



**July 2012**

## **Survey**

### **[Head Start Research and Innovation Survey](#)**

Despite research that documents Head Start's impact in a multitude of ways - on children's learning, on high school and college graduation rates, on health factors, on family engagement with children - the effectiveness of Head Start is often called into question. At NHSA, we are getting ready to address the barrage of attacks on Head Start when the results of the 3rd grade follow-up of the Head Start Impact Study are released this September. You can help us to change the conversation by taking this short survey about your program's innovative practices, local or state data tracking that follows your children to and through school, and any research partnerships you've been involved in over the years. We will use this information effectively to demonstrate that Head Start has much to teach the country! [Take the survey now!](#)

## **News**

### **[Small Change In Reading To Preschoolers Can Help Disadvantaged Kids Catch Up](#)**

*by Alix Spiegel for All Things Considered*

This NPR story explores research conducted by the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education about how to help children get the most out of reading time. The focus of the study is on directing children's attention to print during shared reading. More about the study itself is available [here](#).

## **Resources**

### **[The Linguistic Genius of Babies](#)**

*"Babies all over the world are what I like to describe as 'citizens of the world.' They can discriminate all the sounds of all languages, no matter what country we're testing and what language we're using." - Patricia Kuhl*

Patricia Kuhl is the Co-Director of the University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences at the University of Washington. In this ten-minute video, she describes the critical period that babies go through when they're most able to learn the sounds of the languages they're exposed to. Her work reveals the research basis for why exposure to multiple languages from

fluent adults during the first few months of life is so key for bilingualism.

## **Research**

### **Head Start and Urban Children's School Readiness: A Birth Cohort Study in 18 Cities**

*by Fuhua Zhai, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Jane Waldfogel for Developmental Psychology*

The authors approach the question of what children gain from Head Start participation by addressing the difficulty in understanding similar studies: the control group. In many studies of Head Start's impact, children in the "non-Head Start" condition - the control group - receive a mix of family care, child care, and preschool services and do not necessarily have the same demographic or socio-economic background as the Head Start children. In this study, the authors performed "propensity matching," where each Head Start child is compared to a non-Head Start child who is as similar as possible in identified ways (including demographics, pre-treatment scores, family characteristics). Using this technique, Head Start children were compared to non-Head Start children and then more specifically to non-Head Start children in different types of care.

Analysis showed that:

- Compared with matched children who were in parental care before kindergarten, Head Start children performed considerably better on both cognitive and social measures.
- Compared with matched children who were in prekindergarten programs, Head Start children performed better only on social measures.
- Compared with matched children who were in center-based programs, Head Start children performed better on social measures and had fewer attention problems and negative behaviors.
- Compared with matched children who were in other mixed types of nonparental care, Head Start children performed better on cognitive measures and had fewer attention problems.

Overall, gains could be seen more clearly when propensity matching was used. The authors suggest that their findings support directing scarce Head Start services to children who would otherwise receive parental care. They also emphasize that Head Start's benefits go beyond simply cognitive gains and that increased focused on school readiness should not lose sight of social-emotional domains.

### **Disadvantaged Families and Child Outcomes: The Importance of Emotional Support for Mothers**

*by Tawana Bandy, B.S., Kristine M. Andrews, Ph.D., and Kristin Anderson Moore, Ph.D. for*

### *ChildTrends Research-to-Results Brief*

This recent *Research-to-Results Brief* poses the question of why some children do better than others in similar less advantaged environments and whether their mothers' emotional support plays a role. Bandy, Andrews and Moore were looking not at how the mothers supported their children but whether the mothers themselves had support for themselves. The results showed that when mothers reported having support, children were more engaged in school, had higher social competence and showed lower rates of depression. These results were shown for children in single-parent households, children whose parents had low educational attainment, and children whose families lived in poverty. Findings like these make clear how important it is to help parents develop supportive relationships in their communities and can help Head Start and Early Head Start programs explain to their communities and their representatives just how much children can gain from all of the services these programs provide.

### **The Effectiveness of Early Head Start for 3-Year-Old Children and Their Parents: Lessons for Policy and Programs**

*by John M. Love et al for Developmental Psychology*

This study, which analyzed data gathered through the National Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project funded by the Administration for Children and Families, examines Early Head Start outcomes and how they varied for different program settings and for different levels of implementation of performance standards. Three thousand and one families in 17 programs were randomly assigned to either Early Head Start or a control group. All families were visited when children were 14, 24 and 36 months of age; programs were also assessed for implementation over the three-year period of the study.

Children who participated in Early Head Start showed positive gains in cognitive, language development and social emotional development, and their parents showed increased emotional support and support for language and learning. Gains also varied by program setting:

- Children/families in mixed settings (time in both home-based and center-based settings) showed the greatest gains in cognitive, social-emotional and parenting areas.
- Children/families in home-based programs made gains in social-emotional development and some areas of parenting.
- Children/families in center-based programs made no statistically significant gains that the authors could detect given the limited number of children in this setting.

The authors emphasize that their findings regarding standards implementation show that average outcomes obscure the potential for much higher outcomes if all programs implemented standards fully. They also recommend that these findings be considered by Early Head Start programs as they design service delivery models.

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Do you know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Do you have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin ([edropkin@nhsa.org](mailto:edropkin@nhsa.org)).