

Children Enrolled in Head Start

DEFINITION

Children enrolled in Head Start is the percentage of eligible 3 and 4 year old children enrolled in the Head Start preschool program as of October 2003.

SIGNIFICANCE

Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood program for low-income preschool children and their families.¹ Children are eligible for Head Start if their family's income is below 100% of the federal poverty line; the family receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or is enrolled in the Family Independence Program (FIP); or the family is using supportive services that are federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, such as transportation vouchers, subsidized child care, or job training. Children in foster care are also Head Start eligible. Up to 10% of the children served by Head Start can be in families that do not meet these eligibility guidelines, especially if the child has a special need.^{2,3}

The Head Start program is designed to provide low-income children with the socialization and school-readiness skills they need to enter public schools on an equal footing with more economically advantaged children. Head Start performance standards require that programs deliver a high-quality early

childhood education program; involve parents in program policy and planning; provide at least one nutritional meal per day; identify children's individual nutritional needs; ensure that each child has an ongoing source of health care; perform or obtain health, developmental and behavioral screenings; and make arrangements for mental health professionals to be available to identify mental health concerns and help locate needed treatment.⁴

Children in poor families are at greater risk for developmental delays and learning disabilities; have a greater prevalence of health and nutrition problems; and are more likely to have serious accidents, require special education, perform below grade level at school, drop out of school and earn less as adults.⁵ The Head Start program succeeds in narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and other children in vocabulary, writing, math skills and social skills, with the greatest gains among the most disadvantaged children.⁶ Long-term improvements include reduced rates of grade retention and need for special education services and increased rates of high school graduation.⁷



Children Enrolled in Head Start, Rhode Island, 1995-2003

- ◆ As of 2003, Head Start served 53% of the estimated 4,989 children ages 3 and 4 in Rhode Island.
- ◆ Between 1997 and 2000, there was a steady increase in the number of children who participated in Head Start. In Rhode Island in 2003, the Head Start Program experienced its highest enrollment to date with 2,646 children, an increase of 267 children since 1995.⁸
- ◆ Because Head Start is available to only half of Rhode Island's lowest-income children, resources were appropriated under Starting Right (Rhode Island's 1998 child care law) to create Comprehensive Child Care Networks which provide developmentally appropriate education and support services to children and families in underserved communities.⁹
- ◆ As of January 2004, the Comprehensive Child Care Networks were providing services to 320 children. Children in the lowest-income families are prioritized for services to ensure that the most disadvantaged children receive the services they need to start school ready to learn.¹⁰



Early Head Start

- ◆ Early Head Start is a national program developed in 1995 to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, support the early care and education of infants and toddlers ages birth to three, foster healthy family relationships and build community resources.¹¹
- ◆ Rhode Island's six Early Head Start programs are located in Warwick, Warren, Providence, Cranston, Johnston and Middletown. During 2003, 369 families and 402 infants and toddlers received Early Head Start services.¹²

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Table 25. Percent of Eligible Children Ages 3 and 4 Enrolled in Head Start, Rhode Island, 2003

CITY/TOWN	ESTIMATED ELIGIBLE CHILDREN AGED 3&4*	NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HEAD START	% OF ELIGIBLE 3&4 YEAR OLDS ENROLLED
Barrington	10	1	10%
Bristol	50	20	40%
Burrillville	36	23	64%
Central Falls	280	90	32%
Charlestown	6	10	100%*
Coventry	51	37	73%
Cranston	147	228	100%*
Cumberland	34	9	26%
East Greenwich	28	4	14%
East Providence	139	92	66%
Exeter	25	2	8%
Foster	0	0	NA
Glocester	15	6	40%
Hopkinton	15	2	13%
Jamestown	0	1	100%*
Johnston	55	44	80%
Lincoln	24	4	17%
Little Compton	3	1	33%
Middletown	30	23	77%
Narragansett	17	8	47%
New Shoreham	1	0	0%
Newport	218	138	63%
North Kingstown	87	30	34%
North Providence	63	43	68%
North Smithfield	16	3	19%
Pawtucket	598	193	32%
Portsmouth	24	5	21%
Providence	2,075	917	44%
Richmond	7	3	43%
Scituate	9	3	33%
Smithfield	5	7	100%*
South Kingstown	31	33	100%*
Tiverton	15	33	100%*
Warren	15	22	100%*
Warwick	133	173	100%*
West Greenwich	7	2	29%
West Warwick	209	125	60%
Westerly	56	69	100%*
Woonsocket	455	242	53%
Core Cities	3,835	1,705	44%
Remainder of State	1,154	941	82%
Rhode Island	4,989	2,646	53%

*Estimated Number Eligible is based on Census 2000 and may not reflect increases in eligible population.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Head Start Programs, children enrolled as of October 2003.

The denominator is the estimated number of eligible children based on the number of three and four-year-old children in each community multiplied by the poverty rate for children under 5 in that community, according to Census 2000. This is an estimate of the eligible population and does not take into account any increases or decreases in the number of eligible children enrolled in Head Start since 2000.

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

References for Indicator

- ¹⁴ *Head Start Fact Sheet* (2001). Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.
- ² Administration for Children and Families, Program Instruction: Receipt of Public Assistance and Determining Eligibility for Head Start (Log No. ACYF-PI-HS-99-06), 7/29/99.
- ³ Head Start Program Regulations and Program Guidance (45 CFR 1304, 1305).
- ⁵ Sherman, A. (1997). *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America*. Washington, DC: The Children's Defense Fund.
- ⁶ *Head Start FACES: Longitudinal Findings on Program Performance*. (Third Progress Report). (January 2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ⁷ Barnett, W.S. (2002). *The Battle over Head Start: What the Research Shows*. National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers.
- ^{8,12} Rhode Island Early Head Start Programs, children enrolled as of October 2003
- ⁹ Rhode Island General Statute, 42-12-26.
- ¹⁰ Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Office of Child Care.
- ¹¹ Fenichel, E and Mann, T. (Spring/Summer 2001). *Caring for Infants and Toddlers: Early Head Start for Low-Income Families with Infants and Toddlers*, Vol.11, No.1. Los Altos, CA: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.