

HISTORY OF EASTERN PLAINS C.A.A., INC. HEAD START

Eastern Plains Community Action Agency Head Start began in 1965 as part of Project Head Start. Originally an eight-week program for children entering public school the following autumn, it was held during the summer months. It was housed in various facilities, including a Knights of Columbus building, vacant homes, and public school classrooms. Children attended class until 3:00 p.m. each day, where they received snacks, such as juice and choose, and lunch. Each child had a cot for nap time. Children's activities included art, role-playing, music, singing, finger-plays, and field trips.

Teachers were usually from the public school and were assisted by aides, most of whom were parents. One of the aides from Tucumcari (whose child attended from June 12, 1967 to August 4, 1967) had been hired in early June 1967. Along with others, she attended a training session at Eastern New Mexico University in Portales, where they stayed in the dorms and ate at the cafeteria. In 1968, she was one of the 175 people from Clovis, Fort Sumner, Lovington, Portales, Raton, Roswell, Tucumcari, Vaughn, and Chavez County who attended a four-day seminar at the Roswell ENMU Campus Adult Education Center. While there, the attendees were housed in vacant army barracks.

During this period of time, Head Start Day Care also came into being in some of the area. As it was not funded, parents were required to pay or to volunteer one day per month for each child enrolled in the program. At one location, a building that was a former dance hall was used to house this program. A former cook remembers that, even after they had moved to another site, they did not have a kitchen or hot water. She used to cook at home and the bus drivers would deliver the meals to the site. The children were appreciative of the food and would tell her she was a "good cooker."

Two changes occurred in 1969. Head Start went from a summer program to being a program held during the school year. Further, the various Community Action Programs in the area incorporated as Eastern Plains Community Action Agency (E.P.C.A.A., Inc.) and the Head Start programs came under its auspices. Anthony Mesquita served as EPCAA's first director and Troy Ramsey was the assistant. The office was located in the Coronado building on the north side of Portales.

During his term, Governor Jerry Apodaca approved an \$8,000 supplemental grant for purchase of a minivan to provide transportation to Portales Head Start children. EPCAA's budget for 1976/77 was \$161,153. The following year, it was increased by \$2,605, at which time a health coordinator was hired for two hours per day. When Child Development Associate (CDA) slots first became available, New Mexico Highlands University had the contract to provide this training under direction of a Dr. Sandoval. Fifteen of the sixteen available slots were given to EPCAA.

With services offered by EPCAA, parents, youth, and others from Portales were given the opportunity to attend a carpentry class. Members of this class made wooden chairs for the Portales site. A staff member, the late Gloria Ortega, remembers that, while sitting on one of these chairs, it broke. Reminiscent of the smallest bear in *Goldilocks*, a little boy said, "And, she broke it all to pieces." People from the carpentry class were joined by Head Start parents to help renovate the center. Local carpenters volunteered as project supervisors. The center was one big room, so the volunteers built a wall to create two classrooms. They put up sheet rock, and painted. Tiles of various colors and carpet pieces for the concrete floor were purchased from the surplus supplies at Cannon AFB. Since that time, the center has moved to a different location.

Some centers have changed locations several times over the years. Clovis, at one time, had a classroom at a local youth recreation center. Because the site was used every weekend for community activities, the staff had to take down the classroom every Friday and set it up again in time for Monday morning class. Today, we are located in buildings that are set up for an ideal learning environment.

Children used to be taken on field trips to places like the circus in Amarillo, the zoo in Albuquerque, a train ride to Clovis from Portales, Conchas Lake for picnics, and theaters to see full-length movies, such as *Mary Poppins*. Parents would bring younger children with them to class. A former staff member

said she used to take her two-year-old stepson when she volunteered at a Head Start program in Albuquerque, and she was there almost every day.

Over the years the quality of our Head Start program has also improved in the following areas:

- Student-teacher ratio is smaller.
- Education and training requirements for staff have improved.
- The children receive developmental Screenings and IPPs.
- Health and additional educational services are provided to the children through collaboration with providers such as the public schools, Children's Medical Services, dentists, public health offices, WIC, and Eastern New Mexico University (practicum students from ENMU have provided play therapy, music therapy, and speech therapy under guidance of a supervisor).
- The children are provided with nutritious meals and snacks.
- Training/workshop opportunities are offered to the parents
- Resource information is provided to parents.
- Classrooms are equipped with need supplies and equipment, and developmentally appropriate practices are used.
- Playgrounds have safe, developmentally-appropriate equipment.
- Training is provided to Policy Council members and Parent Committee officers.

Through the years, EPCAA Head Start has expanded. There are now centers in six communities: Anton Chico, Clovis, Fort Sumner, Portales, Santa Rosa, and Tucumcari. The program also formerly served Vaughn (closed 1993) and Clayton (closed 2011). The funded enrollment for three and four year olds is 339, including 10 slots in a PreK classroom in Santa Rosa.

In 2007, EPCAA added Early Head Start, which serves children from birth to age three. EHS centers are located in Clovis, Portales, and Tucumcari. The funded enrollment is 102.

The number of children served during EPCAA Head Start's early years is unknown. However, by 1977, there were 160 slots.

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Anton Chico HS	<i>Not yet opened</i>	15	1
Clayton HS	20	<i>Closed 2011</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Clovis HS	20	136	8
Fort Sumner HS	<i>Not yet opened</i>	15	1
Portales HS	40	68	4
Santa Rosa HS/PreK	20	54	4
Tucumcari HS	40	51	3
Vaughn HS	20	<i>Closed 1993</i>	<i>n/a</i>
T !	271!	44 !	32
Clovis EHS	<i>Opened 2003</i>	32	8
Portales EHS	<i>Opened 2003</i>	38	11
Tucumcari EHS	<i>Opened 2003</i>	32	8
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H ! !	271!	552	59!

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M d !	2 88! _{f fe!}	3123!
Anton Chico HS	<i>Not yet opened</i>	3
Clayton HS	4	<i>Closed 2011</i>
Clovis HS	4	21
Fort Sumner HS	<i>Not yet opened</i>	3
Portales HS	6	14
Santa Rosa HS/PreK	3	8
Tucumcari HS	6	9
Vaughn HS	4	<i>Closed 1993</i>
T !	38!	69!
Clovis EHS	<i>Opened 2003</i>	9
Portales EHS	<i>Opened 2003</i>	13
Tucumcari EHS	<i>Opened 2003</i>	10
T !	1!	43!
Administration Offices	3	15
H ! !	41!	216!

Sources: Delvinia Calbert, Viola Davis, Diane Gallegos, Virgie Garcia, Carmen Lucero-Vigil, Gloria Ortega, Mary Sandoval, Rita Torres, Lydia Villa, *1976 Minutes of the Multi-County Board*

Narrative information obtained and compiled by Gloria Lopez, July 1995; updated and edited by Christian Mericle, September 2012