

# Head Start Works!

## Issue Background

The historical commitment of the federal government to sponsor and encourage research and evaluations in the Head Start and Early Head Start programs has generated a large body of research. These studies reveal that HS and EHS programs demonstrate both short and long-term results.

### Head Start Is an Investment

Research shows that Head Start is a wise investment for society: The preliminary results of a randomly selected longitudinal study of more than 600 graduates in San Bernardino County, California, showed that society receives nearly \$9 in benefits for every \$1 invested in Head Start children. These benefits include increased earnings, employment, and family stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education.<sup>1</sup> Head Start also benefits society-at-large by reducing crime and its costs to crime victims.<sup>2</sup> Head Start children are significantly less likely to have been charged with a crime than their siblings who did not participate in the program.<sup>3</sup>

### Educational Benefits

Substantial research finds that Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide positive educational benefits. Recent Head Start Family and Children Experience Survey (FACES) data shows that HS graduates, by the spring of their kindergarten year, were essentially at national norms in early reading and early writing and were close to meeting national norms in early math and vocabulary knowledge.<sup>4</sup> By the spring of their kindergarten year, Head Start graduates' reading assessment scores reached national norms, and their general knowledge assessment scores were close to national norms.<sup>5</sup> In a recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start children performed better on cognitive, language, and health measures than their comparison group counterparts did.<sup>6</sup> Reliable studies have found that Head Start children have increased achievement test scores and that they experience favorable long-term effects on grade repetition, special education, and graduation rates.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, findings from the Early Head Start Impact Study show that Early Head Start children on average had a higher cognitive development score than their control group had.<sup>8</sup> Early Head Start children at age 3 had larger vocabularies than the control group children had. They also demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development than their control group did.<sup>9</sup>

### Health Benefits

Studies demonstrate that Head Start programs improve the well-being of the children and families they serve, providing health and dental services to children and families who might otherwise not have them.<sup>10</sup> Parents who participate in Head Start are found to have greater quality of life satisfaction; increased confidence in coping skills; and decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and sickness.<sup>11</sup> Head Start children are at least eight percentage points more likely to have had their immunizations than those children who did not attend preschool.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Early Head Start children had a higher immunization rate than children in a control group.<sup>13</sup>

### References

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- <sup>3</sup> Garces *et al.* (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start, p. 1011.
- <sup>4</sup> Zill, N. and Sorongon, A. (2004). *Children's Cognitive Gains during Head Start and Kindergarten*. Presentation at the National Head Start Research Conference, Washington, DC. June 28-30, 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Abbott-Shim, M., Lambert, R., and McCarty, F. (2003). A Comparison of School Readiness Outcomes for Children Randomly Assigned to a Head Start Program and the Program's Wait List. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 8(2), pp. 210-211.
- <sup>7</sup> Barnett, W. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows. Presentation at a Science and Public Policy Briefing Sponsored by the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences; p. 999; Garces, E., Thomas, D. and Currie, J.. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92, 4: 999.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002, June). Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start, Executive Summary, p. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. (2002). Research Practice, Talking Points: Overall Findings Presentation "Long Version." Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Slide 12.
- <sup>10</sup> Hale, B., Seitz, V., and Zigler, E. (1990). Health Services and Head Start: A Forgotten Formula. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 11, 447-458.
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- <sup>12</sup> Currie, J. and Thomas, D. (1995, June). Does Head Start Make a Difference?. *The American Economic Review*, 85, 3: 360.
- <sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Research Practice, Talking Points: Overall Findings Presentation "Long Version." Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Slide 11.



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