



Head Start Fact Sheet

Created in 1965, Head Start is the most successful, longest-running, national school readiness program in the United States. It provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. Over 19,000 children in Washington received Head Start services in 2007. The majority of the children are 4 years old. A separate program called Early Head Start is available for pregnant women and children up to age 3. There are also specific programs for Migrant/Seasonal and Indian children.

Providing a Wide Range of Educational Programming and Social Services

Head Start's goal is get low-income children ready for school. This is accomplished by combining strong academic enrichment (pre-reading, literacy, vocabulary, and pre-mathematics skills) with a wide array of critical social services. One of the fundamental beliefs of the program is that a child who is not health, has vision or dental problems, or is hungry, cannot learn. Head Start truly focuses on the whole child. Head Start programs are required to provide children with two nutritious meals. They screen all children for health problems including physical, mental, and dental. Children in need of services are referred out to an appropriate provider and the program ensures that follow up services are received.

Getting Parents Involved with their Children

Another key ingredient to Head Start's success is parent involvement. Head Start believes that a parent is a child's first and best educator. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom by reading to their children, joining field trips to museums, and assisting the program staff. Parents often participate in parenting classes, job training, and GED courses. Parents are taught the latest techniques regarding family literacy, child nutrition, and best practices. Some parents even take part in the governance of the program by serving on parent elected policy councils.

Help for Families in Need of Emergency Assistance

Head Start families are often very poor and the majority of families have incomes below the federal poverty level (\$22,000 for a family of four). They often are in need of emergency shelter, medical services, and food and clothing assistance. Head Start programs provide families in need with housing subsidies, referrals to local shelters, help with their groceries and utilities, and domestic violence assistance among many other services if needed.

Serving Children with Disabilities

At least 10 percent of Head Start's enrollment must be made up of children with disabilities. Often programs serve a large number of children with disabilities which range from speech and language impairment, developmental delays, social emotional problems, learning disabilities and autism. Head Start is open to all children regardless of need and each program provides children with individually tailored services to help them succeed.

Studies Demonstrate Head Start Works

Reliable short and long-term research has demonstrated that Head Start works for children and families. Children who have been through the program are better prepared for kindergarten and do better in school. Some studies have even found that for every dollar taxpayers invest in the program they receive a return of \$9. The savings occur because children who have been through the program are less likely to repeat a grade in school, more likely to graduate from high school and college, and are less likely to commit a crime.

Head Start by the Numbers *(all data from 2006)*

Children served

- 45 Head Start & AI/NA Programs
- 23 Early Head Start Programs
- 2 Migrant Head Start Programs
- 19,105 children served in 15,382 slots

Eligibility

There are five ways to qualify:

- Family income below the poverty line
- Family is on public assistance
- Family has a child with a disability;
- Family has a foster care child
- Family above income guidelines, but program has slots available (rare)

Agencies providing services

- Community Action (11 programs)
- Public Schools (5)
- Stand-alone non-profits (26)
- Government agencies (8)
- Tribal governments/consortiums (20)

Demographics

- *Race/Ethnicity:* 50.4% white, 7.6% black, 37.8% Hispanic, 4.2% Asian
- *Primary language:* 58.5% English, 34.7% Spanish, 3.2% East Asian languages, 1.8% African languages

Health services

- 2,316 children referred for further medical treatment
- 2,800 children referred for dental care
- 544 children referred out for mental health services.

Disabled children served

2,297 disabled children were served:

- 739 children with speech or language impairment
- 897 with developmental delays
- 32 children with emotional/behavioral problems, 25 children with autism

Parents

- 6,830 have less than a high school education
- 5,189 have a high school education
- 4,176 have some college education
- 602 have at least a BA degree
- 12,836 parent volunteers in 2006.

Services to families in need

- 3,573 families received emergency food, clothing, or shelter assistance
- 1,971 received housing assistance (subsidies, utilities, repair)
- 7,351 received health or pre-natal ed
- 8,579 received parenting education

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