

## Five Reasons Why Head Start Should be Front and Center in Indiana's Conversations about Pre-K Expansion

Discussions about when and how to invest in preschool are set to take center stage during the 2017 legislative session. Governor-elect Eric Holcomb [has promised](#) to "responsibly expand access to pre-k options for the state's most at-risk children." Meanwhile, state [legislators have been raising questions](#) about preschool's effectiveness and [All IN 4 Pre-K](#) is advocating for state-funded pre-k for all Hoosier children. As the dialogue continues, Indiana Institute for Working Families wants to draw attention to Head Start, one of the longest-running early childhood education programs in the state, and to ensure that [Head Start](#), which has been considered by many to be the "gold standard" in early childhood education, is maximized as we consider expanding investments in early childhood education.

Here are five reasons why.



**1. Head Start is a cornerstone of the early childhood education system in Indiana:** Head Start has been providing high-quality educational programming and services to children from low-income families in Indiana for decades. The program has an established presence in all 92 counties and over 85% of Head Start teachers have at least an associate's degree in early childhood education. Sixty-two percent of Indiana's Head Start teachers have a bachelor's degree or above. Head Start also brings over \$100 million in federal dollars into the state each year.

	<b>Head Start</b>	<b>Early Ed Matching Grant</b>	<b>On-My-Way PreK</b>
<b>Founded</b>	1965	2013	2015
<b>Hoosier children served 2015</b>	15,614 children / 8,813 4-year-olds	491	2300 (cohort 2)
<b>2015 Budget</b>	\$113 million in federal funds for Indiana	\$1.4 million in state funds	\$10 million in state funds (budgeted)
<b>Counties Served</b>	92 counties	14 counties	5 counties
<b># Programs Funded</b>	37 Head Start programs/ 20 Early Head Start	19 programs	Unclear; 219 providers were approved
<b>Research Conducted</b>	<a href="#">Click here</a> for access to dozens of research projects conducted in partnership with Head Start, including the <a href="#">2012 advisory committee research and evaluation final report</a>	<a href="#">Year 1 evaluation</a>	<a href="#">Year 1 update</a>

**2. Head Start does so much more than ABCs:** While Head Start does offer a strong, research-based school readiness program with outcomes aligned to Indiana's early learning standards, the program is also a [whole-family approach](#), linking children and their families to medical services, nutrition, and parenting supports. Head Start programs offer developmental

screenings, meals, and oral and mental health services. Program staff members also assist families with self-selected goals like housing stability, education, and financial security.

**3. Head Start is remarkable when it comes to family involvement:**

Family involvement can mean a lot of things in education, from sending notes home and hosting one-time events like "family fun day" to fully immersing families in the life of school. Head Start programs are required to include [systemic, integrated, and comprehensive family engagement](#). Nearly 22,000 current and former Head Start and Early Head Start parents volunteered in programs last year, and family and community members participate in policy councils to engage in shared governance of the program. John Pennycuff, Indiana Head Start Association (IHSA) Board President and Director of Children's Services for ICAP Head Start, has seen whole family trajectories change as a result of this involvement. One mother's term of service on the policy council at his Head Start program led her to return to school for her bachelor's degree in social work. "She came back a fifth year to be a community rep for the community in which she lived for our policy council [and] she mentored families who had been in the same boat that she had been in at one point in time," John shared. "We really encouraged her. We really rallied behind the family."

**4. As Indiana's demographics shift, Head Start is well-equipped to serve all children:**

In 1991, the Head Start introduced [Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs](#) and since that time, the organization has been encouraging staff to develop strengths-based connections with the families they serve. Head Start has a program specifically geared toward the children of migrant workers and it also prioritizes serving students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Head Start recognizes bilingualism as a strength and provides interpreters and translation services to families.

**5. Head Start is rigorously evaluated and continually improving:**

This year, [new regulations](#) will change the way Head Starts operate based largely on ongoing assessments of the program's effectiveness. For example, when researchers looked at the program effects in the most recent Head Start Impact Study, they found greater benefits for children in full-day programs. Accordingly, beginning 2019, at least half of Head Start preschoolers will be enrolled in longer programs. Also, Head Starts will strengthen services, curriculum, and professional development in line with current research.

Like many others who support Head Start, John Pennycuff wants state policymakers to recognize its value and what supplementing rather than

supplanting federal Head Start dollars could do. First, it could create opportunities for the thousands of Hoosier children and low-income families who are currently on Head Start waiting lists. Beyond this, with smart policy that promotes federal and state investments to work in tandem, John envisions that "every child could have an amazing, amazing experience in early childhood." The Indiana Institute for Working Families echoes the call for Head Start to maintain its prominent place in Indiana's early childhood education system as the state considers expanding its investment in preschool.

*This is part one in IIWF's series on Head Start in Indiana. Stay tuned for future discussions of the research on Head Start and ways in which local Head Start programs are transforming communities in Indiana.*

Indiana Community Action Association, 1845 W. 18th St., Indianapolis, IN 46202