



# **Head Start Impact Study News and Policy Update**

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Second Annual Edward Zigler Western Research Institute  
February 2, 2010**



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## About the Head Start Impact Study

- In the 1998 Reauthorization of Head Start, federal lawmakers mandated the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund a national study to determine whether Head Start works and for whom does it work.
- Nationally representative sample of 84 randomly selected grantee/delegate agencies and 383 oversubscribed Head Start centers.
- This study is a value-added study.



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## About Head Start Impact Study (Continued)

- Experimental random assignment research design. The study consisted of nearly 5,000 newly entering, eligible 3- and 4-year-old children who were randomly assigned to either (1) a Head Start group with access to Head Start services or (2) a control group that did not receive Head Start services. Parents of control group children could still enroll their children in other early childhood programs or non-Head Start early childhood services.



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## About Head Start Impact Study (Continued)

- The study separately examined two cohorts of children: newly entering three-year-olds and newly entering four-year-olds.
- Data collection began in fall 2002 and continued through 2006 following children through the spring of their first grade year.



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## Scientific Considerations

- Control group contamination. 60 percent of the control group participated in child care or early education programs during the first year of the study, with 13.8 percent of the four-year-olds in the control group and 17.8 percent of three-year-olds in the control group making their way into other Head Start programs during this year. Because of this contamination, it would be difficult scientifically to expect impacts to be equivalent in size to those of model programs, such as the Perry Preschool study.



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## Scientific Considerations (Continued)

- Dosage. Children in the Head Start group received 6 to 9 months of Head Start.
- Pre-Head Start Reauthorization Data. This study examines children who attended Head Start programs five years prior to Head Start's reauthorization and does not reflect the quality improvements in Head Start that were authorized by federal lawmakers in 2007.



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## Scientific Considerations (Continued)

- Narrow Scope of Measures. The study used a rather narrow scope of measures considering Head Start comprehensive provision of services.
- Federal Funding. During the study's data collection period, federal funding for Head Start did not keep pace with inflation.



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# Key Head Start Impact Study Findings





## Program Quality

- ❖ Head Start classrooms on average were rated as “good” in terms of quality using the ECERS-R, and these classrooms were of higher quality than classrooms in other center-based programs.
- ❖ This finding is consistent with good quality ratings reported in a couple national cohorts of the Family and Child Experience Survey.

## Cognitive Impacts

- ❖ In comparison to the control group, three-year-old children who had attended Head Start demonstrated modest gains in language, literacy, pre-writing, and math skills by the end of their Head Start year.
- ❖ Three-year-old children with special needs had favorable math outcomes by the end of first grade.



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## Cognitive Impacts (Continued)

- ❖ In comparison to the control group, four-year-old children attending Head Start demonstrated modest gains in language and literacy skills by the end of their Head Start year.
- ❖ Four-year-old children with mild depressive symptoms had favorable language and literacy impacts at the end of first grade.



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## Socio-Emotional Impacts

- ❖ Three-year-old children with special needs showed improvements in the socio-emotional domain at the end of first grade.



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## Socio-Emotional Impacts (Continued)

- ❖ Three-year-olds who attended Head Start showed less hyperactive and problem behavior by the end of Head Start, favorable social skills and positive approaches to learning at the end of age 4, and less hyperactive behavior and increased social skills and positive approaches to learning by the end of their kindergarten year.

## Socio-Emotional Impacts (Continued)

- ❖ Parents of the three-year-old Head Start group children reported evidence of a closer relationship with their child and reported a more positive overall relationship with their child than parents of the control group children did by the end of first grade.
- ❖ Children who attended Head Start as four-year-olds were found to exhibit less withdrawn behavior by the end of first grade than those in the control group.

## Health Impacts

- ❖ Three-year-old children attending Head Start were more likely to receive access to dental care by the end of their Head Start year and again at the end of their age 4 year.
- ❖ In comparison to the control group children, these children were more likely to have access to health insurance at the end of their kindergarten year, an overall excellent/good health status by their end of their Head Start year, and care for an injury in the last month by the end of the age 4 year.



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## Health Impacts (Continued)

- ❖ Four-year-old Head Start children were 15 percent more likely to receive dental care, more likely to have health insurance coverage by the end of kindergarten and first grade, and more likely to possess an overall excellent/good health status by their end of their kindergarten year.
- ❖ Four-year-old children who were dual language learners were more likely to have health insurance coverage at the end of their Head Start and kindergarten years and were more likely to have access to dental care by the end of first grade.





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## Impacts on Parenting Practices

- ❖ Three-year-old Head Start children were less likely to be spanked in the last week at the end of their Head Start year and kindergarten, less likely to have parents using an authoritarian parenting style with them by the end of the age 4 year and first grade, more likely to have parents read to them during their Head Start year, and more likely to have parents involving them in cultural enrichment activities by the end of their Head Start year.



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## Myth of the Fade-Out Effect

- This study found relatively few favorable impacts when children who had attended Head Start finished first grade. However, this study is only one of numerous studies evaluating Head Start over the past forty-five years of Head Start's history.



## Myth of the Fade-Out Effect (Continued)

- This study was not designed to and does not capture the intermediate and long-term benefits of Head Start, but numerous rigorous studies have done so.
- Those studies found Head Start decreased criminal activity, child mortality rates, the need for special education, the need for children to repeat grades later in school, and increased achievement test scores, high school graduation rates, and immunization rates.



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## Myth of the Fade-Out Effect (Continued)

- Moreover, a very recent econometric study found that Head Start had significant favorable impacts on long-term outcomes of adults 19 years or older who attended Head Start.



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## Policy Implications

- Funding
- Future Head Start Reauthorization
- Early Childhood Defined as Birth to Grade 3



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## Conclusions

- Yasmina Vinci asserts, “We look forward to using the Head Start Impact Study and other studies to further improve Head Start for the benefit of the most vulnerable children, their families, and their communities. This study demonstrates that Head Start programs are of good quality and finds favorable cognitive, socio-emotional, and health impacts for children who attended Head Start as well as positive impacts on parenting practices.



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## Conclusions (Continued)

- This study shows that Head Start meets its mission: to help to prepare children for kindergarten. Yet the study indicates that many of the early gains made in Head Start prior to kindergarten might be lost by the end of first grade. We look forward to working with the Department of Education and school districts across the country to help improve post-Head Start education by sharing strategies, such as parent involvement, that have worked well in Head Start and should work well in the elementary school setting."



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# The End