



Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.



## Head Start & Early Head Start

A Proven Model for Serving Children and Families on Their Paths to Success in School and Life

**37 million+**

More than 37 million children supported on their paths to success

**56 years**

55-year history of success, leading innovation

**262,814**

Jobs created by Head Start

**378,456**

Volunteers nationwide

### Frequently Asked Questions

Since its inception in 1965, Head Start’s locally-run programs have been at the forefront in partnering with families and communities to give young children and their families from at-risk backgrounds the skills they need to succeed in school and in life. Despite six decades of success, more than 37 million alumni, 270,000 staff, 21,000 centers and 57,000 classrooms operating in every corner of the United States, Head Start has sometimes flown below the radar in public policy discussions about data-driven innovations in early childhood development and multi-generational support.

Head Start has a rare combination of flexibility and uniformity. Programs adapt to the local needs of individual children, families, and communities and are built around a framework of outcomes-focused regulations that maintain high-quality services nationwide. Head Start has also maintained strong public and bipartisan political support in every congressional district and at every level of government.

### Who does Head Start reach?

Head Start (children age 3-5) and Early Head Start (pregnant women and children age 0-3), collectively referred to as “Head Start,” serve more than one million children and families each year. Families who are in poverty, eligible for public assistance, experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care are eligible for Head Start.

# What is Head Start?

**Head Start is a federal program with a multi-faceted, "whole child, whole family" approach proven to break intergenerational poverty.**

Depending on both community and family needs, Head Start services may be delivered in a center, at a family child care home, or as a home visiting model.

Regardless of the model, there are five high-quality elements that are the essential elements of Head Start's comprehensive approach.

In Oklahoma, dual language learner Alejandrina loves studying English together with her children. "My kids are learning words in school, and when they share what they're learning with me, it feels like we are learning together," she says.

[ESL Program Helps Oklahoman Refugee Parents Advocate for Themselves and Their Children](#)



## Education

A Head Start education relies on research-based curriculum and social-emotional learning in order to achieve kindergarten readiness through developing literacy, exploring numeracy, and establishing a love of learning.



## Health

Head Start's health services, including mental health and dental health, ensure that children have access to health insurance, regular screenings and check-ups, and medical/dental homes. Programs work with families to streamline the process for accessing necessary medical attention, prevention, and intervention services.



## Nutrition

The nutrition services provided by Head Start programs provide children with access to daily healthy food; develop connections to programs, such as SNAP and WIC, to address child and family hunger; and educate families about healthy nutrition at home.



## Multigenerational Approach

Head Start's multigenerational approach recognizes that the needs of parents/caregivers must be addressed in order for a child to achieve success after leaving Head Start. Whether it be job training, English as a Second Language courses, leadership skills, or financial planning, Head Start programs work with families to set goals, meet their needs and, ultimately, bolster long-term outcomes for children and their families.

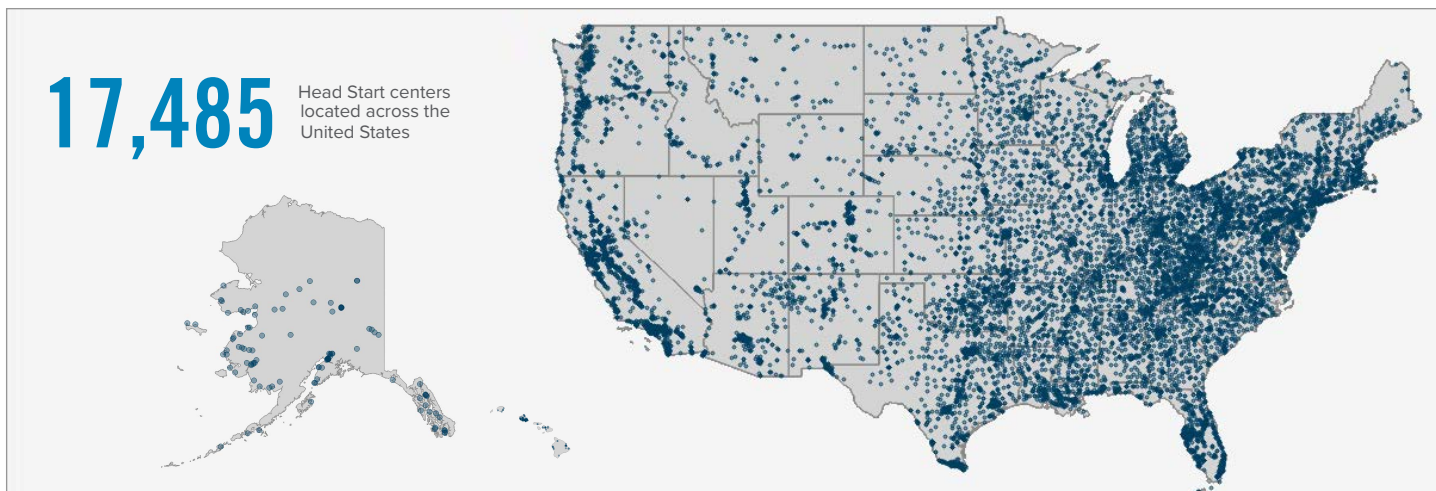


## Locally Governed

With its roots in the civil rights movement, Head Start programs are governed by the principle of "maximum-feasible participation" of local communities and parents/caregivers. This legacy continues through Head Start's unique federal-to-local funding structure and system of joint governance that includes prominent roles for current parents/caregivers.

## Where is Head Start offered?

Head Start services are delivered by more than 1,600 local grant recipients operating more than 17,000 centers across the country, reaching children and families in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the territories. American Indian and Alaska Native grants are awarded to tribal governments, and Migrant and Seasonal grants serve across state lines.



## Is Head Start effective?

**Extensive research has found that there are positive outcomes** for the children and families who participate in Head Start in the short, intermediate, and long terms.

**These outcomes include:**

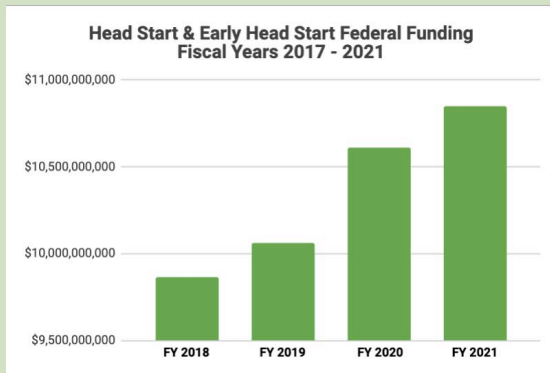
- **more readiness for kindergarten<sup>1</sup>**
- **less grade repetition by 8th grade<sup>2</sup>**
- **less chronic absenteeism in middle school<sup>3</sup>**
- **greater high school graduation rates<sup>4</sup>**
- **reduced foster care placement rates<sup>6</sup>**
- **increased higher education enrollment and completion rates<sup>5</sup>**
- **stronger parental involvement (including more father engagement)<sup>7</sup>**
- **less likely to rely on public assistance<sup>8</sup>**
- **less likely to live in poverty<sup>8</sup>**

Research has also shown that Head Start access was linked with the disruption of intergenerational poverty, as evidenced by increased maternal educational attainment, reduced likelihood of teen pregnancy, and less involvement with the criminal justice system.<sup>8</sup>

Learn more about the research behind Head Start's successful outcomes:

[nhsa.org/the-head-start-advantage/](https://nhsa.org/the-head-start-advantage/)

## How is Head Start funded by the federal government?



Federal grants, administered by the Office of Head Start (OHS) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), are awarded directly to local government, nonprofit, for-profit, and faith-based organizations. Head Start and Early Head Start grants are all five-year grants with a system for redetermination of grants at the end of the five-year period.

Each fiscal year, Congress enacts an overall appropriation for Head Start and Early Head Start. Each grantee is allotted the same base grant as the prior year and is required to provide a 20% non-federal financial match. In the event that the federal appropriation for Head Start is less or more than the previous year, the funding level is adjusted proportionately per the Head Start Act of 2007.

In 2014, Head Start's infant-toddler services were expanded through Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCPs). EHS-CCPs leverage the strengths of Early Head Start—flexible, high-quality care grounded in cultural and social values—to support, expand, and improve quality in child care settings.

## How are high standards of quality maintained nationwide?

In 2016, updated federal Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)—the regulations that govern everyday practice—took effect. These regulations set robust expectations around staff education, professional development, and data-informed continuous improvement of program services, while also including flexibility to encourage innovation at the local level. Therefore, while every Head Start program is unique and locally-designed, each must provide a certain level of quality education, health, nutritional, social, and other services to enrolled children and families.

OHS regularly monitors all grantees for performance and ability to continuously improve services according to set, rigorous monitoring protocols. If OHS finds poor performance or a serious violation of the HSPPS, a grantee is placed on an improvement plan and must compete to receive its next five-year grant, or the grant is terminated.

## Conclusion

Head Start has been serving America's most vulnerable children, families, and communities for more than five decades. As we look to the future, we will continue building on our nation's shared belief that every child in America deserves the opportunity to succeed.

**Questions?** Contact NHSA's Director of Government Affairs, Bob Bissen, at [bbissen@nhsa.org](mailto:bbissen@nhsa.org).