

FY18 Federal Budget: Head Start and Latinos

Head Start is one of our nation's oldest federal public programs and is designed to help preschool-aged children in low-income families. Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start expanded the benefits to even more vulnerable children. However, current federal funding levels are inadequate to ensure that all children living in poverty have access to quality early childhood education that will provide them with opportunities for success later in life.

What is Head Start?

Head Start seeks to break the cycle of poverty by providing comprehensive federal health and educational programs aimed at leveling the playing field for low-income children up to the age of five and their families. These programs are administered by approximately 1,700 local, public, and private organizations operating under national standards and goals. To be eligible, children must come from families that are living below the federal poverty level, are homeless, receive public assistance, or are in foster care. Funding for Head Start programs flows directly from the federal government to grantees, through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Head Start.

Who Benefits?

Since its inception in 1965, the program has assisted 33 million children with early childhood development and school readiness. In 2014-2015, Head Start (including Migrant Head Start) reached more than 760,000 children three to four years old. However, this only represents 18% of low-income three-year-olds and 21% of low-income four-year-olds.¹ There are millions of children not enrolled in Head Start that would benefit from the program. Under-enrollment stems from inadequate funding, inhibiting Head Start from serving all eligible children, and requiring states to make enrollment and programmatic decisions. In 2016, Hispanic children represented 37% (more than 400,000) of all Head Start enrollees, and they account for almost all children enrolled in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, more than 32,000 children in 2016.²

What About the Federal Budget?

Estimates show that the cost to fully fund Head Start to serve all eligible children who are three to four years old and living in poverty is \$20 billion.³ President Trump's FY18 budget request provides just over \$9 billion in funding for these programs, nearly level funding from FY17, and not enough to meet the needs of American children. Maintaining level funding, paired with an

increasing population and rising costs, is essentially a cut to the program. The House Appropriations Committee included a larger increase for Head Start than in the Trump budget, providing for a nearly \$22 million increase over FY17.⁴ However, to reach all needy children, Congress should significantly increase funding for these crucial programs.

¹ National Institute for Early Education Research, “State(s) of Head Start: National Profile,” (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Graduate School of Education, 2017), http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS_National_Profile.pdf (accessed June 2017).

² Administration for Children and Families Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, “Head Start Program Facts, Fiscal Year 2016,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017), <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/factsheets/2016-hs-program-factsheet.html> (accessed June 2017) and National Institute for Early Education Research, “State(s) of Head Start: Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Profile,” (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Graduate School of Education, 2017), http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS_MSMS_Profile.pdf (accessed June 2017).

³ W. Steven Barnett and Allison Friedman-Krauss, *State(s) of Head Start*, (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2016), http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HS_Full_Reduced.pdf (accessed June 2017).

⁴ House Committee on Appropriations, *Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2018*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., 2017, Committee Print, <https://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/23920.pdf>