

## HEAD START HISTORY

In 1964, the Federal Government asked a panel of child development experts to draw up a program to help communities meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children. The panel report became the blueprint for Project Head Start.

Project Head Start, launched as an eight-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965, was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs. Recruiting children age three to school entry age, Head Start was enthusiastically received by education, child development specialists, community leaders, and parents across the Nation. Head Start serves children and their families each year in urban and rural areas in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories, including many American Indians and migrant children.

In 1969, Head Start was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and has now become a program within the Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. A well-established, though still an innovative program, Head Start has had a strong impact on communities and early childhood program across the country.

The program is locally administered by community-based non-profit organizations and school systems. Grants are awarded by the Department of Health and Human Services Regional offices, except for the American Indian and Migrant programs, which are administered in Washington, D.C.

For statistical information on Head Start visit the following web site -  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/about/headstartfactsheet/index.htm>

### Major Components of Head Start

Head Start provides diverse services to meet the goals of the following four components:

- Education - Head Start's educational program is designed to meet the needs of each child, the community served, and its ethnic and cultural characteristics. Every child receives a variety of learning experiences to foster intellectual, social, and emotional growth.
- Health - Head Start emphasizes the importance of the early identification of health problems. Every child is involved in a comprehensive health program, which includes immunizations, medical, dental, and mental health, and nutritional services.

- Parent Involvement - An essential part of Head Start is the involvement of parents in parent education, program planning, and operating activities. Many parents serve as members of policy councils and committees and have a voice in administrative and managerial decisions. Participation in classes and workshops on child development and staff visits to the home allow parents to learn about the needs of their children and about educational activities that can take place at home.
- Social Services - Specific services are geared to each family after its needs are determined. They include: community outreach; referrals; family need assessments; recruitment and enrollment of children; and emergency assistance and/or crisis intervention.

Grants are awarded to local public or private non-profit agencies. Twenty percent of the total cost of a Head Start program must be contributed by the community. Head Start programs operate in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories.

Most of the Head Start program's appropriation funds local Head Start projects. The remainder issued for: training and technical assistance to assist local projects in meeting the Head Start Program Performance Standards and in maintaining and improving the quality of local programs; research, demonstration, and evaluation activities to test innovative program models and to assess program effectiveness; and required monitoring activities.

Head Start provides training to staff at all levels and in all program areas. The Child Development Associate (CDA) program gives professional and non-professional employees the opportunity to pursue academic degrees or certification in early childhood education.

Volunteers are an important part of all Head Start programs. High school and college students, homemakers, parents of Head Start children, retired senior citizens -- all kinds of people -- have offered critical help to local Head Start programs. Volunteers assist with: indoor creative play; transportation; parent education; renovation of centers; and recruiting and instructing other volunteers. Approximately 1,315,000 individuals volunteer, and community organizations provide a wide array of services to Head Start, including the donation of classroom space, educational materials, and equipment for children with disabilities.

Since 1965, Head Start has served over 15.3 million children and their families. Head Start plays a major role in focusing attention on the importance of early childhood development. The program also has an impact on: child development and day care services; the expansion of state and local activities for children; the range and quality of services offered to young children and their families; and the design of training programs for those who staff such programs. Outreach and training activities also assist parents in increasing their parenting skills and knowledge of child development.

### **Improving Head Start**

Funding for Head Start has increased by 68 percent, increasing from \$2.2 billion in 1992 to \$4.66 billion in FY 1999. These additional funds have enabled Head Start to increase enrollment by over 200,000 children, enhance the quality of Head Start services, launch a new initiative to serve infants and toddlers, and improve program research. In FY 1998, Head Start served an estimated 830,000 children and their families.

On Jan. 12, 1994, the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, appointed by HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala, presented recommendations that called for improved staff training and career development, including better salaries for Head Start workers, improving management of local Head Start centers, reengineering federal oversight, and providing for better facilities. Bipartisan legislation was soon introduced to reauthorize and strengthen the Head Start program. The reauthorization bill, which reflected the Administration's commitment to strengthening the quality of all Head Start programs, was signed on May 18, 1994. It included tough new provisions to ensure that no Head Start grantee will be funded if it falls below a minimum quality level and fails to correct deficiencies promptly.

Acting on the committee's recommendation, HHS offered technical assistance, partnership and support to Head Start programs that are ready to pursue excellence -- and terminated the grants of those programs that were not delivering quality services. HHS has helped turn around approximately 120 grantees identified as deficient. Since October 1993, approximately 100 grantees have been terminated or have relinquished their Head Start grants.

### **New Performance Standards**

A cornerstone of the bipartisan 1994 legislation was the requirement to develop a major revision of the Head Start Program Performance Standards -- key regulations that set the guidelines and standards for quality in Head Start programs nationwide.

In the spirit of the Administration's reinvention goals, the revised Head Start Program Performance Standards were developed based on communication with Head Start and early childhood program practitioners. This new version focuses on quality services for children, including infants and toddlers, and their families. It was published as a final rule in the Federal Register on November 5, 1996.

The new guidelines integrate new standards for infants and toddlers, reform the structure of the earlier standards for increased ease of use, incorporate emerging research knowledge and expertise of health professionals, and highlight the importance of collaboration between Head Start programs and the broader community.

## **Early Head Start**

The Head Start Act Amendments of 1994 also established the Early Head Start program, which expands the benefits of early childhood development to low income families with children under three and to pregnant women.

The purpose of this program is to:

- enhance children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development;
- enable parents to be better caregivers of and teachers to their children; and
- help parents meet their own goals, including that of economic independence.

The services provided by Early Head Start programs are designed to reinforce and respond to the unique strengths and needs of each child and family. Services include quality early education in and out of the home; home visits; parent education, including parent-child activities; comprehensive health services, including services to women before, during and after pregnancy; nutrition; and case management and peer support groups for parents.

Early Head Start focuses on four cornerstones essential to quality programs: child development, family development, community building and staff development. Projects must coordinate with local Head Start programs to ensure continuity of services for children and families.

In Funding Year 1998, funding for Early Head Start totaled \$279 million, or more than 5 percent of the total Head Start budget, which served approximately 39,000 children and their families. In FY 1999, funding for Early Head Start totaled nearly \$340 million. Head Start proposes to more than double the number of children in Early Head Start over 5 years.

## **New Investments**

From 1992 through 1998, HHS will have invested more than \$600 million in quality improvements to ensure that every Head Start program works. Head Start programs across the country have used these quality resources to fix leaky roofs, make sure facilities are healthy and safe for children, and hire more teachers to reduce class size and eliminate double-session classes.

Head Start plays an important role as a national laboratory for early childhood development programs. Head Start is now taking up the challenge to focus on measurable results for social competence and school-readiness in young children. To initiate this effort, four major academic institutions and Head Start grantees around the country have formed Head Start Quality Research Centers which are piloting new approaches to measuring and collecting data.

Head Start is also increasing investment in research that follows children and families over time and is collaborating with the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institutes of Health to develop strong scientific research on young children.

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**U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
phone: (202) 401-9215  
website: [www.acf.dhhs.gov](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov)**