

# Prominent Researchers Support Head Start Funding

March 2011

Dear Member of Congress,

We understand that due to growing federal deficit, we are entering a period of significant cuts to non-security discretionary spending. At a time when America's economic survival and global competitiveness is at stake, while child poverty in America is also soaring, we consider cuts to Head Start and Early Head Start extremely short-sighted. As researchers, we offer some facts about Head Start that are worth remembering:

Head Start improves the odds and the options for at-risk kids for a lifetime. Kids that have been through Head Start and Early Head Start are healthier, more academically accomplished, more likely to be employed, commit fewer crimes, and contribute more to society.

## **Simply put: Head Start works. It's been proven.**

**Studies of Head Start programs found that Head Start increases educational achievement:** raising test scores, decreasing the need for children to receive special education services and making it less likely that children will repeat a grade.<sup>1</sup> Head Start graduates are also more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.<sup>2</sup>

**Head Start's impact on child health is impressive.** Likely because of its required medical screenings, vaccinations, and emphasis on nutrition, Head Start reduces by as much as 50 percent the mortality rates for 5- to 9-year-olds.<sup>3</sup> A Head Start child is 19 to 25 percent less likely to smoke as an adult.<sup>4</sup> And **Head Start parents receiving health literacy decreased annual Medicaid costs by \$232 per family.**<sup>5</sup>

**Head Start graduates are 12 percent less likely to be booked or charged with a crime.**<sup>6</sup> This reduction translates into savings for crime victims, local, state, and federal governments, and the American taxpayer.

The National Impact Study of Head Start found that children attending Head Start made significant cognitive and socio-emotional gains compared with the control group children during the Head Start year and were in better health compared to the control group children.<sup>7</sup>

And it's not just the at-risk kids who benefit. Head Start and Early Head Start also provide improved parenting skills and practices.<sup>8</sup> Head Start's emphasis on parental involvement contributes to the upward mobility of Head Start parents by helping to move them out of poverty,<sup>9</sup> and that Early Head Start parents are much more likely to participate in job training programs and more likely to have a job.<sup>10</sup> At a time when unemployment rate is hovering close to 10%, Head Start and Early Head Start are critical gateways to employment.

As the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress evaluates domestic discretionary spending, we urge you to look at the substantial research showing that Head Start and Early Head Start programs have a long history of not only being a wise investment and saving local, state, and federal taxpayers money but also a critical safety net for our most vulnerable citizens.

**Multiple studies demonstrate that Head Start is an astoundingly smart investment. For every \$1 invested in Head Start, we get a Return On Investment (ROI) ranging from \$7 to \$9.<sup>11</sup>** As James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economics at the University of Chicago, recommended to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Reform: “Early Head Start and Head Start are programs on which to build and improve – not to cut.”<sup>12</sup> That’s why we ask that Congress to provide \$8.2 billion in Fiscal Years 2011 and 2012 to ensure that Head Start and Early Head Start can maintain their current enrollment levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Barnett, W. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows. Presentation at a Science and Public Policy Briefing Sponsored by the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences; Barnett, W. and Hustedt, J. (2005). Head Start's lasting benefits. *Infants & Young Children*, 18 (1): 16-24; Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

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<sup>6</sup> Garces, E., Thomas, D. and Currie, J. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92 (4): 999-1012

<sup>7</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. (2010, January). Head Start Impact Study Final Report – Executive Summary. The control group children were supposed to only consist of children who did not receive Head Start services, but a significant proportion of the control group received Head Start services anyway.

<sup>8</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. (2010, January). *Head Start Impact Study Final Report*; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. (2004). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The impacts of Early Head Start, Volume I*. Washington, DC.

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