



Head Start

ACTION

- Oppose efforts to turn Head Start into a block grant to states through waivers, pilot projects, or other mechanisms that would divert funding from local providers.
- Reauthorize the Head Start program, and maintain Head Start's mission as a comprehensive child development, child care, and child- and family-focused program with strong program performance standards.
- Increase funding for Head Start and Early Head Start beyond the rate of inflation so the program can once again increase the number of children and families it serves while enhancing program and staff quality.
- Oppose efforts to transfer Head Start from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the U.S. Department of Education.
- Ensure current comprehensive Head Start performance standards continue to be met.

HISTORY

Created in 1965, Head Start began as an eight-week summer program designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs. In 2003, Head Start served nearly 910,000 children.

Head Start's goal is to ensure that every child enters school ready to learn. Indicators of each child's progress are included in the program's annual self-assessment. Studies indicate that by the spring of their kindergarten year, Head Start children show substantial increases in word knowledge, letter recognition, and math and writing skills. In preliminary results from a randomly selected longitudinal study of more than 600 Head Start graduates in San Bernardino County, California, Head Start graduates in kindergarten had higher final grades in numeracy, language, literacy, social conduct, and physical development, and were absent 4.5 fewer days than their non-Head Start peers.

Head Start functions not just as a child care and education program, but also as a comprehensive effort to promote child development in at least eight areas, including social, emotional, physical, and health needs. Head Start recognizes that both families and communities are important to the program's success; as a result, partnerships are an important part of its structure. Wellness and the health of the child are important concerns for Head Start programs. Head Start also seeks to fully include children with disabilities as a way to help all children, parents, and staff in the program.

In 1994, Head Start was expanded to include a new Early Head Start program, which extends services to pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families. Early Head Start receives a smaller portion of the overall funding, through an annual set-aside, than does the larger Head Start program.

The 1998 reauthorization of Head Start increased the amount of funds set aside to expand Early Head Start, from 7.5% in 1999 to 10% by 2003. It also dedicated specific amounts of the annual funding increases toward quality improvements. In 1999, 60% of the increased funding was dedicated to quality; the remaining 40% of the new funds were dedicated to program expansion. In 2000, 50% of the funding increases went to program expansion, and 50% went to quality; by 2003, 25% of funding increases was dedicated to quality, and the remaining 75% went to program expansion.

As of December 2001, 145 tribal Head Start and 40 tribal Early Head Start programs in 26 states were serving 21,288 children ages 3–5, and 2,335 infants and toddlers. Tribal programs are run directly by tribes or tribal consortia.

2005 DEBATE

In 2005, Congress will once again consider reauthorization of Head Start, a debate that began in 2003. In 2004, Congress approved funding for FY 2005 for Head Start at \$6.8 billion, an increase of less than \$75 million.

Head Start enrollment steadily increased throughout the 1990s, from 540,930 children in 1990 to 857,664 by the end of the decade in 2000. These increases took place while significant investments were being made in program and

staff quality and education. Due to very slight increases in the past four years, however, Head Start is no longer expanding. National enrollment has actually declined, from 912,345 in FY 2002, to 909,608 in FY 2003. This is the first decline in enrollment since 1986–1987, when enrollment declined by 5,000.

In 2003, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a Head Start reauthorization bill that contained a controversial proposal to allow up to eight states to receive Head Start funding as a block grant instead of the current structure that provides dollars directly to local Head Start programs. The controversy over the proposed block grant created a contentious debate, and the House bill passed by a one-vote margin, 217–216.

The full Senate never voted on Head Start reauthorization, but a bill did pass in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). Key members of that committee indicated their early opposition to the block grant proposal and, after several months of discussion, the HELP Committee adopted a bill by unanimous vote that did not include the block grant. Further debate and possible amendments were expected on the Senate floor, but time ran out before the Senate could act.

KEY FACTS

- In 1965, Head Start served 561,000 children. By 2003, the program was serving more than 909,608 children. As of 2003, Head Start has served more than 22 million children since its creation.
- Children in Head Start receive significantly more health care screenings and dental examinations than do their peers not enrolled in Head Start.
- Since 1972, Congress has required that at least 10% of the children a Head Start grantee serves be children with disabilities. Of the total Head Start population nationwide, 13%, or 125,000 children, are children with disabilities.
- A review of 40 early childhood programs, including Head Start, found positive long-term effects on parent or teacher ratings of antisocial behavior and actual delinquency records.
- FY 2003 funding for Head Start was \$6.6 billion, serving approximately 60% of all eligible children. Eligibility for Head Start is limited to 100% of the federal poverty level.
- Head Start includes more than 1,670 grantees comprising 47,000 classes. Total staffing for Head Start is 206,000, 43,497 of whom are teachers. Almost 1.4 million volunteers are involved—880,000 of these are parents.
- Of Head Start enrollees,
 - 52% are age 4,
 - 34% are age 3,
 - 5% are age 5,
 - 8% are younger than 3,
 - 31.5% are African American,
 - 30.6% are Hispanic,
 - 27.6% are white, and
 - 3.2% are American Indian.
- An evaluation of state preschool services found that Head Start, for the most part, offers a more comprehensive set of higher quality services than states have offered through their preschool programs.
- A recent study of state-funded preschools revealed that between 1977 and 1998, only 13 state-funded preschools had conducted formal evaluations of the effectiveness of their programs on children they served. Unlike the Head Start Impact Study, none used randomly assigned control groups, and some had no control groups—features of a scientifically based research effort.

Sources for statistical information are provided in the online version of this fact sheet. See www.cwla.org/advocacy/2005legagenda.htm.

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