



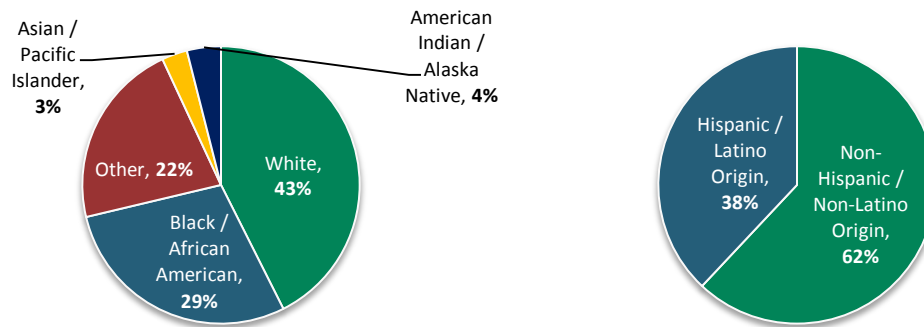
OUTCOMES: HEAD START

Head Start is a federally-funded early education program for low-income families. About 1,700 local agencies (both public and private) [receive grants](#) from the Department of Health and Human Services to administer Head Start programs. Head Start uses a “whole child” and “whole family” approach [to include](#) health services, parental involvement, and social services alongside its educational services. The Head Start program [includes](#) the original program for preschoolers, Early Head Start (a newer and smaller program serving children younger than 3 years old), American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. In 2013, Head Start [programs served](#) 932,164 families, and Early Head Start programs served 150,100 children and 6,391 pregnant women and their families.

Who benefits?

Head Start participants come from low-income families. Most families [must have incomes](#) at or below the federal poverty level in order to be eligible for enrollment (with some exceptions for families meeting certain criteria such as foster parents or children with special needs).

Head Start participants are disproportionately African American, American Indian/Alaska Natives, and/or Hispanic, compared to the national averages for children.



The above figures are based on [data](#) from 2014. For comparison, [according to the US Census](#), approximately 15% of the US child population was Black or African American, 1.6% were American Indians or Alaska Natives, and 24% was Hispanic or Latino in 2013.

Head Start participants come from working families. [Three-quarters](#) of Head Start children live with a parent who is working full-time, according to a 2011 report.

Head Start is Underfunded

Head Start was hit hard by sequester cuts in 2013. [During sequestration](#), Head Start lost \$405 million in funding, which meant that 57,000 children lost access to Head Start services. While the lost funds have since been restored, Head Start [could face](#) similar cuts again if sequestration is not permanently fixed.

Even absent cuts, the FY 2016 appropriations bill does not adequately expand Head Start. [Compared to](#) the President’s budget, either 570,000 fewer children would receive full-day, full-year services, the program would serve 140,000 fewer children, or a combination of the two. At the same time, child care costs are rising, furthering the need to expand Head Start: the average annual cost of center-based care for an infant is [almost half](#) of the income of a family of 3 living at the poverty level.

As a result, not enough children are served by Head Start. [There are currently](#) almost 6 million children ages 0 to 5 living in poverty, while total Head Start enrollment is less than 1 million. The National Head Start Association [estimates](#) that less than 5 % of children from birth to age 3 and less than half of eligible children ages 3 to 5 are served by Head Start. As a result, many Head Start centers have long wait lists.

Why it Matters: Good Outcomes of Head Start

Many of these outcomes were compiled by CHN members, the National Head Start Association and the National Women's Law Center. See their fact sheets [here](#) and [here](#) for even more data.

Children are more prepared for elementary school and experience immediate academic gains.

- Head Start participants improved according to all measured cognitive and social-emotional metrics, compared to a control group in a nationally representative [randomized experiment](#).
- Four-year-old Head Start participants [had significantly faster language skill development](#), compared to similar four-year-olds who were waitlisted for Head Start.

Children also have long-term gains.

- Head Start participants are more likely to attend college and be employed and less likely to be a teen parent or in poor health, when [compared](#) to siblings who did not enroll. This closes one-third of the gap between children with median family incomes and those in the bottom quartile, and occurs even though these impacts are not visible in later test scores.
- According to another study, white Head Start participants have a greater probability of completing high school and attending college (as well as higher earnings), as [compared](#) to non-participating siblings. While more needs to be done to close racial achievement gaps to produce similar gains for students of color, Head Start also benefitted African American participants, who were less likely to be charged or convicted of a crime.
- Head Start has significant long-term benefits for [levels of educational attainment](#), according to research looking at a discontinuity in Head Start funding.
- [A national review](#) of 36 different studies found that early childhood programs (including Head Start programs) increase educational achievement and high school graduation rates.
- Researchers have found more generally that early childhood education helps children develop skills that aren't reflected in later test scores but [still re-materialize](#) in long-term adult outcomes such as lifetime earnings, indicating that test score fade-out does not mean Head Start has no long-term effects.

The “whole-family” and “whole-child” approaches have non-academic benefits as well.

- [Researchers found](#) that Head Start participation is associated with decreased child mortality between ages 5 and 9.
- Head Start participants have been found to be [more likely](#) to receive dental care, routine medical [checkups](#), and [immunizations](#). They also have [improved](#) overall health outcomes.
- Head Start [promotes parental involvement](#): according to the National Women's Law Center, in 2009, over 850,000 parents volunteered in their local Head Start program, and 228,000 fathers participated in regularly scheduled activities designed to involve them in Head Start and Early Head Start.
- Head Start [can be an effective means](#) of connecting low-income families to important financial resources, such as starter bank accounts or free tax preparation services that can help families claim the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Head Start is effective as a form of childcare: according to the Center for American Progress, in 2012, [almost 40%](#) of Head Start families included either two working parents or a single working parent.

Cost-benefit analysis shows that even in purely economic terms, investments in Head Start pay off.

- Head Start [is cost-effective](#), according to even the most modest estimates. Only very small test score gains (which have been proven to exist) are required to translate into increases in health and lifetime earnings as well as reductions in crime, grade retention, and special education placements that are collectively greater than the costs of the program.
- A study from the Brookings Institution cited early childhood education as [one of the four most cost-effective](#) investments in children meriting further governmental investment (in purely economic terms).
- [Another study](#) found that Head Start provides 80% of the gains of other early childhood programs at 60% of the cost.

If anything, the above data underestimates the impact of Head Start.

- [Evidence shows](#) a child's participation in Head Start also benefits non-participating siblings. Not only is this a largely unaccounted-for benefit of Head Start, it also means that the effects of Head Start documented in studies comparing siblings are an underestimation, as even the control group (the sibling not participating in Head Start) receives some of the benefit from the program.
- Head Start is improving its overall performance levels as [new accountability measures](#) are introduced. In 2012, for the first time, low-performing Head Start providers were required to compete with other potential providers to keep their grants. As low-performing programs are replaced, Head Start's effectiveness will continue to improve.
- Head Start is also improving due to new requirements for teacher qualifications. Since 2007, the percentage of Head Start teachers with Bachelor's degrees [has risen by](#) over 73%, according to the National Head Start Association.