

Head Start model has been effective

Community Action Agency (CAA) Head Start is more than an ordinary preschool program. It is more than just a child care program. CAA Head Start is a comprehensive child development program for low-to-moderate income children and families, with a primary focus on literacy and preparation for kindergarten. It is this comprehensive design which has significantly contributed to Head Start's success.

That success is evident in the data from our child assessment report, Galileo, which was initiated by the Ohio Department of Education. Galileo data, which is compiled by Head Start teachers three times per year, show that 5-year-old CAA Head Start children scored in the 80 percent to 100 percent range in language/literacy and early math.

The Head Start program is not one that prioritizes "socialization over reading." CAA Head Start parents of today, 74 percent of whom are high school graduates with 31 percent to 41 percent having some college coursework, would never approve of a curriculum with such a narrow focus. In fact, the program uses a literacy-based curriculum that is age appropriate to prepare Head Start students to succeed in kindergarten. And yes, appropriate socialization is encouraged.

In addition to a strong curriculum, Head Start provides nutrition, health, dental, mental health and social services to each child and sometimes to their family to ensure that child's healthy entrance into public school. It's strong collaboration with 21 school districts (of which CPS is the largest), MRDD, Children's Hospital, area speech and language pathology and mental health providers enables us to zone in on children with special needs and individualize their education plan with parents, and all the players at the table. It's working.

Is there a preschool program of higher quality in this country? Of course not. The Federal Performance Standards, which Head Start adheres to, ensure the highest quality in early childhood education. Federal reviewers schedule regular visits where the program operations are measured against the Performance Standards and corrective actions are followed if necessary. It's a tightly run ship.

We support President Bush's initiative to hold Head Start programs accountable. We have operated a successful Head Start program that works and now we are willing to operate an improved successful program.

— Verline Dotson
Grantee Head Start Director
for Hamilton County