



## ACTION

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- Reauthorize the Head Start program and maintain Head Start's mission as a comprehensive child development, child care, and child- and family-focused program.
- Oppose efforts to turn Head Start into a block grant to states. Since 1965, Head Start has been operated at the local level.
- Oppose efforts to move Head Start from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to the Department of Education.
- Increase funding for Head Start and Early Head Start so the program can increase the number of children and families it serves and improve its quality.

## HISTORY

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Congress will reauthorize Head Start this year. 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.

Today, Head Start is funded at \$6.5 billion; in 2001, Head Start served 905,000 children. Head Start functions not just as a child care and education program, but as a comprehensive effort that will ultimately help children thrive.

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. Head Start recognizes that both families and communities are important to the success of the program—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. Early Head Start extends services to pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families. This program receives a smaller portion of the overall funding than the larger Head Start program through an annual set-aside.

The 1998 Head Start reauthorization increased the amount of funds set aside to expand Early Head Start from 7.5% in 1999 rising to 10% by 2003. It also dedicated specific amounts of the annual increases in funding 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 funding increases went to quality; by 2003, 25% of funding increases were dedicated to quality, while the remaining 75% went to program expansion.

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

This year, Head Start reauthorization will likely include a debate over the program's structure, role, and oversight. Reform proposals may include changing the current structure, which has always provided grants directly to local Head Start providers. The Administration has suggested it would shift the program's emphasis from overall learning and the health and development of enrolled children and their parents to an emphasis on teaching literacy and number skills. As part of this shift in mission, the Administration has suggested moving jurisdiction over Head Start from HHS to the Department of Education.

## KEY FACTS

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- In 1965, Head Start served 561,000 children. By 2001, the program was serving more than 905,000 children.<sup>1</sup>
- One of the key indicators of Head Start's success is the Family and Child Experiences Survey. This ongoing national random sample of more than 3,000 children and families in 40 Head Start programs show that children enrolled in Head Start enter school ready to learn—with substantial gains in work knowledge, letter recognition, and math and writing skills.<sup>2</sup>

- In one recent study, future school successes for children who participated in Head Start appear to have been enhanced by more active, child-initiated early learning experiences. Progress for some, however, may have been slowed by overly academic preschool experiences that introduced formalized learning too early for most children's developmental levels.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>4</sup>
- Large-scale national surveys of Head Start and similar programs have demonstrated positive long-term effects on school achievement, grade retention, placement in special education, and social adjustment.<sup>5</sup>
- FY 2002 funding for Head Start was \$6.5 billion, serving approximately 60% of all eligible children. Eligibility for Head Start is limited to 100% of the federal poverty level.<sup>6</sup>
- Nationwide, there are 2,427 local Head Start programs comprising 45,258 classes. Total staffing for Head Start is 176,654—43,497 of whom are teachers. More than 1.2 million volunteers are involved with Head Start.<sup>7</sup>
- More than half the children enrolled in Head Start (55%) are age 4; 33% are age 3; 5% are age 5; and more than 6% are 2 or younger.<sup>8</sup>

## SOURCES

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## CWLA CONTACT

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John Sciamanna

202/639-4919

[jsciamanna@cwla.org](mailto:jsciamanna@cwla.org)