

EARLY HEAD START

With the reauthorization of the Head Start program in 1994, Congress established a new program for low-income families with infants and toddlers and pregnant women which is called Early Head Start. In creating this program, the Congress acted upon evidence from research and practice which illustrates that early intervention through high quality programs enhances children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development; enables parents to be better caregivers and teachers to their children; and helps parents meet their own goals, including economic independence. Such programs answer an undeniable need.

The Early Head Start program provides resources to community programs to address such needs and to achieve the purposes set forth by Congress. The local programs funded through Early Head Start operate as a national laboratory to demonstrate the impact that can be gained when early, continuous, intensive and comprehensive services are provided to pregnant women and very young children and their families.

Programs participating in Early Head Start:

- Ensure quality by meeting the requirements in the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other applicable regulations;
- Provide early, individualized child development and parent education services to low-income infants and toddlers and their families according to a plan developed jointly by the parents and staff;
- Provide these services through an appropriate mix of home visits, experiences at the Early Head Start center, and experiences in other settings such as family or center-based child care;
- Provide early opportunities for infants and toddlers with and without disabilities to grow and develop together in nurturing and inclusive settings;
- Ensure that the Early Head Start program is supportive and nurturing of families;
- Respond to the needs of families, including, where appropriate, the need for full-time child care for working families
- Connect with other service providers at the local level to ensure that a comprehensive array of health, nutrition, and other services is provided to the program's pregnant women, very young children, and their families;
- Recruit, train, and supervise high quality staff to ensure the kind of warm and continuous relationships between caregivers and children that are crucial to learning and development for infants and toddlers;
- Ensure parent involvement in policy and decision making; and
- Coordinate with local Head Start and other child development programs in order to ensure continuity of services for these children and families.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR Part 1304) are the program requirements that all grantees must meet in order to assure high quality programs. In addition to defining the standards for Head Start services to preschool children and their families, these regulations provide, for the first time, performance standards for Early Head Start programs serving pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers.

For more information on Early Head Start, please contact the Early Head Start National Resource Center at www.ehsnrc.org

For information on the McKinney ISD Early Head Start program call the MISD Administrative Office - 469-742-4000