



Head Start Helps High-Risk Families Get Ahead in Life

More than one million children and pregnant women benefit from either Head Start or Early Head Start programs, which include developmental and health screenings, center-based training and services, and parenting support. (Source: National Head Start Association, 2004–2005.) Established in 1965, Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that serves low-income families through two complementary programs: Head Start and Early Head Start. The philosophy of Parents as Teachers, like Head Start, revolves around the idea that parents are children's first and best teachers. Although both programs emphasize parent involvement as the foundation of their programs, Head Start specifically serves high-risk families with incomes at or below the federal poverty line.

According to the Early Head Start Impact Study, conducted in 2002, "Early Head Start children on average had a higher cognitive development score than the control group had." In addition, the study showed that these children had larger vocabularies and demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development. A study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also showed that "Head Start children performed better on cognitive, language and health measures than their comparison group counterparts did."

Parents as Teachers meets the Head Start Performance Standards through:

- Family support through home visits;
- Development screenings; and
- Parent resources to establish, record and achieve child development, education and parenting goals.

Parents as Teachers National Center's Position

Parents as Teachers National Center and National Head Start Association programs have a common intent: to support families as children develop during the crucial first years. Further, the programs share the purpose of encouraging and equipping parents with the tools they need to help their child learn and succeed. Head Start and Early Head Start programs receive 80 percent of their funding through the federal government. Parents as Teachers National Center endorses increased funding to maintain programs and increase the number of high-risk families that are served through Head Start and Early Head Start.

An analysis of the Head Start Performance Standards and the Parents as Teachers Quality Standards revealed that, while the two programs operate with similar philosophies, there are differences in the scope and overall structure of the programs. The unique components of Parents as Teachers address critical areas identified by the Head Start Performance Standards, such as education and school readiness, early childhood development and health services, and family and community partnerships.

Supporting Facts

1. Parent involvement has long-term positive effects on children

- Head Start Performance Standards require a home-based program option to include both parents and children. The purpose of home visits is to help parents improve their parenting skills, particularly in the child's primary learning environment.
- Through the Parents as Teachers program, parent educators work with families to build developmental skills, screen for potential problems and provide parenting support and resources. Parents as Teachers fosters positive parent-child relationships, helps parents observe their children and understand their development, and strengthens parenting skills. (Source: Pfannenstiel and Zigler, 2007.)
- Parents whose children participate in Parents as Teachers are more involved in their children's education. (Source: Pfannenstiel, 1998; Pfannenstiel, Lambson and Yarnell, 1996.)



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2. Home visits involve children and parents

- Head Start Performance Standards require a home-based program option to include both parents and children. The purpose of home visits is to help parents improve their parenting skills, particularly in the child's primary learning environment.
- Parents as Teachers is a home-based program, delivered by a trained professional and provided to one family at a time. Participants may include the children, parents, primary caregiver and multigenerational family members.
- Approximately 250 Early Head Start and 220 Head Start sites provide Parents as Teachers home visiting services to families and focus on parent education, parent-child interaction and screening for developmental milestones. (Source: Parents as Teachers National Center Annual Report, 2005.)

3. Health and developmental screening requirement warrant individualized program services

- Each Head Start program must use developmental and health screenings to help both staff and parents identify the best way to respond to each child's individual needs.
- One of the eight Parents as Teachers standards focuses on screening, including developmental, hearing, vision, dental and overall health. The screening component isn't just a standard, it is one of the four basic components of Parents as Teachers. Parent educators fulfill the standard through individualized services using the child's screening results.

4. Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 requires outreach to hard-to-reach populations

- Because the Parents as Teachers home-visitation model is adaptable in a range of environments, the program's services are effective in reaching and meeting the needs of fathers, rural families and grandparents.
- Parents as Teachers program information and resources are distributed in very visible areas including physician offices, health clinics, schools, hospitals, churches and grocery stores. Parent educators are trained to work with all types of families which may include parents, primary caregivers and multi-generational family members. Training offered through the Parents as Teachers National Center addresses how to work with typically hard-to-reach populations.

Additional Resources

www.parentsasteachers.org

www.nhsa.org

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>



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