



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

## Benefits of Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

The federal government's historical commitment to sponsor and encourage research and evaluations in the HS and EHS programs has generated a large corpus of research on HS and EHS. This research reveals that HS and EHS programs provide educational, economic, health, and law enforcement benefits.

### Educational Benefits

Substantial research finds that HS and EHS programs provide educational benefits. National Family and Child Experiences Survey 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>1</sup> By the spring of their kindergarten year, HS graduates' reading assessment scores reached national norms, and their general knowledge assessment scores were close to national norms.<sup>2</sup> The HS Impact Study reveals small to moderate statistically significant positive impacts for 3- and 4-year-old children enrolled in HS on pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary, and parent reports of children's literacy skills.<sup>3</sup> This study found that a higher proportion of HS parents read to their children more frequently than those parents of children who were not enrolled in HS.<sup>4</sup> Reliable studies have found that HS children experience increased achievement test scores and that HS children experience favorable long-term effects on grade repetition, special education, and graduation rates.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, findings from the EHS Impact Study show that EHS children on average had a higher cognitive development score than their control group.<sup>6</sup> EHS children at age 3 had larger vocabularies than the control group children had. EHS children demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development than their control group.<sup>7</sup>

### Economic Benefits

Research shows that HS is a wise investment for society. The preliminary results of a randomly selected longitudinal study of more than 600 HS graduates in San Bernardino County, California, showed that society receives nearly \$9 in benefits for every \$1 invested in these HS children. These benefits include increased earnings, employment, and family stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education.<sup>17</sup> A recent analysis of Head Start impact data suggests that Head Start as it operated during 1960s through the 1980s yielded a benefit-cost ratio that may be at least as large as the \$7 to \$1 figure often cited for model early childhood programs such as Perry Preschool which served children during the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Properly trained HS parents can decrease Medicaid costs by \$198 per family.<sup>19</sup>

### Health Benefits

Studies demonstrate that HS and EHS improve the health of the children and families they serve. Recent research reports that the mortality rates for 5- to 9-year-old children who had attended Head Start are 33 to 50 percent lower than the rates for comparable children who were not enrolled in Head Start. In fact, Head Start reduced the rates to the national average of mortality rates for all 5- to 9-year-old children.<sup>8</sup> The HS Impact Study demonstrated that a much higher proportion of HS children received dental care than those children who did not receive HS services.<sup>9</sup> A higher proportion of parents with 3-year-old children in HS reported that their child was either in excellent or very good health as compared with those parents who did not have children enrolled in HS.<sup>10</sup> The HS Impact Study showed that HS reduces the frequency and severity of problem behavior as reported by their parents.<sup>11</sup> HS provides health and dental services to children and families who might otherwise not have them.<sup>12</sup> Parents who participate in HS are found to have greater quality of life satisfaction; increased confidence in coping skills; and decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and sickness.<sup>13</sup> Research suggests that HS reduces childhood obesity.<sup>14</sup> HS children are at least eight percentage points more likely to have had their immunizations than those children who did not attend preschool.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, EHS children had a higher immunization rate than children in a control group.<sup>16</sup>

### Law Enforcement Benefits

Along with improving the health of its children and families, HS benefits its children and society-at-large by reducing crime and its costs to crime victims.<sup>20</sup> HS children are significantly less likely to have been charged with a crime than their siblings who did not participate in HS.<sup>21</sup>

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The National Head Start Association, an independent membership organization, advocates on behalf of the entire Head Start community and provides training and resources to Head Start programs nationwide.

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<sup>1</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>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2005, June.) Executive Summary, Head Start Impact Study First Year Findings, ii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>5</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; Garces, E., Thomas, D. and Currie, J.. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92(4): 999.

<sup>6</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, 3.

<sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. (2002). Research Practice, Talking Points: Overall Findings Presentation "Long Version." Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Slide 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2005, June). Executive Summary, Head Start Impact Study First Year Findings, xv.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>12</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.

<sup>13</sup> Parker, F., Piotrkowski, C., and Peay, L. (1987). Head Start as a Social Support for Mothers: The Psychological Benefits of Involvement. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57(2): 220-233.

<sup>14</sup> Frisvold, D. (2007, January). Head Start Participation and Childhood Obesity. Paper presented at the Allied Social Science Association Meetings, Chicago, IL.

<sup>15</sup> Currie, J. and Thomas, D. (1995, June). Does Head Start Make a Difference?. *The American Economic Review*, 85(3): 360.

<sup>16</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.

<sup>17</sup> Meier, J. (2003, June 20). Interim Report. Kindergarten Readiness Study: Head Start Success. Preschool Service Department, San Bernardino County, California.

<sup>18</sup> Ludwig, J. and Phillips, D. (2007). The Benefits and Costs of Head Start. *Social Policy Report*. 21, 3: 4.

<sup>19</sup> UCLA Johnson & Johnson Health Care Institute for Head Start. (2004, April 14). UCLA Study Shows Medicaid Costs Can Shrink Significantly When Head Start Parents Are Trained to Handle Kids' Common Ailments.

<sup>20</sup> Fight Crime: Invest In Kids. (2004). Quality Pre-Kindergarten: Key to Crime Prevention and School Success. Available at <http://www.fightcrime.org/> on July 23, 2004, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Garces et al. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start, 1011.