

## Head Start Program

The **Head Start Program** is a program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.

Head Start began in 1965 and was later updated by the Head Start Act of 1981. It went through its most intense revisions in its latest reauthorization in December, 2007. It is one of the longest-running programs to address systemic poverty in the United States. As of late 2005 more than 22 million pre-school aged children have participated in Head Start. The \$6.8+ billion dollar budget for 2005 provided services to more than 905,000 children, 57% of whom were four years old or older, and 43% three years old or younger. Services were provided by 1,604 different programs operating more than 48,000 classrooms scattered across every state (and nearly every county) at an average cost of \$7,222 per child. The staff consists of nearly 212,000 paid personnel in addition to six times as many volunteers.

### Mission statement

Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families.

### History

Head Start was started as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society. It was modeled on the Little School of the 400. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 had a single line authorizing program,<sup>[4]</sup> and the Act gave broad powers to the Office of Economic Opportunity, which began the program. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 also addressed preschool education. In 1968, "Head Start begins funding a program that will eventually be called Sesame Street. It is a Carnegie Corporation Preschool Television Show".

↳The Office of Economic Opportunity's Community Action Program launched Project Head Start as an eight-week summer program in 1965. The project was designed to help end poverty by providing preschool children from low-income families with a program that would meet emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs. The following year it was authorized by Congress as a fully-funded year-round program. In 1981, the Head Start Act was passed.

Head Start was then transferred to the Office of Child Development in the Department of Welfare (later the Department of Health and Human Services) by the Nixon Administration in 1969. Today it is a program within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the HHS. In FY 1995, the Early Head Start program was established to serve children from birth to three years of age in recognition of the mounting evidence that the earliest years matter a great deal to children's growth and development. Programs are administered locally by non-profit organizations and local education agencies such as school systems. Head Start is a program for children age 3 to 5 in the United States.

### Programs

- **Early Head Start** – Promotes healthy prenatal outcomes, promotes healthy family the development of infants and toddlers beginning as young as newborn infants.
- **Head Start** – Helps to create healthy development in low-income children, ages three to five. Programs offer a wide variety of services that depend on a child's and each family's heritage and experience, to influence all aspects of a child's development and learning.
- **Family and Community Partnerships** – Head Start offers parents opportunities and support as they identify and meet their own goals, nurture the development of their children in the context of their family and culture, and advocate for communities that are supportive of children and families of all cultures. The building of trusting, collaborative relationships between parents and staff allows them to share with and to learn from one another.
- **Migrant and Seasonal Head Start** – Provides Head Start services to children of migrant and seasonal farm workers who meet income and other eligibility guidelines. Services are for children from six-months to five-

years of age. Because of the nature of the work done by the families, the hours of services are longer and the length of program is shorter (fewer months) than traditional Head Start services.

- **American Indian-Alaska Native Head Start** – Provides American Indian and Alaska Native children and families with services such as: health care, educational, nutritional, socialization, as well as other services promoting school readiness. Services are primarily for disadvantaged preschool children, and infants and toddlers.

## Services

Head Start provides education, health and social services to eligible families with the goal of ensuring the children enrolled are ready to start school. Education includes pre-school education to nationally set standards that have become the de-facto standards for pre-school in the USA. Health services include screenings, health check-ups and dental check-ups. Social services provide family advocates to work with parents and assist them in accessing community resources.

Eligibility for Head Start services is largely income-based (100% of the federal poverty level), though each locally-operated program includes other eligibility criteria such as disabilities and services to other family members. Up to 10% of any funded program's enrollment can be from over-income families or families experiencing emergency situations, but with the latest Head Start Act there was a provision to offer an option to serve children from 100 to 130% of the federal poverty guidelines. All programs are required to provide full services to children with disabilities (10% of their total enrollment).

An important update to the Head Start re-authorization signed by President Bush on December 12, 2007 is the importance of Head Start to serve the homeless children in America. Homelessness is defined as a child "who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." This includes not only the typical homeless child in a shelter or other outreach program, or those living in motels or cars but also the children who are living in a "sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason." (<http://www.naehcy.org>). These homeless children must be sought out by the local Head Start and have to be served within a reasonable time frame. Head Start programs must communicate with the local school districts to help in providing services to the younger siblings of those the school has identified as homeless as well as helping older siblings of the preschool children Head Start has identified.