

Head Start Reduces Crime and Improves Achievement

A research brief by FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids is a crime prevention organization of more than 3,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors. Our members know that the best way to prevent crime is to give kids the right start in life.

Summary

Head Start, the nation's premier federal early education program for 3- and 4-year-olds, has given millions of America's low-income children the opportunity to succeed in school and later in life. Research shows that Head Start has narrowed the educational achievement gap between low- and upper-income kids, increased high school graduation rates and reduced crime. Yet, because of underfunding, Head Start serves only half of eligible 3- and 4-year-old children. Early Head Start, the groundbreaking child development and family strengthening program for at-risk children from birth to three, serves less than four percent of eligible kids.

Increased investments in Head Start would make it even stronger by raising teacher qualifications, enhancing curriculum standards, expanding parent coaching, and introducing interventions for children with behavioral problems. America should invest more in Head Start to save taxpayers' money and save lives.

Higher Educational Attainment

Head Start narrowed the school readiness gap between children from low-income homes who attended Head Start and children from higher-income homes. A study with a nationally representative sample of 2,800 children showed that Head Start significantly raised average scores of children's performance. Moreover, the largest gains were made by the lower-performing children, especially in the areas of vocabulary and early writing. Head Start kids doubled their vocabulary test scores by the end of kindergarten.

A separate national impact study utilized the best design possible – a randomized control trial – and found that

Head Start cut the achievement gap nearly in half for pre-reading skills between Head Start children and the national average for all 3- and 4-year olds. In another large national survey, researchers found that former Head Start students were more likely to graduate from high school and to attend college than their siblings who attended other preschools.

Lower Crime Rates

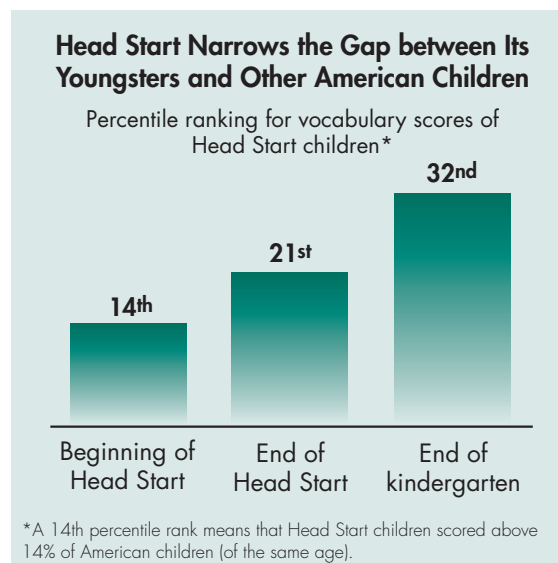
In addition to improved school readiness, Head Start graduates have also been shown to have lower crime rates as adults. In a large national survey, Head Start graduates were 8.5 percent less likely to be later arrested or charged with a crime than their siblings who attended other preschool programs.

A Little Head Start Goes a Long Way

After careful review of major Head Start studies, early education experts have determined that the positive educational effects of Head Start are long lasting on a broad range of real-world outcomes like high school graduation, grade retention, and special education placement.

Some early studies of Head Start initially suggested that the program's effect on school achievement faded out over time, but these early studies were flawed. For example, in studies

comparing the achievement test scores of children who had formerly attended Head Start to those who had not, researchers failed to obtain scores for the children who had been placed in special education or held back to repeat a grade. These lower-performing students were more likely to have been in the non-Head Start group. Omitting their test results artificially inflated the average scores of the non-Head Start group, resulting in the



appearance of “fade out” for the Head Start group.

Although there is evidence that Head Start kids’ gains in IQ scores “faded out” over time, stronger research has discredited the myth of school achievement “fade out” by showing the long-term improvements for kids. In large national studies, researchers found that former Head Start students were less likely to repeat a grade, less likely to need special education services, and more likely to graduate from high school.

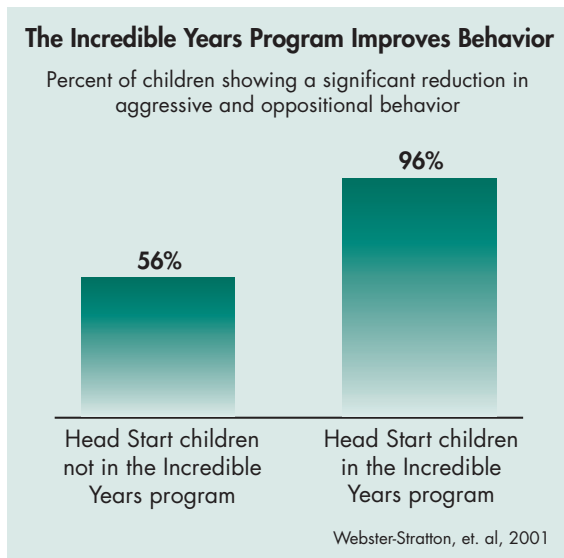
Nipping Aggressive Behavior in the Bud

Research shows that 60 percent of young children with elevated levels of aggressive behaviors will manifest high levels of anti-social and delinquent behavior. Head Start addresses this problem by providing services to further the social/emotional and behavioral development of youngsters. Some Head Start centers have used *The Incredible Years* program to treat children at-risk for later behavioral difficulties. *The Incredible Years* program trains parents, teachers and family service workers to reinforce problem-solving skills and non-aggressive social skills in children. In a study conducted in Washington State, children in Head Start were randomly assigned to *The Incredible Years* group or to a control group. Among the children with conduct problems, 96 percent of those who participated in Head Start/Incredible Years showed a significant reduction in aggressive and oppositional behavior, compared to 56 percent of children in the control group.

Early Head Start is Making a Difference

Early Head Start (EHS) is a proven program that extends the benefits of Head Start to children under three. Families are served by centers and/or home visits. Mathematica Policy Research and Columbia University conducted a national

evaluation of EHS. Families randomly assigned to receive the combined center/home visit approach were 62 percent more likely to read to their children daily than families who did not receive the program. Children left out of EHS were 34 percent more likely to score in the low range on a test of cognitive, social and emotional development than those enrolled in EHS.



Key Improvements Can Make Head Start Even Better

To achieve lasting impacts and a good return on investment, pre-kindergarten programs like Head Start must provide quality services. Research shows that the training and education level of teachers are essential for providing the high-quality early education needed to reduce later crime. Teachers

with at least a four-year college degree and specialized training in early childhood education are the most effective pre-kindergarten teachers. Since the salary for a full-time Head Start teacher was just over \$24,000 in 2004 (compared to \$44,000 for a kindergarten teacher), attracting and retaining staff with bachelor degrees will require additional funding.

Moving Ahead

Although Head Start produces lasting benefits for vulnerable children, its full potential cannot be achieved without reaching more children and raising Head Start’s quality even higher. The cost to society of failing to provide at least two years of quality early-childhood care and education to low income children is estimated at approximately \$100,000 per child – a total cost to society of \$400 billion for all poor children under five. It is imperative that new investments be made in Head Start so that more at-risk children can be helped to succeed in life, become contributing adults, and avoid lives of crime.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations. It receives no funds from federal, state or local governments. Major funding is provided by: The Atlantic Philanthropies • Buffett Early Childhood Fund • The Annie E. Casey Foundation • Marguerite Casey Foundation • Naomi & Nehemiah Cohen Foundation • Freddie Mac Foundation • JEHT Foundation • The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation • The David and Lucile Packard Foundation • The William Penn Foundation • The Pew Charitable Trusts - Advancing Quality Pre-K for All
Source citation and other research are available at www.fightcrime.org

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, 1212 New York Ave., NW, Ste. 300, Washington, D.C., 20005, 202-776-0027.

Endnotes

• Summary

Head Start serves only half (48%) of those eligible:

The percentage of income-eligible children who are enrolled in Head Start was computed by dividing the number of 3- and 4-year-old children served in 2004 (n=779,032) by the number of 3- and 4-year-old children in poverty 2004 (n=1,624,000). The number of 3- and 4-year-old children served was calculated by multiplying the total number of children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start (n=905,851) in 2004 by the percentage of children aged 3 and 4 enrolled in Head Start (86%). For the number 3- and 4-year-old children served by Head Start, see: U.S. Department of Health & Social Services, Administration for Children & Families, Head Start Bureau. (2005). Retrieved from

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/research/2005.htm>.

For the number of 3- and 4-year-old children in poverty, see: U.S. Census Bureau. (2004). *Single year of age-Poverty status: 2004, Below 100% of poverty line-all races*. Annual Demographic survey, March supplement. Retrieved from:

http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new34_100_01.htm.

Early Head Start serves less than 4 (3.27) percent of those eligible:

The percentage of income-eligible children who are enrolled in Early Head Start was computed by dividing the number of 0, 1 and 2-year-old children served in 2004 (n=81,527) by the number of 0, 1, and 2-year-old children in poverty in 2004 (n=2,492,000). The number of children in Early Head Start was calculated by multiplying the total number of children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start (n=905,851) in 2004 by the percentage of children aged 0-2 enrolled in Early Head Start (9%). For the number of children enrolled in Early Head Start, see: U.S. Department of Health & Social Services, Administration for Children & Families, Head Start Bureau. (2005). Retrieved from:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/research/2005.htm>.

For the number of children aged 0-2 in poverty, see: U.S. Census Bureau. (2004). *Single year of age-Poverty status: 2004, Below 100% of poverty line-all races*. Annual Demographic survey, March supplement. Retrieved from:

http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new34_100_01.htm.

• Higher Educational Attainment

Head Start raises performance scores of all children, etc.; Head Start children outpace other children during kindergarten: Zill, N. et al. (2003). *Head Start FACES 2000: A whole-child perspective on program performance*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Outcomes Research and Evaluation & Head Start Bureau.

Graph: Vocabulary Scores for Head Start children: For vocabulary scores of the 1997 FACES sample of children in Head Start and then in kindergarten, see: Zill, N. et al. (2003). *Head Start FACES 2000: A whole-child perspective on program performance*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Outcomes Research and Evaluation & Head Start Bureau.

Head Start reduced the achievement gap in pre-reading skills:

Yoshikawa, H., (2005), *Placing the first-year findings of the national Head Start Impact Study in context*, Washington, DC: Society for Research in Child Development; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families. (2005, May). *Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings*. Washington, DC: Author.

Higher graduation and college enrollment rates: Garces, E., Thomas, D., & Currie, J. (2002). Longer-term effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92(4), 999-1012. Barnett, W. S. (1998). Long-term effects on cognitive development and school success. In W. S. Barnett & S. S. Boocock (Eds.), *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term outcomes* (pp. 11-44). Buffalo, NY: SUNY Press.

• Lower Crime Rates

Head Start graduates were 8.5 percent less likely to have been charged or convicted of a crime: Duncan Thomas, personal communication via e-mail to Cate Miller, Co-Director of Research, Fight Crime Invest in Kids, on February 28, 2003, based on an analysis of data in Garces, E., Thomas, D., & Currie, J. (2002). Longer-term effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92(4), 999-1012.

• Long-lasting Impacts

Long-term effects on academic success: Barnett, W.S. (2002). *Battle over Head Start: What the research shows*. Retrieved from the National Institute for Early Education Research Web site:

<http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=4>; Barnett, W. S. (1995).

Long-term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes. *The Future of Children: Long-term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs*, 5(3), 25-50.

Long-term effects do not "fade out": Barnett, W. S. (2004) "Does Head Start Have Lasting Cognitive Effects?" In E. Zigler and S. J. Styfco (Eds). *The Head Start Debates*. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes Publishing; Also Garces, E., Thomas, D., & Currie, J. (2002). Longer-term effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92(4), 999-1012; Barnett, W. S. (1998). "Long-term effects on cognitive development and school success." In W. S. Barnett & S. S. Boocock (Eds.), *Early care and education for children in poverty: Promises, programs, and long-term outcomes* (pp. 11-44). Buffalo, NY: SUNY Press.

• Success in Promoting Social/Emotional and Behavioral Development

10 percent of students exhibit high levels of aggressive behavior: Kupersmidt, J. B., Bryant, D., and Willoughby, M. (2000). Prevalence of aggressive behaviors among preschoolers in Head Start and community child care programs. *Behavioral Disorders*, 26, 42-52.

60 percent of children with high levels of aggressive behavior: Campbell, S.B., Shaw, D.S., & Gilliom, M. (2000). Early externalizing behavior problems: Toddlers and preschoolers at risk for later maladjustment. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12, 467-488; Nagin, D., & Tremblay, R.E. (1999). Trajectories of boys' physical aggression, opposition, and hyperactivity on the path to physically violent and nonviolent juvenile delinquency. *Child Development*, 70, 1181-1196. Both as cited in Raver, C. C. (2002). Emotions matter: Making the case for the role of young children's emotional development for early school readiness. *Social Policy Report*, 16(3). Washington, DC: Society for Research in Child Development.

The Incredible Years program research results: Webster-Stratton, C., Reid, M. J., Hammond, M. (2001). Preventing conduct problems, promoting social competence: A parent and teacher training partnership in Head Start. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 30(3), 283-302.

• Early Head Start is Making A Difference

EHS evaluation research results: Love, J. M. et al. (2002). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The impacts of Early Head Start, Volume I, Final technical report*.

Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Head Start Bureau.

- **Key Improvements Can Make Head Start Even Better**

Quality as a function of teachers' education level and training: For reviews see Barnett, S. W. (2003, January). Better teachers, better preschools: Student achievement linked to teacher qualifications. *Preschool Policy Matters*, 2. Retrieved from the National Institute for Early Education Research Web site: <http://nieer.org/resources/policy-briefs/2.pdf>; Vandell, D.L. & Wolfe, B. (2002). *Child care quality: Does it matter and does it need to be improved?* Retrieved from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation Web site: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality00/ccqual.htm>. See also Zill, N. et al. (2003). *Head Start FACES 2000: A whole-child perspective on program performance*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Outcomes Research and Evaluation & Head Start Bureau.

Head Start and kindergarten teachers' salaries: Hamm, K., & Ewen, D. (2005, November). *Still going strong: Head Start children, families, staff, and programs in 2004*. Policy Brief. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Retrieved from: http://www.clasp.org/publications/headstart_brief_6.pdf.

- **Moving Ahead**

Cost of failing to provide quality early childhood education: Barnett, W. S. (1995). Long term effects of early childhood programs on cognitive and school outcomes. *The Future of Children: Long-term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs*, 5(3), 25-50.