

Head Start and Early Head Start

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- **Head Start improves children’s vocabulary, early writing, and early math skills.** Studies of Head Start show statistically significant expansions of children’s vocabulary, early writing, and early math skills at the end of the Head Start year. However, children’s skills at the end of Head Start were still lower than national norms. By the end of kindergarten, children who participated in Head Start made further progress toward national averages in vocabulary, early writing, and early math scores. In fact, the gains children made in Head Start were predictive of their achievement levels at the end of kindergarten—the larger their Head Start gains, the higher their kindergarten achievement.[6]
- **Head Start increases overall educational achievement by raising test scores, decreasing the need for children to receive special education services and making it less likely that children will repeat a grade.** Head Start graduates are also more likely to graduate from high school and attend college than eligible non-participants. [2],[3],[7]
- **The Head Start Impact Study shows that Head Start is contributing to measurable developmental gains for certain subgroups of disadvantaged children, including children from high-risk households, having special needs or living in non-urban settings.** The most recent wave of the Head Start Impact Study documents measurable gains for certain subgroups of children considered to be especially disadvantaged, including children from high-risk households, children with special needs, and children in non-urban settings. These sub-groups demonstrated sustained cognitive gains through the end of first grade. Additionally, while the recent Head Start Impact Study did find mixed results overall, several subgroups showed particularly positive and enduring benefits through first grade associated with participation in Head Start:
 - Children in the lowest academic quartile showed lasting improvements to their social-emotional and cognitive skills.
 - Children with special needs gained lasting improvements in their math and social-emotional skills.
 - Dual language learners had better health.
 - Children living in non-urban settings showed lasting cognitive gains.[12]
- **Children who started Head Start earlier (the 3-year-old year as opposed to the 4-year-old year) and remained in the program longer show more lasting improvements than the children who attended Head Start at age 4.** Children who entered Head Start at age 3 and

spent up to 18 months in the program had more and more sustained cognitive, social-emotional, and health outcomes their parents demonstrated increases supportive parenting practices. [12]

- **Collaborations with Head Start can improve Child Care and Pre-K Quality, extending the reach of Head Start.** The presence of Head Start in communities over the years has fostered the creation of learning collaboratives that have resulted in quality improvements in a variety of early childhood learning settings even beyond the Head Start environment. Research finds that child care centers that partner with Head Start provide higher quality care than do non-partnering programs, which may be attributed to partnering centers' efforts to meet Head Start's national standards for quality. Results are similar for state-funded preschool programs that partner with Head Start. Many states are choosing to create collaborations between their state programs and Head Start, allowing them to take advantage of Head Start's quality standards, infrastructure, and content.[10]
- **Head Start yields positive effects on individual and public health and safety.** [1],[5],[8],[12]
 - Children in Head Start had better health than a similar group of children in a control group.
 - Head Start has been credited with reducing the mortality rate for 5- to 9-year-olds by up to 50%, through its emphasis on medical screenings, nutrition, and vaccinations.
 - A child who went to Head Start is 19 to 25 percent less likely to smoke as an adult.
 - Graduates of Head Start programs, when compared to their non-participant siblings, are 12 percent less likely to be booked or charged with a crime.
- **Early Head Start positively impacts children's school success.** Compared to similar children who were not enrolled, children who participated in Early Head Start showed:
 - A larger vocabulary
 - Improved cognitive skills
 - Better social-emotional development including lower levels of aggressive behavior and less negativity towards parents, as well as higher levels of sustained attention and greater engagement with peers. [4]
- **The positive impact of Early Head Start extends beyond the child.** Parents whose children are in Early Head Start show improved parenting practices:
 - Showed greater warmth to their children
 - Provided more stimulating home environments
 - Provided more support for language and learning
 - Were more likely to read to their child daily

- Were less likely to spank their child
 - Demonstrated increased health literacy leading to annual Medicaid savings of \$232 per family.[11]
- **Early Head Start and Head Start show a positive return on investment.** The calculated return on investment for each dollar spent on Head Start ranges from \$7 to a little more than \$9. [7],[9],[12]

References

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