

Children Enrolled in Head Start

DEFINITION

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

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

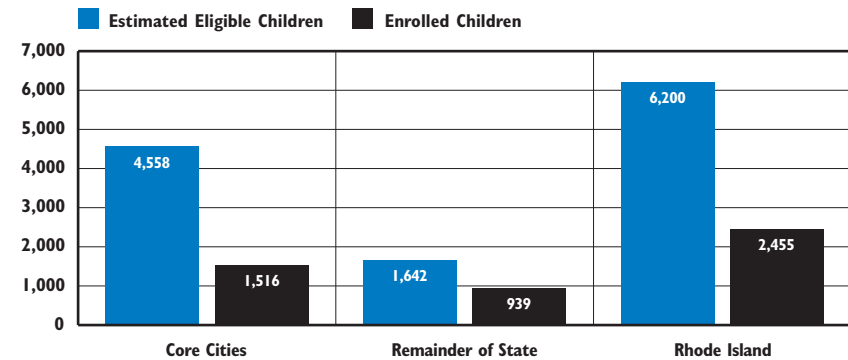
Family income is strongly correlated with children's cognitive and social skills at school entry. Before kindergarten entry, children in the highest socio-economic group have average cognitive test scores that are 60% higher than the average scores of children in the lowest socio-economic group. Children 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 children who participate in Head Start show improvements in language and literacy skills.^{5,6} Researchers have found lasting impacts in reduced grade retention and special education placement and increased high school graduation rates.⁷

Since 2002 annual federal Head Start funding has not kept pace with inflation resulting in fewer children served across the country.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

Access to Head Start, Rhode Island, 2009



Source: Rhode Island Head Start program data compiled by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2009.

- ◆ In October 2009, Rhode Island Head Start programs served 2,455 children, 40% of the estimated 6,200 eligible children. In the core cities, 33% of eligible children were enrolled in Head Start compared with 57% in the remainder of the state.¹¹
- ◆ In 2008 and 2009, state funding for Head Start was cut.^{12,13} For the 2009-2010 school year there were 129 state-funded Head Start slots.¹⁴
- ◆ Beginning in 2010, federal stimulus funding to expand Head Start services in Rhode Island will create 18 new Head Start slots in Providence.¹⁵

Head Start and Public Pre-K

- ◆ Across the U.S., a growing number of states are establishing publicly-funded, voluntary Pre-K for children ages three and four. Some states target enrollment to low-income and at-risk children while other states strive to provide universal access.¹⁶ Federally-funded Head Start programs can partner with state-managed Pre-K to serve more children and/or to expand resources for improved quality and access.
- ◆ Rhode Island began a publicly funded Pre-K program in September 2009 with seven classrooms serving 126 children. One of the classrooms is operated by a Head Start program. Funding for the Pre-K program is a combination of state funds and federal Title I funds invested by local school districts.¹⁷

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Table 36.

Children Enrolled in Head Start, Rhode Island, 2009

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN AGES 3 & 4	ESTIMATED ELIGIBLE CHILDREN < 100% OF FPL*	ESTIMATED ELIGIBLE CHILDREN 100-129% OF FPL*	# OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HEAD START	ESTIMATED % OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HEAD START
Barrington	416	10	0	2	21%
Bristol	547	54	9	35	56%
Burrillville	370	35	14	21	43%
Central Falls	607	260	82	98	29%
Charlestown	184	7	17	8	32%
Coventry	789	45	25	39	56%
Cranston	1,689	143	43	206	100%
Cumberland	776	32	32	3	5%
East Greenwich	381	29	5	1	3%
East Providence	1,030	134	46	107	59%
Exeter	220	35	25	5	8%
Foster	76	0	0	0	NA
Glocester	313	18	2	2	10%
Hopkinton	263	19	31	10	20%
Jamestown	71	0	0	0	NA
Johnston	638	55	20	57	76%
Lincoln	483	24	7	8	25%
Little Compton	66	3	0	4	100%
Middletown	508	30	32	45	73%
Narragansett	290	18	4	7	31%
New Shoreham	27	1	0	2	100%
Newport	599	223	41	118	45%
North Kingstown	750	85	15	37	37%
North Providence	540	60	35	51	54%
North Smithfield	180	13	1	0	0%
Pawtucket	2,112	643	136	184	24%
Portsmouth	443	24	0	9	38%
Providence	4,590	1,919	451	797	34%
Richmond	226	7	4	5	48%
Scituate	164	6	0	3	49%
Smithfield	365	5	3	5	66%
South Kingstown	660	33	0	23	69%
Tiverton	261	12	2	15	100%
Warren	243	17	15	25	79%
Warwick	1,989	137	52	144	76%
West Greenwich	241	11	5	3	19%
West Warwick	791	207	59	113	42%
Westerly	538	51	45	57	60%
Woonsocket	1,233	443	94	206	38%
Core Cities	9,932	3,695	863	1,516	33%
Remainder of State	15,737	1,153	489	939	57%
Rhode Island	25,669	4,848	1,352	2,455	40%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, all children enrolled (ages three to five) as of October 2009. Children enrolled are listed by residence of child, not location of the Head Start program.

The estimated number of children eligible for Head Start is divided into two categories (below 100% of the Federal Poverty Line and between 100 and 129% of the Federal Poverty Line) as described in the 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 from Census 2000, Summary File 3 by the percentage of children under age five living in families with incomes below 100% of the poverty level and between 100 and 129% of the poverty level in that community, according to Census 2000, Summary File 3.

*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, federal Head Start regulations allow 10% of enrolled children to be over the income threshold.

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.
- ⁵ *Head Start impact study: First year findings (Executive Summary)*. (2005). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

(continued on page 170)