



# The Head Start Program

## Background

Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood program established in 1965 to ameliorate the effects of poverty on preschool children and their families. Initially the program was an eight-week summer program that gradually expanded its scope of activities, length of operating year and funding base. Today more than 1,400 grantees throughout the country, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Trust territories provide services to more than 750,000 children and their families annually through a \$4.3 billion federal government appropriation. Since 1965, Head Start has served more than 14 million at-risk children. Legislation in 1994 enabled the funding of infant/toddler projects. To date, approximately 200 grantees throughout the country operate one of these Early Head Start programs. LBUSD Head Start was awarded an Early Head Start program, effective July 1, 1998.

Head Start is a federal to local continuation grant administered through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Head Start Bureau. Each Head Start grantee is assigned a Federal ACF regional office Head Start specialist who is responsible for grant application submissions, technical assistance requests, and program oversight.

## Program Summary

As a family-focused, comprehensive child development program, Head Start provides education, health, nutrition, social services, and parent involvement to zero through five year old at-risk children and their families in either a center-based or home-based program option. In addition, at least ten percent of enrolled children have been professionally diagnosed as having a disability.

This comprehensive approach stresses the delivery of integrated services to promote self-help, self-esteem, socialization, and school readiness skills for children and encourages family self-sufficiency by working with parents both as adult learners and as the most important influence in their children's lives.

Children are screened and assessed for cognitive development activities in the classroom; screened for dental and medical problems and provided appropriate follow-up services where needed; fed at least one-third of their daily nutritional requirements when attending classes through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Feeding Program; and observed by mental health professionals to ensure that emotional and psychological needs are being met. Individual Education Plans are developed and implemented for disabled children in addition to regular program services.

As members of the Policy Council, parents are decision-makers for the program and provide input into classroom activities by participating in center committees. They are invaluable as volunteers in the classroom, as well as in other component areas. Parents are made aware of community resources available to them through the social services component and are offered both formal and informal training on a variety of cross-component subjects, such as preventative health practices, parenting skills, child abuse awareness/avoidance, and sound nutrition planning for the family.

Current and former parents are encouraged to apply for entry level positions in the Head Start program. Parents are supported in this endeavor through training and classes to qualify them for these positions. Approximately 33 percent of all Head Start staff nationally are former Head Start parents.

## LBUSD Head Start

The Long Beach Unified School District Head Start program currently provides comprehensive services to 1,732 at-risk children and their families in 21 center-based sites. Depending upon the option in which the preschooler is enrolled, each child receives between 3 1/2 hours and ten hours of classroom experience a day in either a traditional or year round schedule. Early Head Start serves an additional 96 pregnant women, infants and toddlers in two center-based sites.

A comprehensive and integrated Head Start delivery system is managed by a team of service area managers, two assistant directors, and a program director to assure that direct service providers, such as the teaching teams, health assistants and family service workers, have the families at the neighborhood level. Currently the program has a staff of 270 and receives annual federal funding exceeding \$10 million.

