

Community Needs Assessment 2024



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I. Introduction

This Community Needs Assessment is presented in accordance with Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.11(b)(1):

To design a program that meets community needs, and builds on strengths and resources, a program must conduct a community assessment at least once over the five-year grant period. The community assessment must use data that describes community strengths, needs, and resources and include, at a minimum:

- (i) The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak, including
 - (A) Children experiencing homelessness in collaboration with, to the extent possible, McKinney-Vento Local Education Agency Liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432 (6)(a));
 - (B) Children in foster care; and
 - (C) Children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies;
- (ii) The education, health, nutrition and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
- (iii) Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
- (iv) Other child development, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served;
- (v) Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families; and,
- (vi) Strengths of the community.¹

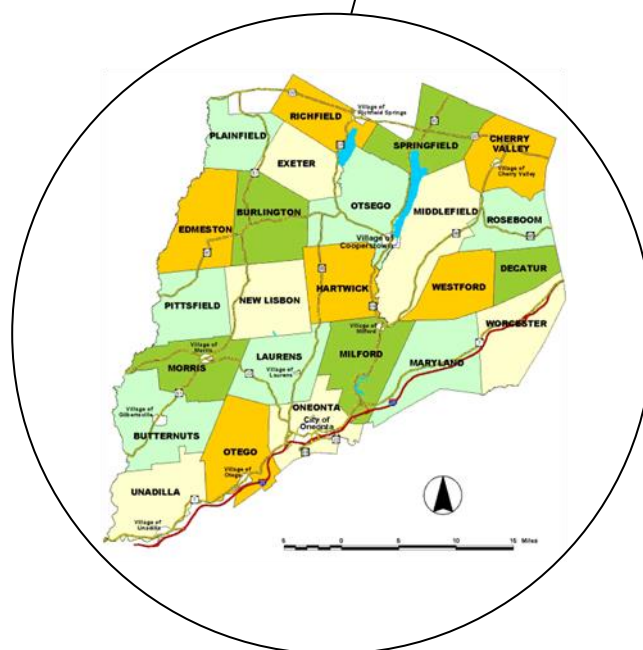
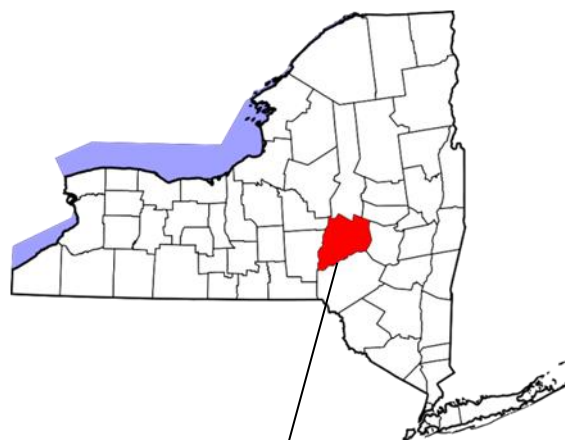
¹ *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. September 2016.

II. Overview of Service Area: Otsego County

A. Geography

Otsego County is centrally located in New York State, with the southern part of the county falling into the Catskill Mountain region. The county covers an area of 1,001.7 square miles and is the 17th largest county in New York by total area.² Otsego County has an estimated population density of 58.4 people per square mile.³ It is bordered on the west by Chenango County, to the south by Delaware County, to the east by Schoharie County, and to the north by Montgomery, Herkimer, Oneida, and Madison Counties. It is located approximately half way between Albany (86 miles) and Binghamton (67 miles). Serving as a connector route from the Capital District to Binghamton, Interstate 88 runs along the southernmost edge of Otsego County, allowing for easy access to these cities.

Otsego County is a heavily rural area with farms dotting the countryside. The county is comprised of 34 municipalities – 24 towns, 9 villages, and 1 city. The two largest communities within the county are Oneonta and Cooperstown. The City of Oneonta is home to three institutions of higher education – Otsego Area School of Practical Nursing, Hartwick College (population 1,099), and the State University of New York College at Oneonta (population 4,868).⁴ Cooperstown, the county seat, is home to the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Fenimore Art Museum, and the Farmers' Museum. Baseball camps throughout the county, along with several lakes and miles of trails throughout the mountainous region, continue to attract tourism. In 2021, visitors to Otsego County spent \$221 million across a range of sectors (lodging, recreation, food



² Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/profile/Otsego_County,_New_York?g=050XX00US36077 on 6/3/2024

³ Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/otsegocountynyork,US/PST045223> on 6/3/2024

⁴ Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?county=47> on 6/3/2024

and beverage, etc.), representing an 88.9% increase in spending since 2020.⁵ Tourism in Otsego County accounted for 8.8% of all labor income in 2021.⁶

B. Economy and Employment

Historically, and typical of rural areas, Otsego County's economic base has consisted of farming, specifically family-owned dairy farms (as opposed to corporation-owned farms). Due to changing climate conditions and rising costs, both the number of farms and total farm acreage across New York State have seen a steady decline over the past several years. There was an 8.8% decrease in the number of farms in the county between 2017 and 2022.⁷ While farmland accounts for 21.9% of the total land area in Otsego County, there has been a decrease of 9.1% in the total land area of county farms since 2017.⁸ Additionally, median earnings in the agriculture/forestry industry decreased significantly; earnings were 21.2% lower in 2022 than in 2021.⁹

Employment in Otsego County grew at a rate of 0.8% from 2021 to 2022.¹⁰ The most common industries are currently: health care and social assistance (employing approximately 5,383 people), educational services (employing approximately 4,003 people), and retail trade (employing approximately 3,636 people).¹¹ While these are the largest employment sectors in the county, the health care and social assistance workforce decreased by 4.5% and the educational services workforce decreased by 3.6% over the same time period.¹² The highest paying industries are utilities (average annual salary of \$113,409), public administration (average annual salary of \$62,583), and finance and insurance (average annual salary of \$60,639).¹³ Median earnings for men in Otsego County is \$42,076; that figure drops to \$33,572 when it comes to women's median earnings.¹⁴ Public administration is one of the industries with the best median earnings for both men and women; men's average salary in this industry is \$68,589 while women's is \$48,750.¹⁵ Figure I below outlines the county's industry profile.

⁵ Retrieved <https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/Economic-Impact-of-Visitors-in-New%20York-2021-Central-New-York.pdf> on 6/3/2024

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Retrieved from

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/New_York/st36_2_008_008.pdf on 6/3/2024

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/otsego-county-ny> on 6/4/2024

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

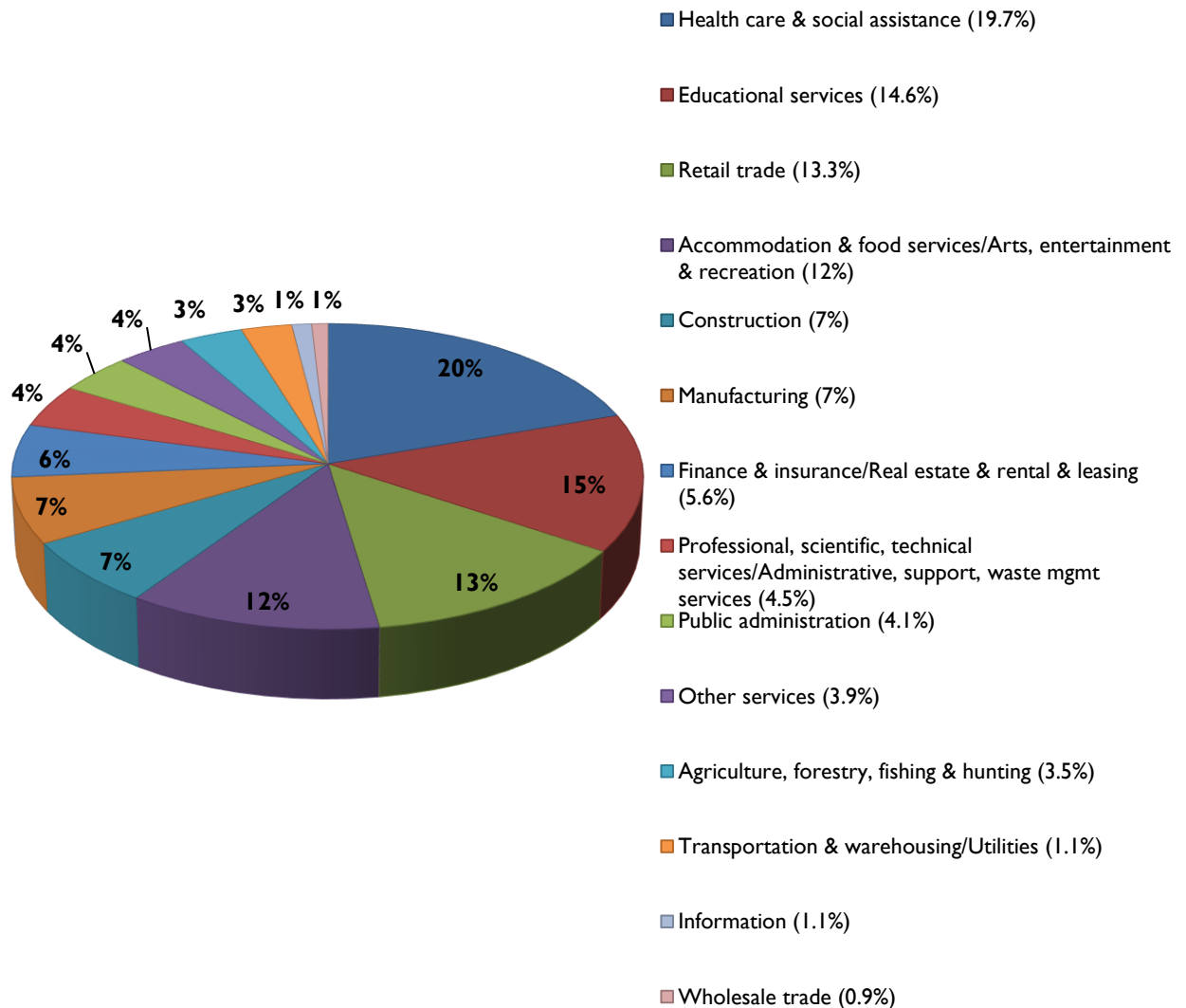
¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

Figure I Industry Profile¹⁶



Over 1,200 businesses are in operation within the county according to Otsego Now. Major employers include insurance companies, colleges, health care facilities, and retailers. A wide variety of products are manufactured in the area including communications equipment, integrated circuits, pharmaceuticals, transportation equipment, plastic and rubber products, and food and beverage.¹⁷ The city of Oneonta is the largest employment center in Otsego County. Due to its location in the southernmost part, combined with the overall size of Otsego County and the lack of public transportation, residents living other areas of the county often cannot access employment opportunities in Oneonta. In addition to year-round employment, the tourism industry is a major source of seasonal employment in Otsego County. Summer youth baseball camps surrounding Cooperstown and Oneonta have grown in number and size, creating a large demand for

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Retrieved from <https://otsegonow.com/sites-and-buildings/county-overview/> on 6/4/2024

seasonal lodging and food service. While the tourism industry has helped create more jobs, these jobs are seasonal, leaving many people searching for supplemental employment during the better part of the year. Additionally, Otsego County's miles of lakes and trails attract many outdoor enthusiasts to the region, with numbers spiking during the warmer months and again creating more seasonal versus year-round positions. Presenting another challenge in regards to employment is the fact that the bulk of the county's industries require an unskilled workforce, therefore paying lower wages.

Otsego County's labor force averaged 27,331 in 2022, which is a decrease of 1,570 (5.4%), since 2013.¹⁸ The number of unemployed people in 2022 averaged 1,426 (5.0%), which represents a decrease of 1,019 (41.7%) since 2013.¹⁹ Between 2013 and 2022, unemployment rates decreased from 7.8% to 5.0%.²⁰ While unemployment rates have been dropping, so too has the labor force, with 2022 seeing the lowest labor force numbers since data on this topic was released by the New York State Department of Labor in 1990. At its height in 1999, the labor force in Otsego County was comprised of 32,087 individuals; this represents an overall 16.0% decrease in the workforce.²¹ The average commute time is 23.1 minutes, however 2.6% of the workforce have "super commutes" in excess of 90 minutes.²²

Minimum wage increases in New York State have had a devastating impact on Head Start enrollment. As part of the 2016 – 2017 state budget, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo implemented a complicated and staggered set of minimum wage increases. A schedule was established to incrementally increase minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2021. Federal minimum wage, unchanged since 2009 despite the rising Consumer Price Index, is \$7.25 per hour, putting New York State's minimum wage an astounding 107% above the federal level. This bill was signed into law as a way to address the discrepancy between minimum wage and the actual cost of living in New York State. While these increases have moved families earning minimum wage above the poverty line as intended, this plan did not take into account the support services and supplemental programs that low-income families would no longer be eligible for due to increased earnings. These wage adjustments quickly moved families out of the eligibility bracket for Head Start. Furthermore, the majority of wait list families are now over income based on the federal poverty level, creating a challenge in terms of finding and enrolling eligible families and keeping a viable wait list for program openings. For example, a single mother working 40 hours per week in the retail industry at minimum wage (\$15/hour) grosses \$31,200 per year. According to the 2024 Federal Poverty Guidelines, a family of two (mother and child) must be at or below \$20,440 to meet the 100% eligibility guideline, and at or below \$26,572 to meet the 130% eligibility guideline. While this child would be eligible to receive services as part of the over income allowance, a program is only permitted to enroll an additional 10% of participants whose earnings put them in this category. This child would therefore be excluded from receiving services if the program was already at that 10%

¹⁸ Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/otsego-county-ny> on 6/4/2024

¹⁹ Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP03?q=unemployment&g=050XX00US36077> on 6/4/2024

²⁰ Retrieved from <https://labor.ny.gov/stats/laus.asp> on 6/4/2024

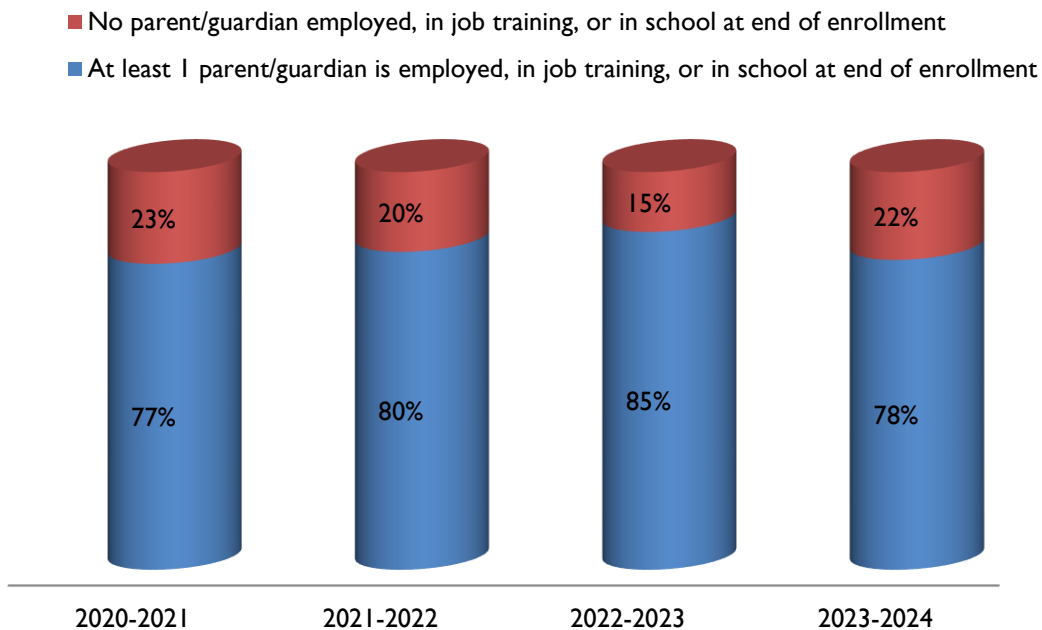
²¹ Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NYOTSE0LFN#0> on 6/4/2024

²² Retrieved from [https://datausa.io/profile/geo/otsego-county-ny#:~:text=Commuter%20Transportation&text=In%202022%2C%2073.7%25%20of%20workers,worked%20at%20home%20\(8.47%25\)](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/otsego-county-ny#:~:text=Commuter%20Transportation&text=In%202022%2C%2073.7%25%20of%20workers,worked%20at%20home%20(8.47%25)) on 6/4/2024

benchmark. These guidelines move this single mother and her child out of eligibility for Head Start services, despite the fact that this family with several established risk factors (female head of household, single mother, only child, minimum wage job, low income) is exactly who this program was designed to support and benefit. Currently there is an excess of 61 children in Otsego County that are not eligible for services due to family income levels; this number accounts for 77% of the program's wait list. Furthermore, all 61 of these children are at or above 146% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

The majority of Otsego County's Head Start families are working. As shown in Figure 2, only 22% of families were unemployed by the end of their participation in program year 2023 – 2024. This number has remained relatively stable, with program year 2022 - 2023 being the lowest unemployment rate in four years at 15%.

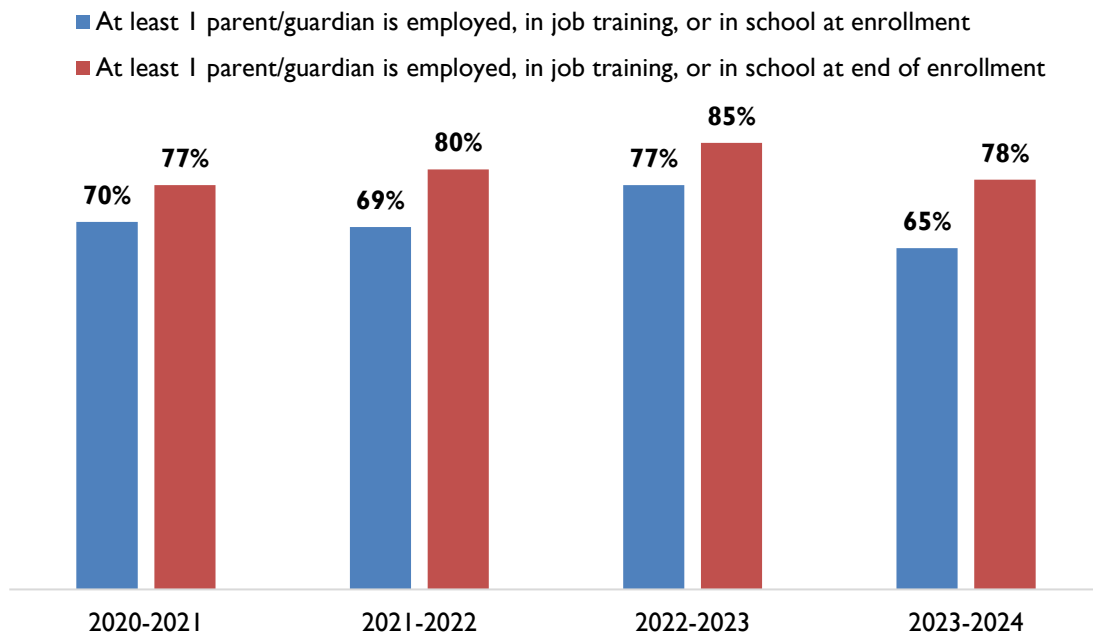
Figure 2 Employment Status of Head Start Families in Otsego County²³



More families gain employment during program participation than either lose employment or stay unemployed. Figure 3 outlines the percentage of families that entered the program with employment as compared to the percentage that are employed at the end of enrollment. Moreover, many of the available jobs (which are in social services; retail trade; and accommodation and food services/arts, entertainment, and recreation and account for 45% of jobs in Otsego County) generally tend to pay less and have less comprehensive benefits than other industries.

²³ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2020-2024)

Figure 3 Head Start Families that Gained Employment During Program Participation²⁴



There has been a 27% increase in the median household income in Otsego County from \$54,321 in 2018, to \$68,962 in 2022.²⁵ Median household income rates in Otsego County trend lower than those of both New York State and the United States. In 2022, the median household income in New York was \$79,463, and was \$74,755 in the United States, which is 15% and 8% (respectively) higher than Otsego's rates.²⁶ With only one exception, the overall cost of living has increased during that time as well, as shown in the following tables.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/saiper/#/?map_geoSelector=mhi_s&s_state=36&s_county=36077&s_measures=mhi&s_year=2017&s_district=&s_geography=county on 10/31/2024

²⁶ Ibid

Table 1 Sample Annual Consumer Expenditures in the Northeast Region: 2014 – 2023²⁷

Item	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change
Food at home	\$4,156	\$4,014	\$4,031	\$4,418	\$4,775	\$5,018	\$5,497	\$5,966	\$6,217	\$6,598	58.8%
Fresh milk & cream	\$162	\$152	\$144	\$156	\$166	\$162	\$170	\$183	\$189	\$181	11.7%
Natural gas	\$597	\$658	\$607	\$538	\$579	\$622	\$620	\$635	\$707	\$750	25.6%
Electricity	\$1,360	\$1,366	\$1,339	\$1,331	\$1,353	\$1,361	\$1,404	\$1,473	\$1,525	\$1,672	22.9%
Fuel oil & other fuels	\$463	\$407	\$303	\$282	\$357	\$378	\$338	\$358	\$439	\$462	-0.2%
Gasoline & motor oil	\$2,322	\$2,037	\$1,709	\$1,665	\$1,797	\$1,817	\$1,560	\$1,595	\$2,240	\$2,441	5.1%
Health insurance	\$2,793	\$3,173	\$3,198	\$3,432	\$3,523	\$3,566	\$3,586	\$3,732	\$3,892	\$4,095	46.6%

Table 2 Sample Average Price Data: 2014 – 2023²⁸

Item	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change
Bananas, per lb.	\$0.61	\$0.58	\$0.58	\$0.54	\$0.57	\$0.57	\$0.57	\$0.60	\$0.64	\$0.63	3.1%
Bread, white, pan, per lb.	\$1.41	\$1.43	\$1.33	\$1.35	\$1.29	\$1.30	\$1.49	\$1.58	\$1.75	\$1.97	40.4%
Chicken, fresh, whole, per lb.	\$1.54	\$1.42	\$1.49	\$1.48	\$1.49	\$1.49	\$1.54	\$1.50	\$1.89	\$1.90	23.2%
Eggs, grade A, lg. per doz.	\$1.97	\$2.97	\$1.47	\$1.42	\$1.65	\$1.38	\$1.35	\$1.84	\$2.90	\$2.07	4.8%
Flour, white, all purpose, per lb.	\$0.51	\$0.52	\$0.55	\$0.51	\$0.47	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$0.38	\$0.56	\$0.57	10.1%
Milk, fresh, whole, fortified, per gal.	\$3.73	\$3.39	\$3.23	\$3.21	\$2.89	\$3.10	\$3.45	\$3.59	\$4.18	\$3.97	6.2%
Rice, white, long grain, uncooked, per lb.	\$0.75	\$0.66	\$0.72	\$0.74	\$0.69	\$0.80	\$0.78	\$0.80	\$0.94	\$0.98	31.5%
Tomatoes, field grown, per lb.	\$1.55	\$1.78	\$1.79	\$1.83	\$1.83	\$1.91	\$1.85	\$1.83	\$1.90	\$1.84	19.3%
Electricity, per KWH	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.17	\$0.17	21.3%
Gasoline, unleaded regular, per gal.	\$3.40	\$2.39	\$2.21	\$2.63	\$2.87	\$2.63	\$2.19	\$3.27	\$3.88	\$3.99	17.2%

Across the board, food and energy costs have been on the rise over the past 10 years. Food prices continue to climb as a result of increased demand, reduced supply, and adverse weather conditions which impact crops. The increase in gasoline prices has been particularly difficult for rural upstate counties such as Otsego County where public transportation is limited and residents must travel greater distances to get to local grocery

²⁷ Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/cex/tables/geographic/mean.htm> on 10/31/2024

²⁸ Retrieved from <https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet> on 10/31/2024

stores. The Consumer Price Index increased by 29% between September 2014 and September 2023.²⁹ Due to inflation, \$1 in September 2014 had the same buying power as \$1.29 in September 2023.³⁰

C. Population

The US Census estimates Otsego County's population to be 59,678, which represents a 3.8% decrease since 2013.³¹ The two largest communities within the county are Oneonta and Unadilla, with populations of 19,171 and 4,128 respectively.³²

While New York State's population has increased slightly by 2.6% from 2013 to 2022, Otsego County's population has decreased from 62,029 to 59,678, a decrease of 3.8%.³³ During the same time, the under 5 population decreased from 2,667 to 2,343 (a 12.2% drop), and the under 18 population has decreased from 11,165 to 9,150 (a 18.1% drop).³⁴ School enrollment data confirms that the county's youth population has seen a decrease, with a 13.7% drop from 2013 to 2022.³⁵ While Otsego County's youth population has seen a significant decline, the elderly population has been increasing. The 65 years and over population increased from 10,607 to 12,622 (a 19.0% increase), and the median age decreased minimally from 41.1 to 40.8 (a 0.7% decrease) during the 2010 to 2022 period.³⁶ Otsego County population trends are noted in Figure 4 below.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Retrieved from <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=1.00&year1=201409&year2=202309> on 10/31/2024

³¹ Retrieved from

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2010.S0101?q=population%20and%20ages%20in%20otsego%20county%20new%20york&g=040XX00US36> on 10/31/2024

³² Retrieved from

https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=population%20data%20for%20Otsego%20County%20New%20York&hidePreview=true&table=B01003&tid=ACSDT5Y2017.B01003&g=0600000US3607783129,3607779972,3607776012,3607770310,3607763638,3607761467,3607758420,3607758343,3607755695,3607755629,3607754892,3607754881,3607750485,3607748494,3607747240,3607746910,3607745920,3607741531,3607732589,3607724845,3607723613,3607719895,3607715253,3607711528,3607711209&vintage=2017&layer=countysubdivision&cid=B01003_001E&lastDisplayedRow=74&tp=true on 10/31/2024

³³ Retrieved from

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2010.S0101?q=population%20and%20ages%20in%20otsego%20county%20new%20york&g=040XX00US36> on 10/31/2024

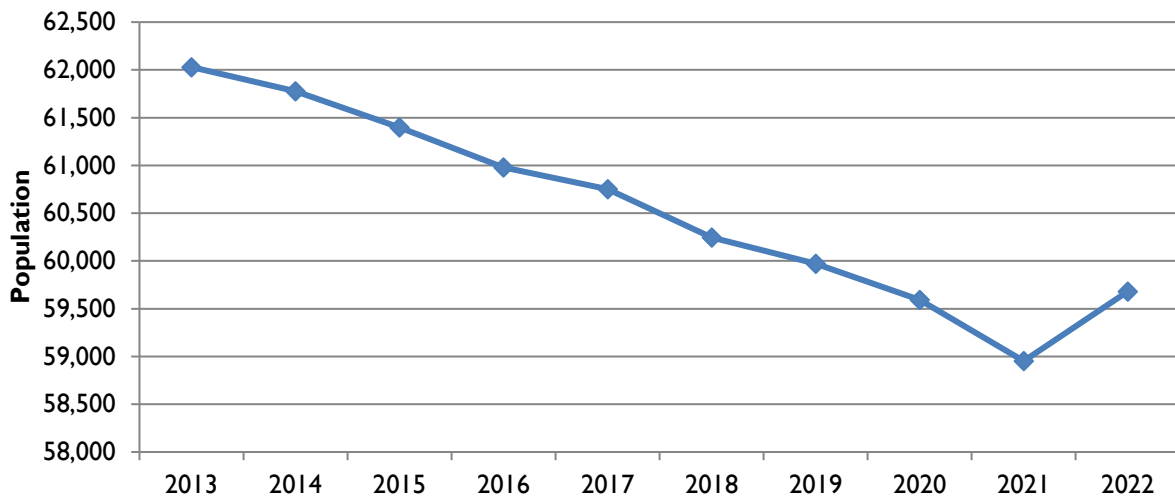
³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?county=47> on 11/1/2024

³⁶ Retrieved from

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2010.S0101?q=population%20and%20ages%20in%20otsego%20county%20new%20york&g=040XX00US36> on 10/31/2024

Figure 4 Otsego County Population Trends: 2013 - 2022³⁷



In addition to a declining county population, there have also been shifts in the city and village populations. From 2010 to 2020, all villages in Otsego County experienced a population decrease. The villages of Laurens and Gilbertsville experienced the largest population declines. Laurens lost 78 residents causing a population drop of 29.7%, while Gilbertsville lost 91 residents causing a population drop of 22.8%. Four other villages saw a decrease in population of 10% or more. City and village population changes are outlined in Table 3 below.

³⁷ Retrieved from

https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2017.B01003?q=population%20data%20for%20Otsego%20County%20New%20York&hidePreview=true&table=B01003&g=060XX00US3607758343,3607758420,3607755695,3607754881,3607745920,3607776012,3607783129,3607723613,3607724845,3607746910,3607763638,3607719895,3607715253,3607750485,3607770310,3607747240,3607748494,3607761467,3607754892,3607741531,3607779972,3607755629,3607711528,3607711209,3607732589&vintage=2017&layer=countysubdivision&cid=B01003_001E&lastDisplayedRow=74&tp=true&tid=ACSDT5Y2017.B01003 on 10/31/2024

Table 3 Changes in City/Village Population in Otsego County³⁸

Village/City	2010 Census	2020 Census	10 Yr. Change	
			#	%
Cherry Valley	520	467	-53	-10.2%
Cooperstown	1,852	1,794	-58	-3.1%
Gilbertsville	399	308	-91	-22.8%
Laurens	263	185	-78	-29.7%
Milford	415	367	-48	-11.6%
Morris	583	486	-97	-16.6%
Oneonta	14,006	13,855	-151	-1.1%
Otego	1,010	875	-135	-13.4%
Richfield	1,264	1,187	-77	-6.1%
Springs				
Unadilla	1,128	1,065	-63	-5.6%

Town populations have changed as well as shown in Table 4 below. Although several towns saw growth between 2010 and 2020, town populations are trending in line with village populations and are overall experiencing decreases. In terms of actual numbers, the towns of Exeter and Maryland have experienced the largest increase in population (263 and 146, respectively); and the towns of Worcester and Pittsfield have experienced the greatest decline (-580 and -529, respectively).³⁹ In terms of percentages, the towns of Exeter and Maryland have experienced the largest increase in population (30.3% and 9.1%, respectively); and the towns of Pittsfield and Worcester have experienced the greatest decrease (-31.6% and -22.6%, respectively). Overall, 18 out of 24 (75%) towns in Otsego County saw a decrease in population since the 2010 census, which is in line with the decrease in the county population during the same time period. Of the towns that saw a population increase, 5 of 6 (83.3%) saw an increase of less than 10%.

Shockingly, both the city and town of Oneonta have experienced a decrease in population between the 2010 and 2020 census. Oneonta is considered the hub of Otsego County, playing host to the majority of the county's employers and shopping opportunities, providing easy access to the interstate, and is the only municipality with regular public transportation routes and options. Also of note, all 6 (100%) towns that saw population increases are small, rural communities. Because of their overall size, 3 of these towns (50%) do not have their own school districts; instead children living here attend school in communities that are geographically close and have higher population numbers. These

³⁸ Retrieved from

https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALSF12010.P1?g=160XX00US3615242,3618047,3628959,3641520,3647229,3648483,3655618,3676001_1620000US3661489 on 11/1/2024

³⁹ Ibid

shifts in population, along with the county's rising 65 years and over population, speak to the fact that many people are moving out of the area for more diverse opportunities.

Table 4 Changes in Town Population in Otsego County⁴⁰

Town	2010 Census	2020 Census	10 Yr. Change	
			#	%
Burlington	1,355	1,093	-262	-19.3%
Butternuts	1,894	1,856	-38	-2.0%
Cherry Valley	1,103	1,134	31	2.8%
Decatur	314	304	-10	-3.2%
Edmeston	1,724	1,846	122	7.1%
Exeter	867	1,130	263	30.3%
Hartwick	2,424	2,257	-167	-6.9%
Laurens	2,432	2,268	-164	-6.7%
Maryland	1,605	1,751	146	9.1%
Middlefield	1,824	1,820	-4	-0.2%
Milford	3,041	2,889	-152	-5.0%
Morris	1,604	1,694	90	5.6%
New Lisbon	1,164	1,248	84	7.2%
Oneonta	5,205	4,966	-239	-4.6%
Otego	3,141	2,889	-252	-8.0%
Otsego	3,916	3,717	-199	-5.1%
Pittsfield	1,674	1,145	-529	-31.6%
Plainfield	842	757	-85	-10.1%
Richfield	2,379	2,079	-300	-12.6%
Roseboom	803	704	-99	-12.3%
Springfield	1,437	1,297	-140	-9.7%
Unadilla	4,437	4,128	-309	-7.0%
Westford	846	779	-67	-7.9%
Worcester	2,567	1,987	-580	-22.6%

⁴⁰ Ibid

D. Poverty

While the number and percentage of people living in poverty in Otsego County has decreased from 2013 – 2022, these figures have stayed fairly steady over this time period. There was a slight decrease of 2.5% for all ages since 2013; ages 0 – 5 saw the largest decrease in poverty (-2.3%) and ages 5 – 17 saw a -2.0% decrease.⁴¹ The decrease in the number of people living in poverty is in line with overall population decreases in Otsego County – there has been a 3.8%⁴² decrease in population and a 13.7%⁴³ decrease in school enrollment since 2013. The overall percentage of Otsego County residents living in poverty is 13.0%, which is below the New York State rate (13.6%) but exceeds the United States rate (12.5%).⁴⁴ From 2013 – 2022 both the number and percentage of children under age 18 living in poverty decreased, however the 0 – 5 age group consistently experienced poverty at higher rate than the 5 – 17 age group. It is estimated that 19.9% of children under 5 in Otsego County are living in poverty, which exceeds both the New York State (18.7%) and the United States (18.1%) rates.⁴⁵ Poverty estimates for Otsego County are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Poverty Estimates for Otsego County⁴⁶

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change
All Ages											
Count	8,883	9,288	9,275	9,106	8,966	8,467	8,154	7,280	6,650	7,090	-1,793
Percent	15.5%	16.4%	16.5%	16.3%	16.1%	15.4%	14.9%	13.4%	12.4%	13.0%	-2.5%
Under Age 18											
Count	1,983	1,959	2,008	1,788	1,920	1,768	1,638	1,728	1,561	1,404	-579
Percent	18.0%	18.4%	19.5%	17.8%	19.5%	18.5%	17.4%	18.6%	17.0%	15.8%	-2.2%
Ages 0 - 5											
Count	No data available	635	562	607	548	542	550	465	449	-113	
Percent		25.1%	22.2%	23.9%	21.8%	21.7%	22.4%	20.2%	19.9%	-2.3%	
Ages 5 - 17											
Count	No data available	1,373	1,226	1,313	1,220	1,096	1,178	1,096	955	-271	
Percent		17.7%	16.4%	17.9%	17.3%	15.9%	17.2%	15.9%	14.4%	-2.0%	

Looking within Otsego County, one indicator of poverty is the number of students eligible for free lunch ($\leq 130\%$ poverty level). During the 2022 – 2023 school year, there were 2,558 students eligible for free school lunch in the 12 school districts within Otsego County, which represents 41% of the total school population. An additional 141 students

⁴¹ Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2021.S1701?q=poverty%20in%20Otsego%20County,%20New%20York> on 11/4/2024

⁴² Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2010.S0101?q=population%20and%20ages%20in%20otsego%20county%20new%20york&g=040XX00US36> on 10/31/2024

⁴³ Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?county=47> on 11/1/2024

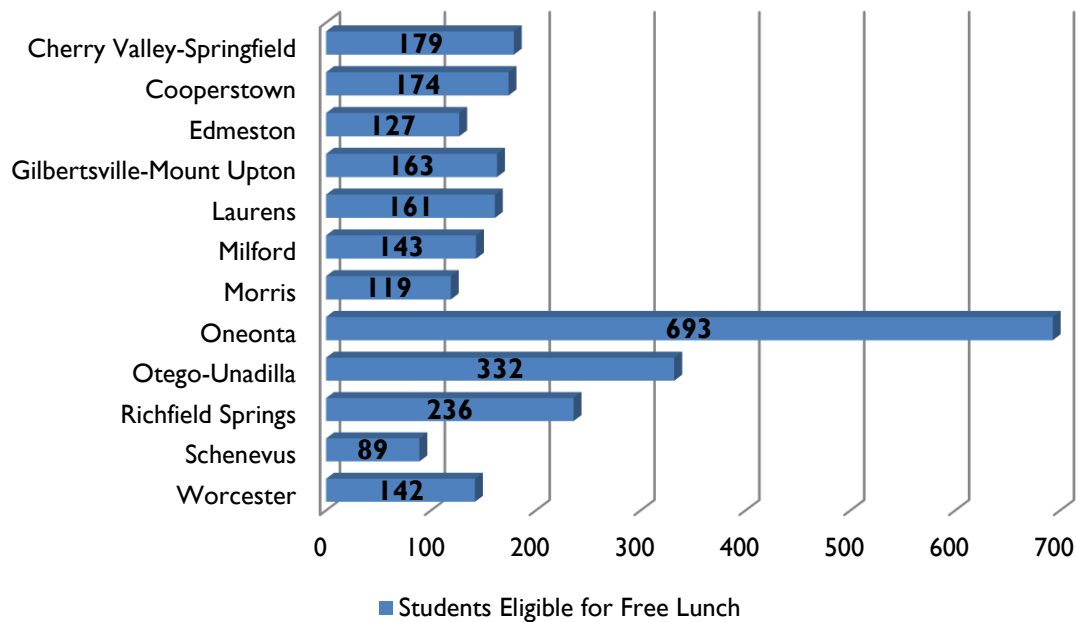
⁴⁴ Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/table?q=poverty%20in%20Otsego%20County,%20New%20York&g=010XX00US_040XX00US36 on 11/4/2024

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

were eligible for reduced-price lunch, accounting for 2% of the county’s school population. While the number and percentage of children eligible for free lunch has increased, the number and percentage of children eligible for reduced price lunch has decreased. In the 2022 – 2023 school year, 41% (2,558) of children in Otsego County were eligible for free lunch and 2% (141) were eligible for reduced price lunch; in the 2018 – 2019 school year, 35% (2,313) of children were eligible for free lunch and 6% (376) were eligible for reduced price lunch.⁴⁷ The following figures show where these students are located in Otsego County and the percentage of eligible students in each district during the 2022 – 2023 year.

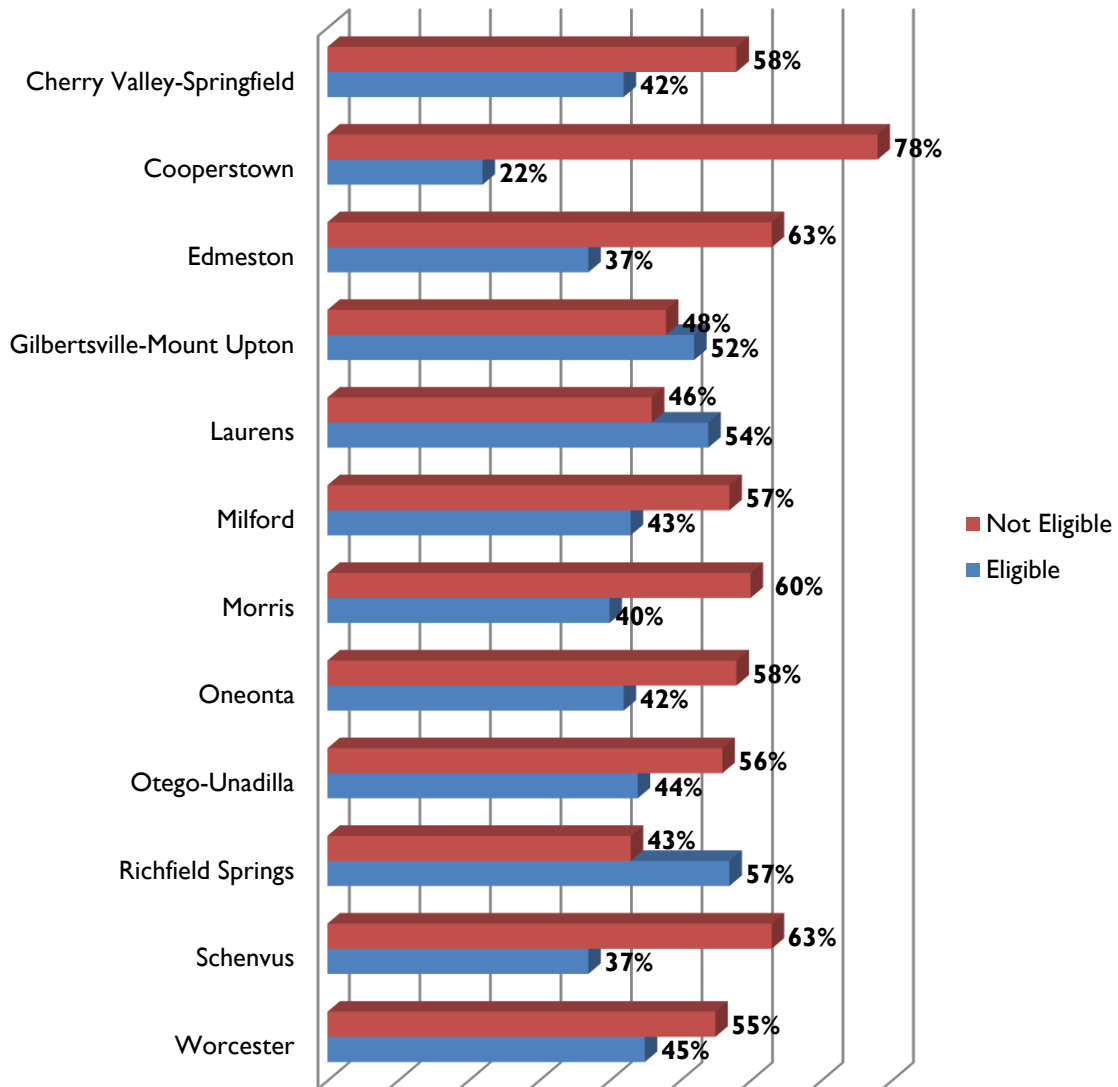
Figure 5 Students Eligible for Free Lunch in Otsego County School Districts⁴⁸



⁴⁷ Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2020&county=47> on 11/4/2024

⁴⁸ Ibid

Figure 6 Percentage of Students in Otsego County School Districts that are Eligible for Free Lunch⁴⁹



In 2021, 1.1% of the birth – 17 age group in Otsego County were receiving public assistance, 16.9% were receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and 1.9% were receiving Supplemental Security Income.⁵⁰ According to the Opportunities for Otsego 2023 Annual Report, 20.7% of clients served were homeless during the October 2022 – September 2023 period.⁵¹ There were 50 homeless school-aged children in Otsego County during the 2022 – 2023 school year, with the highest concentrations in the small and rural districts of Edmeston, Otego-Unadilla, and Richfield Springs, followed

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Retrieved from https://www.nyskwic.org/get_data/county_report_detail.cfm?countyID=36077 on 11/4/2024

⁵¹ “2023 Annual Report.” *Opportunities for Otsego, Inc.* (n.d.).

closely by the much larger Oneonta City School District.⁵² There were 72 children in Otsego County who received subsidized child care benefits from July 2022 – June 2023.⁵³ Of those 72 children, 68 (94%) were deemed “low income” and 4 (6%) were in receipt of public assistance.⁵⁴ In 2022, Governor Hochul overhauled New York’s child care benefits program in an effort to stabilize the workforce and provide needed resources to working families. As part of this update, the eligibility criteria for child care subsidy was increased to 300% of the federal poverty guidelines, which allowed families not previously eligible to qualify for benefits. At 300% of federal poverty guidelines, it is important to note that it is not possible to determine how many of these children who were eligible to receive subsidized child care benefits are Head Start eligible since our eligibility criteria is only 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.

III. Demographic Makeup of Head Start Eligible Children and Families

A. Estimated Number

There are approximately 449 children under the age of 5 living in poverty throughout Otsego County, accounting for 19.9% of that population.⁵⁵ Using the agency database, it was identified that there were approximately 202 children who were eligible for Head Start Preschool (ages 3 and 4 and income $\leq$ 100% poverty level) and 151 children who were eligible for Early Head Start (ages 0 – 2 and income $\leq$ 100% poverty level) during the 2023 calendar year. This represents a decrease of 64.1% and 62.7% respectively in the number of eligible children in the agency’s database since the 2019 Community Needs Assessment. The Head Start Reauthorization changed income eligibility guidelines and now allows for the eligibility of children up to 130% of the poverty level. This change has allowed for eligibility of an additional 19 children (ages 3 and 4) for Head Start Preschool and an additional 17 children (ages 0 – 2) for Early Head Start. This represents a decrease of 73.9% and 76.4% respectively in the number of eligible children in the 101 – 130% category in the agency’s database since the 2019 Community Needs Assessment. Additionally, 2.3% of children in Otsego County are living in foster care, which is in line with the New York State rate of 2.6%.⁵⁶

⁵² Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2020&county=47> on 11/4/2024

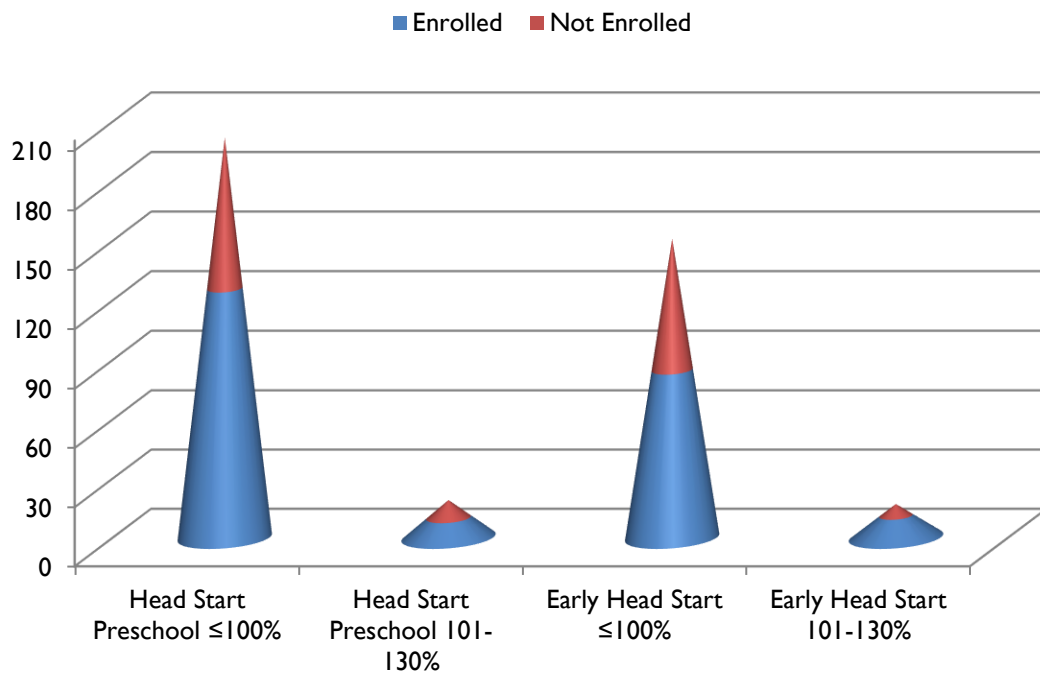
⁵³ Retrieved from <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/legislative-report/2022-Legislative-Report.pdf> on 11/7/2024

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S1701?q=poverty%20in%20Otsego%20County,%20New%20York> on 11/4/2024

⁵⁶ Retrieved from https://www.nyskwic.org/get_data/indicator_profile.cfm?subIndicatorID=51&indYear1=2016&indYear2=2023 on 11/7/2024

Figure 7 Population of Children Who Were Age and Income Eligible for Head Start⁵⁷

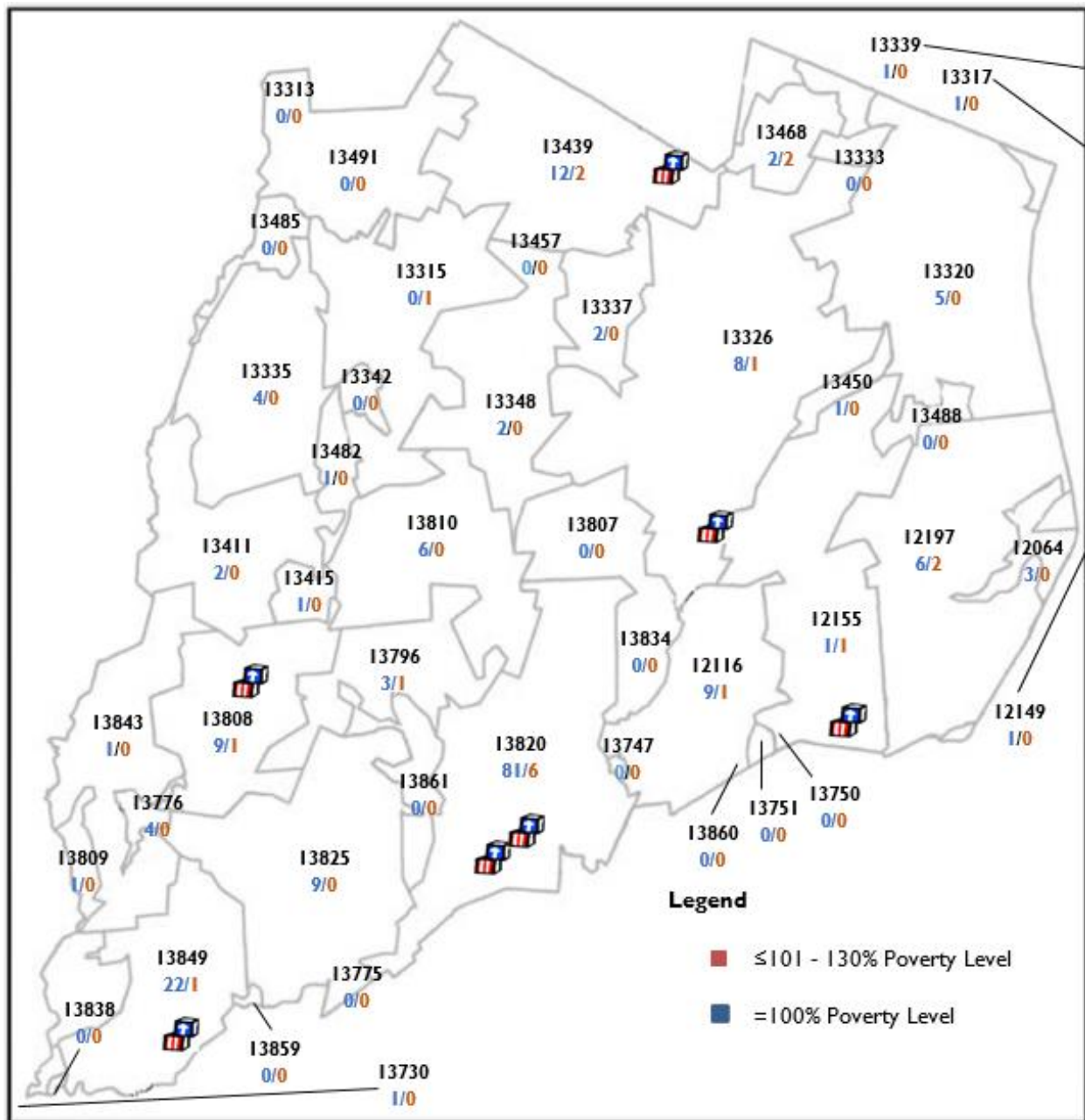


B. Geographic Location

The following maps show the location of children eligible for Head Start Preschool and Early Head Start in relation to the Head Start centers in Otsego County.

⁵⁷ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. Agency Database – Captain. (2024).

Figure 8 Location of Children Who Were Age and Income Eligible for Head Start Preschool (Ages 3-4 and $\leq$ 130% Poverty Level)⁵⁸

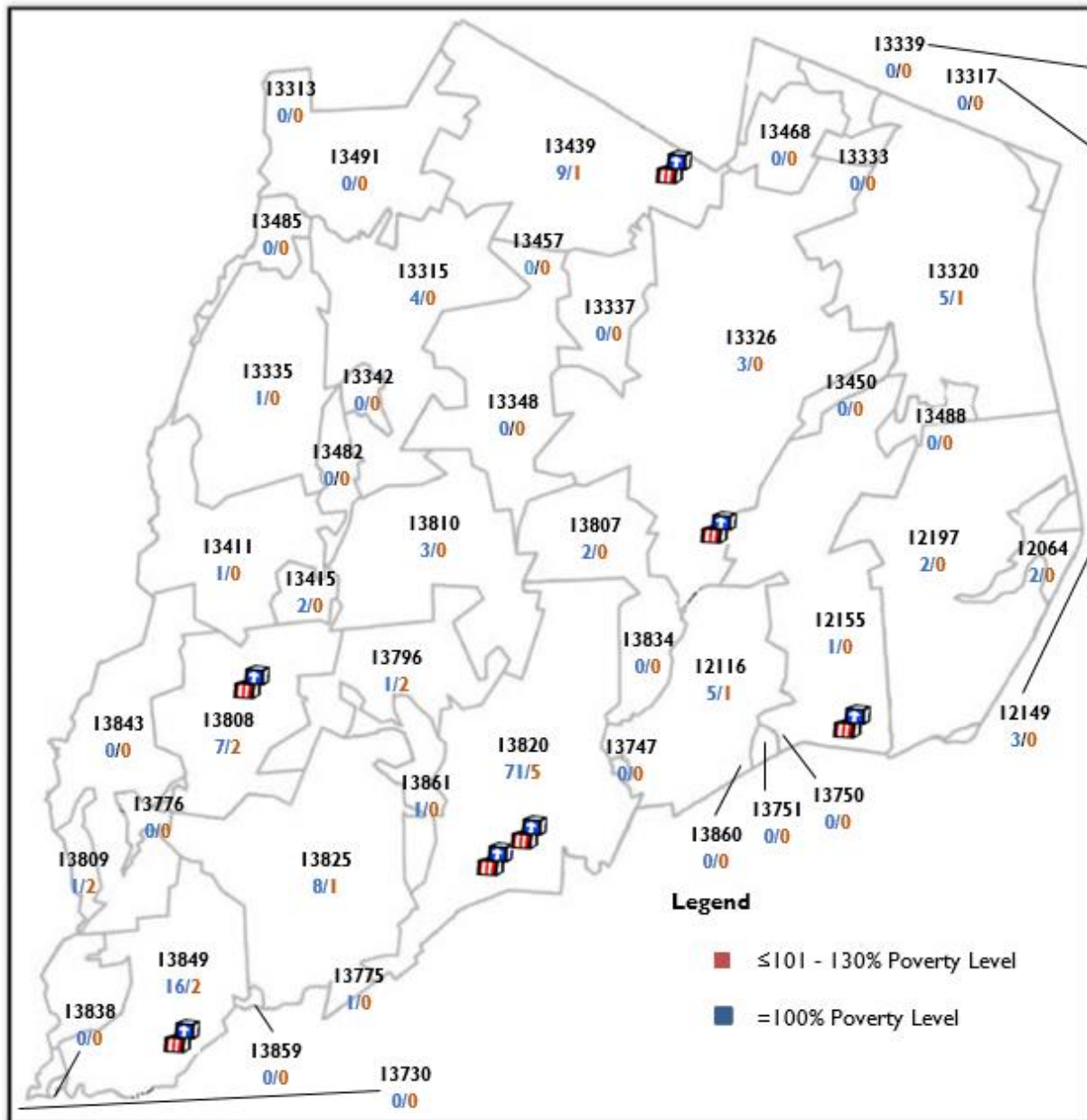


2 Head Start Preschool children were homeless and did not have a zip code for a place of residence

1 Head Start Preschool child whose income was $\leq$ 100% of the poverty level had an Albany zip code (over 80 miles away); the family was in process of moving to Otsego County and did not have a residence yet

⁵⁸ Ibid

Figure 9 Location of Children Who Were Age and Income Eligible for Early Head Start (Ages 0-2 and $\leq 130\%$ Poverty Level)⁵⁹



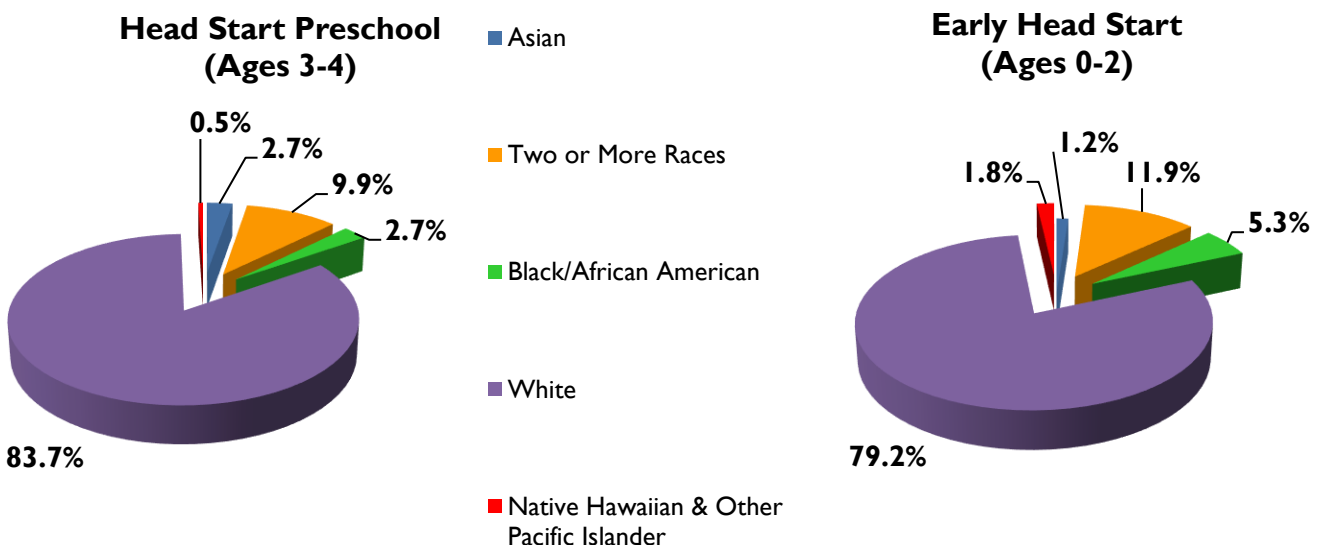
2 Early Head Start children were homeless and did not have a zip code for a place of residence

⁵⁹ Ibid

C. Racial Composition

Like many rural counties in the region, Otsego County's racial composition is overwhelmingly White. According to the U.S. Census, 93.1% of the county's population is White, 3.0% is Black/African American, 1.7% is Asian, 0.3% is American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.1% is Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 1.8% identify as two or more races.⁶⁰ The racial composition of the county's Head Start eligible children follows this trend, with a slightly smaller White population and larger Two or More Races population, as shown in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10 Racial Composition of Children Who Were Age and Income Eligible (≤130% Poverty Level) for Head Start⁶¹



'American Indian & Alaska Native', 'Other', and 'Unspecified' races were less than 1% for both programs

D. Ethnic Composition

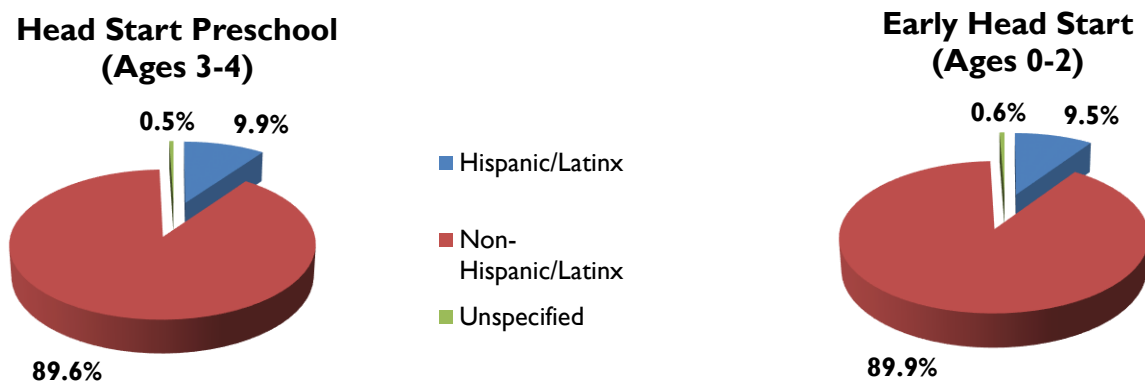
As with racial composition, Otsego County's ethnic composition is not particularly diverse. The population is primarily non-Hispanic/Latinx (89.5%), with a small Hispanic/Latinx population (4.6%)⁶². The ethnic composition of the county's Head Start Preschool and Early Head Start eligible children is fairly similar, with a slightly larger Hispanic/Latinx population, as shown in Figure 11 below.

⁶⁰ Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/otsegocountynewyork> on 9/10/2024

⁶¹ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2020-2024)

⁶² Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/otsegocountynewyork> on 9/10/2024

Figure 11 Ethnic Composition of Children Who Were Age and Income Eligible ($\leq 130\%$ Poverty Level) for Head Start⁶³



E. Languages Spoken

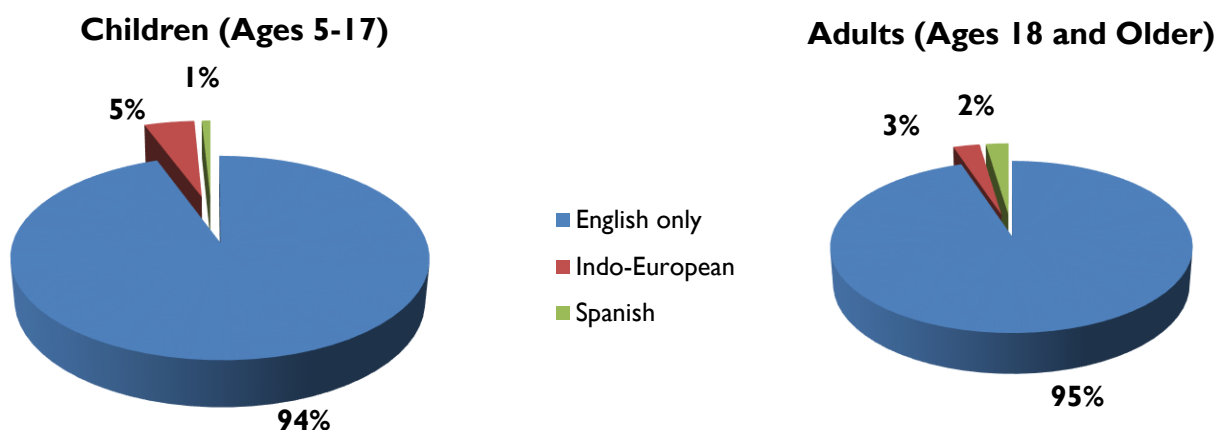
As outlined in Figure 12 below, the majority of Otsego County residents speak English only, followed by Indo-European and Spanish. The percentage of English-speaking residents is higher than both the New York State and national rates. For children ages 5 – 17, 70.1% in New York and 78.3% in the United States speak English only; for adults ages 18 and over, 69.3% and 78.3% respectively speak English only.⁶⁴

⁶³ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. Agency Database – Captain (2024).

⁶⁴ Retrieved from

https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2022.B16004?t=Language%20Spoken%20at%20Home&g=010XX00US_040XX00US36_050XX00US36077 on 11/8/2024

Figure 12 Languages Spoken at Home in Otsego County for Children (ages 5-17) and Adults (ages 18 and older)⁶⁵



'Asian and Pacific Island' and 'Other' languages were less than 1% for all age groups

IV. Child Development and Child Care Programs Serving Head Start Eligible Children and Families

A. Universal Pre-Kindergarten

Established in 1998, Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) is a preschool education initiative implemented by New York State, with the intention to offer pre-kindergarten to all 4-year-old children in the state, regardless of family income or other risk factors. According to *The State of Preschool 2023 Yearbook*:

During the 2022-2023 school year New York preschool enrolled 155,512 children, an increase of 3,524 from the prior year...\$25 million in competitive Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program (SUFKPK) grants were awarded to 57 school districts for preschool expansion. Additionally, the Fiscal Year 2024 enacted state budget included an additional \$100 million for the UPK and \$50 million for a new competitive SUFDPK grant...In the 2013-2014 school year, the state continued targeting its pre-K funding, launching the New York State Priority Prekindergarten Program (NYSPPK) offering competitive grants creating new full- and half-day slots for high-need children in low-income school districts and enabling districts to convert half-day slots to full-day...In 2015-2016, the Expanded Prekindergarten for 3- and 4-Year-Old Students grant began, creating new slots for both 3- and 4-year-olds. New York was also awarded a 2014 federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) supporting enrollment of additional low-income 4-year-olds in five school districts. Ninety percent of children were served in full-day programs in 2022-2023.⁶⁶

As shown in Table 6 below, all 12 of the school districts that are located within Otsego County received funding to administer UPK programs in the 2024 – 2025 school year,

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Retrieved from <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023/state-profiles/new-york> on 11/12/2024

with a total capacity to serve 385 children in both half-day and full-day programming. This is an increase of 114 slots since the 2019 Community Needs Assessment, which represents an increase of 42.1%. Among the 9 school districts that border or are partially located in Otsego County, all 9 had UPK programs in the 2024 – 2025 school year, with a total capacity to serve 343 children in both half-day and full-day programming. Additionally, one of these bordering districts received funding to expand UPK services to twelve 3-year-olds in a full-day setting. Thus, for the 21 school districts in and around the county, 21 districts are receiving funding to implement UPK, and one district has expanded to begin providing services to 3-year-olds. One district, Cooperstown, first received funding to establish a UPK program several years ago, but has struggled to find space and teaching staff; this district is on the UPK funding list, but they have not implemented their program as of yet.

Table 6 UPK Programs within Otsego County⁶⁷

Otsego County School Districts	Capacity
Cherry Valley-Springfield	23
Cooperstown	41
Edmeston	17
Gilbertsville-Mount Upton	20
Laurens	20
Milford	15
Morris	17
Oneonta	115
Otego-Unadilla	60
Richfield Springs	22
Schenevus	16
Worcester	19
Subtotal for Otsego County School Districts	385

The Oneonta school district secures UPK funding, then partners with early childhood programs throughout the city to administer UPK programming at their specific centers. Oneonta City School District currently partners with six agencies to provide half-day UPK programming, one of which is Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. In the past, some Head Start Preschool classrooms operated at different times from UPK so that they did not compete with each other for enrollment of eligible children 4 years of age. This became increasingly difficult when the Head Start Program Performance Standards were revised and released in 2016 requiring center-based Head Start Preschool classrooms to transition to 1,020 annual hours of operation. Oneonta City School District and Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. have collaborated to provide wrap-around services, allowing families the opportunity for their children to participate in both programs for a full day of early childhood education services. With the increased hour requirement, many school districts are unable to run UPK classes at differing times from Head Start

⁶⁷ Retrieved from <https://www.nysed.gov/early-learning/prekindergarten-data> on 10/15/2024

Preschool classrooms, or have expanded their services to encompass a full day of programming. This has had an impact on recruitment and enrollment in Head Start Preschool in these school districts.

Head Start Preschool and UPK programs are similar in that both offer free services and focus on school readiness skills, preparing preschoolers for a successful transition to their school setting. There are, however, several differences between each program. Head Start Preschool provides services to low-income 3 and 4 year old children that fall at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines, whereas UPK provides services without income eligibility to 3 and 4 year olds residing within their school district (at this time, there are no UPK programs in Otsego County that offer services to 3 year olds). Head Start Preschool teachers are required to have a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education, whereas UPK teachers must hold a current teacher certification in the state in which they are teaching. Some UPK programs require children to be potty-trained before accepting them into the program, whereas Head Start Preschool does not instill prerequisites and uses this as an opportunity to partner with the family and help the child obtain the skills needed to successfully master this task. Opportunities for Otsego Inc.'s Head Start Preschool offers both full- and part-day programming. Transportation services are limited to those areas with the greatest need when a bus is available. In select areas in Otsego County, UPK is able to offer a full day of programming and transportation to enrolled children. While Head Start Preschool offers more to families in the way of social and supportive services, referrals to area resources, and developmental screenings for enrolled children, it is challenging to compete with a program that can provide a full day of programming which appeals to working families and those without access to transportation. UPK is also appealing to families who have another child who is already attending school. In regards to transportation, parents can put both children on the bus instead of transporting a younger child to the nearest Head Start Preschool center, saving the family time, mileage, and money. Having an older child in the school district means parents are familiar with school personnel and have established relationships with district staff as well. Parents often choose UPK over Head Start Preschool because of these factors, and due to the decreased amount of paperwork required to enroll in a UPK program.

B. Child Care Programs

Catholic Charities of Delaware and Otsego Counties is the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for Otsego County. They provide services to both parents seeking child care and the child care community in an effort to meet the needs of working families with young children. The following information on day care centers and providers was obtained from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

Table 7 Capacity of Licensed Family and Group/Family Day Care Providers in Otsego County⁶⁸

Type of Provider		Capacity: Ages 6 Weeks - 12 Years
Family Day Care Providers		60
Group/Family Day Care Providers		72
	TOTAL	132

⁶⁸ Retrieved from <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/looking/ccfs-search.php> on 10/7/2024

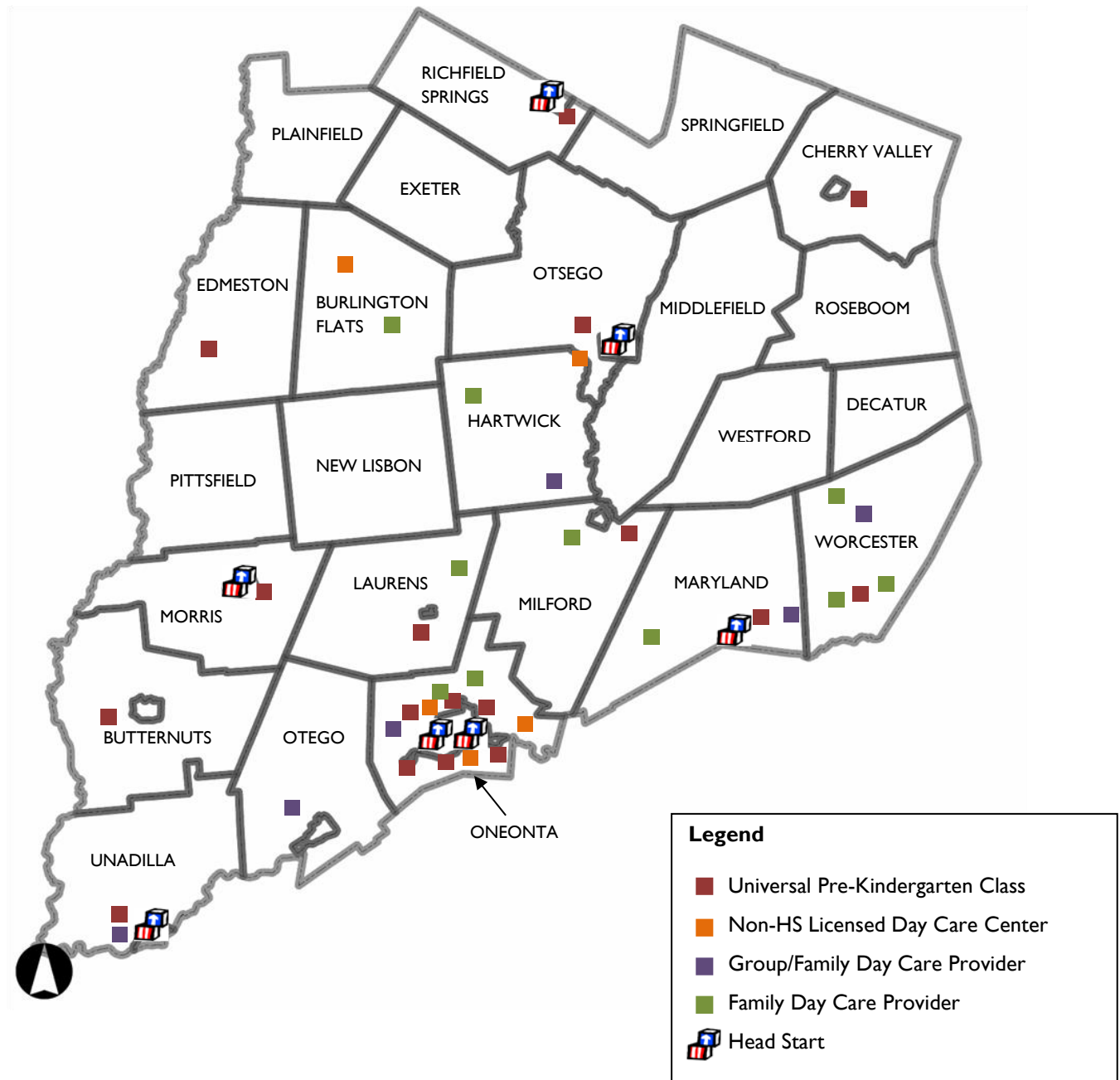
Table 8 Capacity of Licensed Day Care Centers in Otsego County⁶⁹

Name	Location	Capacity		
		Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Bugbee Children's Center	Oneonta	24	46	71
Great Beginnings Preschool	Burlington Flats	0	0	30
Kids Unlimited Preschool	Oneonta	0	0	44
OFO - Cooperstown HSP	Cooperstown	0	0	15
OFO - Morris HSP	Morris	0	0	12
OFO - Oneonta HSP/EHS	Oneonta	0	16	15
OFO - Richfield Springs HSP	Richfield Springs	0	0	15
OFO - Schenevus HSP	Schenevus	0	0	15
OFO - SUNY Oneonta HSP	Oneonta	0	0	42
OFO - Unadilla HSP	Unadilla	0	0	15
The Brookwood School	Cooperstown	24	30	66
Yak's Youth Center	Oneonta	15	24	44
	TOTAL	63	116	384

The following map shows the location of child development and/or child care providers in 2024.

⁶⁹ Ibid

Figure 13 Location of Child Development and Child Care Providers in Otsego County for Children Ages 0 – 5⁷⁰



Historically, there has been an identified lack of licensed day care centers in Otsego County, especially centers that provide services to infants and toddlers. According to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, there are a total of 5 day care

⁷⁰ Ibid

centers in the county, with a total capacity to serve 63 infants, 100 toddlers, 255 preschoolers, and 82 school-aged children.⁷¹ This represents a decrease of 1 day care center, 91 preschool slots, and 2 school-age slots; and an increase of 22 toddler slots in the past year. While the number of available infant slots stayed steady and there was an increase in toddler slots, there was an overall decrease in capacity in county day care facilities. Additionally, Head Start Preschool provides services to 129 preschoolers and Early Head Start provides services to 16 toddlers in a center-based setting. Otsego County has 10 licensed Family Day Care providers and 6 licensed Group Day Care providers, with a capacity to serve 60 and 72 children (ages 6 weeks to 12 years) respectively.⁷² This represents an increase of 2 Family Day Care facilities, for a total increase of 12 child care slots in these categories since 2023. School-age day care options in Otsego County have been unstable and inconsistent. While school-age capacity only decreased by 2 since last year, we saw the closure of one of only two school-age only day care centers; that facility (with a capacity to serve 40) opened in September 2023 and was closed in August 2024.⁷³ Fluctuations to school-age capacity have occurred as follows: in 2020, 80 school-age slots were available countywide; in 2021 there were 40 slots; in 2022 there were 0 slots; in 2023 there were 80 slots; and in 2024 there were 40 slots.⁷⁴ Available child care slots in Otsego County decreased significantly since 2023, with an overall loss of 248 slots. According to Child Care Aware's 'Mapping the Gap in New York', there is a greater demand than there are available slots in Otsego County in regard to infant/toddler care. Based on census numbers and available infant/toddler child care slots, there is a shortage of approximately 824 child care slots for this age group.⁷⁵ Despite the decreasing number of available child care slots, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services reports that overall Otsego County is not considered a child care desert with 1.02 children per available child care slot, however 70% of census tracts in the county are considered deserts, and 21.52% of families are living below 22% of the federal poverty level.⁷⁶

C. Children with Disabilities

The Otsego County Department of Health's Division for Children with Special Needs reported providing services to 200 children ages 0 – 3 and 165 children ages 3 – 5 in 2023.⁷⁷ Information about the breakdown of services provided to these children is not available – while specific disability categories are reported for school-age children, this data is not publically available for children ages 0 – 5 in Otsego County.

For the 2023 – 2024 program year, 19 Early Head Start children (16% of total cumulative enrollment) and 27 Head Start children (18% of total cumulative enrollment) were determined to have a disability. Figure 14 below displays the breakdown of disability

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

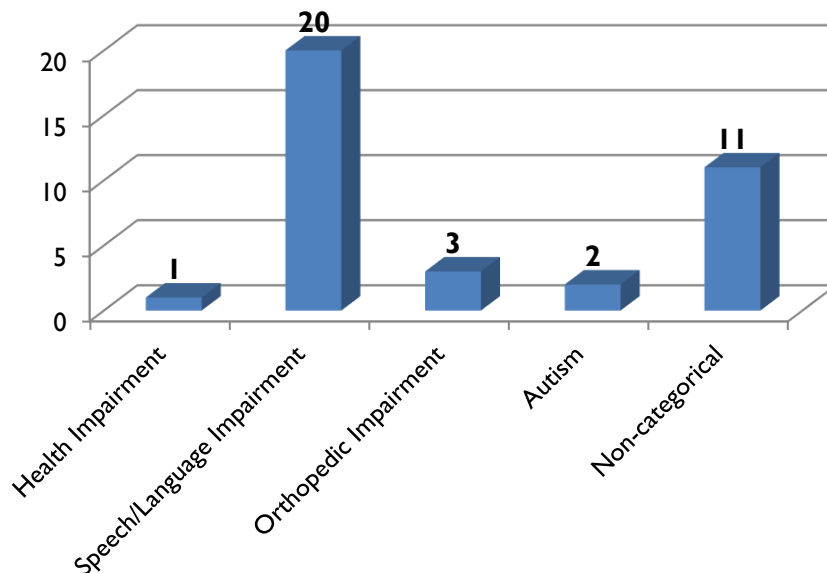
⁷⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f598bce2a0bb43c1944f95235aad7bd6&extent=-9047033.8128%2C5000877.5401%2C-7872961.0584%2C5568957.5343%2C102100> on 10/7/2024

⁷⁶ Retrieved from <https://nysccf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=b0281149b595404e9d1c26bef8b9735> on 10/7/2024

⁷⁷ Retrieved from <https://cms2.revize.com/revize/otsegocountyny/2023%20Annual%20Report.pdf> on 11/13/2024

diagnoses of Head Start Preschool children (primary disability diagnoses are not collected for Early Head Start children). Catholic Charities of Delaware and Otsego Counties reports that less than 3% of parents are looking for child care for a special needs child.⁷⁸

**Figure 14 Disabilities Diagnoses of Head Start Preschool Children (ages 3–5):
School Year 2023 – 2024⁷⁹**



Some children were diagnosed with multiple disabilities, which accounts for the larger number of disabilities in this figure than the number of children diagnosed with a disability

V. Education, Health, Nutrition, and Social Services Needs of Head Start Eligible Children and Families

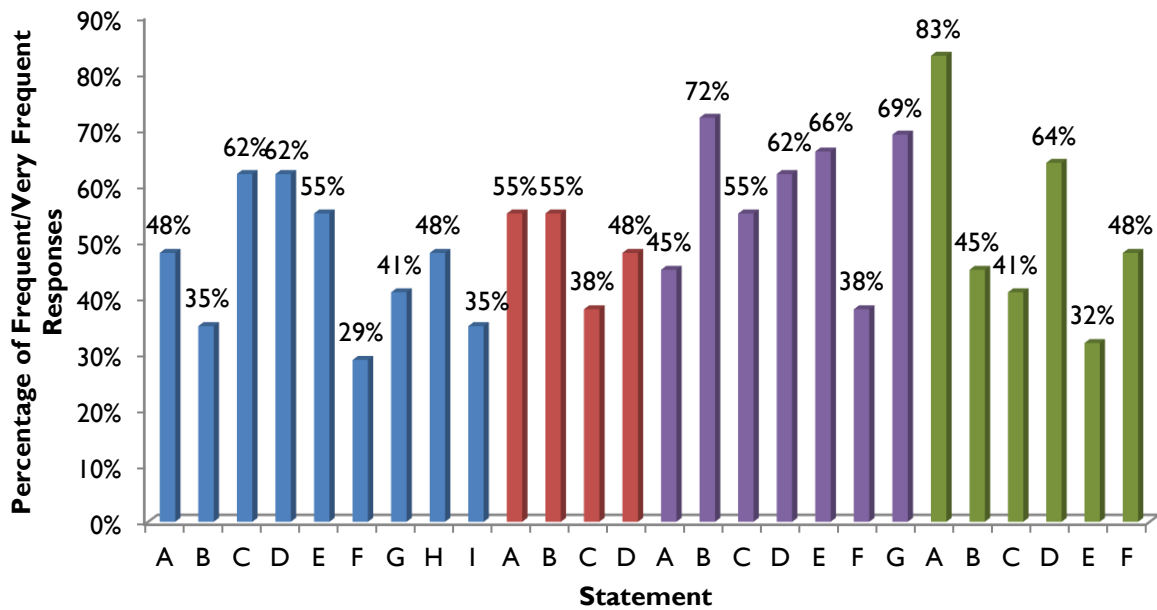
A. Education

Head Start has collaborative UPK agreements with all school districts in which a center operates. As part of the kindergarten transition process for Head Start Preschool children, information is typically collected from kindergarten teachers in November to assess how well Head Start Preschool children are adapting to their new classroom. Figure 15 below shows the responses from kindergarten teachers for 2022.

⁷⁸ *Child Care Support Services: 2019 Otsego County Child Care Report*. Catholic Charities of Delaware and Otsego Counties. (n.d.).

⁷⁹ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2023-2024)

**Figure 15 2022 Kindergarten Transition Reports for Otsego County Head Start
Preschool Children⁸⁰**



Category I: Language Literacy

- A Identifies 10 letters of the alphabet; especially letters in their name, out of order.
- B Correctly uses new or rare words introduced by adults or peers.
- C Writes his/her own name.
- D Understands and follows spoken directions.
- E Follows words from left to right, top to bottom and page by page.
- F Understand rhyming and sound patterns.
- G Attempts to write a letter or letters to represent a word.
- H Follows directions of two or more steps.
- I Demonstrates awareness or relationships between sounds and letters.

Category II: Mathematics

- A Uses one-to-one correspondence in counting objects 1-10.
- B Identifies shapes regardless of size.
- C Understands addition and subtraction.
- D Can identify which number of objects is more, less, greater than, fewer or equal to another group of objects.

Category III: Social/Emotional

- A Accepts guidance/direction from, and asks questions to familiar adults.
- B Interacts positively with children during play and/or conversation.
- C Uses turn taking, trading and problem solving.
- D Has the ability to control strong emotions in appropriate manner.
- E Follows limits, expectations and redirection from adults.
- F Exhibits self-confidence by attempting new tasks independently (without prompt or reinforcement).
- G Has one or more preferred playmates.

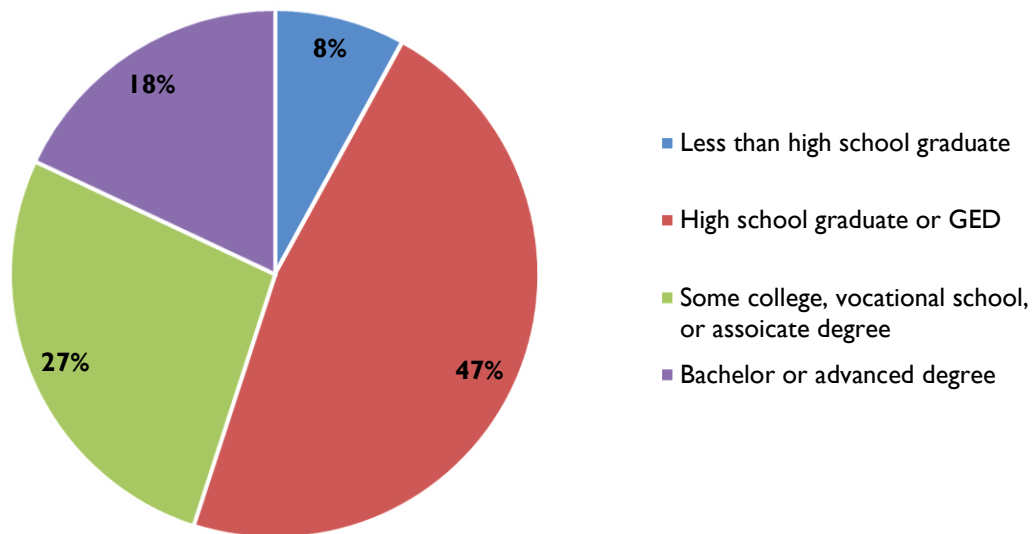
Category IV: Approaches to Learning

- A Engages in pretend and imaginative play.
- B Willingly engages in new experiences and activities.
- C Maintains focus on a task/follows routine independently.
- D Maintains focus on a task/follows routine with assistance.
- E Can solve problems through trial and error, problem solving or interactions with adults and peers.
- F Participates in small/large group activities.

⁸⁰ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Kindergarten Transition Reports. (2022)

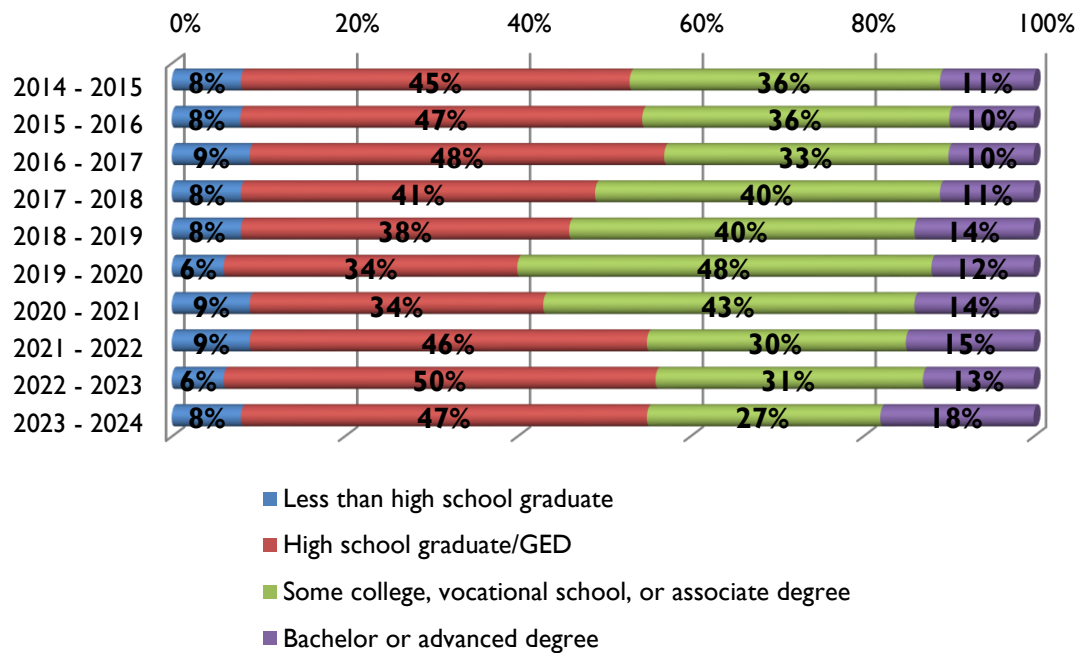
Figure 16 below shows that 45% of parents had more than a high school graduate degree/GED in program year ending 2024. The percentage of parents who hold a bachelor or advanced degree is not only an increase over prior program years, but the largest percentage of parents that have this level of college education that the program has seen. In program year ending 2017 only 43% of parents had an education beyond high school.

Figure 16 Education Level of Head Start Parents: PY 2023 – 2024⁸¹



⁸¹ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2024)

Figure 17 Education Level of Head Start Parents: 2014 – 2024⁸²



During the 2023 – 2024 school year, 65% of Head Start parents were employed at enrollment, but none were enrolled in job training or school. The last time a parent reported attending job training or school during program enrollment was during school year 2020 – 2021. In 2020, the percentage of parents participating in job training was 1%, and the percentage of parents participating in school was 6%. The low number of parents participating in job training or school may be associated with the increased number of parents with an education beyond high school. “Higher levels of education increase the chance an unemployed person will emerge with a comparable wage and reduce the time required to find new employment.”⁸³

⁸² Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2014-2024)

⁸³ Retrieved from

<https://www.ibrc.indiana.edu/ibr/2016/spring/article2.html#:~:text=Higher%20levels%20of%20education%20increase,household%20and%20the%20general%20economy> on 12/3/2024

Figure 18 Head Start Parents Employed or in Job Training/School at Enrollment: PY 2023 – 2024⁸⁴

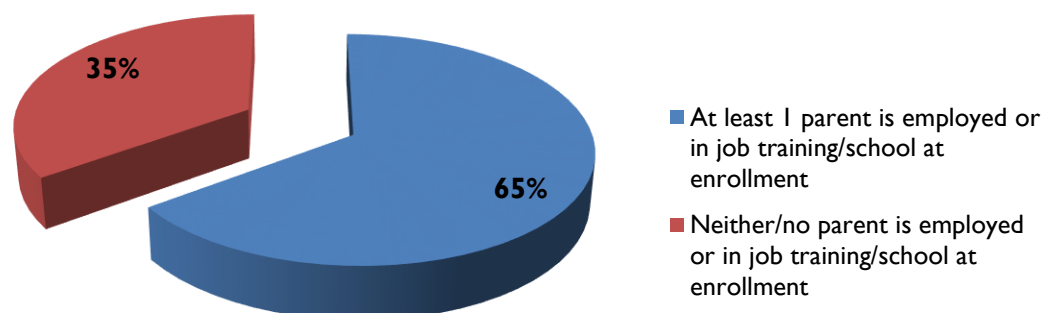
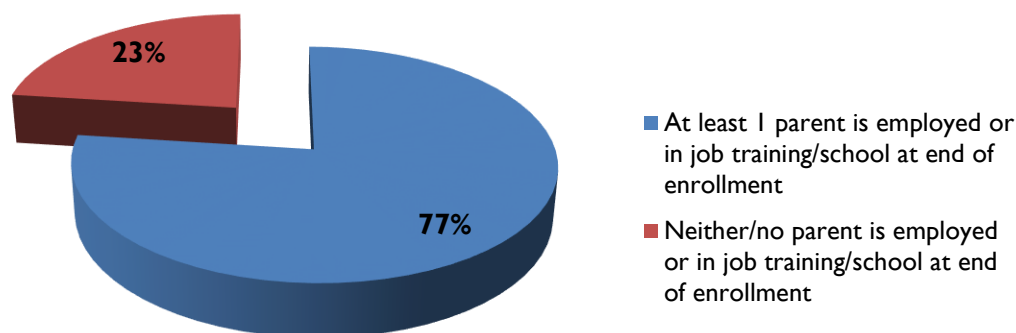


Figure 19 Head Start Parents Employed or in Job Training/School at End of Enrollment: PY 2023 – 2024⁸⁵



B. Typical Work, School, Training Schedules of Parents

According to last report from Catholic Charities of Delaware and Otsego Counties, 69% of parents are looking for full-time child care, 28% are in need of part-time care, and 3% are looking for a combination of both full-time and part-time child care services.⁸⁶ Additionally, 14% are in need of early day/morning child care, 4% need late day/afternoon care, 18% need evening child care hours, 21% need weekend child care hours, 11% need

⁸⁴ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2024)

⁸⁵ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2024)

⁸⁶ *Child Care Support Services: 2019 Otsego County Child Care Report*. Catholic Charities of Delaware and Otsego Counties. (n.d.).

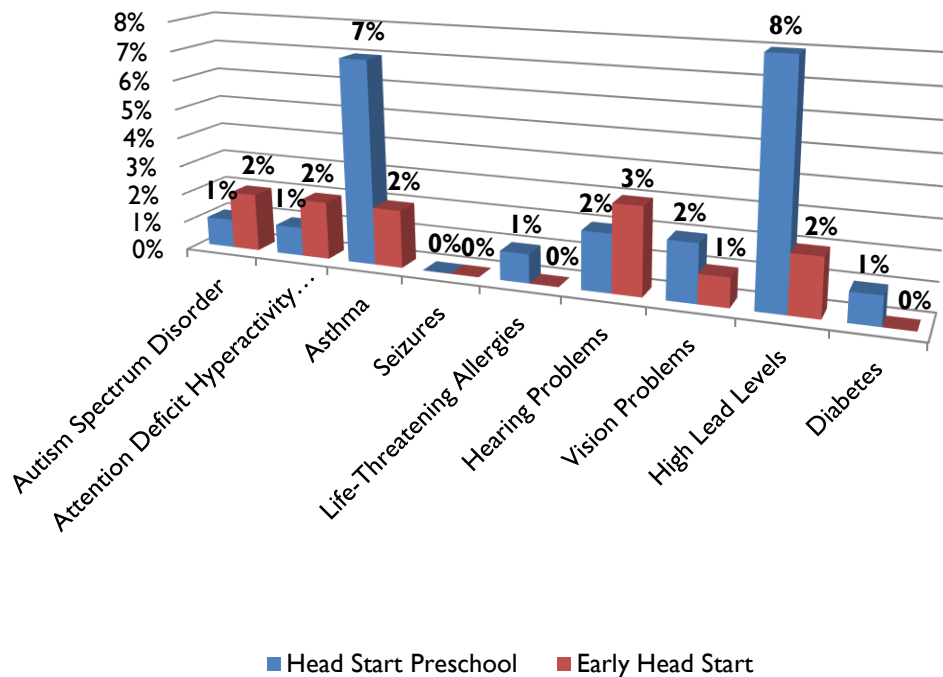
child care with flexible hours, and 32% need care during snow days.⁸⁷ When surveyed about program satisfaction annually, parents consistently share that a longer program day would benefit both enrolled children and their working parents. During the 2023 – 2024 school year, 91% of parents said they preferred a full-day option to better align with sibling school schedules and work schedules.⁸⁸

C. Health

1. Physical Health

In Head Start Preschool during the program year 2023 – 2024, approximately 42% (62 of 148) of enrolled children were diagnosed as needing medical treatment; of those diagnosed, 98% (61 of 62) received medical treatment. In Early Head Start during the same time period, approximately 21% (26 of 122) of enrolled children were diagnosed as needing medical treatment; of those diagnosed, 96% (25 of 26) received medical treatment. Figure 20 below shows the breakdown of medical conditions for Head Start children receiving treatment.

Figure 20 Conditions for Which Head Start Children Received Medical Treatment: PY 2023 – 2024⁸⁹



⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Annual Parent Survey. (April 2024)

⁸⁹ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2024)

The Otsego County Community Health Assessment, completed in 2022, identified the following areas were in need of improvement in regards to maternal, infant, and child health for the county:

- Increase use of primary and preventative health care services by women of all ages, with a focus on women of reproductive age
- Reduce maternal mortality and morbidity
- Reduce infant mortality and morbidity
- Increase breastfeeding
- Support and enhance children and adolescents' social-emotional development and relationships
- Increase supports for children and youth with special health care needs
- Reduce dental caries among children
- Reduce racial, ethnic, economic, and geographic disparities in maternal and child health outcomes and promote health equity for maternal and child health populations⁹⁰

2. Mental Health

During the 2023 – 2024 program year, the Mental Health Specialist provided assistance to 9 (100%) Head Start Preschool Teachers through observation and consultation. In Early Head Start during the same time period, the Mental Health Specialist provided assistance to 9 (100%) Teachers and Home Visitors through observation and consultation.

Table 9 Mental Health Consultations Provided to Head Start Staff: PY 2020 – 2024⁹¹

Mental Health Sepcialist - Consultation Provided	# of Head Start Preschool Staff	# of Early Head Start Staff
Program Year 2023 - 2024	9	9
Program Year 2022 - 2023	10	9
Program Year 2021 - 2022	17	10
Program Year 2020 - 2021	12	10

A common problem for rural communities is a lack of service providers, which in turn decreases the population's overall health status and strains already overwhelmed health systems. Otsego County has struggled to meet the mental health needs of residents due to a lack of providers. The patient-to-provider ratio for mental health providers in Otsego County is 480:1; for New York State that ratio is 310:1.⁹²

⁹⁰ Retrieved from https://www.bassett.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Otsego_County_Community_Health_Needs_Assessment_and_Community_Service_Plan_2022-2024.pdf on 12/3/2024

⁹¹ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2020-2024)

⁹² Retrieved from https://www.bassett.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Otsego_County_Community_Health_Needs_Assessment_and_Community_Service_Plan_2022-2024.pdf on 12/3/2024

3. Oral Health

The Oral Health Disparities and Inequities Research Program has found that oral dental, and craniofacial conditions are among the most common health problems for low income individuals across the life span.⁹³ In a report published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, dental caries (tooth decay) was identified as the most common chronic disease of children in the United States. It was noted that 23% of children ages 2 – 5 have caries, and that significant disparities persist in receipt of childhood preventive dental care, with young children, uninsured children, children living in poverty, non-Hispanic Black children, children from non-English-speaking household, and children with special health care needs less likely to receive needed preventive oral health care.⁹⁴ According to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicaid Services, 2,461,324 children in New York were enrolled in Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in August 2024

In general, the number of children entering the program with access to continuous oral health care has been decreasing significantly, as shown in Figures 21 and 22 below. While the number of both Head Start Preschool and Early Head Start children with access to continuous oral health care at the end of year has seen an increase each program year, the overall number of children with continuous access to oral health care continues to trend downwards. The percentage of Early Head Start children who have access to oral health care each year (both at the beginning and at end of enrollment) is consistently below the percentage of Head Start Preschool children in this category. These decreases are a result of an excessive and ongoing shortage of providers that will either see pediatric patients or accept Medicaid payments in Otsego County and the surrounding areas. The National Library of Medicine reports that studies on access to oral health care for Medicaid-insured children have shown three major reasons for providers' lack of participation in the program – low reimbursement rates, broken appointments and patient noncompliance, and burdensome paperwork.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Otsego County has a 1,890:1 patient-to-provider ratio in regard to oral health providers; for New York State that ratio is 1,190:1.⁹⁶ These circumstances have created a hardship for families living in the 1,002 square miles of Otsego County in accessing oral health professionals, especially those who are specifically trained to provide treatment to young children.

⁹³ Retrieved from <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/grants-funding/grant-programs/health-disparities-research-program/more> on 12/3/2024

⁹⁴ Retrieved from <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/151/1/e2022060417/190307/Maintaining-and-Improving-the-Oral-Health-of-Young> on 12/3/2024

⁹⁵ Retrieved from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1447388/#:~:text=Numerous%20studies%20on%20access%20to,patient%20noncompliance%2C%20and%20burdensome%20paperwork> on 12/4/2024

⁹⁶ Retrieved from https://www.bassett.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Otsego_County_Community_Health_Needs_Assessment_and_Community_Service_Plan_2022-2024.pdf on 12/3/2024

Figure 21 Head Start Preschool Children with Continuous Accessible Oral Health Care: 2014 – 2024⁹⁷

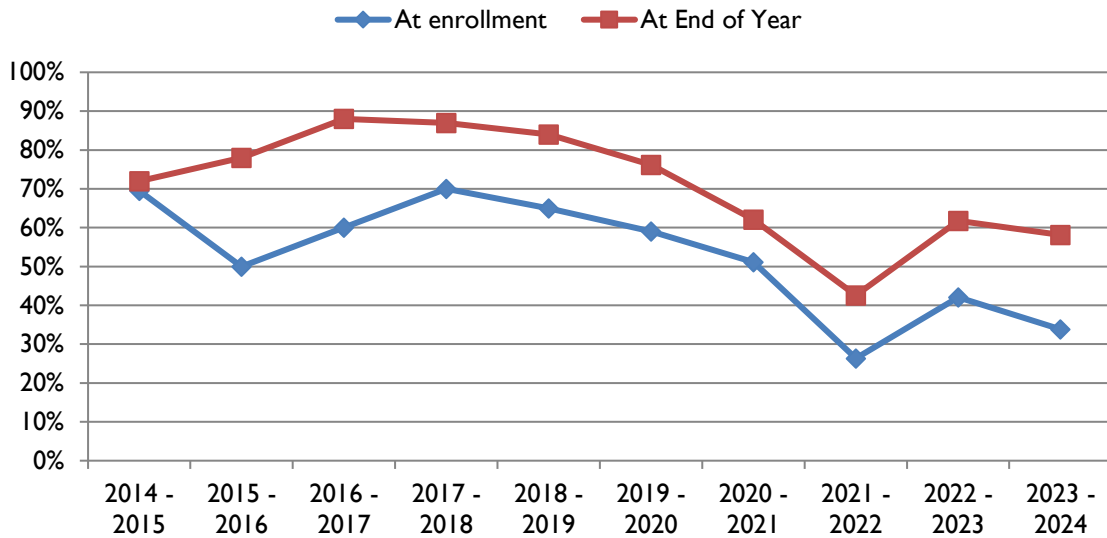
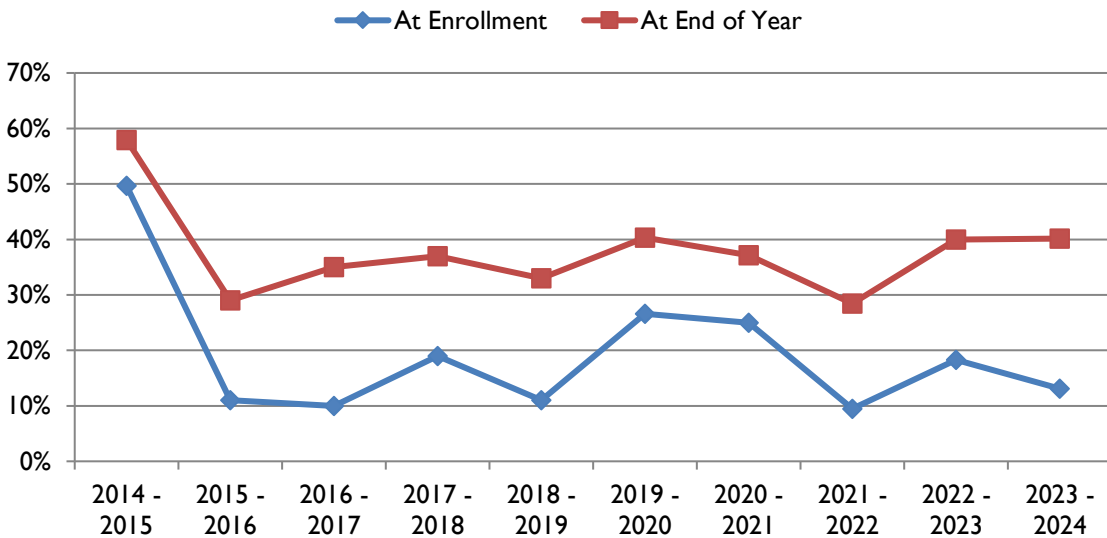


Figure 22 Early Head Start Children with Continuous Accessible Oral Health Care: 2014 - 2024⁹⁸



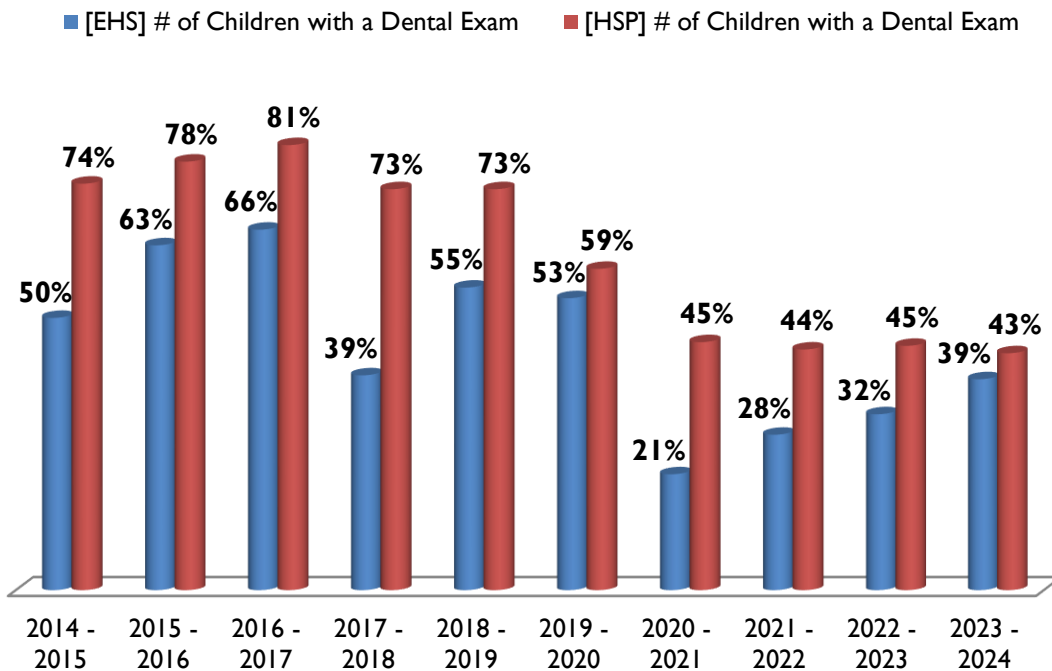
Much like the trend seen in children with access to continuous oral health care, the number of children that completed a professional dental examination has also seen a decline over the past 10 years. The number of Early Head Start children completing

⁹⁷ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2014-2024)

⁹⁸ Ibid

oral health exams decreased 11%, and Head Start Preschool children completing oral health exams decreased 31%.

Figure 23 Head Start Children That Completed a Professional Dental Exam: 2014 - 2024⁹⁹



Several successful collaborations with dentists and dental schools outside of Otsego County have proven to be effective in providing children with much needed services. Our Head Start program provides transportation to families to assist with these out-of-county oral health visits. While these collaborations have opened doors to accessible oral health care, there is still a need for dental providers in the area to ensure families have access to preventive and emergency services. Once families age out of Head Start, we are no longer able to assist with transportation, creating a hardship in continuing to access these out-of-county dental homes for ongoing needs.

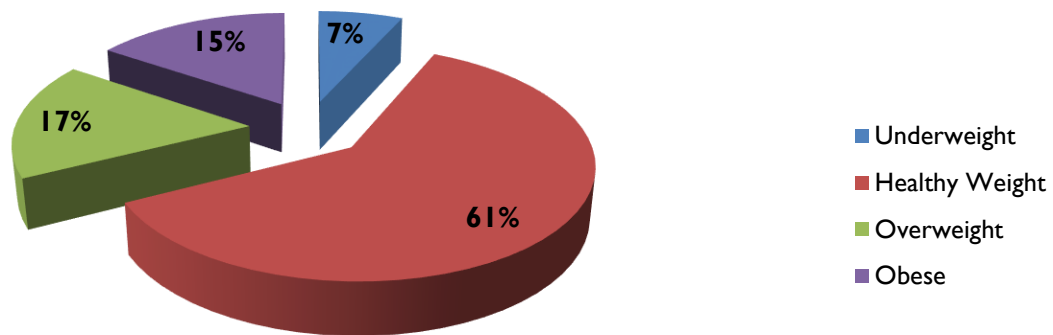
⁹⁹ Ibid

D. Nutrition and Fitness

The New York State Department of Health reports that obesity has become an epidemic in the state and across the nation. “Increasingly, many diseases previously associated only with adulthood are also being seen in children who have overweight or obese BMI status. Along with the risks for life-shortening chronic diseases, having overweight or obesity in a society that stigmatizes this condition contributes to poor mental health associated with serious shame, self-blame, low self-esteem and depression.”¹⁰⁰ Overweight status appears to be more prevalent in girls and increases as children get older, and is typically the result of unhealthy eating and lack of physical activity. Habits and patterns of behavior are established early in life, which is why it is important to teach young children about healthy lifestyles that include nutritious meals and daily physical activity.

Head Start Preschool has seen a rise in the number of enrolled children with Body Mass Index (BMI) above the 85th percentile. A BMI of 85 – 95% is categorized as overweight and above 95% is categorized as obese. In Head Start Preschool, program year 2023 – 2024, 32% of enrolled children fell into the overweight/obese category.

Figure 24 BMI Status of Head Start Preschool Children: 2023 – 2024¹⁰¹



BMI status is not determined for EHS children

To continue to promote healthy habits and lifestyles, Head Start began incorporating the *Eat Well, Play Hard* program into daily routines in 2019. This program, funded by New York State’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education Program, is a childhood obesity prevention initiative that has been incorporated into public health food and nutrition programs that serve low-income preschool children and their families. The goal of the program is to improve the nutrition and physical activity behaviors of young children and their parents through education and skill-building activities.

¹⁰⁰ Retrieved from <https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/obesity/> on 12/4/2024

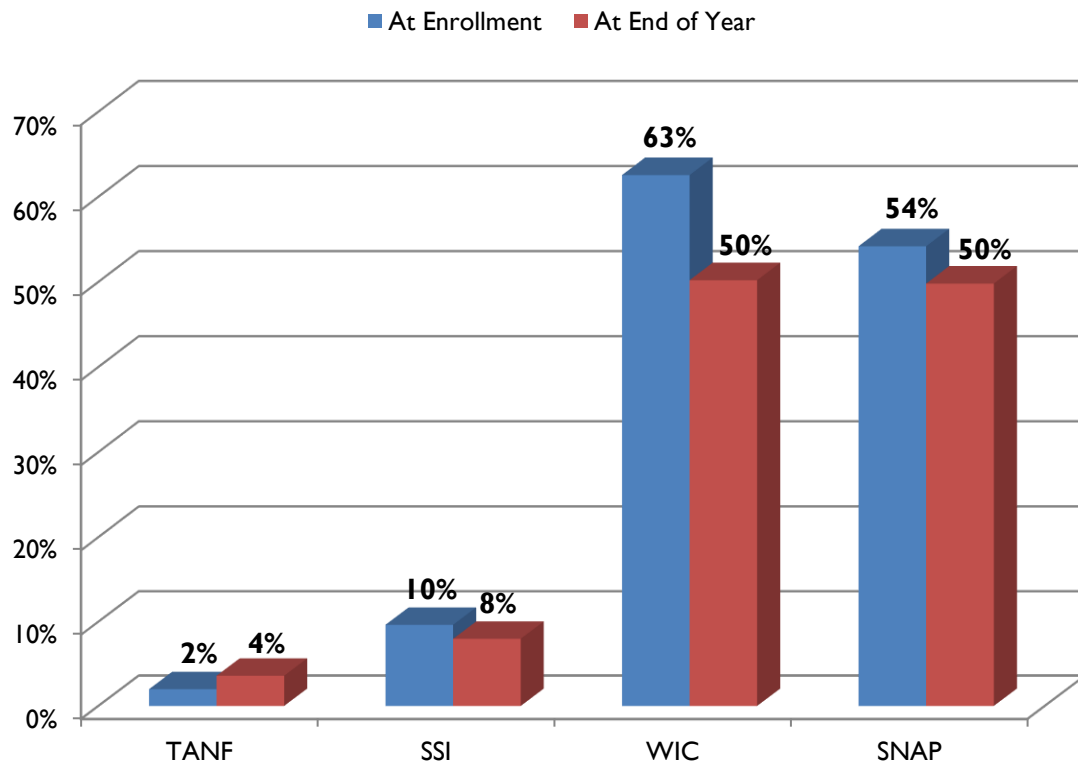
¹⁰¹ Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2024)

Additionally, Head Start has recently started implementing Special Olympics Young Athletes, which is a sport and play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities ages 2 – 7 years old. This program introduces basic skills, like running and throwing, while providing children with an opportunity to develop skills, build relationships, learn healthy habits, and have fun being active. Special Olympics Young Athletes provides equipment that can be adapted for both center and home-based programming.

E. Social Services

As shown in Figure 25 below, WIC and SNAP services were in great demand by Head Start families, while only 4% of families used TANF funding during the program year. The usage of both WIC and SNAP services decreased from the time of enrollment to the end of year, meaning children either aged out of the program (as is the case with WIC which only provides support to families up until a child reaches age 5) or families moved into a new income bracket and were no longer eligible for these services.

Figure 25 Federal or Other Assistance Being Utilized by Head Start Families: PY 2023 - 2024¹⁰²

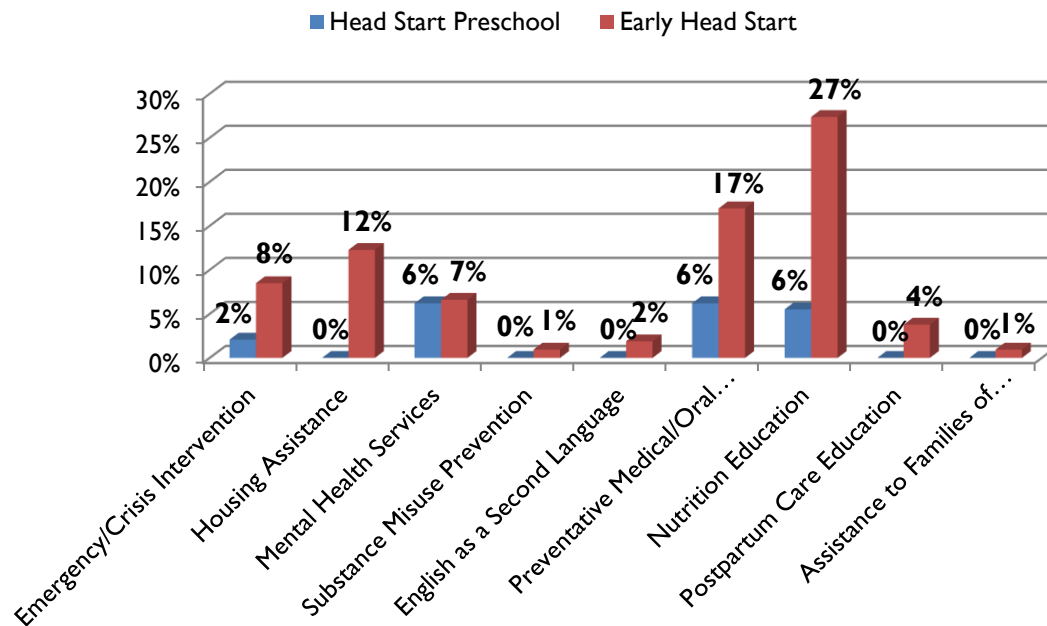


Mental health services, preventative medical/oral health education, and nutrition education were the services most requested by Head Start Preschool families during the 2023 – 2024 program year. Nutrition education, preventative medical/oral health education, and housing assistance were the most requested services by Early Head Start

¹⁰² Opportunities for Otsego, Inc., Head Start Program Information Report Summaries. (2024)

families during the same program year. Services being requested are outlined in Figure 26 below.

Figure 26 Services Being Requested and Received by Head Start Families: PY 2023 – 2024¹⁰³



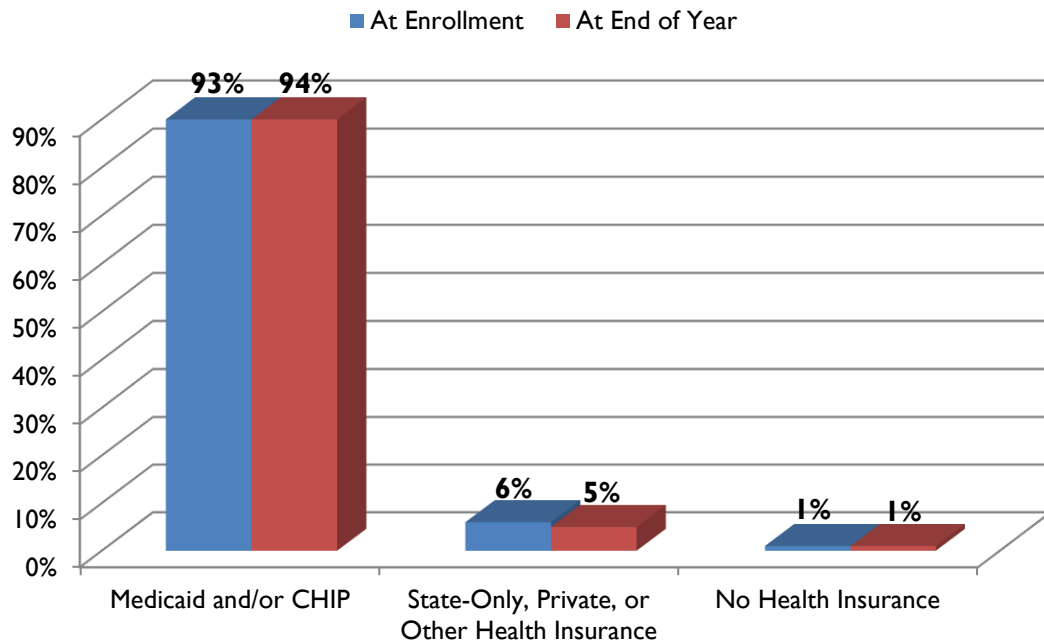
The majority of Head Start families are enrolled in Medicaid and/or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). In New York State, income-based Medicaid is available for:

- Adults under the age of 65 with household income up to 138% of the poverty level
- Pregnant women and children under age 1 with household income up to 223% of the poverty level (Medicaid for the mother continues for up to 12 months postpartum)
- Children age 1 – 18 with household income up to 154% of the poverty level; New York also has separate CHIP coverage available for children with household income up to 405% of the poverty level (the highest threshold in the country)
- Some low-income individuals who are 65 or older, blind, or disabled (if assets/resources fall within allowable ranges¹⁰⁴)

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.healthinsurance.org/medicaid/new-york/> on 12/4/2024

Figure 27 Type of Insurance Being Used by Head Start Families: PY 2023 – 2024¹⁰⁵



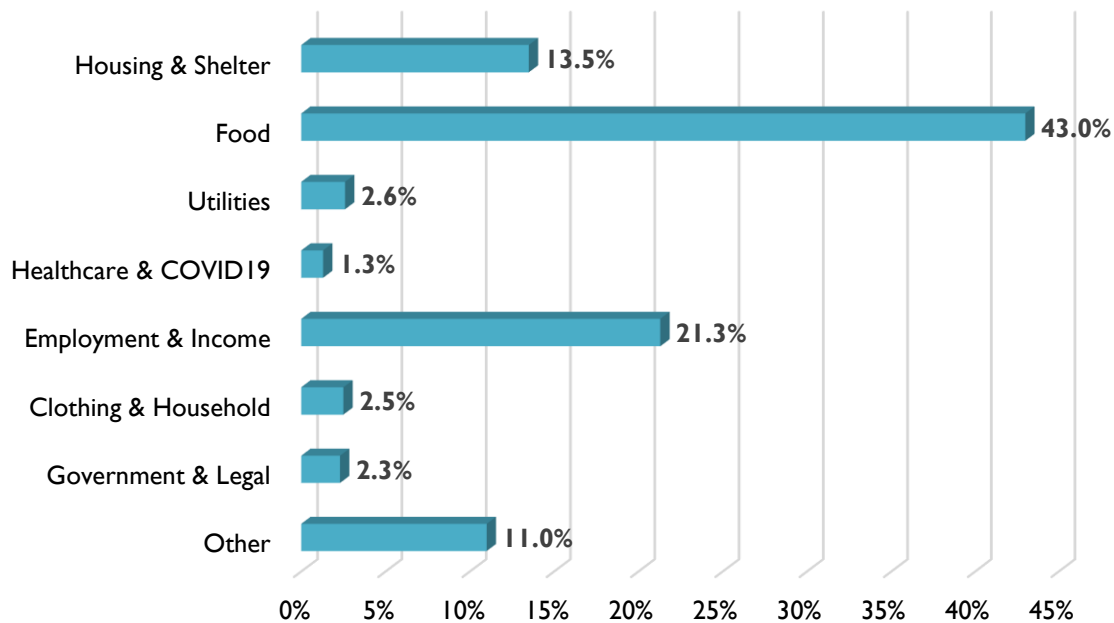
F. Needs Defined by Families, Residents, and Community Institutions

According to Susquehanna River Region 2-1-1, there were 42,394 requests for services from Otsego County residents from 12/6/2023 – 12/4/2024.¹⁰⁶ Figure 28 below summarizes the top requests during this time. Assistance with food (buying; finding places to pick up or eat free/low cost meals), employment and income (jobs and job training; unemployment insurances, taxes, finances, and money management), and housing and shelter (paying for or finding low-cost, emergency, or other housing) were the top three requests during the year.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Retrieved from <https://helpme211.211counts.org/> on 12/4/2024

Figure 28 Types of Services Requested by Otsego County Residents¹⁰⁷



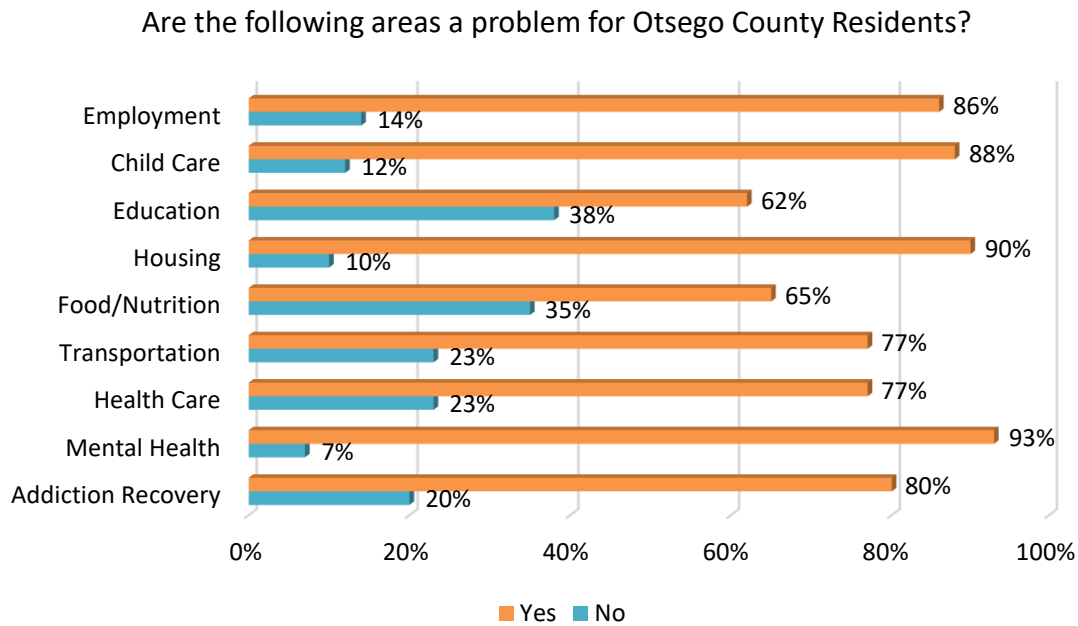
Requests for the following services were 1% or less: Mental Health & Addiction, Child Care & Planning, Transportation Assistance, Education, and Disaster

As the recipient of Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding, Opportunities for Otsego is required to conduct a Community Needs Assessment every three years to ensure the services we are providing are meeting the community's current needs. The most recent Opportunities for Otsego Community Needs Assessment was released in October 2023, and "summarizes qualitative and quantitative data gather from consumers, the community, and various data sources to identify community needs and resources."¹⁰⁸ Figure 29 below outlines survey responses from community members and organizations regarding the needs of Otsego County.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Approved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

Figure 29 Summary of Areas of Need in Otsego County¹⁰⁹



Using available public data, other agencies reports and assessments of the county (for example: Otsego County Department of Health Annual Report, Otsego County Community Health Needs Assessment, Economic Impact of Visitors in New York – Central New York Focus), and input from community members, leaders, and partners, the needs of Otsego County have been identified and are discussed below.

1. Mental Health Services

As reported in the Otsego County Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Service Plan, the patient-to-provider ratio for mental health providers in Otsego County is 480:1, which is higher than the New York State ratio of 310:1.¹¹⁰ According to the Opportunities Community Needs Assessment:

“...there are 14 private providers offering services to children and adolescents, 17 providers of adult mental health services, and 12 family providers, and one Psychiatrist. Since 2017, there has been a loss of 5 private providers offering services to children and adolescents; 9 providers of adult mental health services; 8 family providers; and one Psychiatrist in Otsego County. Additional outpatient mental health care is offered through the Otsego County Mental Health Clinic, Bassett Hospital Psychiatry Department, and through Bassett Healthcare School Based Health Centers for youth enrolled in the individual school districts.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Retrieved from https://www.bassett.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Otsego_County_Community_Health_Needs_Assessment_and_Community_Service_Plan_2022-2024.pdf on 12/3/2024

¹¹¹ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Approved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

This lack of mental health providers makes accessing mental health services challenging, especially when crises arise that require immediate attention and intervention. Related to the overall shortage of providers in Otsego County, getting established with a provider or scheduling a timely appointment is another barrier residents often encounter due to provider wait lists. Another challenge in accessing mental health services is the cost and fees associated with these services. Many private providers in this county do not accept Medicaid, do not accept any insurance and instead offer a sliding scale fee, or provide a super bill insurance compensation plan (the patient pays the full amount out-of-pocket and submits for reimbursement through their insurance carrier). This creates a hardship, leaving the 5.1% of uninsured and 17.1% of Medicaid recipients in Otsego County without viable options.¹¹²

Susquehanna River Region 2-1-1 reports that the following are the top mental health and addiction services requested by Otsego County residents.

Table 10 Top Mental Health and Addiction Requests by Otsego County Residents¹¹³

Requested Service	% of Requests	% of Requests for Which No Help Was Available
Substance abuse and addictions	18%	1% of requests were unmet
Marriage and family	5%	0% of requests were unmet
Crisis intervention and suicide	22%	5% of requests were unmet
Mental health services	44%	5% of requests were unmet
Mental health facilities	11%	2% of requests were unmet

According to the Community Needs Assessment Survey distributed by Opportunities for Otsego, 93% of county residents saw mental health as a problem in this area, citing the following as the largest barriers:

- Lack of providers (14.8%)
- Waiting times for appointments (12.2%)
- Inadequate crisis services (10.2%)¹¹⁴

¹¹² Retrieved from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/otsego-county-ny#:~:text=94.9%25%20of%20the%20population%20of,on%20military%20or%20VA%20plans.> on 12/5/2024

¹¹³ Retrieved from <https://helpme211.211counts.org/> on 12/4/2024

¹¹⁴ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Approved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

2. Affordable Housing

In Otsego County, 72.7% of residents live in a low population density area (less than 2,000 housing units and less than 5,000 people).¹¹⁵ Like many other rural areas, the county has struggled to meet the housing needs of its residents in regard to available, affordable, and safe housing. About 24.9% of households are cost-burdened, meaning they spend 30% or more of their income on housing.¹¹⁶ People who spend 30% or more of their income on housing are often financially insecure, making it difficult to cope with unexpected expenses or save for the future.¹¹⁷ Additionally, 25.6% of the housing units in Otsego County have suboptimal conditions.¹¹⁸ Housing is considered suboptimal when at least one of the following four conditions exists: a lack of complete plumbing facilities; a lack of complete kitchen facilities; with 1.01 or more occupants per room; and monthly owner costs or rent make up more than 30% of a household's income.¹¹⁹

Oneonta, the county's largest community and only city, is home to two four-year colleges – Hartwick College (1,093 full-time students¹²⁰) and the State University of New York College at Oneonta (4,760 full-time students¹²¹). The second largest community in Otsego County, Cooperstown, is home to the Baseball Hall of Fame and Cooperstown All Star Village, a summer baseball tournament camp and family resort. Housing for college students and families participating in youth baseball camps has created a shortage for full-time residents as available housing has been converted to accommodate these more profitable populations. These factors have forced low-income families to seek housing in more isolated areas of the county, which are inadequately serviced by public transportation and often lack access to a reliable internet connection.

Susquehanna River Region 2-I-1 reports that housing and shelter information/services are the third most requested services by Otsego County residents. The top housing and shelter requests are outlined in Table 11 below.

¹¹⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/new-york/otsego?year=2024> on 12/6/2024

¹¹⁶ Retrieved from <https://www.winmeasures.org/housing/New%20York/Otsego-county> on 12/6/2024

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/highered-enrollment.php?year=2024&instid=800000039834> on 12/6/2024

¹²¹ Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/highered-enrollment.php?year=2024&instid=800000039836> on 12/6/2024

Table 11 Top Housing and Shelter Requests by Otsego County Residents¹²²

Requested Service	% of Requests	% of Requests for Which No Help Was Available
Shelters	8%	10% of requests were unmet
Low-cost housing	6%	7% of requests were unmet
Home repair/maintenance	6%	5% of requests were unmet
Rent assistance	74%	3% of requests were unmet
Mortgage assistance	≤1%	22% of requests were unmet
Landlord/tenant issues	3%	3% of requests were unmet
Contacts	2%	2% of requests were unmet
Other housing and shelter	1%	9% of requests were unmet

According to the Community Needs Assessment Survey distributed by Opportunities for Otsego, 90% of county residents saw housing as a problem in this area, citing the following as the largest barriers:

- Limited inventory of year-round housing (12.9%)
- Cost of monthly rent/housing payments (12.6%)
- Cost of heat and/or utilities (9.4%)¹²³

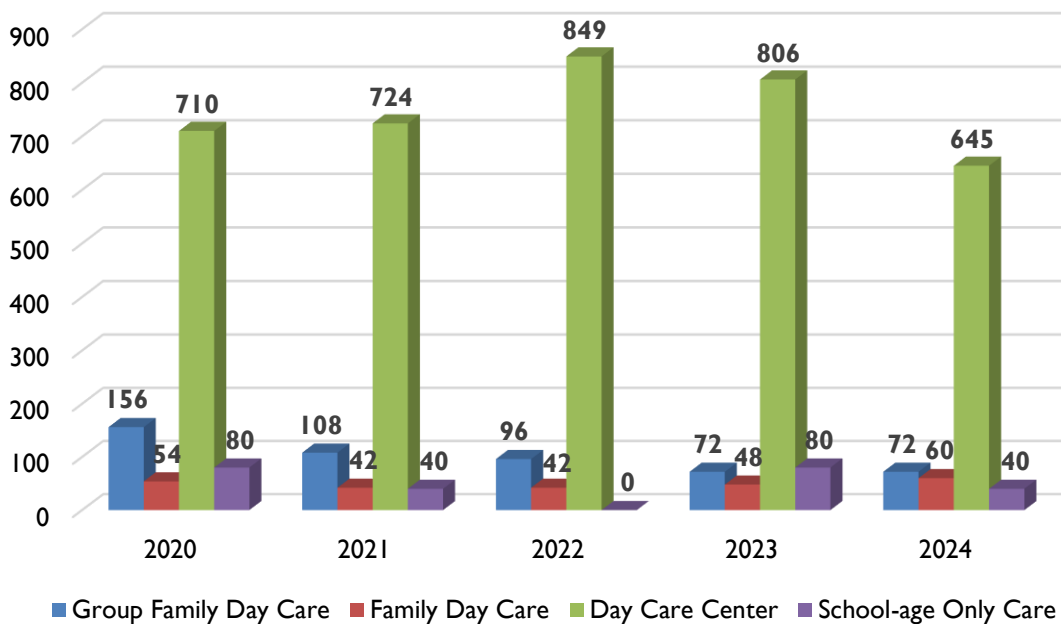
3. Child Care

There has been an ongoing, persistent lack of licensed day care centers in Otsego County for more than a decade, especially in regard to centers that provide services for infants and toddlers. School-age only child care has been the most volatile in regard to availability. Over the last five years, there has been a loss of capacity in three of the four (75%) day care modalities – family group day care, day care centers, and school-age only day care centers. Figure 30 below depicts the change in available child care slots over the last five years.

¹²² Retrieved from <https://helpme211.211counts.org/> on 12/4/2024

¹²³ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Approved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

Figure 30 Change in Number of Available Child Care Slots in Otsego County: 2020 - 2024¹²⁴



According to Child Care Aware ‘Mapping the Gap in New York’, there is a greater demand than there are available slots in Otsego County in regard to infant/toddler care. Based on census numbers and available infant/toddler child care slots, there is a shortage of approximately 824 child care slots for this age group.¹²⁵

An additional barrier to child care in this area is the stringent day care licensing regulations regarding space/buildings. Otsego County is a heavily rural area with many historical sites and large farming communities. Being that these communities have not experienced much population growth, there has been very little growth in terms of development. Day care centers are required to meet strict New York State uniform fire prevention and building codes. According to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services Fire and Safety Representative who performs building inspections for licensing requirements, our county faces a unique challenge in identifying and passing buildings for day care use due to the age of available structures and the building materials used. The majority of buildings in Otsego County are old and often in substandard condition, therefore limiting viable options when it comes to finding structures that will meet Office of Children and Family Services licensing requirements.

Susquehanna River Region 2-I-I reports that the following are the top child care and parenting services requested by Otsego County residents.

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f598bce2a0bb43c1944f95235aad7bd6&extent=-9047033.8128%2C5000877.5401%2C-7872961.0584%2C5568957.5343%2C102100> on 10/7/2024

Table 12 Top Child Care and Parenting Requests by Otsego County Residents¹²⁶

Requested Service	% of Requests	% of Requests for Which No Help Was Available
Child care	58%	4% of requests were unmet
Parenting	22%	5% of requests were unmet
Family support services	20%	0% of requests were unmet

According to the Community Needs Assessment Survey distributed by Opportunities for Otsego, 88% of county residents saw child care as a problem in this area, citing the following as the largest barriers:

- Affordability/cost of child care (15.5%)
- Lack of providers/available slots (13.3%)
- Hard to find quality, safe care (11.8%)¹²⁷

4. Access to Employment

The geography of employment in Otsego County poses barriers for those without reliable transportation in obtaining and maintaining employment. Oneonta, the only city within the county, is the hub of businesses in the area, however its location at the southernmost portion of the county has limited those living outside of Oneonta from seeking employment. Residents living in outlying areas must travel on average 11 – 40 miles one-way to get to Oneonta, which is impossible for individuals without a regular means of transportation. Employment is also available in the Cooperstown area and northern border of the county, however, these employers usually require specialized skill sets.

Seasonal employment also creates a unique situation for those in Otsego County. Outdoor employment and summer employment serving baseball enthusiasts and tourists are readily available; when the summer ends, however, these employees typically live on unemployment benefits which are not substantial enough to meet basic needs.

Susquehanna River Region 2-1-1 reports that employment and income information/services are the second most requested services by Otsego County residents. The top employment and income requests are outlined in Table 13 below.

¹²⁶ Retrieved from <https://helpme211.211counts.org/> on 12/4/2024

¹²⁷ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Approved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

Table 13 Top Employment and Income Requests by Otsego County Residents¹²⁸

Requested Service	% of Requests	% of Requests for Which No Help Was Available
Tax preparation	92%	8% of requests were unmet
Financial assistance	6%	3% of requests were unmet
Money management	≤1%	7% of requests were unmet
Contacts	≤1%	11% of requests were unmet

According to the Community Needs Assessment Survey distributed by Opportunities for Otsego, 86% of county residents saw employment as a problem in this area, citing the following as the largest barriers:

- Area jobs are low paying (18.0%)
- Cost of child care (15.7%)
- Lack of child care during hours needed (14.7%)¹²⁹

5. Availability of Transportation

Head Start Preschool provides bus transportation for as many enrolled children as possible. Due to the relatively large size of the county, increasing costs of maintenance, and shortage of qualified bus drivers, it has not been possible to provide transportation to all enrolled children. As a result, some parents must self-transport their children either to the center or to a designated meeting point between their home and the center or their children cannot receive Head Start Preschool services. Many eligible families on the wait list are unable to accept available slots at the nearest Head Start Preschool center due to transportation barriers.

The cost of gasoline and reliable vehicles has made self-transportation increasingly difficult for low-income parents. While public transportation does not exist in some areas, there is limited service provided between Oneonta and Cooperstown with stops throughout the city and village.

Also contributing to transportation issues in Otsego County are the weather conditions and size and layout of the county. Long, harsh winters and a lack of main thoroughfares have a negative effect on road conditions. Potholes, frost heaves, and unavoidable damage from snowplows and salt destroy the pavement, thus creating more wear and tear on vehicles regularly traveling these roads. When families are already struggling financially, added vehicle repair costs due to substandard road conditions are often not feasible or put families at greater risk of financial instability.

Susquehanna River Region 2-I-I reports that the following are the top transportation assistance services requested by Otsego County residents.

¹²⁸ Retrieved from <https://helpme211.211counts.org/> on 12/4/2024

¹²⁹ Ibid

Table 14 Top Transportation Assistance Requests by Otsego County Residents¹³⁰

Requested Service	% of Requests	% of Requests for Which No Help Was Available
Medical transportation	45%	7% of requests were unmet
Public transportation	36%	8% of requests were unmet
Automobile assistance	14%	33% of requests were unmet
Ride share services	2%	20% of requests were unmet
Other transportation assistance	3%	20% of requests were unmet

According to the Community Needs Assessment Survey distributed by Opportunities for Otsego, 77% of county residents saw transportation as a problem in this area, citing the following as the largest barriers:

- Bus routes do not meet the needs (15.4%)
- Cost of gasoline (14.5%)
- Bus schedules do not meet the needs (12.8%)¹³¹

6. Access to Broadband

A new issue that has come to light in the wake of COVID is that Otsego County also struggles with connectivity and broadband access. While we know that the rural and expansive nature of the county has created difficulties for many households in accessing high-speed or reliable internet services, this became alarmingly clear during the height of COVID-19. To limit exposure and reduce the need for in-person services, many healthcare centers in the county opted to offer telehealth services. In theory, this was a good work-around to continue providing services during a pandemic, however due to the lack of broadband access, many households were unable to utilize these services to meet their medical needs. This was also an issue when school districts operated (at least in part or during certain times of the year, i.e. after holiday breaks) virtually during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. Children struggled to join virtual classrooms or submit classwork electronically throughout Otsego County, falling behind peers with reliable internet access and creating undue frustration for many families during already turbulent and unsure times. Otsego County is trending slightly behind New York State when it comes to households with a computing device (desktop, laptop, smartphone, tablet or other portable wireless computer, or other type of computer) of some kind and a broadband internet subscription: 91.1% of Otsego County residents own a computing

¹³⁰ Retrieved from <https://helpme211.211counts.org/> on 12/4/2024

¹³¹ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Approved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

device compared to 93.1% of all New York residents, while 84.9% of Otsego County households have a broadband internet subscription compared to 88.2% of all New York households.¹³² Furthermore, 8.9% of Otsego County residents do not have a computing device of any kind (compared to 6.9% of all New York residents), and 14.7% do not have an internet subscription (compared to 11.6% of all New York residents).¹³³

While this is a newly identified and developing need in Otsego County, the Community Needs Assessment Survey distributed by Opportunities for Otsego did not have a category specifically designated to questions about this topic. However, the survey did have questions related to how technology affects other systems embedded in questions about other community conditions, as outlined in the table below.

Table 15 Technology Issues/Barriers Identified by Otsego County Survey Respondents¹³⁴

Area of Need	Survey Statement	% of Respondents
Employment	No or unreliable access to technology	4.8%
Education	No or unreliable access to technology (computer/internet/cell service)	9.3%
Health care	No or unreliable access to technology for Telemedicine	4.4%
Mental health	No or unreliable access to technology for TeleSupport	4.7%
Addiction Recovery	No/unreliable access to technology for TeleSupport	6.1%

VI. Community Resources to Address Needs of Head Start Eligible Children and Families

In partnership with Bassett Healthcare and Otsego County Department of Social Services, the Otsego Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCCAN) published the most recent

¹³² Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2021.S2801?q=broadband%20access%20in%20new%20york&g=050XX00US36077> on 12/6/2024

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ Retrieved from https://ofoinc.org/application/files/3216/9841/3294/CNA_Board_Aproved_2023.pdf on 12/5/2024

edition of *The Parent Handy Book: The Parent Handbook of Otsego County Community Resources* in 2023. The book includes hundreds of resources organized into 12 sections:

1. Counseling, Listening, Referral
2. Crisis Intervention/Safety Net Services
3. Education, Employment/Job Skill Development Services
4. Energy & Emergency Energy Service
5. Food and Nutrition Services & Clothing
6. Housing
7. Legal and Consumer Services
8. Medical/Dental Services
9. Parenting and Family Support Services
10. Services for Children & Adults with Special Needs
11. Transportation Services
12. Youth Programs and Services

This book is updated every few years to provide Otsego County residents an accurate and comprehensive listing of community resources and services. The idea behind this resource guide is that families will know where to turn in times of need without having the added stress of trying to search for or find needed services in times of crisis.

Residents of Otsego County can also contact 2-1-1 Susquehanna River Region for information and referrals to agencies and programs in the area. 2-1-1 is a free and confidential service that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Assistance with identifying and locating needed resources can be attained by contacting their call center or using the online database of regional resources. Unfortunately, due to the rural and removed nature of our county, resources available in Otsego County are limited. While 2-1-1 typically offers assistance with clothing, counseling, job searches, utilities, community meals, food, shelters, and weatherization, in Otsego County they are only able to provide assistance with clothing and food because of the lack of resources and services available in this area to refer people to.

The Rehabilitation Support Services (RSS) program provides community-based mental health and substance abuse services. The goal of this organization is “to improve the quality of people’s lives through recovery-oriented housing, work, treatment, socialization, and health and wellness services.”¹³⁵ RSS provides services to children and adults, and includes New York State Office of Mental Health residential group homes, licensed and supported apartment living, supported employment and affirmative businesses (also known as social enterprises), care coordination, personalized recovery oriented services, treatment, crisis services/respite services, and wellness centers.¹³⁶ In Otsego County, RSS provides the following support services:

- Care Coordination, Treatment, & Crisis Services
- Housing Options
- Employment
- Wellness

¹³⁵ Retrieved from <https://rehab.org/> on 12/5/2024

¹³⁶ Ibid