

# Stronger Together: The Role of Head Start in New Mexico's Universal Early Childhood Ecosystem

Presented by:

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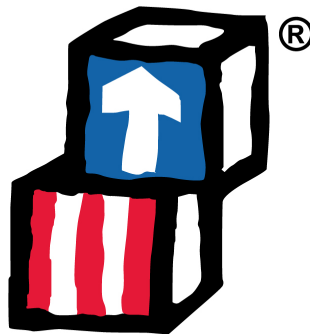
# Head Start 101

- Head Start (3–5) and Early Head Start (birth to age 3, expectant families)
- Children served must be at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level
- Promotes early learning, health, and family well-being
- Parents as partners: family engagement drives strong outcomes
- Services are delivered in centers, family child care homes, and through home visiting

## New Mexico By the Numbers

- **31** grant recipients
- **\$108,546,846.00** awarded
- **30** counties served
- **196** sites
- **6,912** funded slots
  - **3,392** Head Start
  - **1,682** Early Head Start
  - **1,513** Tribal Head Start
  - **325** Tribal Early Head Start

New Mexico needs programs like Head Start to support family choice in our universal child care expansion.



# Collaboration in Action

- Build partnerships between Head Start and state, territorial, and Tribal entities
- Strengthen universal early care and education systems for expectant families and children birth to age 5
- Connect families to health, education, and other supports
- Increase system effectiveness by aligning and coordinating services
- Support children and families in becoming lifelong learners and meeting ongoing needs

Friday, August 29, 2025

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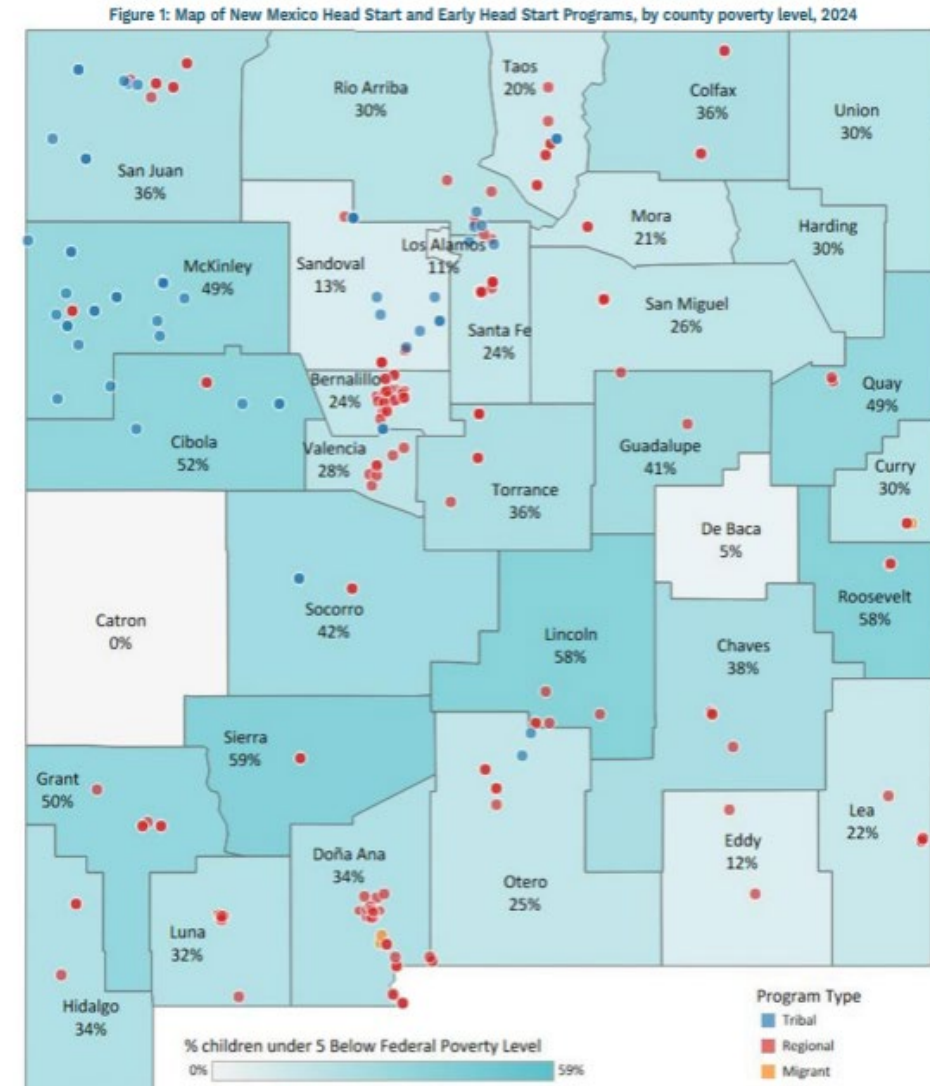






# 2025 Head Start Collaboration Office Needs Assessment

- Conducted by Cradle to Career Policy Institute (UNM) in collaboration with ECECD, Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO), and the NM Head Start Association
- Distributed to all 31 Head Start directors statewide in May 2025; (71% response rate)
- Covered eight priority areas: partnerships, family needs, dual language learners, Family Infant Toddler (FIT), transitions, quality rating and improvement systems, workforce supports, and collaboration with HSCO
- Directors expressed a desire to:
  - Deepen collaboration between local programs and HSCO
  - Play a larger role in state policy and system design
  - Expand their contributions to New Mexico's universal child care and supply-building efforts



# State Supports for Head Start Staff

- Scholarships
  - Covers costs for tuition, fees, and books for early childhood professionals pursuing a certificate or degree in Early Childhood Education
- Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential
  - Cover the cost of the initial Assessment fee
- Wage Supplement and Pay Parity
  - Provides supplemental pay to qualified educators based on degrees, credentials, and work experience





# Local Highlight: A Las Cruces Story

Alejandra Gonzales, La Clinica and  
NGage New Mexico Coalition



# Las Cruces Place Holder Slide





# Las Cruces: Growth in ECE Related Partnerships in Dona Ana

The Depths of Relationships analysis found steady growth in ECE partnerships and collaborations since 2014. (2) In 2023, 65 local organizations participated in 353 partnerships, a 224% increase from the 109 partnerships in 2014.



2014



2017



2020



2023



**BE BOLD. Shape the Future.**  
**Center for Community Analysis**

# Las Cruces: Family Support Specialists

Family Support Specialists (FSSs) are dedicated advocates who connect families to the healthcare and early childhood education resources they need. Building bridges between services, FSSs help ensure every child has the opportunity for a healthy and thriving start in life.

- **What FSSs Do:**

- Work directly in healthcare settings, bridging the gap between medical providers and ECE resources.
- Facilitate referrals to connect families with the appropriate services, ensuring that children get a healthy start in life.
- Active in engaging with the community, attending events, and providing families with information and support.

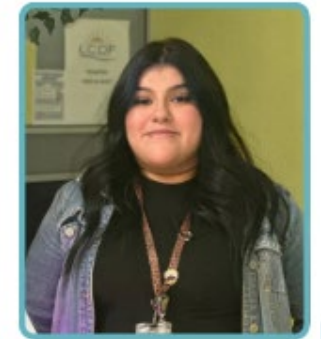
- **Benefits:**

- Comprehensive and holistic care for families that addresses both health and educational needs.
- Increasing access for families, especially in underserved areas, making it easier for them to find services.
- Enhancing outcomes and Improving educational and health outcomes by providing timely interventions.

## Meet the Family Support Specialist Team



Mayra Corral



Kenya Hernandez





# Head Start in Lea County New Mexico A Proven Two-Generational Model in a New Era of Universal Childcare

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Patricia Grovey Evans

Executive Director/Founder, CFS, Inc.

President, NM Head Start Association



# The Two-Generational Model: Our Differentiator

- Children: Whole-child approach; Early Learning plus integrated Health, Mental Health, and Nutrition Services Supports for lifelong success.
- Parents: Empowered as Leaders — Education, Career Pathways, Wellness Supports, and a real Voice in Decision-Making.
- Whole Families: Personalized Family Plans and Advocacy that builds Resiliency, Stability, and Generational Progress.



# What's at Stake if Head Start Diminishes?

- **Children:** Lose health exams, screenings, and follow-up treatment, plus the Family Advocate who helps families navigate health, social service, and community systems
- **Parents:** Lose a trusted Family Advocate and Skilled Specialists who support goals, build advocacy and leadership skills, and strengthen their role as their Child's Champion
- **Communities:** Face higher costs in schools, healthcare, and social services when prevention, early intervention, and stability are lost
- **New Mexico:** Risks losing millions in federal investment and long-term generational progress

# Policy Recommendations

- Protect Head Start's 60 years of proven two-generational success — preserve its model of whole-child, whole-family impact.
- Ensure universal childcare complements — not replaces — Head Start in New Mexico's mixed delivery system.
- Safeguard access for the most vulnerable including low-income, immigrant, and undocumented families.
- Invest in strong partnerships across early childhood systems to maximize reach, equity, and impact.

***Head Start is not optional — it is essential*** 





...And I think that's just what  
Head Start is about.

It's empowering families.

It's giving them resources,  
supporting them, having  
families be involved and  
then watching them grow to  
become advocates for their  
children and other children  
in their community

Crystal Peña, May, 2024

