

HEAD START: SUPPORTING SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Since 1965, Head Start has helped over 27 million children build the confidence and skills they need to succeed in school and to become the leaders, taxpayers, and productive citizens of the future.¹ Head Start is unique in its comprehensive approach to the needs of children and families, offering early education, health care, social services, and nutrition services, while emphasizing parent involvement and support and building upon the strengths of local communities. It can help children get ahead and improve their chances for success.

Head Start takes a comprehensive approach to helping children and families.

- Unlike many other early childhood programs, Head Start helps the whole child. Its four components—education, social services, health care, and parent involvement—are each essential to preparing low-income children to enter school ready to learn. Head Start also addresses families' unmet needs—for housing, job training, health care, emotional support, and family counseling—that may stand in the way of a child's full and healthy development.
- Head Start is based on several common-sense principles:
 - Children who have a good preschool experience will be better prepared for school and more likely to succeed.
 - Children who are provided breakfast and enough to eat during the rest of the day will be better able to concentrate in school and generally more likely to thrive.
 - Children who are immunized and receive regular check-ups and health care will be healthier, which means they will miss less school and have more energy and heightened attention when they are in class. When health issues—such as vision or hearing problems—are caught early, costly complications can be prevented. This can help improve children's performance throughout their school careers.
 - Low-income parents who are struggling to support their children against overwhelming odds can become stronger partners in their children's learning experiences and take steps toward self-sufficiency if they receive help. In this way, Head Start can support parents as they try to get or keep a job or move from welfare to work.

Each year, Head Start is part of the lives of hundreds of thousands of young children and families living in poverty.

• In 2010, Head Start served 904,118 children (873,413 preschool-age children in Head Start and 66,705 infants and toddlers in Early Head Start) with approximately \$7.2 billion in funding provided through the regular FY 2010 appropriation. In addition, Head Start served 61,078 children (13,037 preschool-age children in Head Start and 48,041 infants and toddlers

in Early Head Start) with \$2.1 billion provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in FY 2009 and FY 2010.²

- Head Start serves vulnerable children and families, with the program primarily serving children whose families have incomes below the poverty line (\$18,530 a year for a family of three in 2011³) or receive public assistance.
- Head Start aims to help children before they enter school. It primarily serves children between the ages of three and five, and the majority of children are age four. In FY 2009, 51 percent of children served by the program were age four, 36 percent were age three, 10 percent were under age three, and 3 percent were age five or older.⁴
- Early Head Start, which was established as part of the 1994 reauthorization of Head Start and began with 68 programs in 1995, offers comprehensive supports for infants, toddlers, and their families through center-based, home-based, and combination program options.
- After more than four decades of providing the support that children and families need to succeed, Head Start still reaches only about two-fifths of eligible preschool-age children and Early Head Start reaches only about 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.⁵

Head Start and good early childhood education programs that promote children's successful development and prepare them for school are cost-effective investments.

- Early education programs can mean the difference between failing and passing, regular or special education, staying out of trouble or becoming involved in crime and delinquency, and dropping out of or graduating from high school.⁶
- The Head Start Impact Study of 2007, which examined the effects of Head Start on school readiness and parental practices and the circumstances in which Head Start was the most successful, found Head Start children made advances toward school readiness. Data on Head Start children and a control group of similar children who were not in Head Start (but who may have been enrolled in another early childhood program) were collected through the spring of their first grade year.⁷ The study found statistically significant differences between experiences of the Head Start group and the control group at the end of the preschool year in domains such as vocabulary, letter-word identification, spelling, pre-academic skills, letter naming, and parent-reported emergent literacy.⁸ When the Head Start children were reassessed at the end of kindergarten and first grade, the Head Start children and the control group children were on the same level on many of the measures studied, although there were favorable impacts on some sub-groups of children.⁹ The study was conducted prior to improvements in Head Start made as a result of the 2007 reauthorization of the program (discussed in more detail below), so the impacts may be greater once these improvements are fully implemented.¹⁰

- A national review of 36 studies on the long-term impact of early childhood education programs (including a number of Head Start programs) found multiple benefits for low-income children.¹¹
 - > Children were less likely to be held back in school.
 - > Children were less likely to be placed in special education classes.
 - Children were more likely to succeed in school.
 - > Children were more likely to graduate.
 - Children were more likely to be rated as behaving well in class and being better adjusted in school.
- Head Start helps disadvantaged children gain ground on their more advantaged peers before entering school, according to findings from an October 2010 report on the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). This study, which followed a group of children entering Head Start in the fall of 2006, found that Head Start narrowed the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers in early literacy skills such as their receptive vocabulary and letterword knowledge; children who had the least skills at the beginning of the Head Start year made the most progress developmentally.¹² Once in kindergarten, Head Start graduates demonstrated that they were ready to learn by making progress in word knowledge, letter recognition, math skills, and writing skills toward national norms.¹³
- A study that analyzed data from a longitudinal survey found that children who participated in Head Start scored better on vocabulary, reading, and math tests at ages five and six than their siblings who did not participate in the program, after controlling for other differences between siblings. While the test score gains largely faded by ages eleven to fourteen, Head Start children were less likely to repeat a grade, less likely to have a learning disability, and more likely to have positive long-term outcomes, including being more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to have poor health.¹⁴
- An evaluation of Early Head Start found that the program produces sustained positive impacts on children's cognitive and language development at age three. Early Head Start children were significantly less likely than a similar group of children who did not participate to score in the at-risk range of developmental functioning in these areas. Early Head Start also had positive impacts on children's social-emotional development. They were more engaged with their parents and more attentive during play, while displaying less negative behavior. In addition, Early Head Start parents provided more support for language and learning at home, were more likely to read daily to their child, and reported a wider range of discipline strategies including milder and less punitive disciplinary methods.¹⁵
- A study of the Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project, which provides supports and educational enhancements to former Head Start children and their families as they move into the public schools, shows that Head Start children enter school ready to learn and that they can achieve academically at national norms. Former Head Start children were able to make good progress in their first four years of elementary school. Although they entered kindergarten with reading scores about eight points below the national average, by the end of second and third grade, their scores were essentially at the national average. These same children scored 15 points below the national average on math tests during kindergarten, but

made rapid advances in their skills, scoring at or slightly above the national average in second and third grades. 16

- In the study of the Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project, former Head Start children overwhelmingly reported having positive early elementary school experiences. The vast majority said they liked school, valued doing well, tried hard, got along well with teachers and peers, and learned a lot from their teachers. Parents consistently rated their children's school adjustment as very positive from the spring of kindergarten through the end of third grade. Over the first four years of school, teachers also rated children's social skills positively, ranking them near the national average.¹⁷
- The positive impacts of Head Start on children's academic outcomes are further demonstrated by findings from a 2002 University of Delaware study. More than 69 percent of children in poverty who had participated in Head Start or a similar state prekindergarten program in Delaware at age four met or exceeded the standards on their third-grade state reading tests. This was 20 percentage points higher than the proportion of poor children in a comparison group who had not received the services and only six percentage points lower than the proportion of the state's general student population meeting the standard. The majority of children who had participated in early education programs also performed relatively well on state math tests, with 62 percent meeting or exceeding the standard. In addition, children who had participated in Head Start or the state prekindergarten program were less than half as likely to be retained a grade in school as children in poverty who had not participated.¹⁸
- A review of research demonstrated that Head Start has positive impacts on children's development in a range of areas:¹⁹
 - Head Start helps children's physical health, motor coordination, and development. The largest gains in motor development are for children with physical disabilities and those with developmental delays.
 - Head Start improves children's nutrition. Head Start children tend to have higher protein, calorie, and essential nutrient intake, and tend to be healthier.
 - Head Start improves children's dental care. Children participating in Head Start receive better dental care, have fewer cavities, and practice better dental hygiene.
- There are high-quality teacher-child interactions in Head Start, according to the October 2010 report on the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). In an assessment of the content of their interactions with children, teachers' scores indicated high levels of teacher sensitivity, responsiveness, and encouragement of children's independence and self-help skills.²⁰
- Parents report high levels of satisfaction with Head Start, according to the October 2010 report on FACES. On each of the four child-related measures—helping the child develop, identifying and providing services to the child, maintaining a safe program, and preparing the child for kindergarten—over 80 percent of parents expressed satisfaction with the program.²¹

Head Start works closely with parents to support them in their parenting and help them move forward.

- Head Start helps parents understand ways to support their children's learning and success in school. Parents volunteer in the classroom and gain experience working with children. In 2009, over 850,000 parents volunteered in their local Head Start program, and 228,000 fathers participated in regularly scheduled activities designed to involve them in Head Start and Early Head Start.²² Furthermore, parents make decisions about the operations of Head Start—every Head Start program has a policy council, at least half of whose members are Head Start parents.
- Head Start, building upon its years of experience of working with very low-income families, supports parents' efforts to gain and maintain self-sufficiency by helping parents get into the workforce, interacting with parents as volunteers, and providing social services to children and families. Fifty-three percent of mothers whose children completed a year of Head Start in 2007 were employed, including one-third working full time (35 or more hours a week) and another 21 percent working part time. Eighty-six percent of children's fathers were employed, including 72 percent working full time. More than three-quarters of children lived in households with at least one employed parent, and 59 percent had at least one parent who worked full time.
- Head Start helps families access the services they need, including parenting education, health education, emergency/crisis intervention services, adult education, housing assistance, mental health services, job training, and English as a Second Language services. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of families accessed at least one family service through Head Start, according to Program Information Report (PIR) data for 2009.²⁴ In addition, 37 percent of families who received either community or government services (12 percent of households overall) reported that Head Start informed them about or assisted them in obtaining at least one of these services, according to 2007 data from FACES.²⁵

Head Start is an integral part of thousands of communities across the country and is built upon a base of community involvement and support.

- Head Start builds upon community resources, working with local institutions to encourage them to respond to the needs of low-income children and families. Head Start forges partnerships with social services, health, education, and recreation agencies, as well as service clubs, colleges and universities, senior citizen volunteer groups, libraries, and others.
- Low-income communities can draw strength by helping themselves and running their own Head Start programs. In 2009, Head Start was operated by 1,591 grantees with 49,200 classrooms. The program employed 212,000 paid staff and relied upon about 1.274 million volunteers.²⁶

• Local programs support Head Start by helping meet the requirement to provide a 20 percent local match in the form of monetary contributions, donations of goods or services, volunteer hours, or other in-kind services.²⁷

The reauthorization of Head Start in 2007 included several measures to strengthen and improve Head Start and Early Head Start.

- The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007,²⁸ which reauthorizes (renews) Head Start through September 30, 2012, sets aside half of all expansion funds for Early Head Start expansion and gives Head Start programs flexibility to convert slots previously used to serve preschoolers for infants and toddlers.
- The reauthorization requires all Head Start teachers to have an associate's degree by 2011 and half of Head Start teachers nationwide to have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, or a bachelor's degree with coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education and experience teaching preschool-age children, by 2013. As of 2009, 83 percent of Head Start preschool teachers had at least an associate's degree in early childhood education or a related field, including 49 percent who had a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field.²⁹ The reauthorization also requires all Head Start curriculum specialists to have at least a bachelor's degree and all Head Start assistant teachers to have at least a child development associate credential and be working toward completing a degree within two years.
- The reauthorization set forth new requirements for Early Head Start teachers and staff, including requiring at least one full-time infant and toddler specialist in every state, training in infant and toddler development for all Early Head Start teachers, new standards for home visitors in Early Head Start programs, and increased credentials for all teachers providing direct services to children and families in Early Head Start centers.
- The reauthorization included provisions to reserve funding for Head Start quality improvement. Forty percent of any new Head Start funds are set aside for quality enhancements in programs, including salary increases for Head Start staff. In 2009, Head Start teachers' average salary was \$27,752. This average is comparable to the national average for public and private preschool teachers, \$27,450 in 2009. However, the national average for preschool teachers is far below that of kindergarten teachers, \$50,380.³⁰
- The reauthorization included other provisions to enhance Head Start's quality.
 - Programs failing to provide a high-quality early education experience will be required to re-compete for their grant using an application review process developed by an expert panel, which will consider multiple measures of program performance.
 - A separately funded Centers of Excellence program recognizes high-quality grantees that can serve as models for early childhood programs in their communities and states.
 - A minimum of 2.5 percent and up to 3 percent of Head Start funding is set aside for training and technical assistance.

- All Head Start teachers must have at least 15 hours of in-service training every year.
- The reauthorization expanded access to Head Start for certain populations by increasing setasides for both the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program and the Indian Head Start program; prioritizing homeless children for enrollment in Head Start; supporting training for teachers on assisting children in learning English and developing critical skills; and ensuring that children with disabilities are promptly identified and served. Moreover, the reauthorization provides programs increased flexibility in meeting the needs of families in their communities. It allows up to 35 percent of the children served by a grantee to have family incomes between 100 percent and 130 percent of poverty as long as the grantee demonstrates that children with family incomes below 100 percent of poverty are already being fully served. Previously, the income eligibility limit was 100 percent of poverty and a maximum of 10 percent of children enrolled could have incomes above this limit. In addition, part-day Head Start programs now have the flexibility to convert to full-day, yearround services.
- The reauthorization seeks to increase collaboration between Head Start and other early childhood programs by requiring the creation of State Advisory Councils on Early Education and Care to assess needs across programs serving children birth to age six and develop recommendations for collaboration between early childhood programs, data collection techniques, improving early learning standards, and professional development for educators. In 2010, councils in 45 states and five territories received funding totaling \$100 million in non-competitive three-year start-up grants through ARRA.³¹

Head Start incorporates a number of special components that reach out to children with particular needs.

- Head Start's Home Start project allows isolated families, particularly in rural areas, to receive Head Start's educational, health, and social services at home rather than at a center. During the 2008-2009 program year, 44,109 children participated in home-based services.³²
- Head Start helps to meet the needs of a diverse group of children and families through its multicultural and multilingual efforts. In 2009, nearly 36 percent of children in Head Start were from Hispanic families; American Indian/Alaska Native (4 percent) and Asian (1.7 percent) children were also represented.³³ Seventy-two percent of children in Head Start preschool programs came from homes where English was the primary language and 24 percent were from homes speaking primarily Spanish (1 percent or less were from homes speaking each of the other primary languages).³⁴
- Head Start works with children who have special needs. Programs are required to allocate 10 percent of their spaces for children with special needs. In the 2009, 12 percent of children enrolled in Head Start had a diagnosed disability, such as developmental delays, health and orthopedic impairments, visual and hearing impairments, emotional disturbances, speech and language impairments, or learning disabilities. Approximately half of these children were

diagnosed prior to the Head Start year and half were diagnosed during the program year, and 99 percent of children diagnosed with a disability received special education and related services.³⁵

Head Start is primarily a part-day program, so it must often partner with other programs.

- Head Start dollars generally do not go beyond covering the cost of part-day, part-year programs. In 2008, only 52 percent of center-based programs operated at least six hours a day for five days a week, while the remainder operated for fewer hours per day and/or fewer days per week.³⁶ Moreover, even the six-hour day may not meet the needs of working parents who work eight to ten hours a day. In 2008, just 17 percent of children in Head Start were in programs operating at least eight hours a day.³⁷
- Many low-income parents work nontraditional hours that do not match the program hours of Head Start. Their children need Head Start for the early education experience, but then may need a completely separate child care arrangement to cover the parents' work hours during evenings, weekends, or some other time.
- For some parents, other resources such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) are used to help provide child care for the hours of the work day not supported by Head Start. In 2008, 10 percent of the children in Head Start received child care assistance to help parents pay for additional child care.³⁸ Some states make efforts to encourage this blending of Head Start and CCDBG funds. For example, in 2007, twelve states were extending the day and/or year of Early Head Start services by making additional funding available (often using the child care assistance program) or by implementing policies to facilitate coordination of funding streams.³⁹ Six states and the District of Columbia issue grants and contracts for wrap-around care in Head Start, prekindergarten, or other programs, according to analysis of state CCDBG plans for 2010-2011.⁴⁰
- Eight states allow eligibility redetermination for child care assistance to coincide with the Head Start eligibility period.⁴¹ Coordinating state child care assistance and federal Head Start eligibility requirements allows families to better navigate these two systems to obtain care that meets their needs. Parents are more secure in their child care arrangements when they do not have to worry about losing their child care assistance eligibility during the Head Start year.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, The 2011 HSS Poverty Guidelines: One Version of the [U.S.] Federal Poverty Measure, available at http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/11poverty.shtml.

⁴ Head Start Program Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2010.

⁵ National Women's Law Center calculations based on data on Head Start enrollment from the Office of Head Start and data on children in poverty from U.S. Census Bureau, Detailed Poverty Tables, POV34: Single Year of Age -Poverty Status: 2010, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/pov/new34_100_01.htm.

⁶ Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Roberston, and Emily A. Mann, "Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24(4), 267-303; Eric Dearing, Kathleen McCartney, and Beck A. Taylor, "Does Higher Quality Early Child Care Promote Low-Income Children's Math and Reading Achievement in Middle Childhood?," Child Development, 80(5), 2009, 1329-1349; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000).

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Impact Study: Final Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact study/reports/impact study/hs impact study final.pdf.

⁸ Head Start Impact Study: Final Report.

⁹ Head Start Impact Study: Final Report.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS Accelerates Head Start Quality Improvements and Submits Impact Study on 2002-2003 Head Start Programs (Press Release), January 13, 2010, available at http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2010pres/01/20100113a.html.

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¹³ Jerry West, Lizabeth Malone, Lara Hulsey, Nikki Aikens, Louisa Tarullo, ACF-OPRE Report, Head Start Children Go to Kindergarten (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2010), available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/faces/reports/hs kindergarten/hs kindergarten.pdf.

¹⁴ David Deming, "Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start," American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 1(3), 2009, 111–34.

¹⁵ John M. Love, Ellen Eliason Kisker, Christine M. Ross, Peter Z. Schochet, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, et al., Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start, Executive Summary (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2002), available at

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs resrch/reports/impacts exesum/impacts execsum.pdf; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Early Head Start Benefits Children and Families (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006), available at

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²¹ A Year in Head Start.

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²³ A Year in Head Start.

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³² Head Start Program Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2010.
³³ Head Start Program Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2010.

³⁴ CLASP, Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2009.

³⁵ CLASP, Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2009.

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http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/headstartdata2008us.pdf.

³⁷ CLASP, Head Start by the Numbers: 2008.

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³⁹ Rachel Schumacher and Elizabeth DiLauro, Building on the Promise: State Initiatives to Expand Access to Early Head Start for Young Children and their Families (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy and Zero to Three, 2008), available at http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0409.pdf.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Care Bureau, Child Care and Development Fund, Report of State and Territory Plans FY 2010-2011, 10, available at http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/files/resources/sp1011full-report.pdf.

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