

# **Head Start Connects**

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## F. Head Start Connects Project Description



### **Head Start Connects: Individualizing and Connecting Families to Comprehensive Family Support Services**

One of the hallmarks of Head Start is its whole-family approach to the services it provides. This approach is informed by evidence that low-income parents face challenges related to health, safety, and financial stability that can affect their well-being, economic mobility, and children's school readiness. The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) outline expectations for programs to provide a comprehensive, integrated set of services tailored to the individual needs of parents and families, as well as to the needs and resources of local communities. However, reflecting the community flexibility that is fundamental to Head Start, the HSPPS do not specifically outline how family support services should be provided or coordinated within a program.

The Head Start Connects project aims to build substantial knowledge about how Head Start grantees, delegate agencies, and staff across the country coordinate family support services for parents/guardians and the processes or practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs and fosters family well-being. Family support services for parents and guardians include the following: education, employment services, financial capability services, housing and food assistance, emergency or crisis intervention services, substance abuse treatment, physical health services, and mental health services.

The Head Start Connects project is guided by several broad research questions including:

- How do Head Start programs *identify and assess individual family needs* and *develop individualized plans* for family support services?
- How do Head Start programs *link or refer families* to family support providers and/or services? How do Head Start programs help families navigate services if multiple needs are identified?
- How do Head Start programs *track service uptake*, particularly for services delivered by community partners? How do programs determine whether referrals and/or services are meeting families' needs?
- How do Head Start programs *identify service providers* in the community who provide family support services for parents and guardians? How do community needs assessments inform and affect how programs coordinate family support services? How are partnerships with service agencies developed and maintained?
- What are the *facilitators and barriers* to implementing a tailored approach to coordinating family support services at the family-, program-, and community-levels? What resources at the organizational or systems-level support coordinating family support services?

The Head Start Connects project plans to conduct six case studies as one step in the process to address these research questions. Through interviews with Head Start staff, Head Start families, and community providers, the case studies will help describe key program activities for the coordination of family support services. The staff interviews will include a reflective case narrative where staff describe their work with different types of families and how they engage with families over time to coordinate family support services.

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The team will use insights from the case studies in the development of a national descriptive study of Head Start programs to understand how they coordinate family support services that are responsive to family needs.

Head Start Connects is being conducted by MDRC and its partners, MEF Associates and NORC at the University of Chicago. For more information, please contact the project director, Michelle Maier, at [michelle.maier@mdrc.org](mailto:michelle.maier@mdrc.org) or the federal project officer, Amanda Clincy Coleman, at [amanda.coleman@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:amanda.coleman@acf.hhs.gov).

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## G. Contact and Informational Materials for Head Start Staff

### INVITATION EMAIL TO HEAD START GRANTEE DIRECTORS

TO: [DIRECTOR OR HEAD START STAFF DESIGNATED TO COORDINATE VISIT]

FROM: Kate Stepleton

CC: Michelle Maier

**SUBJECT:** Head Start Connects: [PROGRAM NAME] has been selected as a case study site!

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Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

On behalf of the *Head Start Connects (HS Connects): Individualizing and Connecting Families to Comprehensive Family Support Services* project team, I want to thank you and your staff for speaking with us about [PROGRAM NAME]'s approach to coordinating family support services. Over the past few months, our study team has been working closely with key stakeholders to identify Head Start grantees and programs to participate in the study.

**Congratulations! We've selected [PROGRAM NAME] as one of six programs to be included in the *Head Start Connects* project as a case study site.**

As we've discussed, *HS Connects* is a research study funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that is building knowledge about how Head Start programs (Head Start or Early Head Start grantees, delegate agencies, and staff) across the country coordinate family support services for parents/guardians and the processes or practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs and fosters family well-being. Family well-being support services for parents and guardians include the following: education, employment services, financial capability services, housing and food assistance, emergency or crisis intervention services, substance abuse treatment, physical health services, and mental health services.

Participation in the study is voluntary. It would involve a senior member(s) of our study team conducting interviews with the following people from your program:

- 1) **Head Start staff who coordinate family support services** (e.g., Family and Community Services Manager, Supervisor, Family Support Staff) and other staff as appropriate,
- 2) **Parents or guardians** of about four children in the program to understand their experiences with family support services (Parents/guardians will receive a gift card for their time.) and
- 3) **Two community providers** that work with the Head Start program to understand service referrals and coordination.

When we spoke earlier this year, we planned to conduct visits to each case study site. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are conducting our visits virtually via video conference calls over Zoom (which

## Head Start Connects

we would set up), as being able to see one another facilitates rapport-building; though, if a video call is not possible, we can conduct the interviews over the phone.

We would like to set up a call with you to discuss your interest in participating in the HS Connects case study. During the call we will address your questions and concerns, walk through the logistics and timing for the case study, and identify a designated point of contact for the study team. Our goal is to conduct the virtual case study based on what works best for you, your staff, and parents, ensuring the least amount of disruption as possible.

**If you are interested in speaking with our team and potentially serving as a case study site, please respond to this message by [DATE]. We are aiming to conduct the case study interviews in September - October. Please let me know if you think this timeline will not work for you or your staff mentioned above.**

On behalf of the study team, thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Kate Stepleton, PhD

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**THANK YOU AND NEXT STEPS EMAIL TO HEAD START GRANTEE DIRECTORS (ACCEPTED)**

**TO:** [DIRECTOR OR HEAD START STAFF DESIGNATED TO COORDINATE VISIT]

**FROM:** Michelle Maier, Project Director

**CC:** [STUDY TEAM SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

**SUBJECT:** Head Start Connects: [PROGRAM NAME] Next Steps

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Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

On behalf of the project team, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the Head Start Connects case study and the opportunity to learn about [PROGRAM NAME]'s approach to coordinating family support services. As one of HS Connects' case study sites, we will learn more about your approach – what works well and where there are challenges. This will be beneficial for informing future research and for providing stakeholders with useful information about service coordination.

We look forward to having a discussion about next steps with [NAME(S) AND TITLE(S) OF HEAD START STAFF] on [DATE] and [TIME], as noted in your reply to our invitation.

Thank you,

Michelle Maier, PhD  
Head Start Connects Project Director

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**THANK YOU EMAIL TO HEAD START GRANTEE DIRECTORS (DECLINED)**

**TO:** [DIRECTOR OR HEAD START STAFF DESIGNATED TO COORDINATE VISIT]

**FROM:** Michelle Maier, Project Director

**CC:** [STUDY TEAM SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

**SUBJECT:** Thank you from Head Start Connects

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Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

On behalf of the project team, I want to thank you for considering our invitation to participate in the Head Start Connects case study. As noted in your reply to our invitation, we understand that circumstances prevent your participation at this time.

We wish you and the [PROGRAM NAME] the very best. We look forward to sharing what has been learned about coordinating family support services in the future.

Thank you,

Michelle Maier, PhD  
Head Start Connects Project Director

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**PRE-VISIT CALL REMINDER EMAIL**

**TO:** [DIRECTOR OR HEAD START STAFF DESIGNATED TO COORDINATE VISIT]

**FROM:** Michelle Maier, Project Director

**CC:** [STUDY TEAM SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

**SUBJECT:** Head Start Connects Reminder: Call scheduled for [DATE]

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Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

As a reminder, we have a call scheduled on [DATE] at [TIME] to discuss your site's participation as a case study site for the Head Start Connects project.

Please let me know if anything has changed with your availability for the call. Otherwise, we look forward to speaking with you on [DAY OF CALL]!

Best,

Michelle Maier, PhD

Head Start Connects Project Director

**EMAIL SUMMARIZING HEAD START STAFF PRE-VISIT CALLS**

**TO:** [HEAD START ADMINISTRATOR/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER AND/OR HEAD START STAFF DESIGNATED TO COORDINATE VISIT]

**FROM:** [SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

**SUBJECT:** Head Start Connects Study of Family Support Services: Case Study Activities and Schedule

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Dear [HEAD START ADMINISTRATOR/ FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER AND/OR HEAD START STAFF DESIGNATED TO COORDINATE VISIT],

I am following up about the Head Start Connects case study site visit. This email proposes dates for the virtual interviews and describes the activities and participants discussed during the call with [PARTICIPANTS IN THE PHONE CALL] on [DATE].

**Virtual Interview Dates**

We would like to conduct interviews during the week of [1-WEEK TIMEFRAME]. Please let me know as soon as possible if this will not work for you and your staff.

Details about the length of these interviews are in the attached schedule. The rest of this memo provides guidelines for confirming the agenda for the interviews.

**Activities and Participants**



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The purpose of the case study is to gain in-depth knowledge about how Head Start grantees, delegate agencies, and staff coordinate family support services for parents/guardians and the processes and practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs and fosters family well-being.

The attached schedule lists the details we discussed over the phone: the interviews we propose conducting during the week of virtual interviews, the general topics we will cover, and the scheduled time for each interview. Please let me know if you need to move any of these interview days or times. Our goal is to schedule based on what works best for you, your staff, and parents, ensuring the least amount of disruption to your team and parents as possible.

### Next Steps

For finalizing the agenda, we will [NEXT STEPS SPECIFIC TO CENTER OR GRANTEE], as agreed upon during our earlier discussion.

I will reach out to you over the next few days to discuss any questions you have and to confirm the schedule. Thank you very much for your help. The team looks forward to meeting your [CENTER OR GRANTEE] virtually!

Best regards,

[SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

### SAMPLE VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS SCHEDULE

This sample virtual interview schedule is meant to be a hypothetical example. The locations are all virtual and order in which interviews are done will vary by site based on participant's availability. To the extent possible, we will aim to complete all visits within 3 days, though we will allow some flexibility for interviews to take place over other days that week. We will aim to complete all interviews within one week, so as to stay on schedule.

| Activity and Participants   | Topics   | Schedule Day 1 [DATE] |
|---|--|-----------------------|
| Interview Part A with Head Start Administrator/ Family and Community Partnerships Manager | Background and role; data systems and records; approach to family partnerships; delivery of support services for parents/guardians; community partnerships and coordinating with external service providers; individualizing/tailoring for parents/guardians   | 8:30am-10:00am        |
| Interview with Other Head Start Staff #1  | Background and role; family well-being needs; communicating with and working with other staff; reflections on family support services for parents/guardians  | 10:15am-11:15am       |
| Interview with Family Support Worker #1   | Background and role; parent/guardian engagement and relationship-building; processes for working with families; communicating with other Head Start staff; communicating with other programs and service providers; tools and record-keeping; individualizing/tailoring for certain cases (case narrative) | 12:00pm-2:00pm        |

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|  |  |                               |
|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Interview with Family Support Worker #2  | Background and role; parent/guardian engagement and relationship-building; processes for working with families; communicating with other Head Start staff; communicating with other programs and service providers; tools and record-keeping; individualizing/tailoring for certain cases (case narrative) | 3:30pm-5:30pm                 |
| <b>Activity and Participants</b>         | <b>Topics</b>  | <b>Schedule Day 2 [DATE]</b>  |
| Interview with Family Support Worker #3  | Background and role; parent/guardian engagement and relationship-building; processes for working with families; communicating with other Head Start staff; communicating with other programs and service providers; tools and record-keeping; individualizing/tailoring for certain cases (case narrative) | 8:30am-10:30am                |
| Interview with Other Head Start Staff #2 | Background and role; family well-being needs; communicating with and working with other staff; reflections on family support services for parents/guardians  | 11:00am-12:00pm               |
| Interview with Other Head Start Staff #3 | Background and role; family well-being needs; communicating with and working with other staff; reflections on family support services for parents/guardians  | 1:00pm-2:00pm                 |
| Interview with Parent/Guardian #1        | Background and history with Head Start; interactions with Head Start Center; working with Head Start family support workers; developing family partnership plan; goal-setting; services received; what is going well in receipt of services and what can be improved                                       | 2:30pm-4:30pm                 |
| Interview with Parent/Guardian #2        | Background and history with Head Start; interactions with Head Start Center; working with Head Start family support workers; developing family partnership plan; goal-setting; services received; what is going well in receipt of services and what can be improved                                       | 4:30pm-6:30pm                 |
| <b>Activity and Participants</b>         | <b>Topics</b>  | <b>Schedule: Day 3 [DATE]</b> |
| Interview with Parent/Guardian #3        | Background and history with Head Start; interactions with Head Start Center; working with Head Start family support workers; developing family partnership plan; goal-setting; services received; what is going well in receipt of services and what can be improved                                       | 8:00am-10:00am                |
| Interview with Community Provider #1     | Background and role; organizational information; working with parents/guardians; communicating with Head Start; data system; what is going well communicating with Head Start staff and  | 10:30am-11:30am               |

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|   |  |               |
|---|--|---------------|
|   | parents/guardians and what can be improved   |               |
| Interview with Community Provider #2  | Background and role; organizational information; working with parents/guardians; communicating with Head Start; data system; what is going well communicating with Head Start staff and parents/guardians and what can be improved                                   | 1:00pm-2:00pm |
| Interview with Parent/Guardian #4   | Background and history with Head Start; interactions with Head Start Center; working with Head Start family support workers; developing family partnership plan; goal-setting; services received; what is going well in receipt of services and what can be improved | 3:00pm-5:00pm |
| Interview Part B with Head Start Administrator/ Family and Community Partnerships Manager | Wrap up: ask questions remaining from Part A interview, confirm coordination process learned from staff and parent interviews, ask any follow-up questions to fill in gaps in knowledge  | 5:00pm-5:30pm |

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**THANK YOU EMAIL TO HEAD START DIRECTOR AND HEAD START PROGRAM STAFF**

**TO:** [HEAD START DIRECTOR] and [HEAD START PROGRAM STAFF]

**FROM:** [SITE VISIT COORDINATOR] and [PROJECT DIRECTOR]

**CC:** [STUDY TEAM SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

**SUBJECT:** Thank you for participating in the *Head Start Connects* case study

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Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME] and [HEAD START PROGRAM STAFF],

On behalf of our study team and the Administration for Children and Families, thank you participating in the *Head Start Connects* case study! We greatly appreciate your cooperation in planning and conducting the virtual interviews, and letting our study team learn about how you support parents and guardians at your [CENTER].

You helped us gain a fuller understanding of how Head Start grantees, delegate agencies, and staff across the country coordinate family support services for parents/guardians and the processes or practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs. This has been an important knowledge-building effort for early childhood stakeholders working to coordinate family support services. We are grateful for your contributions.

Sincerely,

[SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

## H. Contact and Informational Materials for Head Start Families

### PARENT/GUARDIAN EMAIL OR PHONE SCRIPT

Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

My name is [NAME] and I am working on *Head Start Connects*, a study to understand how Head Start coordinates family support services to meet the needs of parents and guardians whose children attend Head Start. By family support services, I mean services like education, employment services, financial capability services, emergency or crisis intervention services, substance abuse treatment, physical health services, and mental health services. Our study team is visiting your child's Head Start program to meet with families and Head Start staff to understand these services. Head Start Connects is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The project is run by MDRC, a nonprofit social policy research organization, and its subcontractors NORC at the University of Chicago and MEF Associates.

Your [HEAD START STAFF] suggested that you might be interested in speaking with us. The interview will take no more than two hours, and will be held over a video call (that we will set up) on [DATES]. If you are interested in participating, please let me know which of those dates may work best for you. If those dates do not work for you, please let me know, as well. **As a thank-you for your participation, you will receive a \$50 [VISA] gift card.**

We want to understand your experiences and your opinions. Knowing this can help Head Start managers learn how to improve the services offered to parents and guardians in other places, too. You do not have to participate in this interview. The services that you receive, and that your child receives at [HEAD START CENTER] will be the same, whether or not you decide you want to be interviewed. We will keep your responses private. We will not use your name or the name of your site or otherwise identify you when we report our findings. Your name or other identifying information will be protected and will not be shared outside the research team.

We will call you [next week] to talk about the interview and to answer any questions you have about it. If you have questions before then, please call me at any time at [PHONE] or send me an email at [EMAIL].

Thank you very much!

[SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

## **HEAD START CONNECTS PROJECT DESCRIPTION FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS**



### **Head Start Connects with You!**

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*All families have different needs and strengths. Head Start offers a “whole-family” approach to serve children and families in thousands of centers and home-based programs nationwide. Programs help parents and legal guardians prosper and achieve their goals—for health, safety, or financial stability—through family support services.*

**[INSERT PHOTO(S)]**

#### **About the Head Start Connects project**

The Head Start Connects project is a study to learn how Head Start programs coordinate family support services to meet the needs of parents and guardians whose children attend Head Start. The study will take place in six Head Start programs across several states in [MONTHS] 2020.

The study asks these questions:

- How do Head Start programs figure out individual family needs? How do they make plans that meet the needs for each family?
- How do Head Start programs help families find and connect with other organizations or programs that might be helpful to them?
- Do Head Start programs follow up with families to see how their needs are being met and whether services are helping them?
- How do Head Start programs find out about other programs or services in the community that might help parents? How do they develop and maintain partnerships with these service agencies?

A team of researchers is working with [HEAD START SITE] to answer these questions. They will conduct virtual visits to the Head Start program and meet virtually with other organizations in the community to learn about how staff work with families. It’s important to learn from families, too, so the research team would like to interview some parents or guardians one-on-one. At the end of the visit, the research team will write a report about family support services across all six Head Start programs that participate in the study, including [HEAD START SITE]. The information we learn can help improve services that Head Start provides. The report will be shared with the public, but your name will not be used in the report. Your name or other identifying information will be protected and will not be shared outside the research team.

The Head Start Connects Study is being conducted by a research organization called MDRC and two other organizations – MEF Associates and NORC at the University of Chicago. If you’d like to find out more about the project, you can contact the project director, Michelle Maier, at [michelle.maier@mdrc.org](mailto:michelle.maier@mdrc.org) or (212) 340-4517, or the federal project officer, Amanda Clincy Coleman, at [amanda.coleman@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:amanda.coleman@acf.hhs.gov) or (202) 690-5976.

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**THANK YOU LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS**



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Dear [PARENT/GUARDIAN FIRST NAME] [PARENT/GUARDIAN LAST NAME],

On behalf of our study team and the Administration for Children and Families, thank you participating in the *Head Start Connects* case study! We greatly appreciate you speaking with us and letting our study team learn about how you support parents and guardians and coordinate with [CENTER].

You helped us gain a fuller understanding of how Head Start programs coordinate family support services for parents/guardians and the processes or practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs. This has been an important knowledge-building effort for early childhood stakeholders working to coordinate family support services. We are so grateful for your contributions!

Sincerely,

[SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]

## I. Contact Materials for Community Providers

### COMMUNITY PROVIDER EMAIL OR PHONE CALL SCRIPT

Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

My name is [NAME] and I am working on *Head Start Connects*, a study to understand how Head Start coordinates family support services for parents/guardians and the processes or practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs and fosters family well-being. Our study team is interviewing family service providers and Head Start centers in your community to understand how family support services are coordinated. Head Start Connects is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is run by MDRC, a nonprofit social policy research organization, and its subcontractors NORC at the University of Chicago and MEF Associates.

[NAME] from [HEAD START CENTER] identified your organization as a provider of services for parents/guardians of children enrolled in their program. We would like to invite someone from your organization to **participate in an interview**, where we will ask questions about how you provide services to parents/guardians with children enrolled in Head Start and how you communicate with Head Start staff to coordinate and deliver these services. Your participation is voluntary, however, your insights and experiences will provide Head Start Connects with important information about how community providers interact with Head Start centers and the parents/guardians they serve.

The interview would take about 1 hour and would take place over a video call (due to restrictions on travel and in-person work because of the COVID-19 pandemic) during [DATES]. Please reply if you are interested in participating and let me know if one of these dates could work for you.

We will be in touch by phone in the next week to discuss the interview and answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time at [EMAIL] or [PHONE].

Thank you very much!

[SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]



**THANK YOU EMAIL TO COMMUNITY PROVIDERS**

**TO:** [COMMUNITY PROVIDER]

**FROM:** [SITE VISIT COORDINATOR] and [PROJECT DIRECTOR]

**SUBJECT:** Thank you for participating in the *Head Start Connects* case study

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Dear [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME],

On behalf of our study team and the Administration for Children and Families, thank you participating in the *Head Start Connects* case study. We greatly appreciate you speaking with us and letting our study team learn about how you experience family support services at your [CENTER].

You helped us gain a fuller understanding of how Head Start programs coordinate family support services for parents/guardians and the processes or practices used to ensure that service coordination is aligned with individual family needs. This has been an important knowledge-building effort for early childhood stakeholders working to coordinate family support services. We are so grateful for your contributions!

Sincerely,

[SITE VISIT COORDINATOR]