

## **Head Start History: 1965-Present**

Head Start is the most important social and educational investment in children, families, and communities that the United States has ever undertaken. Planning for this enormous social program began in the early 1960s when Attorney General Robert Kennedy began work on finding a way to stop juvenile delinquency. Experts who studied the problem soon came to realize that the cause was poverty. After the assassination of President John Kennedy, President Lyndon Johnson took up the cause of building a "Great Society" by declaring "War on Poverty."

Head Start was launched in 1965 as a comprehensive child development program. Over the past 40 years, it has provided a beacon of hope and support to 22 million low-income children and their families across the United States and in territories outside of the United States. Head Start has remained strong in the face of changing political and fiscal climates over the past 40 years because it has continually improved the services it delivers to children and families and responded to the changing needs of local communities.

### **Head Start**

In 1965, nearly half of the nation's poor were young children, and the Johnson administration was in the enviable position of having a surplus of money to spend. Child development experts had found that early intervention programs could significantly affect the cognitive and socio-emotional development of low-income children. As a former teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Texas, President Johnson believed strongly that education was the key to breaking the cycle of poverty.

Sargent Shriver, who happened to be the brother-in-law of the late President Kennedy and also of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, was named head of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Shriver convened a panel of 14 experts to develop a strategy for meeting the needs of preschoolers living in poverty. At the beginning of 1965, the panel issued "Recommendations for a Head Start Program." The panel envisioned Head Start as a way to enhance children's social competence through a comprehensive program that included health, nutrition, education, social services, and parent involvement components.

At first, Head Start was an eight-week summer program staffed by thousands of volunteers from across the nation. The plan was to open the doors to a few thousand children nationwide. When more than 561,000 children showed up, each one was welcomed with open arms.

Many summer programs became nine-month, half-day programs in the first few years, and Head Start moved to the Office of Child Development in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. (These offices were later renamed the Administration on Children, Youth and Families within the Department of Health and Human Services.) An effort to move the program to the Department of Education was actively opposed by Head Start supporters in the 1970s and in 2004; both times the move failed.

### **Legislative Initiatives**

Head Start was an ideal place to try new child care and educational approaches, and new legislation was passed to help more children and families. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1972 required that at least 10 percent of Head Start's enrollment include children with disabilities.

In 1972, the Child Development Associate (CDA) training and credentialing program was initiated to raise the qualifications of Head Start teachers and aides.

Two years later, Head Start reauthorization legislation called for program standards and practice guidelines in education, health, nutrition, social services, and parent involvement. Regional and state training and technical assistance centers were set up to help meet the new standards and train personnel.

### **1980s and 1990s**

In 1984, the Indian and Migrant branches of Head Start became separate regions; male involvement in Head Start was emphasized; demonstration projects further enhanced services to Head Start children and their families.

In 1988, Congress authorized the Comprehensive Child Development program, a five-year demonstration program to provide comprehensive, integrated, continuous support services to low-income families with infants. Twenty-four programs were funded initially and in 1992-93, 10 more programs with a special emphasis on services to families with substance abuse problems were added.

An initiative to promote family self-sufficiency began with the funding of 66 Family Service Center (FSC) projects in 1990. FSCs promote self-sufficiency by addressing the needs of Head Start families facing illiteracy, substance abuse, and unemployment.

The National Head Start/Public School Transition Project: was designed to determine whether providing education, health, social services, and parent involvement services to children through the third grade would help to maintain benefits achieved during the regular Head Start years.

In 1994, Congress passed a Head Start reauthorization act that expanded and improved the program. The legislation required the development of quality standards (including revising the Program Performance Standards), the development of performance measures, and improved monitoring of local programs. It authorized family-centered programs for infants and toddlers and the development of a renewed training and technical assistance initiative. It established new standards for classroom teachers and family service workers and paved the way for mentor teachers and staff fellowships. The legislation also required a continuing program of research, demonstration, and evaluation to improve Head Start quality and disseminate new ideas.

### **Funding for Head Start Over the Years**

In 1965, Head Start had a \$96.4 million budget and served 561,000 children through summer programs. Funding and the number of children served grew steadily throughout the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, the conversion to year-round operations and some funding cuts decreased the total number of children served. Funding gradually increased in the mid-to-late 1970s and, by 1979, the Head Start budget had reached \$680 million. Ten years later, the program's budget was \$1.2 billion and services were being provided to more than 450,000 children throughout the United States and its territories.

The Human Service Reauthorization Act in 1990 dramatically increased Head Start funding in an effort to serve all eligible 4-year-olds and 30 percent of eligible 5-year-olds by 1994. The Head Start Reauthorization Act of 1994 expanded Head Start still further and proposed yet another funding increase. Head Start's appropriation for 1995 was \$3.53 billion, with services to be provided to some 752,000 children. The appropriation for Fiscal Year 2000 climbed to more than \$5.2 billion to serve Head Start and Early Head Start children and their families. Today's budget is \$6.8 billion.

When President Bill Clinton assumed office in 1993, he praised Head Start as one of our country's most successful social programs, and the 1994 Head Start reauthorization legislation marked a new chapter in the history of the program. Key initiatives in recent years have expanded Head Start services and enhanced program quality. These include Early Head Start, for children 0-3, a reorganization of the training and technical assistance system, issuance of revised Program Performance Standards and Guidance, revision of the monitoring system, and a renewed emphasis on professional development, creating partnerships, family literacy, and research.

### **Early Head Start**

With the reauthorization of the Head Start program in 1994, Congress established a new program for low-income families with pregnant women, infants, and toddlers: Early Head Start. Congress was responding to strong evidence suggesting that early intervention through high quality programs enhances children's development, helps parents become better caregivers and teachers, and helps them meet their own goals, including economic independence. There are currently 525 Early Head Start programs serving some 39,800 infants, toddlers, and pregnant women.

### **Training and Technical Assistance**

In 1996, the Head Start Bureau undertook a review of its training and technical assistance (T/TA) system. This resulted in a network of "cooperative agreements" and a new partnering between federal staff and T/TA providers across the country.

In addition to the Central and Regional Offices, key components of the T/TA Network include:

- Quality Improvement Centers and the Quality Improvement Centers for Disabilities Services in each region. QICs provide T/TA to all Head Start grantees and delegate agencies. They are staffed with specialists in early childhood education and development, health, family and community development, technology, transportation, facilities, and fiscal/administrative management.
- Regional Coordinating Councils, which meet quarterly to review the T/TA needs in the region.
- National contacts, including the National Head Start T/TA Resource Center, the Head Start Publications Management Center, and the Early Head Start National Resource Center.

### **Revised Program Performance Standards and Guidance**

Head Start Program Performance Standards, originally were revised in 1996 to include standards for services to families with children ages birth to 3, pregnant women, family literacy, and transition. The standards were also reorganized into three new major areas - Early Child Development and Health Services, Family and Community Partnerships, and Program Design and Management.

### **Professional Development**

At least half of all Head Start teachers in center-based programs must have an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree. Quality improvement funds are available to all Head Start and Early Head Start programs to improve the training and qualifications of Head Start classroom teachers.

## **Partnerships**

Head Start is placing a great emphasis on creating partnerships to enhance services in support of Head Start children and families. It is increasingly important to form partnerships with those who will enable Head Start to provide full-day, full-year services.

## **Family Literacy**

The Head Start Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the National Center for Family Literacy to implement the Head Start Family Literacy Project. The overall goal of the project is to improve the quality, intensity, and outcomes of family literacy services provided by Head Start and Early Head Start grantees in order to increase lifelong learning for children and their parents and to assist families in achieving economic self-sufficiency.

## **Research**

As increasing attention focuses on outcomes and accountability for federal resources, Head Start has been challenged to document its effectiveness in new ways. Several studies have been undertaken to meet this challenge, including The Head Start Impact Study, the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), and the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. FACES findings show that Head Start classroom quality is generally good, and extensive research demonstrates that program quality is related to children's outcomes.

*All of these initiatives are aimed at enhancing our nation's ability to achieve its goal of providing high quality care and education and enhancing opportunities for all children. As we move forward into Head Start's fifth decade, Head Start is ready to take the lead in improving the well-being of our children; preserving and supporting their families; and strengthening the neighborhoods and communities in which they grow.*