



Parents In Community Action, Inc.

**Semiannual Report to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children & Families
Office of Head Start – Region V**

Head Start and Early Head Start

Reporting Period: July through December 2010

The following are significant accomplishments and events that occurred in PICA's Head Start and Early Head Start programs during the above semiannual reporting period:

Program Update

Regular Head Start and Early Head Start

Following parent-child orientation, PICA's 2010-11 program year commenced with a family Open House on September 7 and with classes beginning on September 8. PICA is consistently fully enrolled, with a combined federal and state enrollment of 2,171 preschoolers in its regular Head Start program and 248 infants, toddlers, and pregnant women in its Early Head Start program.

Regular program activities are ongoing, including Parent and Child Time (PAC/Time), Center Committee meetings, Valuing the Involvement of Parents (VIP) meetings, and Men Are Important male involvement activities. PICA's Health Advisory Committee, Education/Disabilities Advisory Committee, Social Services Advisory Committee, and Menu Planning Committee—all of which include parents, staff members, and community representatives—continue to meet regularly to ensure that PICA's component services are meeting the needs of Head Start parents. PICA's well-attended Special Needs, Pregnancy, and Grandparent Support Groups also continue to meet on a regular basis to address specific needs of the families we serve.

Policy Council elections were held, and new members were welcomed and sworn in at a joint meeting of PICA's Board of Directors and Policy Council on November 16. Policy Council members who recently completed their term were honored at the Board meeting and dinner in December.

Project Secure

Homelessness remains extremely high in Hennepin County, with more families than ever before experiencing inadequate wages, unemployment, and food insecurity. Local shelters are filled to capacity every night, and nearly 50 percent of homeless children staying in shelters with their parents are age 5 or younger. Consequently, the demand for Project Secure, PICA's comprehensive program for homeless infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and their families, remains high as well. Children enrolled in Project Secure benefit from the stable environment and consistent routine of Project Secure, as these are often missing in their daily lives.

CARES Team

PICA's CARES (Coaching, Advising, and Responding to Educators and Students) Team, comprised of a member from each of three collaborating organizations—PICA, Minneapolis Public Schools, and The Family Partnership (formerly Family & Children's Service)—continues to support the expansion of on-site mental and behavioral health services for Head Start and Early Head Start children. The CARES Team visits Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms at all PICA sites on a regular basis to support and monitor implementation of the Incredible Years® Curriculum in Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms, provide reflective coaching for teachers who have children with challenging classroom behavior, and provide classroom-based small group therapy for children with a mental health diagnosis. Parent support groups, using the Incredible Years® Parent Training Program, promote positive and nurturing parenting and increase parent involvement in children's academic-related activities at home.

On October 19, PICA's teaching staff participated in a training session conducted by a certified Incredible Years® trainer, increasing the number of PICA teachers who are trained in the Incredible Years® (IY) mental wellness curriculum. This training was designed to promote teacher competencies, including positive communication, limit-setting, and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to promote positive parent involvement. As a result of this training, teachers working in Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms are better able to foster child competencies such as social, emotional, and academic skills, positive peer interaction and friendship, and effective problem-solving and anger-management strategies. As a result of our success with the IY curriculum, children's assessment scores improved significantly on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs).

Inclusion Academy

Also related to the CARES Team and children's mental health, PICA and the Minneapolis Public Schools held the third annual Inclusion Academy on August 26, attended by over 100 Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers and 180 teachers from PICA and therapists from The Family Partnership. The Inclusion Academy, first conducted in 2008, was the first-ever joint training in Minnesota of Head Start and public school ECSE staff. This groundbreaking collaborative effort forged positive relationships between Head Start and public school ECSE staff where none previously existed. This positive collaborative effort has had great benefits for Head Start and Early Head Start children with special needs, better informing families of the options available to them and allowing families to access needed disabilities services for children more quickly and efficiently. In 2009, the Inclusion Academy was expanded to include additional school districts and has since become a highly-anticipated annual event.

Agency-wide Events and Special Programs

Project Parent Connect

PICA's annual Project Parent Connect event was held Saturday, November 13, bringing together dozens of local resources, employers, and service providers at PICA and allowing families to access needed programs, services, and support under one familiar roof. A total of 215 families accessed the available on-site services and information offered by over 45 vendors, including dental checkups, vision and hearing screenings, mental health consultations, flu shots, food support, WIC, prenatal services, kindergarten readiness information, job interviews, energy assistance, housing services, ESL and GED information, and more. An on-site food shelf was also available, through which 7,400 pounds of food were distributed to 211 families. One hundred fifty families received applications for energy assistance, free blankets, and energy efficient supplies from Community Action of Minneapolis. Parents were also able to shop at the free store for clothing, shoes, accessories, books, toys, and household items donated by PICA's staff and community members.

International Holiday Celebration

PICA families celebrated the holiday season at PICA's annual International Holiday event, held at PICA centers the evening of December 16. Classrooms featured decorations, music, food,



and activities from a variety of nations, and families enjoyed the festive atmosphere as they “traveled” from country to country, stamping their “passports” and learning about the history, culture, and customs of the countries they visited.

The Wish Tree Project

Once again, corporate employees in the Twin Cities area joined together to provide holiday gifts for PICA children through The Wish Tree Project. Twenty-seven participating organizations hosted holiday parties and/or provided gifts, monetary donations, and support for The Wish Tree Project. This year, corporate employees, plus six PICA Board members, donated nearly 4,200 gifts to brighten the holidays for Head Start and Early Head Start children and their siblings.

Literacy and Language

Dual Language Classrooms

PICA's pilot Dual Language classrooms—English/Spanish and English/Somali—incorporate dual language philosophies and practices into the daily classroom routine. For example, books and classroom materials are available in both languages; classroom features and equipment are labeled in both languages; and bilingual teachers incorporate both languages into daily communication and teaching. These classrooms have been highly successful in honoring and preserving children's home language while promoting development of English language skills.

Minnesota Reading Corps

A continuing Minnesota Reading Corps site during the 2010-11 program year, PICA has 17 active Reading Corps members, including five community volunteers. Reading Corps volunteers, specially trained through AmeriCorps, work in PICA's preschool classrooms to improve the pre-reading and early literacy skills of kindergarten-bound Head Start students.

FRED Program

PICA has an active Friends, Fathers, and Families Reading Every Day (FRED) program, which encourages significant adults in children's lives to read to children every day and engage in other literacy activities together on a regular basis.

GED and ESL Courses

PICA continues to hold GED preparation and ESL courses for parents. Specifically, PICA's GED Primer course is designed to help new English Language Learners acquire the basic technical language they need to take a GED instructional course in English. ESL classes help parents improve their ability to use English in a number of practical life situations.

Parent News and Training Opportunities



Parents who successfully complete this program are qualified to work in the early childhood field as an Assistant Teacher.

Parent Professional Development Internship Program

PICA's Parent Professional Development Internship Program recently graduated its first group of interns, each of whom successfully completed 700 hours of supervised work in early childhood classrooms at PICA. This pilot project gives selected PICA parents an opportunity to receive specialized training, feedback, and mentor support while gaining practical classroom experience and working to complete the requirements to earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

PICA Parent Training Programs

PICA continues to offer its in-house Parent Training Programs in the areas of Infant-Toddler Child Development, Preschool Child Development, Transportation, Food Service, Clerical Skills, and Fitness. Participating Head Start and Early Head Start parents gain practical experience and hands-on practice to help prepare them for entry-level employment in their selected field of interest.

Cooking Matters

PICA is continuing the *Cooking Matters* program (formerly *Operation Frontline*) in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension program. This program promotes healthy eating and economical meal preparation on the part of PICA families. In class, parents learn how to plan, shop for, and prepare healthy, low-cost meals for their families; they then receive groceries to recreate *Cooking Matters* meals at home.

Staff Training and Development

PICA-U All-Staff Training

PICA's staff members received in-depth training at the agency's annual PICA-U all-staff training event, held August 16-20, 2010. The theme of this year's PICA-U experience was "Belonging." Participating staff members attended a variety of informative and educational sessions designed to increase expand their knowledge, improve their job skills, and foster an inclusive environment in which everyone—children, parents, staff, and the community—belongs. Our PICA-U keynote speaker was Ron Herndon, Chairman of the Board of the National Head Start Association, who challenged PICA's staff to talk to Head Start children and their parents about the importance of a college education and how planning ahead can encourage children to make this dream a reality.

Coaching With CLASS Program

PICA was recently awarded a federal Early Learning Mentor Coaches grant to implement its "Coaching With CLASS" program, the overall goal of which is to develop an individualized approach to improving the quality of teaching that, in turn, impacts teacher practices, child outcomes, research-based instruction, and implementation of curriculum and teaching strategies in a positive way. PICA's Coaching With CLASS program will increase the breadth and availability of coaching to PICA's teaching staff by retaining a full-time professional Early Learning Mentor Coach to work directly with teachers; creating a video coaching library that will provide video coaching vignettes on a wide variety of topics of interest to teachers; and adding three "remote" coaches via the My Teaching Partner (MTP) distance coaching approach to further increase access to quality coaching. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) will be utilized throughout to guide coaching activities and assess their impact.

Staff Assessment and Continuing Education

PICA's staff members continue to take advantage of our in-house Career Development Ladder by progressing through four successive levels of mastery—Trainee, Apprentice, Journey, and Mentor. Staff members are assessed on Head Start and Early Head Start knowledge and Head Start Performance Standards-based competencies and progress to the next level on the Career Development Ladder by demonstrating mastery of all areas of knowledge and competencies at

the previous level. PICA also collaborates with local colleges and universities to award college credits toward an Associates and/or Bachelors degree for successful completion of the Journey level assessment process or the Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing process. In addition, PICA offers an in-house CDA program through which staff members can complete the requirements to earn their CDA credential. Twenty-one education staff members are currently participating in this program. Further, PICA encourages its staff members to continue their education by enrolling in a relevant college degree program. The 45 staff members currently enrolled in college receive mentoring and coaching support from specially trained members of PICA's Education Department staff.