

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT

> STRATEGIC PLAN TO ADDRESS DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE HEAD START SYSTEM IN OHIO





July 15, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

The premise of Head Start is simple: every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, has the ability to reach their full potential. When Head Start was first launched in 1965, the idea of providing comprehensive health, nutrition, and education services to children in poverty was revolutionary, if not radical.

The Head Start program began in the summer of 1965, amidst the mass social upheaval and an organized civil rights movement that was determined to ensure economic equality and an end to discrimination for all Americans, especially African Americans. Head Start's success was neither clearly predicted nor easy, especially for many educators and parents in the South who faced strong political and structural opposition to the idea of providing early education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to African American children.

Head Start's federal to local funding model is rooted in this truth. The Johnson Administration determined that by bypassing the states, the federal government could ensure access to Head Start for all eligible children, regardless of race.

Head Start challenged the status quo and disrupted the white power structures that were in place. The first Mississippi programs were created and run by parents, volunteers, influential individuals and organizations amidst serious threats of violence and intimidation from members of the community. They persevered.

Bringing us to this legacy and responsibility of promoting equity through Head Start.

New this spring, Advancing Equity was designated by the Office of Head Start as one of the four priority areas to support their mission for eligible children and families to receive high-quality services in safe and healthy settings that prepare children for school and life. The Office of Head Start acknowledges that Head Start programs lead their communities in advancing equity by providing services that support the development of the whole child — cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally — and implementing systems that promote an inclusive culture.

OHSAI's work around Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work began in the fall of 2020 with the support of the Head Start Collaboration Grant and in partnership with the Ohio State University.

This document is the culmination of nearly two years of work and creates a blueprint to bring the Head Start community together to tackle our toughest issues. The OHSAI Board and Staff are committed to sustained actions based on this plan and my hope is that each of you will see your place in the next iteration of this important work to advance equity, diversity and inclusion in our Head Start system.

Sincerely,

Julie H. Stone Executive Director

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### **HEAD START SYSTEM PLANNING TEAM<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The planning process was facilitated by a team from the Center on Education and Training for Employment (CETE) housed in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. Planning support team members included Beth Crawford, Gabrielle Hicks, Dave Julian, Melissa Ross, and Kenyona Walker.



The Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. is committed to taking appropriate actions to address issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Head Start system in Ohio. The Head Start system is broadly defined and includes programs, grantees, vendors and community organizations that partner with Head Start grantees. It also includes community organizations that have not historically partnered with Head Start grantees. People who compose the Head Start system include executives, teachers, parents, students, relatives, neighbors, and other members of the communities in which Head Start programs are located. The Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) is committed to sustained actions based on the strategic plan summarized in this document.

The Head Start planning process resulted in the identification of 34 potential issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion that might be addressed within the Head Start system. Given resource constraints, the Planning Team prioritized recommendations deemed most meaningful and feasible for implementation. Planning team members focused on two primary criteria for prioritizing possible recommendations: Meaningfulness and Feasibility. Meaningfulness referred to the degree to which a suggested recommendation actually addressed racial justice in the Head Start system while Feasibility referred to the degree to which a recommendation could be implemented given available resources. Based on the application of these criteria, five recommendations were judged suitable for implementation in the next 12-18 months:

1. The current planning team should become a permanent body within the Head Start system that manages the system's response and position relative to racial/social justice.

2. The Head Start system should develop and implement a formal, ongoing, systemwide intervention designed to increase awareness and competencies related to racial/social justice.

3. The Head Start system should provide the opportunity for white system representatives to participate in formal Affinity Groups.

4. The Head Start system should develop a racial/social justice dashboard and issue an annual progress report.

5. The Head Start system should issue regular communications regarding efforts to address diversity, equity and inclusion.

Implementation of some or all these recommendations will occur over the next 12-18 months (2022-2023). The Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) is committed to taking appropriate actions to address issues related to equity, diversity and inclusion in the Head Start system in Ohio and the recommendations summarized above and in the following strategic plan are viewed as initial steps.

# Strategic Plan to Address Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Head Start System in Ohio

The Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) is committed to taking appropriate actions to address issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Head Start system in Ohio. The Head Start system is broadly defined and includes programs, grantees, vendors, and community organizations that partner with Head Start grantees. It also includes community organizations that have not historically partnered with Head Start. People who compose the Head Start system include executives, teachers, parents, students, relatives, neighbors, and other members of the communities in which Head Start programs are located. The Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) is committed to sustained actions based on the strategic plan summarized in this document. Developing and implementing such actions and achieving associated outcomes that reduce or dismantle racism are the expressed purpose of Head Start planning activities summarized in this document.

#### **Planning Timeline**

A formal Planning Team was convened beginning in October 2021 (see roster). The interim Executive Director of the Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) assumed a significant leadership role in conjunction with Black members of the planning team. These individuals were identified as the "Core Team" and functioned to assure that the planning process conformed to desired specifications and proceeded in a timely fashion. Team members were identified through a nomination process.

The Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) sent each Head Start grantee in Ohio a formal communication inviting grantees to nominate interested staff or Head Start family members to participate in the planning process. All individuals who expressed an interest were invited to participate. This resulted in a 20-member team. As indicated in Table 1, Planning Team meetings commenced on October 2, 2021, and concluded with the endorsement of a plan on June 21, 2022.

Date	Team	Focus of Activity
October 2, 2021	Full planning team	Introduction to planning process and relevant data
November 16, 2021	Full planning team	Review of planning data and discussion of issues
December 21, 2021	Full planning team	Identification of issues and recommendations
January 22, 2022	Full planning team	Prioritization of recommendations
February 15, 2022	Full planning team	Discussion of and elaboration of recommendations
March 31, 2022	Full planning team	Review and endorsement of recommendations
April 11, 2022	Core team	Review and endorsement of recommendations
April 19, 2022	Full planning team	Review and endorsement of recommendations
May 5, 2022	Core team	Review and endorsement of recommendations
May 17, 2022	Full planning team	Review of draft strategic plan
June 21, 2022	Full planning team	Adoption of strategic plan and formalization of next steps

## Table 1. Planning Team Meeting Schedule and Focus of Deliberations



In the spring and early summer of 2021, the groundwork for establishing the Planning Team and planning process was initiated. The planning process was characterized by several critical requirements adopted by Planning Team members:

1. Center Black voice and shift power and authority to people with lived experience of racism

2. Provide the opportunity for review of planning products by individuals who comprise the Head Start system

3. Result in the production of multiple, high priority issues that could feasibly be addressed in a manner leading to the achievement of meaningful outcomes

4. Engage allies in all aspects of the planning process especially the effort to implement resulting planning recommendations

#### **Planning Methodology**

A planning methodology referred to as "Community-based Planning" was employed to support this project. Community-based Planning is an innovative process developed by planners at the Center on Education and Training for Employment (CETE) in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. Community-based Planning intentionally centers the voice of a focal community (e.g., Black Head Start professionals and family members). Community-based Planning follows the general steps in most planning or problem-solving processes: 1) problem definition, 2) solution generation, 3) values clarification, 4) solution selection, 5) implementation and 6) evaluation and monitoring. Community-based Planning is unique in that it incorporates three key guidelines related to community engagement and allyship.

Key planning activities center on two major tasks: problem-solving and decision-making. Community-based Planning teams are composed of community members and allies. Both community members and allies are engaged in problem-solving. This means allies and community members alike have the responsibility to participate in problem definition, solution generation, solution selection, implementation, and evaluation. However, the authority to make decisions related to proposed actions rests exclusively with community members. In addition, allies must do their best to adhere to principles of allyship. These principles include confronting racism and oppression, investing power and authority in the community, functioning in a supportive fashion, engaging in the individual work necessary to be aware of and mitigate implicit bias, actively joining in the planning process, and taking responsibility for and deliberate action to implement the community plan.





#### Review of Secondary Data and Collection of Original Data

Data reflecting conditions in the Head Start system were collected and reviewed by Planning Team members. Planning Team members posed several key questions in the early stages of the planning process:

How many Head Start grantees are there across Ohio? How many are housed in community action organizations, schools or non-profits? In what regions of Ohio are grantees located? What proportion are located in rural, urban, or suburban settings? What are the demographic characteristics of the population served by Head Start grantees?

A "data-book" designed to support the planning process was produced by the planning support team. The data-book provided a series of tables and other information pertinent to the planning process. The data book was not intended to be an exhaustive review of information but a brief overview of key data relative to Planning Team members' questions.

#### **Identification of Issues**

After review of available data and considerable discussion regarding the goals of the Head Start planning process, Planning Team members completed an exercise designed to identify potential issues that might be addressed to foster improved racial/social justice in the Head Start system. Planning Team members completed a worksheet that referenced a series of statements related to key principles consistent with efforts to address racial/social justice. For example, the first principle associated with addressing racial/social justice states,

My organization engages in formal efforts to increase staff awareness and competency related to social justice.

For the Head Start planning process "My organization" was changed to "The Head Start system...", and three response options were available to respondents: 1) a regular and intentional part of operations; 2) occurs occasionally but is not a regular and intentional part of operations; and 3) does not occur in any meaningful way or if it is occurring, I am not aware of it.

The planning support team posed three additional questions to facilitate group conversation regarding opportunities to address racism in the Head Start system:

What principles do you (Planning Team member) think present the opportunity to meaningfully and feasibly address racism in the Head Start system? Which principle is your highest priority? What is the biggest problem associated with the principle you identified?

#### Key Issues Pertaining to the Head Start System<sup>2</sup>

The Head Start Planning Team discussion resulted in the identification of 34 potential issues that might be addressed within the Head Start system:

1. The Head Start system does not engage in formal efforts to increase staff awareness and competency related to racial justice.

2. The system and individual organizations are not considered collectively and holistically (human resources – hiring, promotions, training, goal setting).

3. Not enough work related to racial justice is currently being done. The system needs to ensure that work that does get done is meaningful. Previous trainings have been too general and sporadic.

4. There is not enough regular knowledge building and reflection activity. Currently, knowledge building is often approached as a one-time, check the box activity.

5. Not enough is being done from the top down (state and national) to communicate expectations out to providers and the community.

6. The system does not currently have a unified voice or use the same language.

7. There is a lack of awareness and capacity to translate awareness into competent actions. Many don't know what racism looks like in our agencies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Issues are articulated largely as put forward by Planning Team members. In a few instances, language was added and/or changed for the purposes of clarification.

8. The Head Start system does not assess or report how it is doing with regard to addressing racial justice.

9. Current attention to head-work (planning and problem-solving) is sporadic.

10. No attention and support are provided for individual awareness and action.

11. Managers in the Head Start system do not include employee goals and plans related to racial justice in their regular performance review process.

12. Currently, there is no formal, consistent and sustained commitment to assessing, reporting and improving efforts to address issues related to racial justice.

13. People of color are discharged at higher rates, receive more reprimands and are reprimanded differently.

14. The Head Start system's practices are not consistent with the ideals of racial justice.

15. The Head Start system does not engage in regular activities that support people from diverse cultures.

16. Much of the work done is of a "check the box" nature (to meet compliance expectations). It is not necessarily done in a systematic, systemic and intentional fashion. It does not tend to be embedded in our operations and therefore doesn't result in change.

17. When the Head Start system engages partners from other organizations, it does not apply a set of standards to determine if partners are committed to addressing racial justice.

18. The Head Start system does not seek to prioritize and promote the work of partners who engage in racial justice efforts and activities within their organizations.

19. The Head Start system does not respond to instances of racism committed by people within the system.

20. The Head Start system does not respond to instances of racism committed by people outside the system.

21. The Head Start system does not include issues related to addressing racial justice in regular planning activities.

22. The Head Start system does not recognize racial justice as a strategic imperative that influences the bottom-line.

23. Staff are not aware of and/or don't understand what racial justice looks like in our organizations.

24. The Head Start system does not attend to the role of race in achieving priority outcomes.

25. The Head Start system does not make employment of Black, Indigenous and People of Color a priority.

26. Representation matters – community voices are needed but not present at the leadership table and as a result the lived experiences of stakeholders is not represented.

27. People of color are needed in leadership roles.

28. Racial equity is not considered a need/ issue in rural communities as compared to urban communities. It is not addressed in some rural communities because we don't see it regularly.

29. The Head Start system's staff composition does not reflect the diversity of the people affected by its work.

30. The Head Start system does not promote Black, Indigenous and People of Color to high-ranking positions.

31. Black, Indigenous and People of Color do not have the power to influence policy in the Head Start system.

32. The Head Start systems' efforts to address racism thus far are insufficient.

33. There is no permanent oversight group to address social/racial justice issues in the Head Start system.

34. There is no comprehensive, state methodology for accessing data related to social/racial justice issues.



The issues indicated above were converted into recommendations based on Planning Team deliberations. In many cases, a single recommendation addressed multiple issue statements. **Nine formal recommendations were developed by Planning Team members:** 

1. The Head Start system should develop and implement a formal, on-going, systemwide intervention designed to increase awareness and competencies related to racial/social justice.

2. The Head Start system should develop an index or measure of racial/social justice based on empirical data and issue an annual progress report. Such a report should disaggregate data by setting (urban and rural at a minimum). The comparison of the diversity of participants to the composition of staff across the Head Start system is considered an important measure.

3. The Head Start system should develop a manual and procedures related to racial justice that specify common and regular practices and language. The manual should speak to specific practices that will be followed when instances of racial injustice at the individual, organizational, and/or community level occur.

4. All performance review activities at the individual employee level should include a formal specification and recognition of goals and objectives related to racial/social justice.

5. The Head Start system should develop and conduct a regular assessment related to reprimands and dismissals, experiences, and needs of People of Color within the system. Results of this assessment should be issued in the form of a regular report to stakeholders across the system.

6. The Head Start System should develop a statement and set of principles that apply to relationships with partners and outside organizations with which grantees work. The statement and procedures should provide a means of recognizing exemplary practices of partner organizations.

7. The current Planning Team should become a permanent body within the Head Start system that manages the system's response and position relative to racial/social justice issues. At a minimum, this body should engage in regular planning activities based on needs data. Planning activities should include the specification of short, intermediate, and long-term goals and objectives.

8. The Head Start system should develop and implement a program that prepares and works to secure employment for People of Color across all levels of the Head Start system. This program should focus on training people to fill leadership positions as a major objective.

9. All aspects of the Head Start system's work related to racial/social justice should include mechanisms that center the voice of people with lived experiences of racism.



Given resource constraints, Planning Team members prioritized recommendations that were deemed most meaningful and feasible for implementation in the next 12-18 months. Based on the application of the meaningfulness and feasibility criteria and further deliberations, five recommendations were judged to be suitable for implementation in this time period. More detailed descriptions related to each of these recommendations, including specification of inputs and outputs, will be developed in the form of action plans in the coming months.

# 1: The current Planning Team should become a permanent body within the Head Start system that manages the system's response and position relative to racial/social justice issues.

A formal Oversight Committee should be formally established and meet on a regular basis. Current Planning Team members should be invited to form the permanent Oversight Committee. The Oversight Committee should be an ad-hoc committee of the Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) Board and bylaws or guidelines should be developed to guide operations. A primary function of the Oversight Committee should be to present recommendations and/or updates regarding system-wide efforts to address racial justice. Conveners should strive for representation of areas of Ohio rural and urban grantees and at least 50% community representation. Documentation of formal meetings and review of meeting summaries should be assessed to determine success relative to this recommendation.

#### 2: The Head Start system should develop and implement a formal, ongoing, systemwide intervention designed to increase awareness and competencies related to racial/social justice.

The Head Start awareness and competency building program should address two complimentary objectives: 1) a multi-session, self-paced intervention and an associated curated set of resources that will be made available to participants (including guidance to facilitate the participants use of the intervention) and 2) Identifying and implementing policy change(s) at the organizational level designed to address structural racism. Teams of participants from designated organizations should be introduced to a curriculum designed to address individual-level change. In addition, teams should meet on a regular basis to assess and ultimately implement changes in policies relevant to the organizations they represent. Structural issues should be identified by each team through a process referred to as the "Team Equity Inventory." A formal evaluation should be initiated to assess the degree to which organizational policies are identified and ultimately implemented. Each team must include an organizational leader (CEO, CFO, HR representative) or equivalent "decision-maker." Team members should receive a certificate of participation. In addition, organizations should be recognized as having initiated and completed the program.

#### 3: The Head Start system should provide the opportunity for white systemrepresentatives to participate in formal Affinity Groups.

The white affinity group should be available to affiliates of the agencies that elect to participate as allies in the awareness and competency building program noted above. Resources and guided materials should give these allies encouragement and skills to be more persuasive and effective when addressing racial/social justice issues. The affinity group should serve as a space for white individuals (allies) who believe<sup>3</sup> 1) Racism against people of color is a specific problem that needs to be addressed, 2) Unless addressed, America's overall progress will be undermined, 3) White people have a special obligation and role to play in dismantling racism and 4) Productively talking with other whites is part of that obligation. The affinity group(s) should meet on a regular basis to discuss the impacts of racism at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional and societal levels and work to engage in practices and actions that promote antiracism at each of these levels.

# 4: The Head Start system should develop a racial/social justice dashboard and issue an annual progress report.

The Head Start system should develop a series of indicators related to racial justice in the form of a dashboard. A data dashboard is a tool often used by businesses and other organizations to track and monitor relevant data. Such data are displayed in a user-friendly way and provide a basis for critical policy development. Thus, the racial justice dashboard should include critical metrics related to system-level diversity, equity, and inclusion concerns. The strategic planning process identified many options related to potential indicators. The purpose of the Head Start data dashboard is to present a brief picture of the status of the Head Start system relative to racial justice issues. Such information might also be used to assess progress related to the Head Start system's efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion.

# 5: The Head Start system should issue regular communications regarding efforts to address diversity, equity and inclusion.

The Planning Team's communications plan should be phased in consistent with the implementation of broader efforts to address racism in the Head Start system. Primary audiences include Head Start and Community Action Agency Executive Directors. There are several key messages that should be included in all communications products: 1) statement of the Planning Team's purpose and goals; 2) summary of why this work is important and its relationship to goals expressed in the original legislation creating Head Start; 3) reference to the Head Start system's progress; 4) key takeaways based on recent Head Start system efforts to address racism; 5) actions that might be taken in the short-and long-term; and 6) finally, all communication products should include a mechanism for communicating directly with the Planning Team.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> These beliefs are taken from Dr. David Campt's White Ally Toolkit Workbook.



Action planning will move forward based on specifications outlined in this document. Among other initiatives, action planning calls for the formation and implementation of a formal Oversight Committee. In the coming months, guidelines will be developed and cochairs will be nominated and appointed by the Board President of Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. (OHSAI) in accordance with organizational bylaws. As indicated above, current members of the Planning Team will be invited to become members of the permanent Oversight Committee. The Oversight Committee will be responsible for securing the resources necessary to move from planning to implementation of recommendations designed to directly address issues related to racial justice in the Head Start system. Finally, in the coming months, the Oversight Committee will develop and endorse formal action plans including work plans necessary to implement each of the priority recommendations summarized in *Strategic Plan to Address Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Head Start System in Ohio*.

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