



BEYOND ABCs AND 123s: THE HEAD START CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

HEAD START HISTORY

In 1964, the Federal Government asked a panel of child development experts to create a program to help communities meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children. The panel's report became the blueprint for Project Head Start.

Project Head Start, launched as an eight-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1965, was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs. Recruiting children age three to school entry age, Head Start was enthusiastically received by education and child development specialists, community leaders, and parents across the Nation. Head Start serves children and their families each year in urban and rural areas in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Territories, including many American Indians and migrant children.

In 1969, Head Start was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development in the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and has now become a program within the Administration on Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. A well established though still innovative program, Head Start has had a strong impact on communities across the country, as well as on the early childhood field.

Grants are awarded by the ACF Regional Offices and the Office of Head Start's American Indian-Alaska Native, and Migrant and Seasonal Program Branches directly to local public agencies, private non-profit and for-profit organizations, Indian Tribes, and school systems for the purpose of operating Head Start programs at the community level.

HEAD START PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

The Head Start program has a long tradition of delivering comprehensive and high quality services designed to foster healthy development in low-income children. Head Start grantees and delegate agencies provide a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, and mental health; nutrition; social services; and parent involvement.

In addition, the entire range of Head Start services is responsive and appropriate to each child's and family's developmental, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage and experience.

All Head Start programs must adhere to Program Performance Standards. The [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#) define the services that Head Start Programs are to provide to the children and families they serve. They constitute the expectations and requirements that Head Start grantees must meet. They are designed to ensure that the Head Start goals and objectives are implemented successfully, that the Head Start philosophy continues to thrive, and that all grantee and delegate agencies maintain the highest possible quality in the provision of Head Start services.

Head Start Program Service Areas

Education: Ensuring children enrolled in Head Start begin school ready to learn is a primary program goal. Activities are directed toward skill and knowledge domains and domain elements, as well as social, emotional, and physical development. Indicators of each child's progress are incorporated in the program's annual self-assessment.

Health: Wellness is recognized as a significant contributor to each child's ability to thrive and develop. Accordingly, health screenings evaluate the child's overall health status and regular health check-ups and good practices in oral health, hygiene, nutrition, personal care, and safety are incorporated in the program.

Family and Community Partnerships: This service area recognizes the vital contributions made by parents and community members. Families receive support to become more self-sufficient, and both groups are involved in the operation, governance, and evaluation of the program.

Disabilities: Fully including children with disabilities is a required element of the Head Start program. This initiative is beneficial to all involved: children with and without disabilities, parents of children with and without disabilities, and staff members.

Program Management and Operation: This aspect of the program focuses on providing the systems and support to deliver high-quality child development services to children from low-income families, including training for teaching and other staff.

HEAD START FUNDING

Nationally, in 2006, Head Start provided 1604 grantees a total of \$6,785,771,000 in Federal funding to serve 909,201 Head Start and Early Head Start children. These are approximately 40% of those who are eligible for Head Start. Federal funds represent 80% of the total funding for each Head Start or Early Head Start program.

Prepared by: *Gayle Cunningham, Executive Director, Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity, 300 Eighth Avenue West, Birmingham, AL 35204, 205-327- 7550, gcunningham@jcceo.org*