



Start with Head Start

Head Start’s proven model of intervention and support for at-risk children and families must be the top priority of any expansion of a federal investment in pre-kindergarten.

For 56 years, Head Start programs have partnered with parents living in poverty to prepare their children for success in school and in life, and support family self-sufficiency. Today, Head Start’s 1,600 grantees serve over 700,000 three- and four-year-olds in a diverse range of community-based settings, including public schools, local nonprofits, faith-based agencies, and community action agencies.

Among the target populations of Head Start are our nation’s most at-risk children including those living in poverty, children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and children with disabilities. To meet their complex needs, programs deliver a locally-driven model of comprehensive early childhood services and supports, including in school readiness, health, and early intervention, while also centering family engagement and building family self-sufficiency.



Despite its record of success and extensive infrastructure, **Head Start still only reaches an estimated one in three income-eligible children.** The largest access gaps are for eligible Hispanic and Black children who live in neighborhoods that tend to have fewer available slots. [\(Source\)](#)

Expanding Head Start’s proven model of intervention and support for at-risk children and families must be the top policy priority of any expansion of a federal investment in pre-kindergarten.

Key advantages to expanding pre-kindergarten access through Head Start

Parent Choice

- Community-based programs in schools, nonprofits, and Community Action Agencies
- Presence in urban, suburban, frontier & rural areas
- Services driven by parent needs
- Multiple models & hours of service

Quality

- School readiness, health, and early intervention focus
- Family support & engagement
- Teachers are credentialed & engage in professional development
- Robust data & monitoring

Equity

- Prioritizes children living in poverty, in foster care, homeless, or with a disability
- Maintains a racially & ethnically diverse child, family, and staff population
- Embraces linguistic & cultural competence
- Prohibits expulsion, limits suspension, and works with parents to address concerns

#1 RECOMMENDATION TO CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION:

Expand Head Start Access to 800,000 Children

The Head Start community's first recommendation to Congress and the Administration is to expand access to Head Start to 800,000 children through four distinct pathways.

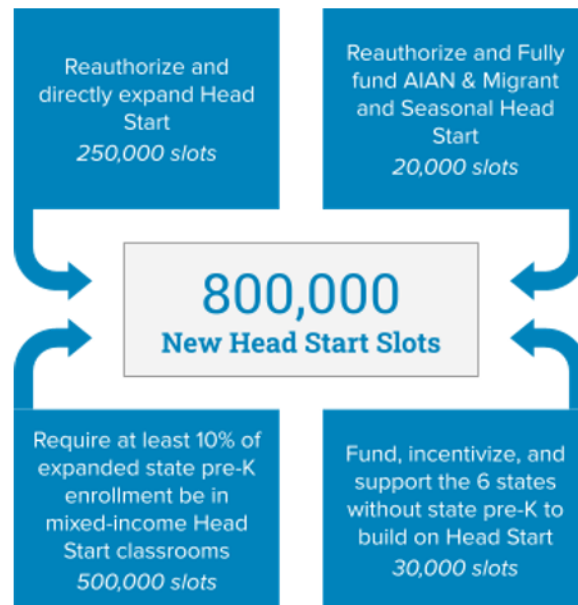
In conjunction with a reauthorization of the Head Start Act, including modernization of Head Start eligibility and a renewed focus on adequately supporting the Head Start workforce:

1. **Increase direct funding to Head Start** through the Office of Head Start (OHS) to serve an additional 250,000 children.
2. **Increase direct funding to American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start** through the OHS to fully fund enrollment. The fiscal year 2019 combined enrollment of both programs was 53,608.

In addition:

3. **Incentivize state pre-kindergarten systems to support mixed socio-economic classrooms** by requiring states to ensure that at least 10% of their federally-funded enrollment be in mixed-income Head Start classrooms. In the context of the Administration's goal of expanding access to five million children, this would equate to 500,000 mixed-income slots in high-quality Head Start classrooms.
4. **Fund, incentivize, and support the six predominantly rural states that do not have state pre-kindergarten** to build on Head Start's proven high-quality model of urban, suburban, and rural service delivery. Each state would expand Head Start access to a minimum of 5,000 young children, for a total of 30,000 new slots. The six states are Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

We further recommend that any funding mechanism replicate Head Start's contract-based model of stable, five-year funding. Reliable funding is necessary to increase quality, maintain enrollment, and support a stable workforce.



#2 RECOMMENDATION TO CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION:

Require and Incentivize Collaboration with Head Start in State Pre-Kindergarten Systems

To further expand access to Head Start...

- Require participating states that wish to offer enhanced preschool services, with comprehensive two-generation services (such as Head Start), lower ratios, higher staff supports or more inclusive practices (such as therapeutic preschool), to offer an **enhanced per-child funding model**, recognizing the increased costs of such service provision.
- Require participating states to offer **automatic preschool eligibility and automatic referral to Head Start for children in foster care, kinship care, or experiencing homelessness**. Each is categorically eligible for Head Start. States would further be required to extend the enhanced per-child funding model, supportive case management and transportation to these children and families.

To build on parent choice and promote equity...

- Require states to provide technical assistance about best practices for blending, braiding, and layering funding, including federal funding, **to facilitate the development of mixed-income Head Start classrooms**.
- Publish federal regulations that compel states to provide preschool services in Head Start settings and especially, to **increase the number of hours that Head Start is funded to provide** (duration funding), while allowing for part-day and other models that meet family needs.
- Ensure that **shared resources**, especially those that enhance equity, such as transportation, facility grants, professional development resources, and mental health consultation are made available to all preschool providers, including Head Start.
- Require states to **offer disability identification and Individualized Education Plan support teams to Head Start programs** that allow children to be identified, maintain their enrollment in Head Start, receive appropriate services and compensate programs.
- Require states to set and meet **enrollment targets by income, family status, dual language status, and other criteria** with a strong relationship to kindergarten readiness.
- To raise awareness among eligible families, require any **state pre-kindergarten enrollment portals to include Head Start and Early Head Start** as options, and expand coordinated outreach among other key at-risk populations, including families applying for unemployment assistance.

To improve quality...

- **Support workforce wages and benefits** by raising starting wages to \$15 per hour, building in regular increases to put programs on a pathway to pay locally competitive wages, requiring pay parity across school and community-based settings, making bonus and incentive pay available, and allowing Head Start staff to buy into the federal Thrift Savings Plan and or a comparable state education retirement plan. It is critical that wages are comparable across both new and current staff.
- Require states to make **licensing and certification pathways** available and accessible to all preschool staff, including those in community-based settings such as Head Start.
- Offer incentives to states to **adopt or model their preschool standards on the Head Start Program Performance Standards**. At a minimum, require participating states to greatly limit suspension and ban expulsion within three years of enactment. Three years will offer time for the implementation of best practices in alternative discipline, child development, and inclusive learning environments.
- Focus expansion efforts on four year olds. In order **to serve three year olds, require states to seek a waiver**, ensuring they first adopt developmentally appropriate curriculum, supports and instructional practices, have trained staff, and support community-based enrollment in local Head Start programs and other high-quality providers that currently serve three year olds.

To promote collaboration...

- Put into law a **“full utilization of Head Start” requirement** that would require participating states to develop coordinated expansion plans that would need to be approved by the federal Office of Head Start. The process would include: 1) including the Head Start community, including parents and guardians, in planning, 2) conducting community needs assessments to identify supply and demand and reduce duplication, 3) targeting expanded preschool services for children and families from the most at-risk backgrounds through Head Start, 4) monitoring and reporting on impacts on Head Start enrollment by age, race, ethnicity, geography, and other criteria, 5) attending to estimated impacts on infant and toddler capacity.
- Require participating states to develop and update each year an **annual statewide preschool agreement**, between their private, nonprofit State Head Start Association, State Head Start Collaboration Office, state Department of Education and the lead state agency for preschool expansion (if different than the state Department of Education).
- Require states to conduct semi-annual **integrated data collection across settings**, as well as disaggregated analysis, to guide and inform enrollment efforts, expansion and other decisions at the state and local level.
- To understand and evaluate child and family outcomes, require **consistent and transparent reporting and analysis** from the Administration for Children and Families, shaped on existing Head Start outcomes data policies and practices.

Head Start expansion would directly support the goals of the Biden-Harris American Families Plan

“ ...adding two years of universal high-quality preschool for every three-year-old and four-year-old... it puts them in the position to be able to compete all the way through 12 years.
It increases exponentially their prospect of graduating and going on beyond graduation.

—President Joseph R. Biden
[Remarks](#) to a Joint Session of Congress, April 28, 2021

Head Start is the *only* coordinated preschool system in the country that serves three- and four-year-old children. Locally run programs serve over 700,000 preschool-aged children each year and are able to serve more when receiving funding to increase access and when coordinating with other early childhood programs.

Decades of [independent research](#) have shown that children who attend Head Start have **enhanced physical health, improved social skills, and increased math, language, and literacy skills** that better prepare them for kindergarten and school. Long-term research shows that adult alumni have **increased high school graduation rates, increased likelihood of pursuing and completing higher education**, and decreased criminal behavior.

Leading states have built their high-quality pre-kindergarten programs around Head Start. A federal expansion of pre-kindergarten in partnership with states should support these leading efforts and incentivize other states to follow suit.

- Washington State modeled their Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program standards on the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) and most providers are federal Head Start grantees.
- In West Virginia, 58% of pre-Kindergarten communities collaborate with Head Start. ([Source](#))
- In Michigan, 18% of children in the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) are served in a blended Head Start/GSRP model. ([Source](#))
- Alabama’s First Class Pre-K offers dedicated funding for Head Start programs, enabling services to 1,693 children across 94 classrooms. ([Source](#))
- In Iowa, Head Start programs serve children through the [Shared Visions Preschool](#) program, which provides services to children from at-risk backgrounds in 29 counties.
- In Minnesota, schools receive application "bonus points" if they partner with Head Start.
- Oregon adopted the [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five](#) as its early learning standards for child development.

“ President Biden is calling for a national partnership with states to offer free, high-quality, accessible, and inclusive preschool to all three- and four-year-olds, benefitting five million children...

—White House, [Fact Sheet: The American Families Plan](#), April 28, 2021

Biden-Harris Universal Preschool Plan	How Head Start Meets or Exceeds These Requirements
<p>“...first prioritize high-need areas and enable communities and families to choose the settings that work best for them.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Head Start targets the highest need areas, with high rates of poverty and low levels of community investment → Head Start programs operate in many different settings, from community-based centers, to public schools, community action agencies and others
<p>“...ensure that all publicly-funded preschool is high-quality, with low student-to-teacher ratios, high-quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum, and supportive classroom environments that are inclusive for all students.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Head Start is the most studied and proven preschool model in the U.S. with evidence of both short and long-term impact on children and families → Head Start’s Program Performance Standards put in place the structural and process elements for child and family outcomes → 100,000 children with disabilities were served (13.2% of cumulative enrollment)
<p>“Unfortunately, many children, but especially children of color and low-income children, do not have access to the full range of high-quality preschool programs available to their more affluent peers.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Head Start (all programs) serves a racially diverse child population: Black or African-American (30%), White (44%), Biracial or Multi-Racial (10%), Asian (2%), American Indian/Alaska Native (4%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%). (Source) → Thirty-seven percent (37%) of families identify as being of Hispanic/Latino origin. (Source) → 28% of children lived in homes where families’ primary language was a language other than English (Source) → Head Start offers specific programs for American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) children and children whose parents are employed in migrant and seasonal agricultural industries.
<p>“...support those who wish to earn a bachelor’s degree or another credential that supports their work as an educator, or to become an early childhood educator. And, educators will receive job-embedded coaching, professional development, and wages that reflect the importance of their work.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Greater than 75% of lead preschool teachers in Head Start have a Bachelor’s degree → Head Start child development staff are diverse, with recent data indicating 48% of staff identify as white, 28% as Black or African-American, and 21% being of Hispanic or Latino origin (Source) → Teachers receive embedded coaching, mental health consultation and administrative leadership → Access to new funding and partnerships is critical to raise Head Start wages and benefits, which lag behind school-based programs in most cases