minorities served by WRHS is greater than the percentages across North Dakota with the Hispanic population (10.4%) second to Native American (9.7%). North Dakota state leaders are struggling to meet the needs of non-English speakers and Dual Language Learners. Public schools and special education programs are working diligently to meet the needs of the changing population. Like them, WRHS is serving Dual Language Learners. Finding translators to effectively communicate with parents and children is challenging. WRHS continues to strive to make sure families feel welcome not only in school, but also within their communities by inviting them to participate in WRHS activities, trainings, etc.

In order to support diversity within the program, WRHS continues to strive to increase the diversity of staff to ensure they are qualified and reflect the diversity of the community. WRHS incorporates diversity into the program both through the hiring of staff and the use of volunteers with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and languages that help reflect the composition of classrooms. WRHS should continue to help families feel safe and welcome within WRHS by decreasing the voluntary turnover number within the program. Families rely on seeing familiar faces in their child's classroom, and WRHS should make that a priority for the upcoming project period. By keeping consistent staff in the program, WRHS should also increase the number of staff who take steps to further their education and grow their role within WRHS.

Since 2017, the ChildPlus software program has been aiding WRHS with enhancing the services offered to children and families. WRHS has been slowly adding ChildPlus component areas to focus on each year. ChildPlus has allowed WRHS to analyze child and family data more easily, which allows WRHS to be more efficient and tailor the services offered to families.

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Therefore, WRHS should continue to grow the use of technology and improve systems. WRHS’ grantee (HIT, Inc.) is currently moving towards a cloud-based server system within Office 365; therefore, this is the perfect time for WRHS to move away from Google Docs and HIT’s website (currently houses WRHS employee documents and forms) to an interface like Office 365.

ChildPlus should continue to be an integral part of WRHS’ everyday lives and WRHS should continue to strive to use it to its fullest capabilities. This growing use of technology should enhance staff efficiency with the work they do with parents and children.

Program Goal 1:					
WRHS will support ongoing learning and development of staff.					
Objectives:	Progress, Outcomes, and Challenges				
	Year 1 (baseline)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
1.) We will decrease the number of resignations as of May 31 st of each school year.	Outcome: With consistent staffing we will be able to decrease the number of behaviors and increase attendance.	.			
2.) We will increase the number of staff who further their education.	Outcome: Staff will be qualified for advancement within our program				

Program Goal 2:					
WRHS will continue to grow in the use of technology to improve systems.					
Objectives:	Progress, Outcomes, and Challenges				
	Year 1 (baseline)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5

West River Head Start Community Needs Assessment

<p>1.) WRHS will move from Google Docs to Office 365.</p>	<p>Outcome: Achieve agency and program-wide use of Office 365 as it offers a more user friendly sharing interface.</p>				
<p>2) WRHS will move WRHS documents from the HIT website to Office 365.</p>	<p>Outcome: This will be a more efficient process in editing documents, allowing edits to be seen in real time and reducing the number of places documents are housed, simplifying the paperwork process.</p>				
<p>3.) WRHS will continue to grow in the capabilities of ChildPlus</p>	<p>Outcome: This will allow us to be more efficient with the use of our time with readily accessible information, and allow us to become less dependent on paper documents</p>				
<p>4.) WRHS will explore what Relias has to offer as a training platform for the program.</p>	<p>Outcome: Mirror the grantee in utilizing the same training platform for online training requirements.</p>				

VIII. Appendices

Appendix A: Community Assessment Survey

2022 WEST RIVER HEAD START COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Please mark which applies to you:

_____ Community Partner

_____ New Salem Parent

_____ WRHS Staff

_____ Carson Parent

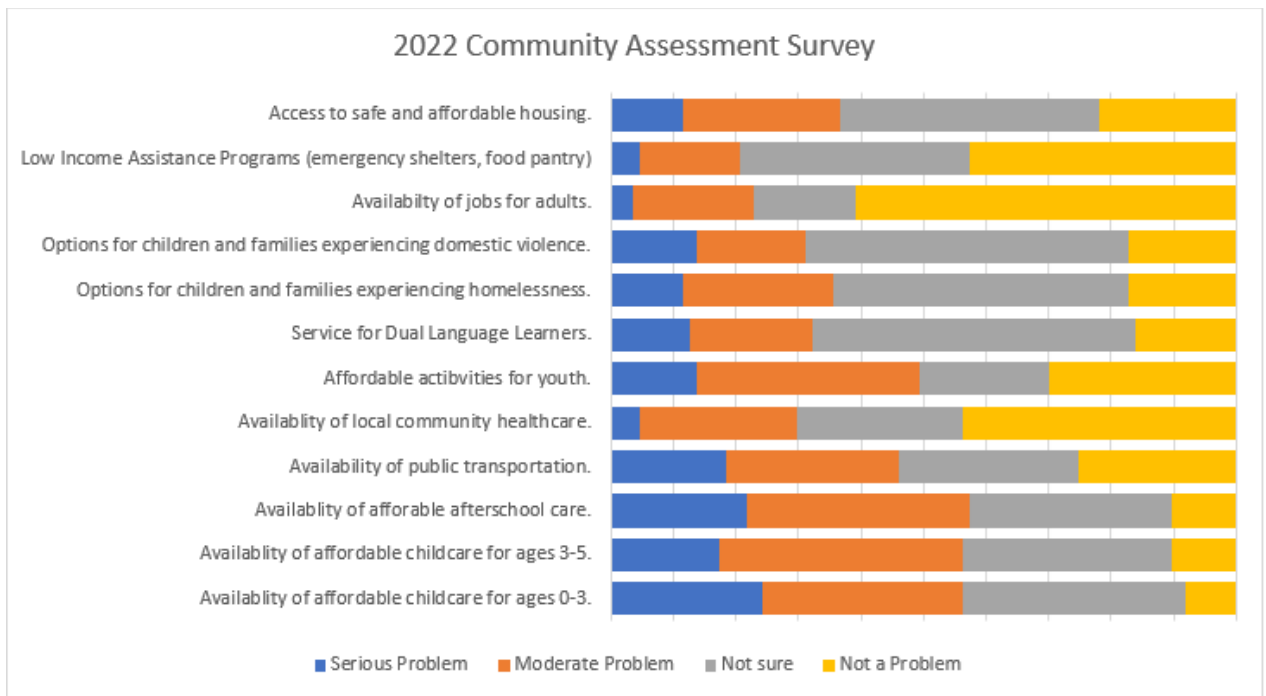
_____ Mandan Parent

_____ Hazen Parent

How would you rate the following issues for your community or household? If you rate something a moderate or severe problems, please share ideas to help with the issue.

	Serious Problem	Moderate Problem	Not a Problem	Does Not Apply to my Household/Community
Availability of affordable childcare for ages 0-3				
Availability of affordable childcare for ages 3-5				
Availability of affordable afterschool care				
Availability of public transportation				
Availability of local community healthcare				
Affordable activities for youth				
Services for Dual Language Learners				
Options for children and families experiencing homelessness				
Options for children and families experiencing domestic violence				
Availability of jobs for adults				
Low Income Assistance Programs (emergency shelters, food pantry)				
Access to safe and affordable housing				
Other: Suggestions for improvement on any moderate or severe problems:				

Appendix B. Survey Results



Appendix C: Gravel Amendment

Gravel Amendment Town, City, and County Chart

County, City and Town	County	Population 2020 census	MUA	Prof. Shortage Area	Pre-school	Gravel Amend. Criteria
Mercer Co.						
Beulah	Mercer	3,058	No	Yes	Yes	No
Hazen	Mercer	2,281	No	Yes	Yes	No
Golden Valley	Mercer	191	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Zap	Mercer	221	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Oliver Co.						
Center	Oliver	588	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Hannover	Oliver	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Hensler	Oliver	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Price	Oliver	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Sanger	Oliver	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Morton Co.						
Almont	Morton	100	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Breien	Morton	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Flasher	Morton	217	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Glen Ullin	Morton	732	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Hebron	Morton	794	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Judson	Morton	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Mandan	Morton	24,206	No	No	Yes	No
New Salem	Morton	973	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
St. Anthony	Morton	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Grant Co.						
Carson	Grant	254	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Elgin	Grant	543	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Heil	Grant	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Lark	Grant	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Leith	Grant	28	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
New Leipzig	Grant	218	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Raleigh	Grant	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Shields	Grant	Not Incorp.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Sources: U.S. Census Data (2022):

- [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

**Lines marked in with a grey bar do not qualify for Gravel Amendment Criteria.*