



Press Release

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NEW RESEARCH FINDS INADEQUATE HEAD START FUNDING FORCES TRADE-OFFS FOR NEBRASKA CHILDREN, FAMILIES

Bipartisan Action Needed to Remedy Disparities

New Brunswick, NJ — Head Start, a federal program created in 1965 that helps children and families overcome the disadvantages of poverty, varies dramatically from state to state in funding, classroom hours, quality, and percentage of low-income children served, according to the *State(s) of Head Start* report released today by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

This groundbreaking report examines Head Start and Early Head Start data from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and six territories for 2014-2015, as well as historical data from 2007 to 2015. The study was conducted to provide policymakers and the public with detailed information regarding federal support for Head Start and the services Head Start provides on a state-by-state basis. The report also includes information on two important programs serving particularly vulnerable populations that do not easily fit in the individual state profiles. The America Indian and Alaska Native program (AIAN) provides culturally sensitive services to children and families in tribal areas who are often isolated from other early childhood education programs. The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program targets the unique needs of primarily agricultural worker families who move across states and work extended days.

State(s) of Head Start reveals widespread differences across states in funding, classroom hours, teacher qualifications and compensation, observed quality, and enrollment. Such differences arise, in part, as local programs have been forced to triage limited funding. *State(s) of Head Start* clarifies the needs in each state for additional federal, as well as state and local, support for the education of young children in poor and low-income families. This report's findings underscore the need for greater coordination between Head Start and state and local government agencies to build high-quality early learning programs with widespread reach and adequate funding.

"Our report for the first time reveals the extent of disparities in Head Start funding and coverage state by state," said NIEER Director W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D. "We urge local, state and federal policymakers to work with Head Start providers and the broader early childhood education community, including researchers, to address issues raised in this report."

In Nebraska, Head Start enrolled 5,450 children during the 2014-2015 program year--about 9 percent of the state's low-income children, just below the national average of 10 percent. Federal funding per child exceeded national averages for Early Head Start (EHS) serving infants and toddlers and for Head Start (HS) serving 3- and 4-year-olds, when adjusted for cost of living. Classroom quality met or exceeded thresholds for effective learning. Head Start program teachers earned significantly less than teachers in public school. Specifically:

- EHS funding per child was \$14,248, exceeding the national average of \$12,575; HS funding per child was \$8,290, also exceeding the national average of \$8,038 when adjusted for cost of living.
- 27 percent of children enrolled attended Head Start for at least 1,020 hours per year, below the national average of 42 percent. New standards will require at least 1,020 hours per year of programming by August 2021 to provide children enough time to make strong development gains.
- Percentage of HS teachers holding a BA or higher is above the national average-- 89 percent in Nebraska, compared to 73 percent nationwide. Percent of EHS teachers with a BA exceeded the national average, at 55 percent in Nebraska and 30 percent nationally.

- HS teachers with a BA earned \$35,560, and EHS teachers earned \$32,288, compared to \$50,597 for teachers in public schools.

Head Start is a federally funded, locally administered comprehensive child development program that provides early education and support services to children and families with household incomes up to 130 percent of poverty by federal standards (about \$33,000 for a family of four). Head Start serves children ages 3 to 5, while Early Head Start serves infants and toddlers. Many Head Start programs collaborate with child care and public preschool programs to serve eligible children, including children of migrant workers and tribal families. Head Start has expanded and innovated over its 50-year history, pioneering home visiting services, infant-toddler care, and raising the standard for teacher training. For example, the percent of Head Start teachers with a bachelor's degree or higher increased nationwide from 44 percent in 2007 to 73 percent in 2015, a direct result of requirements included in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization.

The *State(s) of Head Start* report is also the first to report on Head Start classroom quality by state. Across the country, Head Start teachers demonstrated an ability to provide emotionally supportive environments, and the majority of states also scored well on classroom organization. However, programs in just two states, Kentucky and Vermont, could be determined to score above a research-based threshold for effective instructional support. Eighteen states scored significantly below this threshold. The report also finds variation in teacher qualifications, compensation, and turnover that can create problems for providing effective programs. The report shows that Head Start programs are not uniformly funded at levels adequate to ensure a high quality learning and development experience and attract and retain qualified teachers while providing all the required services. Large differences in funding between states remain even after accounting for differences in the cost of living between states.

NIEER estimates that federal funding falls \$14 billion short of what would be needed to serve all eligible 3- and 4-year-olds in high-quality Head Start programs for 1,020 hours per year (at an average of \$10,000 per child). Early Head Start is even further from the funding levels needed to fulfill its expressed mission. Although Head Start grantees are expected to raise 20 percent of their total budget from non-federal sources in the form of financial or in-kind donations, these added resources do not make up for the gaps in the federal funds needed to adequately pay teachers to deliver the expected quality and hours of services.

NIEER's findings highlight the need for renewed attention to meeting the needs of young children in low-income families in every state, recognizing that Head Start is not the only program serving them. State and local government agencies also sponsor early childhood programs. Coordination with Head Start is already strong in some states and cities, but more can be done. Of course, no amount of coordination can make up for a lack of adequate resources for young children birth to age 5 across all levels of government. For example, some states do not even offer pre-K and others have poorly funded programs with low standards and minimal hours.

"As Head Start is only one in a larger set of public programs supporting young children that varies greatly from one state to the next, we call for an independent bipartisan study commission to develop an action plan supporting quality education for all young children and their families, particularly the most vulnerable, in every state and territory," Dr. Barnett said.

The *State(s) of Head Start* report was supported with funding provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions in this report are solely those of the authors. The *State(s) of Head Start* digest provides a printed narrative, national figures, and national overview. For more information on the *State(s) of Head Start* and detailed state-by-state profiles on quality, duration, access, and funding, please visit www.nieer.org

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The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research.