

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

DEFINITION: Number of funded Head Start slots. Actual enrollment may vary.

SIGNIFICANCE

High-quality early education is an effective long-term strategy to combat poverty. Several longitudinal studies have shown that low-income children who receive high-quality early education experience better outcomes across a variety of measures. One ongoing study, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study, found that low-income children that attended the High/Scope early education program had higher earnings at age 40 and were less likely to drop out of high school, use drugs, and have involvement with the criminal justice system.¹

Such studies show that quality early education benefits the children that participate, as well as the broader society, through increased tax revenue and decreased spending on criminal justice.

Head Start is a federally funded program that provides grants to local for-profit and non-profit agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and their families. Head Start programs not only prepare children with the skills they need to succeed in elementary school; they also work to ensure that children receive the health, nutritional, and social services they need in order to be truly ready to learn. Parental involvement is a major component of every Head Start program, and parents are provided with assistance to meet their own educational, literacy, and employment goals.² The federal government provides 80% of Head Start funding, while local agencies are responsible for a 20% match, which can be in the form of “in kind” contributions, including monetary contributions, volunteer services, and the donation of goods and services.³

Children from families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold are eligible for Head Start services, as are children living with foster families,



children with disabilities, and children whose families receive public assistance (TANF or SSI). Head Start’s income eligibility threshold is lower than the thresholds used by the Child Care Assistance Program or most public preschool programs.

While Head Start serves preschool-aged children (primarily four and five year-olds), the Early Head Start program serves pregnant women and children from birth to three. Nationally, Head Start programs served less than half of eligible children, while Early Head Start served less than 2% of eligible children in 2008.⁴ Some states provide Head Start to more children by directly funding additional slots, though Louisiana does not follow this practice.

DATA SOURCE

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. Figures for Orleans, Jefferson, and Plaquemines parishes, which reflect October 2006 data, were provided directly by local grantees: Pearlle Elloie of Total Community Action (New Orleans), Elaine O’Conner (Jefferson Community Action Programs), and Janel Mumme (Plaquemines Parish School Board).

¹ Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Ph.D., “The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40 Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions,” High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, retrieved from www.highscope.org on 5/1/2009.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, “About Head Start,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, retrieved from www.acf.hhs.gov/ on 6/1/2009.

³ National Head Start Association, “Head Start Basics,” National Head Start Association, 2009, retrieved from www.nhsa.org/ on 6/1/2009.

⁴ National Head Start Association, “Head Start Leaders Have High Hopes for New President,” 2008, retrieved from www.nhsa.org/ on 6/1/2009.

NUMBER OF HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START SLOTS

2006

	No.
LOUISIANA	19,462
Acadia	417
Allen	162
Ascension	311
Assumption	114
Avoyelles	292
Beauregard	74
Bienville	100
Bossier	443
Caddo	1,481
Calcasieu	507
Caldwell	63
Cameron	80
Catahoula	76
Claiborne	72
Concordia	155
De Soto	85
East Baton Rouge	1,418
East Carroll	138
East Feliciana	184
Evangeline	249
Franklin	136
Grant	167
Iberia	418
Iberville	360
Jackson	163
Jefferson	944
Jefferson Davis	200
Lafayette	594
Lafourche	347
La Salle	60
Lincoln	260
Livingston	298
Madison	162
Morehouse	289
Natchitoches	224
Orleans	872
Ouachita	839
Plaquemines	111
Pointe Coupee	0
Rapides	958
Red River	50
Richland	192
Sabine	120
St. Bernard	0
St. Charles	257
St. Helena	98
St. James	241
St. John the Baptist	193
St. Landry	935
St. Martin	436
St. Mary	357
St. Tammany	415
Tangipahoa	609
Tensas	0
Terrebonne	200
Union	80
Vermilion	307
Vernon	300
Washington	224
Webster	270
West Baton Rouge	136
West Carroll	51
West Feliciana	95
Winn	73