

HEAD START: AN ESSENTIAL PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Head Start has a positive impact on school readiness.

- Nearly four decades of research establish that Head Start improves the school readiness of young children.
- The Head Start Impact Study, a national random assignment study using data collected during the fall 2002-spring 2003 school year, found that the program had statistically significant impacts on cognitive, social, and emotional development, health, and parenting practices.¹
- A meta-analysis of reliable studies revealed that Head Start children have increased achievement scores and that the program has favorable long-term effects on grade retention, special education, and high school graduation rates.²
- The federally funded Family and Child Experiences Survey examined a nationally representative sample of children who entered the program in fall 2000 and found that Head Start graduates, by the spring of their kindergarten year, were essentially at national norms in early reading and early writing and were close to meeting national norms in early math and vocabulary knowledge.³ By the spring of their kindergarten year, Head Start graduates' reading assessment scores reached national norms, and their general knowledge assessment scores were close to national norms.⁴
- Head Start children are more likely to have had their immunizations than those children who did not attend preschool.⁵ Similarly, Early Head Start children had a higher immunization rate than children in a control group.⁶

Head Start creates jobs in communities and gives parents the skills they need to work.

- The \$2.1 billion investment in Head Start being considered by Congress as part of the economic recovery plan could create 50,000 to 60,000 new jobs.⁷
- Head Start and Early Head Start support hundreds of thousands of parents by helping them obtain access to job training and employment services. Research demonstrates that high-quality early childhood programs, such as Head Start, are effective as part of a workforce development strategy and as anti-poverty tools.⁸
 - Head Start's emphasis on parental involvement contributes to positive growth and helps Head Start parents move out of poverty.⁹
 - Head Start provides a safe, stimulating environment for children while their parents work. In 2006, most Head Start families (70 percent)

included at least one working parent, and 14 percent of families included a parent in school or job training.¹⁰

- The national Early Head Start Impact Study, a random assignment study following children and their families who entered the program beginning in the fall 1996, found that Early Head Start parents were more likely than control group parents to ever be employed or participate in an education or job training program.¹¹
- Early Head Start parents were also more likely than control group parents to work more hours each week and participate in any education or training program.¹²

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, approved with broad bipartisan support, strengthens the program through several measures, including:

- Stronger program standards in literacy and math.
- Stronger requirements for teacher and assistant teachers. The legislation requires all teachers to have an AA degree by 2011 and sets a goal that at least half of all teachers have a BA degree by 2013.
- Tougher accountability and transparency requirements for Head Start Boards of Directors.
- Increased program accountability. In addition to a comprehensive monitoring review every three years, programs will be subject to unannounced visits.
- A requirement for more programs to compete to renew their grants.
- Increased requirements for collaboration with local school districts.
- A requirement that the National Academy of Sciences make recommendations on an appropriate assessment system, following the suspension of an assessment that had been widely criticized by experts.
- Increased focus on infants and toddlers. Recognizing the importance of the earliest years, half of all Head Start expansion funds are now targeted to Early Head Start.

Head Start assures more comprehensive, high-quality services for low-income children than many other programs.¹³

- Head Start is more comprehensive than the majority of state prekindergarten, providing health services, parent support, and parent education.

- Head Start standards address language, math, literacy, and science, as well as physical health, approaches to learning, social and emotional development, and creative arts. Many state prekindergarten standards do not cover as comprehensive a range of development and learning areas.
- Head Start requires more parent involvement than the majority of state prekindergarten programs.
- Head Start has a more comprehensive system of monitoring than the majority of state prekindergarten programs.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (May 2005). *Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings*. Washington, DC.

² Barnett, W. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows. Presentation at a Science and Public Policy Briefing Sponsored by the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences; Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007, February). Does Head Start Improve Children's Life Chances? Evidence from a Regression Discontinuity Design. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159–208.

³ Zill, N. and Sorongon, A. (2004). *Children's Cognitive Gains during Head Start and Kindergarten*. Presentation at the National Head Start Research Conference, Washington, DC. June 28-30, 2004.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Currie, J. and Thomas, D. (1995, June). Does Head Start Make a Difference?. *The American Economic Review*. 85, 3: 360.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Research Practice, Talking Points: Overall Findings Presentation "Long Version." Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Slide 11.

⁷ Estimate by the National Head Start Association, February 2009.

⁸ Heckman, J. (2006, July 17). *The Technology and neuroscience of skill formation*. Slide presentation to the Invest in Kids Working Group, Center for Economic Development, Partnership for America's Economic Success. Retrieved from http://www.ced.org/docs/ivk/iikmeeting_slides200607heckman.pdf;

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⁹ Oyemade, U., V. Washington, and D. Gullo. (1989). The Relationship between Head Start Parental Involvement and the Economic and Social Self-Sufficiency of Head Start Families. *Journal of Negro Education*. 58, 1, 13.

¹⁰ Center for Law and Social Policy. (2008). Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2006. Washington, DC.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. (2004). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The impacts of Early Head Start, Volume II: Final technical report appendices*. Washington, DC.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Gilliam, W. and Ripple, C. (2004). *What Can Be Learned from State-Funded Prekindergarten Initiatives? A Data-Based Approach to the Head Start Devolution Debate*. In E. Zigler and S. Styfco (Eds.), *The Head Start Debates*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.