

Children Enrolled in Head Start

DEFINITION

Children enrolled in Head Start is the percentage of eligible children enrolled in the Head Start preschool program in October 2008.

SIGNIFICANCE

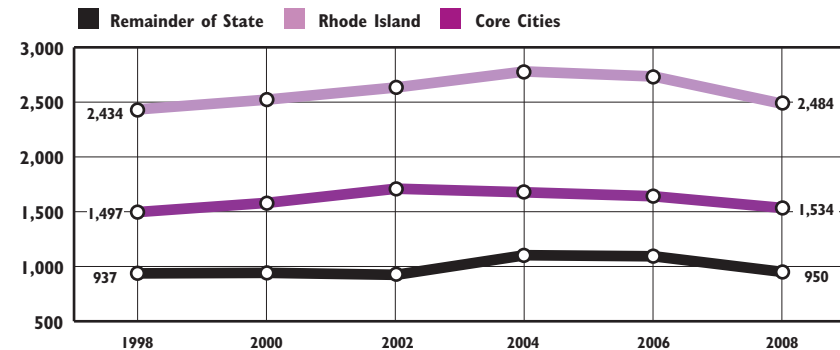
Head Start is a federally-funded comprehensive early childhood program for low-income preschool children and their families. It is designed to address a wide variety of needs during the two years before kindergarten so that low-income children can begin school on a more equal footing with their more economically advantaged peers.¹ Head Start programs deliver early education, medical and dental screenings and referrals, nutritional services, mental health services, parental involvement activities, and social service referrals for the whole family.²

Family income is strongly correlated with children's cognitive and social skills at school entry. On average, before kindergarten entry, children in the highest socio-economic group have cognitive test scores that are 60% higher than the scores of children in the lowest socio-economic group. Children in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold are typically 18 months behind their peers at age four.³

Head Start centers are typically of higher quality than most other early care and education programs available to low-income parents.⁴ Researchers have found that there are both short-term and long-term benefits for children who participate in Head Start, including improved literacy skills, reduced behavior problems, less grade retention, reduced special education enrollment and increased high school graduation rates.^{5,6}

Annual federal Head Start funding has not kept pace with inflation since 2002, resulting in fewer children served across the country.^{7,8} In December 2007, Head Start was reauthorized by the federal government with increased authorized funding levels and new rules designed to expand access, improve quality and strengthen collaboration among state early childhood programs. Eligibility for Head Start was adjusted to include children in families up to 130% of the federal poverty guidelines, with priority enrollment given to children in families living at or below 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.⁹ Rhode Island supplements federal funding with state funds so that Head Start programs can serve more eligible children.¹⁰

Head Start Enrollment, Rhode Island, 1998 – 2008



Source: Rhode Island Head Start program data, compiled by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 1998 – 2008.

◆ In October 2008, Rhode Island Head Start programs served 2,484 children, 40% of the estimated 6,200 eligible children. In the core cities, 34% of eligible children were enrolled in Head Start, compared with 58% in the remainder of the state.¹¹

◆ In 2008, state funding for Head Start was cut, eliminating 244 of the 400 state-funded Head Start slots for the 2008-2009 school year.¹² The state's Comprehensive Child Care Services Program, designed to provide Head Start-like services in child care centers serving low-income children, was also eliminated, resulting in approximately 300 Head Start-eligible children losing enhanced educational and social services through their child care.¹³

Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007

◆ The federal reauthorization of Head Start in 2007 expanded eligibility to children in families with incomes below 130% of federal poverty guidelines (\$23,803 for a family of three in 2009). Children also are eligible if their families are homeless or receive public assistance.¹⁴

◆ New federal regulations require all Head Start teachers to have at least an associate's degree by 2011 and 50% of Head Start teachers in the U.S. to have at least a bachelor's degree by 2013.¹⁵ In 2006 in Rhode Island, 70% of Head Start teachers had at least an associate's degree (compared with 72% across the U.S.), and 32% had a bachelor's degree or higher (compared with 38% nationally).¹⁶

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Table 32.

Children Enrolled in Head Start, Rhode Island, 2008

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN AGES 3 & 4	ESTIMATED # OF CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR HEAD START*	# OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HEAD START	% OF ESTIMATED ELIGIBLE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HEAD START
Barrington	416	10	1	10%
Bristol	547	62	16	26%
Burrillville	370	49	38	77%
Central Falls	607	342	137	40%
Charlestown	184	25	8	32%
Coventry	789	70	43	61%
Cranston	1,689	186	209	100%
Cumberland	776	64	0	0%
East Greenwich	381	33	0	0%
East Providence	1,030	181	110	61%
Exeter	220	60	0	0%
Foster	76	0	0	NA
Glocester	313	19	4	21%
Hopkinton	263	50	6	12%
Jamestown	71	0	1	100%
Johnston	638	75	48	64%
Lincoln	483	32	0	0%
Little Compton	66	3	1	34%
Middletown	508	61	59	96%
Narragansett	290	23	13	58%
New Shoreham	27	1	0	0%
Newport	599	264	125	47%
North Kingstown	750	100	39	39%
North Providence	540	95	40	42%
North Smithfield	180	14	0	0%
Pawtucket	2,112	780	200	26%
Portsmouth	443	24	11	47%
Providence	4,590	2,370	763	32%
Richmond	226	10	3	29%
Scituate	164	6	6	100%
Smithfield	365	8	6	79%
South Kingstown	660	33	24	72%
Tiverton	261	15	19	100%
Warren	243	32	20	63%
Warwick	1,989	189	164	87%
West Greenwich	241	15	0	0%
West Warwick	791	266	103	39%
Westerly	538	95	61	64%
Woonsocket	1,233	537	206	38%
Core Cities	9,932	4,559	1,534	34%
Remainder of State	15,737	1,640	950	58%
Rhode Island	25,669	6,200	2,484	40%

Note to Table

The estimated Head Start eligible population was adjusted in the 2009 Factbook to reflect increased income eligibility guidelines passed as part of the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*. The estimated number of Head Start eligible children is calculated by multiplying the number of three and four-year-old children in each community by the percentage of children under age five living in families with incomes below 130% of the poverty level in that community, according to Census 2000, Summary File 3. Because of the changes in eligibility, the percentage of eligible children enrolled in Head Start cannot be compared with previous Factbooks. Also, this table includes all children ages three to five enrolled in Head Start. Enrollment data in previous Factbooks did not include five-year-olds in the table.

*This is an estimate of the income-eligible population and does not take into account other children who are eligible for Head Start services (e.g., children in homeless families) or changes in child population and poverty rates since 2000. Also, Head Start regulations allow 10% of enrolled children to be over the income threshold.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, all children (ages three to five) enrolled as of October 2008. Children enrolled are sorted by place of residence of child, not the location of the Head Start program.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

References

¹⁴ Currie, J. & Neidell, M. (2003). *Getting inside the "black box" of Head Start quality: What matters and what doesn't?* (Working paper 10091). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

² *Head Start participants, programs, families, and staff in 2006*. (2008). Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

³ Klein, L. & Knitzer, J. (2007). *Promoting effective early learning: What every policymaker and educator should know*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University.

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