

Head Start

OVERVIEW

What is it?

Head Start is a free, comprehensive, early childhood program that offers education, meals, social services, medical and dental care, and mental health services for children, and programs for parents.

Who is it for?

Head Start programs serve low-income children who are at least three years old. The program is available until the child reaches compulsory school-age. Certain other children with disabilities may participate. Some programs in the state also accept younger children.

Where are applications taken?

Applications for Head Start are available at local Head Start programs. There are currently Head Start programs in every county except Polk.

INTRODUCTION

Head Start was established by Congress in 1965. It is a comprehensive early childhood education program offering a wide array of services both to low-income children and their families. Parental involvement is of particular importance, because parents are acknowledged as the primary educators of their children. Head Start programs may be classroom-based or home-based. There are also migrant Head Start programs available to serve families who are working in the migrant stream.

BENEFITS/ SERVICES

Head Start provides children the opportunity to participate in an interdisciplinary program designed to foster development and remedy problems. Individual programs are allowed flexibility to design their own curriculum to develop a greater degree of social competence in the children of low-income families.

Most Head Start programs operate six hours a day (from 8:30 am to 2:30 pm), and generally only during the months school is regularly in session. Some programs may operate “wrap-around” plans, allowing them to be open longer hours or during the summer to accommodate working parents.

Each Head Start program should contain the following early childhood development and health services, and family and community partnerships services.

Early Childhood Development and Health Service

- *Education.* A learning environment should be provided, individualized to meet each child’s needs. The educational environment should take into

consideration the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural characteristics of the community. If, for example, a program has a majority of bilingual children, then at least one of the teachers or aids must speak their native language.

- *Health.* Each child should receive a complete physical exam, including immunizations, vision and hearing tests, identification of disabilities, and a dental exam. Follow-up is provided to ensure that the child's identified health needs are being met.
- *Mental Health.* A mental health professional is available in all Head Start programs to provide mental health training to parents and staff, and to make them aware of the need for early attention to the special problems of children.
- *Nutrition.* Free snacks and lunches are provided to children in Head Start programs, making up at least one third of the daily nutritional requirements. In addition, nutrition counseling and education are provided to parents.
- *Additional Services for Children with Disabilities.* Children with disabilities and their families receive the array of services listed above. In addition, Head Start program staff members receive special training to address the needs of children with disabilities, and work closely with community agencies to ensure that the needs of the children are being met.

Family and Community Partnerships

- *Social Services.* Head Start social services staff work with parents to obtain needed assistance in such areas as housing, Food Stamps, Work First, and job training and may also serve as advocates with area agencies serving the low-income community.
- *Family Literacy Services.* Head Start programs offer literacy training to parents, in addition to the other array of other services.
- *Parent Involvement.* Parents are strongly encouraged to participate in the Head Start programs. Parents can serve as volunteers in the classroom, make decisions about the direction of the program through the Head Start policy council, and take advantage of training opportunities in child development, health and social services. Also, parents receive preference for employment if qualified.

In addition, some Head Start programs operate Early Head Start programs for younger children. These programs work with parents and children, helping to prevent developmental deficits and strengthening the family unit by providing the array of services listed above and working to improve parenting skills.

APPLICATIONS

A family interested in participating in Head Start should contact the local program nearest to them about application procedures. Families can contact the Child Care

Resource and Referral Agencies, local Smart Start partnerships or the NC Head Start Collaboration Office within the NC Division of Child Development to find out about the Head Start programs in their community.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

General Eligibility Requirements

Federal law mandates that at least 90% of the children enrolled in Head Start programs come from low income families (incomes that are at or below the federal poverty guidelines). At least 10% of the enrolled children should be children with disabilities. There are no resource requirements, citizenship or immigration restrictions in the program.

Income Eligibility

Most children who participate in the Head Start program must have family incomes that are at or below the federal poverty guidelines. The federal poverty guidelines are revised every year in the spring. The current income guidelines in effect from April 1, 1999 to March 31, 2000 are as follows:

Family Size	Monthly Income
1	\$ 687
2	922
3	1,157
4	1,392
5	1,627
6	1,862
7	2,097
8	2,332
Each additional person	add \$235

The Head Start program will verify each family's income to ensure eligibility. Verification may include: individual income tax form (1040), W-2 forms, pay stubs, pay envelopes, written statements from employers, or documentation showing that the family is receiving public assistance (Work First or Food Stamps).

Once a child has been admitted into the program, he or she will remain eligible for that year as well as the following year regardless of changes in family income.

Disability Requirements

Programs must make at least ten percent of their slots available to children with disabilities. Children with disabilities may be served in Head Start programs even if their family income exceeds the federal poverty guidelines. To qualify, a 3-5 year old child must have one of the specified disabilities and must therefore need special education and related services. The specific conditions which meet the Head Start disability definition include: mental retardation, hearing impairment (including deafness, speech or language impairment), visual impairment (including blindness), serious emotional

disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, or multiple disabilities.

Fees

There are no fees for this program.

NUMBERS SERVED

There were 17,168 children served in February 1998. In SYF 1998, North Carolina served 860 children in Early Head Start and 17,283 children in the regular Head Start program. The state estimates that Head Start programs served approximately 60% of all eligibles.

PRIORITIZATION SYSTEM

Each program establishes its own priority system to use in enrolling eligible children when there is a waiting list. Preference is usually given to children from the lowest income families.

APPEAL RIGHTS

There are no specific appeal or grievance mechanisms in this program.

FINANCING

North Carolina received a total of \$98.7 million in Head Start funds in FY 1998. Of this:

Early Head Start:	\$ 8,220,459
Regular Head Start:	\$ 90,488,232
Total:	\$ 98,708,691

ADMINISTRATION

The program is administered on the federal level by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, within the US Department of Health and Human Services. The NC Head Start Collaboration Office within the Division of Child Development, NC Department of Health and Human Services, acts as liaison between local Head Start programs and various state agencies.

A priority in the management of the funds is the involvement of parents and community members in the decision making and design of the local program. Each grantee or delegate agency must have an established policy group and a well-functioning governing body. The policy councils are comprised of parents (51%) and community representatives (49%) and are empowered to actively participate in a shared decision making process with the local program.

SOURCES OF LAW

Federal statute:	42 USC 9801 et. seq.
Federal regulations:	45 CFR 1301-06, 1308

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

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