

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
EMPLOYMENT & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT
COMMUNITY SERVICES BUREAU
FY26 HEAD START SELF-ASSESSMENT
November 18 – 26, 2025

Background

The Head Start (HS) Self-Assessment is a required Head Start activity that provides a structured process for reviewing program activities and outcomes (45 CFR 1302.102(b)(2)). During this time, data is reviewed and discussed to determine the effectiveness of the Contra Costa County Head Start program in meeting internal program goals and compliance standards set forth by the Office of Head Start (OHS). The purpose of meeting program goals and requirements is to ensure that families in Contra Costa County can thrive with the support of a well-functioning, informed, collaborative Head Start program.

This assessment was scheduled strategically to prepare the agency for the Office of Head Start Focus Area 1 Federal Review scheduled for January 6-8, 2026. The HS Self-Assessment is completed to ensure full alignment of all program components, readiness of operations, and reinforcement of a unified vision that serving and supporting the community remains the program's highest priority.

Overview of Methods

The FY 2025-26 Self-Assessment was conducted November 18 – 26, 2025 and engaged a wide network of staff members, parents, and the Board of Supervisors to identify required systems and examine related procedures for effectiveness

This year the Self-Assessment focused on the following 4 program areas from the FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocols:

- Supporting Safe and Healthy Learning Environments (SSHLE)
- Program Design, Management, and Improvement (PDMI)
- Fiscal Infrastructure
- Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance (ERSEA)

For the SSHLE focus area, 100% of our sites (directly operated & partners) were reviewed. Review teams conducted on-site observations using a modified Health and Safety Screener. The modified screener assessed emergency preparedness, safety, hygiene practices, and instructional environments. Any observed issues were reported to team leaders who facilitated immediate corrective actions, resulting in no non-compliances.

Building on site-level observations under the focus area of SSHLE, the PDMI focus area centered on examining the systems, structures, and communication and documentation practices. In order to assess this to fidelity we developed a narrative-driven questionnaire for managers and analysts designed to document and evaluate existing systems. The respondents were required to not only complete the tool but validate their response with existing documentation. Questionnaires were also provided to parents, teachers, and members of Board of Supervisors to survey across the various groups to ensure communication is consistent and transparent. Additionally, this section examined personnel file tracking processes including background checks and staff qualifications.

For Fiscal, a narrative-based questionnaire designed to document and evaluate fiscal systems and controls was implemented. The Fiscal team was tasked to answer each question supported by applicable regulations, policies, or manual references, providing a comprehensive understanding of the systems in place for procurement, budgeting, payroll, recordkeeping, and internal controls to ensure compliance with County and Federal requirement.

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For ERSEA, a total of 80 child files were reviewed. The ERSEA team assessed the County Head Start program's system for tracking eligible families from recruitment to waitlist, selection, and enrollment. In addition, a review of internal controls to protect against fraud occurring during the enrollment process was conducted. The review also assessed the timeliness and consistency of ERSEA staff training to ensure ongoing compliance with Head Start regulations.

Program Areas, Instruments, and Participants

Program Area	Instruments/Documents Reviewed	Sites/Staff Participating
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Supporting Safe and Healthy Learning Environments	FA1: Supporting Safe and Healthy Learning Health and Safety Screener	Staff: - All Comprehensive Service Managers - All Comprehensive Service Assistant Managers
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Supporting Safe and Healthy Learning Environments	FA1: Supporting Safe and Healthy Learning Written Narrative Form	Staff: - Julia Kittle-White - Michelle Mankewich - Jessie Black - Amy Wells - Jay Rivera
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Program Design, Management, and Improvement	FA1: Program Design, Management, and Improvement Written Narrative Form	Staff: - Amy Wells - Sarah Reich - MJ Robb - Christina Castle-Barber
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Program Design, Management, and Improvement	FA1: Program Design, Management, and Improvement Written Narrative Form	Board of Supervisors: - Supervisor Candace Andersen

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FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Program Design, Management, and Improvement	FA1: Program Design, Management, and Improvement Teacher Interviews	Staff: - Linda Frazier-Stafford - Cathy Lucero - Julia Kittle-White Teachers: - Maria Buban (Riverview) - Blanca Torres (George Miller Concord) - Blanca Sanchez (George Miller III) - Jessica Murillo (YMCA Richmond Parkway) - Sara Castro (YMCA Lone Tree) - Ashley McNutt (Tiny Toes)
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance	FA1: Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance Written Narrative Form	Staff: - Ellen De Senna - Kelly Chun
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance	FA1: Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance File Review	Staff: - Ellen De Senna - Kelly Chun - Griselda Tovar De Magana - Qing Xu - Tina Ham - Yajara Gonzalez
FY26 Focus Area One Monitoring Protocol: Fiscal Infrastructure	FA1: Fiscal Infrastructure Written Narrative Form	Staff: - Navdeep Singh - Ernestine Cook - Alexandra Heinitz - Priyanka Vidushi - Ali Vahidizadeh

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Key Findings

Observations	
Supporting Safe and Healthy Learning Environment	• Observations were conducted at 100% of sites (partners and directly operated). • A monitoring tool was developed with 33 indicators focused on center health and safety. • Observations were conducted in 67 classrooms, of which 70% achieved a performance score of 90% or higher. • The remaining 30% scored 80%, and identified issues were addressed promptly and effectively. • Safety inspections are performed on a daily, monthly, semi-annual, and annual basis. • Systems such as Track-It support the documentation of corrective actions. • Active supervision is strengthened through tools, consistent monitoring, and staff training. • With the use of our data management system, we are able to ensure hygienic practices and allergy information are being consistently communicated, posted, and updated across all sites and classrooms.
Program Design Management and Improvement	• The CSB ongoing monitoring system is multi-layered and implemented through daily, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual review cycles in an effective manner. • Monitoring data is analyzed and shared with management, senior leadership, Policy Council and the Board of Supervisors. • Findings are documented and tracked in CLOUDS and Track-it, thus demonstrating transparency and timely follow-through. • The Community Assessment findings inform program design decisions, including slot placement, service duration, and program offerings. • Organizational structure and management roles are clearly defined and effective. • Policy Council and Board Supervisors are actively engaged in oversight and decision-making. • CSB uses data, training, and reflective supervision to guide professional development and ensure we continue to better serve children and families. • Using database systems such as NeoGov has supported documentation management, communication, and transparency through the employee selection process.
Fiscal Oversight	• Systems such as GAAP and accrual process enable us to track and process accounts payable and receivables. • Workday is utilized to support accounting and financial management functions. • County-approved systems including PeopleSoft, EcoTime, and Time Study Buddy, are used to record and manage employee timekeeping. • Fiscal leadership includes a licensed CPA with 15+ years of accounting and auditing experience. • Fiscal Monitoring is done through budget-to-actual analysis, monthly expenditure tracking, reconciliation, and separation of duties. • Procurement is conducted in accordance with County Purchasing Policy and Head Start requirements.

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**Eligibility,
Recruitment,
Selection,
Enrollment and
Attendance**

- Eighty (80) eligibility files were reviewed with an overall compliance rate of 99%.
- The data management system serves as a real time database providing current data on waitlist, accepted enrollments, and program vacancies.
- The Centralized Enrollment Unit (CEU) implements a robust verification process to confirm income and/or categorical eligibility of families prior to enrollment.
- The CEU delivers annual training on current Head State and state eligibility requirements.
- The CEU collaborates with school districts, the Special Education Local Planning Area (SELPA), and the Regional Center of the Eastbay to support enrollment of children with disabilities.

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Opportunities for Growth

**Program Design
Management
and
Improvement**

- Monitoring personnel records at partner sites requires a higher degree of regularity. This assessment identified enhanced ongoing monitoring is necessary for us to maintain program-wide compliance, which is now in place.

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Areas of Concern (Findings)

None

- No areas have been noted as requiring a corrective action plan. While there are areas for improvement, compliance is met and plans already exist to address recommended improvements.

Action Plan

None

- No areas have been noted as requiring a corrective action plan.

Overall Observation

- Overall, the FY 25-26 HS Self-Assessment demonstrated a strong and well-established system of oversight, and compliance. 100% of sites were observed using a comprehensive monitoring tool, with the average compliance rate being upwards of 90% and demonstrating that systems such as Track-it and the data management system support consistent documents and transparency. The monitoring data is analyzed and routinely shared with management, senior leadership, Policy Council, and the Board of Supervisors to inform program decisions.
- The assessment highlights CEU's ERSEA systems of real-time tracking of enrollment, vacancies, and waitlists. In addition, CEU's strict income and eligibility verification process, which is reinforced by ongoing staff training, represents a program strength. Fiscal operations are supported by experienced leadership along with county approved systems such as GAAP-aligned accounting practices, budget-to-actual analysis, and monthly reconciliations that meet the county and Head Start requirements.
- The assessment identified growth opportunities to enhance monitoring practices regarding personnel files to further align directly operated and partner documentation review. Additionally, this assessment identified an opportunity to formally document successful metrics and to use performance data to illustrate benefits of positive outcomes. This approach will allow more targeted training and strategic support of the program services, to create better outcomes for children and families in our community.