

- DRAFT -

Head Start Earns Failing Grade on National Evaluation: No Lasting Impact for Children by First Grade

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In 2009, the federal government spent at least \$25 billion on federal preschool and child care programs.¹ But President Obama has pressed for significant increases in preschool spending. The administration approved \$5 billion in new early education and care spending in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. And Congress may soon approve \$8 billion in new spending on the “Early Learning Challenge Fund” in the “Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act,” which already passed the House of Representatives.

Before creating a new preschool program and increasing spending on preschool and child care, federal taxpayers should evaluate whether current programs are working. Atop the list of programs to review should be the Head Start program, the \$7 billion-per-year program that serves approximately 900,000 low-income children. A new experimental evaluation, recently released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that Head Start has little to no effect on cognitive, socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes of children participating in the program,

Created as part of the War on Poverty in 1965, Head Start is a pre-school community-based program funded by the federal government. By providing education, nutrition, and health services, Head Start is intended to provide a boost to disadvantaged children upon entering elementary school. The goal of head start is to catch disadvantaged children up to children living under more fortunate circumstances. From fiscal year (FY) 1965 to FY 2008, Congress has spent a total of \$151.7 billion in 2008 dollars on Head Start.² See Chart 1. From FY 2000 to FY 2008, the average annual appropriation for Head Start was \$7.4 billion.

<INSERT CHART 1>

Despite the long life of Head Start, the program has never undergone a thorough scientifically rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness until Congress mandated such an evaluation in 1998. The resulting Head Start Impact Study, began in 2002, is a randomized experiment based on a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs and approximately 5,000 children applying for Head Start participation.³ The results of the 2010 Head Start Impact Study yield disappointing results. Overall, the evaluation found that the program largely failed to improve the cognitive, socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes compared to the

¹ Dan Lips, “Reforming and Improving Federal Preschool and Child Care Programs Without Increasing the Deficit,” Heritage Foundation, July 13, 2009, at: http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/upload/bg_2297.pdf (January 11, 2010).

² The Department of Health and Human Services, “Head Start Program Fact Sheet: FY 2008,” at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/fy2008.html> (January 14, 2010).

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings*, (Washington, D.C., June 2005).

outcomes of similar children. According to the report, “the benefits of access to Head Start at age four are largely absent by 1st grade for the program population as a whole.”⁴

Background on the National Evaluation

Despite the long life of Head Start, the program has never undergone a thorough scientifically rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness until Congress mandated such an evaluation in 1998. The resulting Head Start Impact Study, began in 2002, is a randomized experiment based on a nationally representative sample of Head Start programs and approximately 5,000 children applying for Head Start participation.⁵ The sample of children applying for Head Start was randomly assigned to intervention and control groups. The intervention group participated in Head Start services, while the control group was excluded from Head Start participation. The parents of control group children were free to enroll their children into other early education programs.

Determining the impact of social programs, like Head Start, requires comparing the conditions of those who had received assistance with the conditions of an equivalent group that did not experience the intervention. Experimental evaluations in which eligible participants are randomly assigned to either intervention or control groups represent the “gold standard” of evaluation designs. Experimental evaluations are widely acknowledged to have the highest degree of internal validity. The higher an evaluation’s internal validity means that researchers can be more certain in answering the following question: Did in fact the program have an impact on the participants? Random assignment allows the evaluator to test for differences between the experimental and control groups that are due to the intervention and not to pre-intervention discrepancies between the groups.

The 2010 Head Start Impact Study

Are the results of Head Start worth over \$7 billion per year? The 2010 Head Start Impact Study found that Head Start largely failed to have to improve the cognitive, socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes compared to the outcomes of similar children. The authors disappointingly concluded:

In sum, this report finds that providing access to Head Start has benefits for both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds in the cognitive, health, and parenting domains, and for 3-year-olds in the social-emotional domain. However, the benefits of access to Head Start at age four are largely absent by 1st grade for the program population as a whole.⁶

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⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (January 2010). *Head Start Impact Study. Final Report*. Washington, DC., p. xxxviii.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings*, (Washington, D.C., June 2005).

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (January 2010). *Head Start Impact Study. Final Report*. Washington, DC., p. xxxviii.

Before the findings are presented, statistical significance tests used by social scientists need to be explained to put the findings of the 2010 study in appropriate context.

A finding of "statistically significant" indicates that the effect of a particular intervention is, for statistical purposes, different from no effect. For example, if Head Start is found to have a statistically significant effect on a particular outcome, then social scientists have a high degree of confidence that the result is caused by the program and did not occur by chance.

A finding of "statistically insignificant" indicates that the effect of a particular intervention is, for statistical purposes, no different from zero. For example, if Head Start is found to have a statistically insignificant effect on a particular outcome, the chances of the effect being caused by chance are too great for social scientists to have confidence that the program produced the effect. In other words, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on the particular outcome.

The common standard among social scientists for declaring a finding to be statistically significant is set at the 5 percent significance level ($p \leq 0.05$). Using this standard means that social scientists are willing to risk a 5 percent chance of mistakenly concluding that the program had an effect, when the program really had no effect at all. Most social scientists use this rigorous standard of statistical significance because they want to have a high degree of confidence in their findings. Policy makers who base their decisions on social science research should also want to have a high degree of confidence as well.

Sometimes, social scientists will use the less rigorous standard of 10 percent ($p \leq 0.10$). Under this looser standard, social scientists are willing to risk a 10 percent chance of mistakenly concluding that the program had an effect, when the program really had no effect at all. The 10 percent significance standard can be justified when social scientists are analyzing small samples, say 100 cases. Studies based on small sample sizes are less likely to be sensitive enough to find statistically significant findings at the 5 percent significance level, than studies using much larger sample sizes.⁷ Thus, social scientists sometimes use the less rigorous 10 percent significance level for small sample sizes. In contrast, the larger the sample size used in a study, the more sensitive the study will be at finding statistically significant effects. For this reason, most social scientists use the 5 percent confidence level when working with large sample sizes.

In some cases, the authors of the 2010 Head Start evaluation report statistically significant impacts based on the 10 percent significance level ($p \leq 0.10$). With a sample of 4,667 children participating in the 2010 study, this level of statistical significance is hard to justify. By using a looser standard, the authors are able to report Head Start had a few more positive impacts than they could have been able to report using the more commonly accepted 5 percent confidence level. Despite using this looser standard of statistical significance, the national Head Start evaluation found few incidents of positive impact.

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⁷ Mark W. Lipsey, *Design Sensitivity: Statistical Power for Experimental Research* (Newbury Park, Cal.: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1990).

The following is an overview of the findings of the 2010 study. For the development of the 4- and 3-year-old cohorts, the 2010 study measured outcomes during kindergarten and the first grade.

Cognitive Development of the 4-Year-old Cohort. For the cognitive development, the 2010 study assessed 19 kindergarten outcomes and 22 first grade outcomes for the 4-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 9 measures of language and literacy, 2 measures of Spanish language and literacy, 3 measures of math skills, and 5 measures of school performance assessment at the 5 percent significance level.⁸

For the first grade, access to Head Start for the 4-year-old cohort had similarly dismal results. All of the 22 first grade cognitive outcomes failed to have statistically measurable impacts at the 5 percent significance level.⁹ However, the authors report a small positive and statistically significant positive outcome at the less rigorous 10 percent significance level for the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPTV Adapted) outcome measure. Under traditional scientific standards, this finding is considered to be statistically indistinguishable from no impact. Thus, for all 41 outcome measures for kindergarten and the first grade, Head Start failed to have measurable impacts at the standard level of statistical significance.

Cognitive Development of the 3-Year-old Cohort. For the cognitive development, the 2010 study assessed 19 kindergarten outcomes and 22 first grade outcomes for the 3-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effects using the 5 percent significance level on 9 measures of language and literacy, 2 measures of Spanish language and literacy, and 3 measures of math skills.¹⁰ One of 5 measures of school performance assessment outcomes, “Kindergarten teachers reported poorer math skills for children in the Head Start group than for those in the control group.”¹¹ The negative effect of Head Start was highly statistically significant at the 1 percent significance level. On the remaining 4 school assessment outcomes, access to Head Start failed to have statistically measurable impacts.¹²

For the first grade, access to Head Start for the 3-year-old cohort has similarly bleak results. All of the 22 first grade cognitive outcomes failed to have statistically measurable impacts at the 5 percent significance level.¹³ However, the authors report a small positive and statistically significant positive outcome at the less rigorous 10 percent significance level for the Woodcock-Johnson (WJ) III Oral Comprehension outcome measure. Under traditional scientific standards, this finding is considered to be statistically indistinguishable from no impact. Thus, for all 41 outcome measures for kindergarten and the first grade, Head Start failed to have measurable impacts at the standard level of statistical significance.

⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (January 2010). *Head Start Impact Study. Final Report.* Washington, DC., Exhibit 4.2, pp. 4-10 to 4-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 4.2, pp. 4-10 to 4-13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 4.5, pp. 4-21 to 4-25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4-26.

¹² *Ibid.*, Exhibit 4.5, pp. 4-21 to 4-25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 4.5, pp. 4-21 to 4-25.

Social-Emotional Development of the 4-Year-old Cohort. For socio-emotional development, the 2010 study assessed 20 kindergarten outcomes and 20 first grade outcomes for the 4-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 9 parent-reported measures and 11 teacher-reported measures.¹⁴

For the first grade, access to Head Start for the 4-year-old cohort had similarly underwhelming results. All of the 9 first grade parent-reported outcomes failed to have statistically measurable impacts.¹⁵ However, using a less rigorous 10 percent significance level, the authors report that the parents of children in the Head Start group perceived their children to be less likely to display withdrawn behavior. Under traditional scientific standards, this finding is considered to be statistically indistinguishable from no impact. For the 11 teacher-reported measures, only one outcome was statistically significant. According to the authors, “Teachers reported that Head Start group children were more shy or socially reticent than the control group children.”¹⁶ This finding was statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level. Using the 10 percent significance level, the authors report that teachers perceived to have more interaction problems with Head Start students than the students in the control group.

Social-Emotional Development of the 3-Year-old Cohort. For socio-emotional development, the 2010 study assessed 20 kindergarten outcomes and 20 first grade outcomes for the 3-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 8 out of 9 parent-reported measures, while Head Start had no statistically measurable impact on the 11 teacher-reported measures.¹⁷ Compared to the parents of children in the control group, parents reported less hyperactive behavior for their child that had access to Head Start. This finding is significant at the 5 percent level. In addition, the authors report that Head Start had a positive impact on improving social skills and approaches to learning at the 10 percent significance level.

For the first grade, access to Head Start for the 4-year-old cohort had similarly ineffective results. Eight of the 9 first grade parent-reported outcomes failed to have statistically measurable impacts at the 5 percent significance level.¹⁸ Head Start appears to have had a positive impact on parent reports of closeness with their child at the 5 percent significance level. In addition, the authors report that Head Start had a positive impact on improving positive relationships with their children. However, this finding is not statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level.

For all 11 of the teacher-reported outcomes, Head Start had no statistically measurable impact on the teacher-reported measures.¹⁹

Parent-Reported Child Health Outcomes of the 4-Year-old Cohort. For parent-reported child health, the 2010 study assessed 5 kindergarten outcomes and 5 first grade outcomes for the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 5.1, pp. 5-4 to 5-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 5.1, pp. 5-4 to 5-6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 5.2, pp. 5-8 to 5-10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 5.2, pp. 5-8 to 5-10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 5.2, pp. 5-8 to 5-10.

4-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 5 measures of dental care, health insurance coverage, overall health status, ongoing care needs, and received care for an injury within the last month.²⁰ The authors report that Head Start had small positive impacts on insurance coverage and on the parents' perception of the overall health status of their child. However, these findings are not statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level.

For the first grade, access to Head Start failed to affect four of the five parent-reported health outcomes.²¹ While access to Head Start had no effect on dental care, overall health status, ongoing care needs, and received care for an injury within the last month, Head Start has a small positive effect at the 5 percent significance level for health insurance coverage.

Parent-Reported Child Health Outcomes of the 3-Year-old Cohort. For parent-reported child health, the 2010 study assessed 5 kindergarten outcomes and 5 first grade outcomes for the 4-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 4 of the 5 health measures.²² Access to Head Start has a small positive effect at the 5 percent significance level for health insurance coverage. For the first grade, access to Head Start failed to affect the five parent-reported health outcomes.²³

Parenting Outcomes of the 4-Year-old Cohort. For parenting outcomes, the 2010 study assessed 11 kindergarten measures and 10 first grade measures for the 4-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 9 measures reported by parents and 2 measures reported by teachers.²⁴ The trend of no statistically measurable impact continued in the first grade. For all 8 measures of parenting as reported by parents and the 2 measures of parenting reported by teachers, access to Head Start failed to have statistically measurable impacts.²⁵

Parenting Outcomes of the 3-Year-old Cohort. For parenting outcomes, the 2010 study assessed 11 kindergarten measures and 10 first grade measures for the 3-year-old cohort. For kindergarten, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on 8 of the 9 measures reported by parents and all 2 the measures reported by teachers.²⁶ Parents of children with access to Head Start were less likely to use a "time out" in the last week. The negative effect of this outcome was small, but statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level. The authors report that access Head Start had small negative impact on parents spanking their children at the 10 percent significance level.

For the first grade, access to Head start failed to have an impact on 7 of the 8 parent-reported measures of parenting.²⁷ Parents of children with access to Head Start were less likely report using an authoritarian parenting style. The negative effect of this outcome was small, but

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 6.1, pp. 6-3 to 6-4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 6.1, pp. 6-3 to 6-4.

²² *Ibid.*, Exhibit 6.2, pp. 6-6 to 6-7.

²³ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 6.2, pp. 6-6 to 6-7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 7.1, pp. 7-4 to 7-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 7.1, pp. 7-4 to 7-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 7.2, pp. 7-8 to 7-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Exhibit 7.2, pp. 7-8 to 7-10.

statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level. The authors report that parents with children that had access to Head Start were less likely to use a “time out” within the last week. However, this finding is statistically significant at the 10 percent significance level. On the two measures of teacher-reported perceptions of parenting, access to Head start failed to have statistically measurable impacts.

Attempts to Undercut the Head Start Impact Study Findings

Some may argue that other research directly assessing the performance of Head Start shows the program to be effective. Research based on the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) has found that Head Start children make gains in vocabulary, math, and writing skills during the Head Start program year.²⁸ However, the research design of FACES is inadequate for determining the program’s effectiveness.

Without a control group, FACES assesses the academic skills of Head Start children at the start and end of the program year. In the scientific literature, this evaluation design is called the one-group pretest-posttest design. This design has poor internal validity because of its inability to rule out rival hypotheses that may have caused the gains.²⁹ First, the changes in the outcome measures may be the result of factors acting independently between the pretest and posttest. The gains could be a result of some parents being more active at teaching their children at home. In the scientific literature, this threat to internal validity is called history.

Second, the FACES design cannot rule out the fact that the cognitive abilities of children naturally evolve with age. This internal validity threat, called maturation, means that the observed gains found in the FACES research are also likely to be strongly influenced by the natural biological and psychological developmental process of children. Without a control group, the FACES design cannot separate the effect of maturation on the measured outcomes.

Third, the FACES design is susceptible to the internal validity threat of testing. The testing threat occurs when the effect of initially taking pretest influences the results of the posttest. After the initial student assessment at the start of the Head Start year, children may adapt and learn how to perform better on the end of year test. In essence, the lack of a control group means that FACES research is unable to determine if the children became better test takers and, thus, did not actually experience improved academic skills resulting from the program.

On the other hand, the experimental design of the 2010 Head Start Impact Study rules out the influence of history, maturation, and testing. The use of random assignment and a control group means that the potential influences of these threats to internal validity are distributed equally between the intervention and control group. Therefore, these potential threats should not affect the results of the Head Start Impact Study.

²⁸ Nicholas Zill, Alberto Sorongon, Kwang Kim, Cheryl Clark, and Maria Woolverton, Children’s Outcomes and Program Quality in Head Start, Faces 2003 Research Brief, (Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December 2006), at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/faces/reports/research_2003/research_2003.pdf (January 12, 2010).

²⁹ Donald T. Campbell, and Julian C. Stanley, *Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research*, (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963).

Another argument offered to undercut the 2010 study's kindergarten and first grade findings is that the program produces gains, but those gains fade out due to Head Start students attending poorly performing elementary and middle schools. This assumption is based on research by Professors Valerie E. Lee of the University of Michigan and Susanna Loeb of Stanford University. They used the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 to assess the quality of middle schools attended by eighth graders who attended Head Start, other preschool programs, or did not attend preschool.³⁰ Using a nationally representative sample of all eighth graders, Professors Lee and Loeb found that former Head Start participants attended lower quality schools compared to the schools attended by students that formerly attended other preschool programs or did not attend preschool programs. The finding that Head Start students go on to attend worse schools than other students should not be surprising. Children living in impoverished, socially disorganized neighborhoods tend to go to lower performing schools compared to children from wealthier neighborhoods.

The potential suggestion that this finding explains why the 2010 Head Start Impact Study found no effect on kindergarten and first grade academic achievement is dubious. The fact that former Head Start students attend poorly performing schools should not affect the results of the experimental evaluation, because evaluation assembled similarly situated children and randomly assigned them to intervention and control groups. Random assignment establishes equivalency on pre-existing differences between the intervention and control groups (the groups have similar socioeconomic backgrounds). Because the intervention and control groups are equal on pre-existing differences, it is highly unlikely that the intervention group systematically attended worse schools after participation in Head Start compared to the later schools attended by the control group. For this argument to hold any credence, one would have to assume that children in the intervention group were systematically sorted into worse schools than members of the similarly situated control group. If this sorting is in fact a reality, such a negative result for the intervention group would be attributable to attending Head Start.

The Forthcoming Third-Grade Impact Study

Following this new impact evaluation assessing Head Start's effect on kindergarten and first grade students, the national evaluation was designed to continue following students' performance through the end of third grade. The results of the forthcoming third grade impact evaluation will shed further light on the question of whether Head Start is effective and providing lasting benefits to participating students.

Members of Congress should request that the Department of Health and Human Services complete this third grade evaluation in a timely fashion and present its findings to Congress and the public immediately upon its completion. There is reason to believe that the 2010 study of first grade students' was not completed or published in a timely fashion. According to the report, data collection for the kindergarten and first grade evaluation was completed in 2006—nearly

³⁰ Valerie E. Lee and Susanna Loeb, "Where Do Head Start Attendees End Up? One Reason Why Preschool Effects Fade Out," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 62-82.

four years before its results were made public.³¹ For the national impact evaluation of third grade students, data collection was conducted during the springs of 2007 and 2008.³² Results from this important third grade follow-up evaluation should be published as soon as possible.

Taxpayers are spending considerable sums on Head Start and other early childhood education programs. Policymakers should be basing decisions about Head Start and other preschool programs on the most useful and up-to-date empirical evidence as possible.

What Members of Congress and the Administration Should Do:

Last year, President Barack Obama declared he was willing to eliminate “government programs shown to be wasteful or ineffective.”³³ Further, he asserted that “there will be no sacred cows, and no pet projects. All across America, families are making hard choices, and it's time their government did the same.”³⁴ President Obama was correct to call for wasteful and ineffective programs to be placed on the chopping block. Based on scientifically rigorous research that demonstrates Head Start is ineffective, Head Start is an ideal candidate for the budget chopping block.

If Head Start is not terminated, Congress and the Obama administration should reform the program (and other federal early childhood education programs) to improve their impact for targeted students and increase efficiency for federal and state taxpayers. In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified 69 federal programs that provide support for pre-kindergarten and child care.³⁵ According to a conservative estimate, the federal government will spend more than \$25 billion on these programs in FY 2009.³⁶

Despite these existing programs and the new empirical evidence confirming the Head Start program's ineffectiveness, Congress and the Obama administration may soon approve legislation and authorize \$8 billion in new funding for the “Early Learning Challenge Fund,” which is included in the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which passed the U.S. House

³¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Head Start Impact Study and Follow-Up: Overview,” at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact_study/impstudy_overview.html (January 14, 2010).

³² Ibid.

³³ President Barack Obama, “Weekly Address: President Obama Discusses Efforts to Reform Spending, Government Waste; Names Chief Performance Officer and Chief Technology Officer” Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, April 18, 2009, at <http://polfeeds.com/item/Weekly-Address-President-Obama-Discusses-Efforts-to-Reform-Spending-Government-Waste-Names-Chief-Performance-Officer-and-Chief-Technology-Officer> (January 12, 2010).

³⁴ President Barack Obama, “Weekly Address: President Obama Discusses Efforts to Reform Spending, Government Waste; Names Chief Performance Officer and Chief Technology Officer” Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, April 18, 2009, at <http://polfeeds.com/item/Weekly-Address-President-Obama-Discusses-Efforts-to-Reform-Spending-Government-Waste-Names-Chief-Performance-Officer-and-Chief-Technology-Officer> (January 12, 2010).

³⁵ Marnie Shaul, “Update on Prekindergarten Care and Education Programs,” letter to Senators Michael B. Enzi, Lamar Alexander, and George V. Voinovich, U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-05-678R, June 2, 2005, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05678r.pdf> (July 6, 2009).

³⁶ Ibid.

of Representatives in September. This Early Learning Challenge Fund would award competitive grants to states that expand early childhood education programs.³⁷

Rather than creating a new federal preschool program to exist independently of the ineffective Head Start program and other programs, Congress should focus on reforming and improving the current federal role in early childhood education:

- First, Congress should work to end ineffective programs and consolidate duplicative ones.
- Second, Congress should reform remaining federal early childhood education and care programs to improve their performance and effectiveness for children served. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. For example, the Head Start program could be reformed to grant families greater ability to use their children's \$7,300 share of Head Start funding to enroll in a preschool program of choice. In addition, states should be granted more autonomy over how Head Start funds and funds from other federal early childhood education and care programs are used to benefit students. Across the country, many states are enacting early childhood education programs. States should be granted the flexibility and autonomy to consolidate and coordinate federal and state programs to best meet students' needs.

Conclusion

Since 1965, the federal government has sought to improve early educational opportunities for disadvantaged children through the Head Start program. In all, taxpayers have spent more than \$150 billion on Head Start, which currently serves approximately 900,000 at an annual cost of at least \$7,300 per child. In the 1990s, Congress mandated that the Head Start program's effectiveness be evaluated. In 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services finally released the results of the impact evaluation of 1st grade students. Overall, the evaluation found that the program largely failed to improve the cognitive, socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes compared to the outcomes of similar children. According to the report, "the benefits of access to Head Start at age four are largely absent by 1st grade for the program population as a whole."

The results of this national evaluation of Head Start, the federal government's largest preschool program, should be of importance to Members of Congress and the administration. The administration has called for significant increases in federal spending on preschool. In September, the House of Representatives approved legislation that would create a \$8 billion preschool program. But the disappointing results of the Head Start evaluation casts doubt over the effectiveness of federal preschool interventions and highlights the need to review the effectiveness of the federal government's current 69 preschool and child care programs. Rather than creating a new federal preschool program, Congress should instead focus on terminating, consolidating, and reforming existing programs to better serve children's needs and improve efficiency for taxpayers.

³⁷ Lindsey Burke, "The Early Learning Challenge Fund: Increased Federal Role in Early Education," Heritage Foundation, October 6, 2009.