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# The Politics of Head Start, the Most Popular Survivor of the War on Poverty

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Claremont McKenna College

**The Politics of Head Start, the Most Popular Survivor of the War on Poverty**

Submitted to

Professor John J. Pitney

By

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For

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and History of Head Start

From its inception in 1965 as a part of the War on Poverty, Head Start has been one of the few anti-poverty government programs with enduring support across the political spectrum. But decades of research have raised questions about the program's effectiveness. Some research suggests that Head Start programs do not have lasting impact on student learning, with measurable effects fading after children finish the program. Nevertheless, Head Start has remained popular with both parties, each championing the program as a way to alleviate effects of poverty on children. Unlike many other social welfare programs, Head Start targets a population that almost everyone could sympathize with, children growing up in poverty. In his 1982 proclamation declaring Head Start Awareness Month, President Ronald Reagan described the program as "a quality program that truly provides young children with a 'head start' in life."<sup>1</sup> Although both parties have consistently been committed to Head Start, a lack of political consensus has stymied steps toward reform in the face of research highlighting the need to make improvements.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson took office in 1963 following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, he was determined to carry on Kennedy's domestic agenda.<sup>2</sup> President Johnson introduced the War on Poverty, a series of proposals to fight

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 4990—Head Start Awareness Month." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. The American Presidency Project, October 22, 1982, accessed October 25, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41906>.

<sup>2</sup> Maris A Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 35.

poverty through expanding the federal government's roles in education and health care. When Johnson took office, Walter Heller, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) briefed Johnson of the Kennedy administration's plans to combat poverty.<sup>3</sup> Johnson's answer to the initiative was unequivocal: "That's my kind of program. I'll find money for it one way or another. If I have to, I'll take away money from things to get money for people."<sup>4</sup> These plans, however, were only in the beginning stages and were formed in the coming months largely by the CEA staff.

President Johnson introduced the War on Poverty legislative program on January 8, 1964 during his first State of the Union speech by describing it as an "all-out war on human poverty and unemployment."<sup>5</sup> The CEA published an analysis of the problem of poverty in the *Economic Report of the President* with broad strategies from maintaining high employment rates to promoting adult job training.<sup>6</sup> The report also contained plans for strengthening preschool education, although it did not receive much attention at the time:

The school must play a larger role in the development of poor youngsters if they are able to have, in fact, "equal opportunity." This often means that schooling must start on a pre-school basis and include a broad range of more intensive services. The President's program against poverty will

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<sup>3</sup> Vinovskis 36.

<sup>4</sup> Vinovskis 36.

<sup>5</sup> Vinovskis 39.

<sup>6</sup> Vinovskis 40.

propose project grants to strengthen educational services to children of the poor.<sup>7</sup>

President Johnson appointed Sargent Shriver to head his Poverty Task Force, which later became the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). OEO was the agency responsible for administering most of the War on Poverty programs.<sup>8</sup> As the OEO director, Shriver remained as Johnson's chief strategist in the War on Poverty.<sup>9</sup>

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 created several War on Poverty programs: the Job Corps, Community Action Program (CAP), and VISTA.<sup>10</sup> Job Corps focused on providing education and training for employment, CAP empowered communities to plan and administer their own programs for the poor, and VISTA was a domestic Peace Corps program.<sup>11</sup> The Economic Opportunity Act gave the OEO a great degree of flexibility and had virtually nonexistent congressional requirements for program accountability.<sup>12</sup>

Head Start began without much fanfare, as an initiative of the Community Action Program (CAP). Heller, chairman of the CEA, described CAP as “the key new element in any realistic attack on poverty” that “relies on well-organized local initiative, action, and self-help under Federally-approved plans and with Federal support.”<sup>13</sup> CAP would begin

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<sup>7</sup> Vinovskis 40

<sup>8</sup> Vinovskis 61.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine, *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on Poverty* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow, *Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Zigler & Valentine 5.

<sup>12</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 2.

<sup>13</sup> Vinovskis 38.

by supporting demonstration projects in five major regions throughout the U.S. It was designed to focus on efforts to organize community solutions by employing adults in poverty.<sup>14</sup> In his presentation on War on Poverty to Congress, Shriver, listed possible community activities for CAP and gave as an example, “establishing programs for the benefit of preschool children.”<sup>15</sup>

Although it started with excitement and ambitious goals, CAP had disappointing results in its first year. Congress allocated \$300 million for the program in its first year, but by mid-year it had only used \$26 million.<sup>16</sup> The OEO had trouble finding enough cities that were interested in applying for CAP grants. An incident between New York City officials and Mobilization for Youth, a CAP prototype, had led to negative publicity of CAP dollars among mayors throughout the nation.<sup>17</sup>

CAP drew critiques from many scholars, particularly Daniel P. Moynihan who published *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* in 1969. The book examined the social and intellectual roots of the War on Poverty, and he particularly discussed CAP with a critical lens. He acknowledged it as a program that began with good intentions, like most government social programs. Moynihan even praised the endeavor calling it “the most notable effort to date to mount a systematic social response” to the lack of community and social engagement in addressing poverty in ethnic minority communities.<sup>18</sup> He was, however, critical of how

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<sup>14</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 3.

<sup>15</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 3.

<sup>16</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 3.

<sup>17</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 3.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Walinsky, “Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding.” *New York Times*, February 2, 1969, accessed October 20, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/10/04/specials/moynihan-community.html>.

the idea of the program was proposed and then implemented by “activist social scientists” without thinking through the practical and political implications.<sup>19</sup> Adam Walinsky, who served as Senator Kennedy’s legislative assistant, described Moynihan’s contention accurately, “that the social-work intellectuals, having conceived the community action program on inexact guesses about the roots of human behavior, imposed these theories on a too-willing Government.”<sup>20</sup> In his review of Moynihan’s book, John Meyer, Stanford Professor of Sociology, wrote:

The community action agencies tended to become foci for various kinds of activities aimed at undermining the power of existing urban political institutions. In particular, as the community action program coalesced with the desire of urban blacks to have more say about their communities, the community action agencies, funded by the federal government, became organized centers of opposition to many mayors and city hall bureaucracies.<sup>21</sup>

Because of the local agencies’ lack of engagement and interest in CAP, Shriver was concerned about having a surplus of spending. This problem almost certainly guaranteed that it would receive less funding in future years. Shriver asked the OEO’s research division to come up with reports of the problem of poverty with

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding; Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: Free Press, 1969).

<sup>20</sup> Adam Walinsky, “Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding.” *New York Times*, February 2, 1969, accessed October 20, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/10/04/specials/moynihan-community.html>.

<sup>21</sup> John R. Meyer, "Reviewed Work: Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty." *Political Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (September 1970): 498-500, accessed October 26, 2016. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2147885?seq=2#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2147885?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents).

recommendations on how to spend the surplus money. Shriver's staff reported back that almost half of the nation's poor were children, mostly under the age of 12.<sup>22</sup> Shriver responded, "it was clear that it was foolish to talk about a 'total war against poverty,' if you were doing nothing about children."<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, during this time there was an increased interest in social science research around the importance of a child's environment in his or her development. For many years, leading child development and testing experts believed IQ was hereditary and for the most part fixed at birth. In the early-twentieth century, however, researchers and scholars started rejecting the idea that IQ was genetically determined and fixed at conception.<sup>24</sup> Scientists at the University of Iowa's Child Welfare Research Station argued the value of early childhood training and the environment's role in shaping children's mental and physical development.<sup>25</sup> A major turning point in creating public awareness of the environmental viewpoint came in the 1950s and the early 1960s with the works of J. McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom. In his 1961 book, *Intelligence and Experience*, Hunt wrote:

At this stage of history and knowledge, no one can blueprint a program of preschool enrichment that will with certainty be an effective antidote for the cultural deprivation of children. On the other hand, the revolutionary changes taking place in the traditional beliefs about the development of

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<sup>22</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 3.

<sup>23</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 3.

<sup>24</sup> Zigler & Valentine 6.

<sup>25</sup> Vinovskis 10.

human capacity and motivation make it sensible to hope that a program of preschool enrichment may ultimately be made effective.<sup>26</sup>

The popularization of this viewpoint that rejected the notion of fixed intelligence and emphasized the importance of a child's environment in shaping his or her intellectual growth fueled support for Head Start. Benjamin Bloom published *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* in 1964, and his data suggested that intellectual growth occurred the most rapidly in the first four or five years of life and that the best time to enrich the environment of a child was during these first critical years of life.<sup>27</sup> These terms used by Bloom, "first five years" as the "critical period" became popularized among advocates of strong preschool programs.<sup>28</sup>

The work of Hunt and Bloom, however, was not the main catalyst for Head Start. Valora Washington, former Co-Chair of the National Head Start Association Commission, and Ura Jean Oyemade, Professor of Human Development at Howard University, write that "the short-run importance of these books was the coincidence of their timing with the political needs and purposes of the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies."<sup>29</sup> Neither President Kennedy nor Johnson's original plan included a program for preschool children, and the Economic Opportunity Act contained only one line authorizing, but not requiring a preschool program.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Head Start did not

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<sup>26</sup> Vinovskis 11.

<sup>27</sup> Zigler & Valentine 7.

<sup>28</sup> Zigler & Valentine 7.

<sup>29</sup> Valora Washington and Ura Jean Oyemade, *Project Head Start: Past, Present, and Future Trends in the Context of Family Needs* (New York: Garland Pub., 1987), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 8.

begin until six months after the Economic Opportunity Act.<sup>31</sup> Maris Vinovskis, Professor at the University of Michigan writes, “Shriver and other War on Poverty officials paid little, if any, attention to early childhood education.”<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps a more influential reason that led to the formation of Head Start was the shared interest of President Johnson and Sargent Shriver in education and disadvantaged communities. Johnson began his career as a school teacher in rural Texas, and Shriver served five years as the president of the Board of Education in Chicago, where he witnessed the challenges of meeting the needs of students growing up in urban poverty<sup>33</sup>. Now with a budget surplus for CAP and the social research to back it up, Shriver had the opportunity to create Head Start, a program he believed would “bring together all of the different resources within different local agencies on one target – the child that is poor, and his family.”<sup>34</sup>

From the beginning, Head Start had a broad reach and purpose. It targeted school readiness as well as psychological and health development. The program would not only provide benefits to children, but to their families through an array of social services. Oyemade says that Head Start “combined day care with medical and dental treatment, emphasized both the child’s psychological development and school readiness, and introduced ‘social services into the child’s home environment plus education of the parents.’”<sup>35</sup> The comprehensive scope of Head Start is not surprising after examining the

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<sup>31</sup> Washington & Oyemade 6.

<sup>32</sup> Vinovskis 50.

<sup>33</sup> Zigler & Valentine 6.

<sup>34</sup> Washington & Oyemade 7.

<sup>35</sup> Washington & Oyemade 7.

composition of the Head Start Planning Committee that gathered in early 1965. Edward Zigler, one of the members of the Committee and the founding director of the Office of Child Development under Nixon, describes that it consisted of only two early childhood educators and “four physicians, a professor of nursing, an associate dean of social work, a nun who was a college president, a dean of a college of education, a clinical psychologist, and two research psychologists.”<sup>36</sup>

It is difficult to determine the origins of the name Head Start. It may have originated from Shriver’s view that “everyone has been in some kind of a food race, where one group, by reason of a handicap, is given a head start. It was a facile phrase, and it actually did represent what we were trying to give these kids – a running head start.”<sup>37</sup> The program began with the optimistic idea that providing social services to children growing up in poverty can address the long-lasting effects of poverty. Head Start began during the summer of 1965, and OEO initially expected to serve about 100,000 children with a spending of about \$17 million. The demand far exceeded these numbers, however, and 561,359 children were enrolled in 11,068 Head Start centers in 1965.<sup>38</sup> Head Start began as an 8-week demonstration project in the summers of 1965 and 1966. It was then expanded to full-day and full-year programs in October 1968.<sup>39</sup>

Fifty years later in 2015, the Office of Head Start within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services received \$8.6

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<sup>36</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 8.

<sup>37</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 6.

<sup>38</sup> Washington & Oyemade 8.

<sup>39</sup> "History of Head Start." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 02, 2016. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>.

billion and administered grant funding and oversight to 1,700 public and private nonprofit and for-profit agencies that provide Head Start services.<sup>40</sup> Since its inception in 1965, it has served more than 30 million children.

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<sup>40</sup> “Head Start: What We Do.” Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 26, 2016, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/what-we-do>.

## **Chapter 2: Mixed Research on the Effectiveness of Head Start**

Results from studies on the effectiveness of Head Start programs have been mixed at best. The first major evaluation conducted on Head Start was the 1969 impact study by Westinghouse Learning Corporation sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity, which found that Head Start programs did not have a lasting impact on children, with cognitive and language gains fading out after a few years.<sup>41</sup> There has been subsequent research both supporting and challenging the Westinghouse research. Four decades of research, however, show a lack of consensus on evidence that Head Start has achieved lasting academic gains for children.

The scope of Head Start makes the program more difficult to evaluate than other social programs. Head Start has a comprehensive approach to caring for children from low-income families. The program's broad goals include educational performance, health and nutrition benefits to children and families, increased self-esteem of children and families, and improved child-rearing practices.<sup>42</sup>

Head Start lacks clearly-defined approaches for achieving each goal and does not set priorities among a sequence of goals. Edmund W. Gordon, Psychology Professor at

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<sup>41</sup> "The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of the Effects of Head Start on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development. (Executive Summary)." Education Resources Information Center, accessed November 11, 2016. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED036321>.

<sup>42</sup> "History of Head Start." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 02, 2016. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>.

Yale University and one of the architects of Head Start, describes the difficulty of the initial process of developing research and evaluation of Head Start programs,

We had to have reliable instruments that would tap the characteristics of a population which has never been studied except in comparison to middle-class children; of a program that was uncharted and inconsistent across sites; and of outcomes that varied depending upon the site, the sponsor, and frequently, the assessor. We had few, if any, precedents for this type of evaluation.<sup>43</sup>

Because of such lack of clarity, researchers have debated whether educational performance should be the most important assessment of Head Start. Valora Washington and Ura Jean Oyemade, authors of *Project Head Start: Past, Present, and Future Trends in the Context of Family Needs*, argue that “there has been an overconcentration of evaluative efforts on the use of IQ and other standardized tests when assessing the effects of interventions... [and] a narrow focus on children’s cognitive and intellectual gains.”<sup>44</sup> They write that the lack of prioritized goals, along with the flexibility of local Head Start programs to design their own program structure “hindered both the achievement of any single aim and the evaluation of program effectiveness.”<sup>45</sup>

The 1969 Westinghouse Head Start study was the first major evaluation of the program. It found that Head Start programs did not create any substantive emotional and cognitive gains for children. The authors found that summer programs were ineffective in

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<sup>43</sup> Zigler & Valentine 399.

<sup>44</sup> Washington & Oyemade 92.

<sup>45</sup> Washington & Oyemade 91.

producing lasting gains in emotional and cognitive development and full year programs were ineffective in creating emotional development and only marginally effective in producing lasting cognitive gains.<sup>46</sup> The authors wrote that “full year programs resulted in cognitive and language gains at the first grade level but appeared to ‘fade out’ by second or third grade.”<sup>47</sup> The study found, however, that parents of Head Start children strongly approved of the program and reported substantial participation in their children’s Head Start center.

The Head Start Synthesis Project in 1986 combined over 210 reports of research on the effects of local Head Start programs. The study published in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* found that Head Start results in “significant, immediate gains in cognitive test scores, socio-emotional test scores, and health status, (though) in the long-run, cognitive and socio-emotional test scores of former Head Start students do not remain superior to those of disadvantaged children who did not attend Head Start.”<sup>48</sup> The study also analyzed the program’s effects on parental involvement and found mixed results on the effectiveness of parent education programs designed to influence child-rearing practices in the home.

In 1987, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children, Youth and Families conducted a study titled, “Path to the Future: Long-Term

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<sup>46</sup> "The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of the Effects of Head Start on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development. (Executive Summary)." Education Resources Information Center, accessed November 11, 2016. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED036321>.

<sup>47</sup> "Head Start: What Do We Know About What Works?" Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, accessed October 16, 2016. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/head-start-what-do-we-know-about-what-works>.

<sup>48</sup> "Head Start: What Do We Know About What Works?" Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, accessed October 16, 2016. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/head-start-what-do-we-know-about-what-works>.

Effects of Head Start in the Philadelphia School District,” using ten years of data on almost 15,000 children. The study found that Head Start children had fewer behavioral problems and had better attendance rates and lower attrition than non-Head Start children. In achievement tests, Head Start children performed slightly better on achievement tests until the third grade, but these differences faded out from third to sixth grade.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these studies that should have brought some skepticism, the popularity of Head Start only continued to grow in the 1990s. In attempting to respond to studies that endangered the growth of Head Start, advocates for early childhood education suggested that Head Start needed to reach the child at an earlier age. Citing policy papers that supported the impact of early childhood experience on brain development, the advocates argued that the reason for the lack of effectiveness of Head Start programs was that they were reaching children too late. The advocates focused on research evidence that the first three years of a child’s life is crucial to the child’s long term emotional and cognitive development. They were successful in driving support to create Early Head Start, created in 1994 to serve children from birth to age three, and expanding Head Start to full-day and full-year programs in October 1998.<sup>50</sup>

Elizabeth Rose, in her book *The Promise of Preschool*, writes that the “mid-1990s saw an unprecedented surge in media and public attention to neuroscience research about

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<sup>49</sup> "Head Start: What Do We Know About What Works?" Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, accessed October 16, 2016. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/head-start-what-do-we-know-about-what-works>.

<sup>50</sup> "History of Head Start." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 02, 2016. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>.

brain development that supported the idea that the first few years of life were a crucial period for brain growth.”<sup>51</sup> The publicity on brain research not only focused on the impact of early childhood education for low-income children but on all children. Rose writes,

It provided a basis for talking about the common needs of all children, not just the poorest, and its potential audience included every family in America. Entrepreneurs capitalized on the new interest in babies’ intellectual development, promising parents that educational toys, Mozart recordings for the crib, and black-and-white graphics for decorating the nursery would help stimulate their babies’ mental development. State policy makers also paid attention; the National Governors Association focused its 1998 conference on early development, and early childhood initiatives were under way in twenty-five states. Twelve governors mentioned brain research in calling for early childhood development programs during the 1998 legislative sessions.<sup>52</sup>

Head Start received its largest budget increase ever in 1990. Edward Zigler and Susan Muenchow, authors of *Head Start: The Inside Story of America’s Most Successful Educational Experiment*, describe the Head Start Expansion and Quality Improve Act as the “culmination of a 25-year bipartisan success story.”<sup>53</sup> They describe that President George H.W. Bush wanted to ensure that Head Start is available to every eligible four-

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<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth R. Rose, *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-kindergarten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 102.

<sup>52</sup> Rose 102-103.

<sup>53</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 211.

year old so that “by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.”<sup>54</sup> Zigler and Muenchow, however, write that it was dangerous to have such an ambitious expansion-focused goal. They argue that Bush placed “too much emphasis on program expansion at the expense of program quality, even proposing to reduce the funds Congress set aside for quality improvements.”<sup>55</sup>

In 1999, John Bruer, President of the James McDonnell Foundation, published the *Myth of the First Three Years* to review relevant neuroscience research that was being used by early childhood advocates. Bruer says that these studies were actually more based on behavioral science – psychology, psychiatry, and sociology – rather than neuroscience. He explains that the advocates focused on brain development because neuroscience was chosen as the “scientific vehicle for the public relations campaign to promote early childhood programs more for rhetorical, than scientific reasons.”<sup>56</sup> Bruer questions the existence of reliable scientific research that has linked brain development, child development, and education and argues,

There was, in fact, no new brain science involved in the policy and media discussions of child development. What seemed to be happening was that selected pieces of rather old brain science were being used, and often

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<sup>54</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 211.

<sup>55</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 212.

<sup>56</sup> John T. Bruer, "Revisiting "The Myth of the 'First Three Years'" Centre for Parenting Culture Studies. September 2011, accessed October 15, 2016. <https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/parentingculturestudies/files/2011/09/Special-briefing-on-The-Myth.pdf>.

misinterpreted, to support preexisting views about child development and early childhood policy.<sup>57</sup>

Recent research on Head Start continue to show mixed results. In 2010, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) conducted the National Head Start Impact Study. Even after almost 40 years, the report found that while providing access to Head Start has a positive impact on children's preschool experiences, the effects of Head Start programs seemed to fade after a couple of years. The report describes that "the advantages children gained during their Head Start and age 4 years yielded only a few statistically significant differences in outcomes at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> grade for the sample as a whole."<sup>58</sup>

Most recently in 2015, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an initiative of U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Educational Sciences, published a report on Head Start impact studies. It reviewed 40 eligible studies that examined the effects of Head Start on school readiness of preschool-aged children. It identified an additional 50 studies that did not meet WWC eligibility criteria for review. Out of the 40 eligible studies, only one study met the WWC group study standards without reservations, the 2010 study conducted by the HHS Office of Planning Research, and Evaluation.

The WWC study included eight domains in student outcomes: alphabetics, cognition, comprehension, fluency, general reading achievement, language development,

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<sup>57</sup> John T. Bruer, "Revisiting "The Myth of the First Three Years"" Centre for Parenting Culture Studies. September 2011, accessed October 15, 2016.

<https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/parentingculturestudies/files/2011/09/Special-briefing-on-The-Myth.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> "Head Start Impact Study Final Report (Executive Summary)." Office of Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. January 2010, accessed October 20, 2016. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/executive\\_summary\\_final.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/executive_summary_final.pdf).

mathematics achievement, and social-emotional development. After assessing the 2010 HHS study, the WWC concluded “the extent of evidence for Head Start on the school readiness outcomes of 3- and 4-year-old children to be small for three outcome domains – general reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and social-emotional development.”<sup>59</sup> It did, however, find potentially positive effects on general reading achievement, compared to mathematics achievement and social-emotional achievement.

The WWC review of Head Start could not identify any Head Start studies that both met the WWC group design standards without reservations and addressed more of these domains. The WWC report also highlights the issue of the lack of Head Start impact studies that meet robust research design standards, with only one of 40 eligible studies meeting the its design standards.

There have been, however, recent studies that suggest that Head Start has long-term impact on program participants. These studies measured variables ranging from high school completion, earnings, and crime. In 2002, the *American Economic Review* published a study titled “Longer-Term Effects of Head Start,” which collected data on adults who completed Head Start. It found that whites who participated in Head Start, compared to their siblings who did not, were more likely to complete high school, attend

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<sup>59</sup> "What Works Clearing House Intervention Report." Institute of Educational Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. July 2015, accessed October 13, 2016. [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc\\_headstart\\_072815.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_headstart_072815.pdf).

college, and possibly have higher earnings in their twenties.<sup>60</sup> African-Americans who enrolled in Head Start were less likely to have been charged with a crime.<sup>61</sup>

A 2009 study by David Deming titled “Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start,” published in the *American Economic Journal*, found that the long-term impact of Head Start for disadvantaged children is large despite “fade-out” of test score gains.<sup>62</sup> Deming used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) to compare those who participated in Head Start with their siblings who did not. The NLSY is a longitudinal study that follows for youth until their adulthood and asks a series of questions on important developmental, and social topics. Deming found that Head Start, “closes one-third of the gap between children with median and bottom quartile family income.”<sup>63</sup>

Most recently, a Brookings Institution study in 2016 titled “The Long-Term Impact of the Head Start Program” examined the long-term outcomes of Head Start by looking into participants’ adulthood and the effect of Head Start on participants’ children. This study also used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The Brookings study found that Head Start improves educational outcomes, increasing the probability of participants graduating from high school, attending college, and receiving a

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<sup>60</sup> Eliana Garces, Duncan Thomas, and Janet Currie, “Longer-Term Effects of Head Start.” *The American Economic Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 999-1012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3083291>.

<sup>61</sup> Eliana Garces, Duncan Thomas, and Janet Currie, “Longer-Term Effects of Head Start.” *The American Economic Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 999-1012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3083291>.

<sup>62</sup> David Deming, “Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, no. 3 (2009): 111-134. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.1.3.111>

<sup>63</sup> David Deming, “Early Childhood Intervention and Life-Cycle Skill Development: Evidence from Head Start.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1, no. 3 (2009): 111-134.

post-secondary education.<sup>64</sup> It found that Head Start also causes social, emotional, and behavioral development which was seen in adulthood measures of self-control, self-esteem, and positive parenting practices.<sup>65</sup> The authors write that this was particularly true for African-American participants. The program also increased positive parenting practices for participants whose mothers did not have a high school degree.

There have also been studies examining the variation of Head Start programs and their effect on children. The studies examined the effects of three different Head Start delivery models, high quality Head Start programs, and Head Start centers offering full-day programs and home visiting.

A University of Delaware study in 1988 compared the effects of three different delivery models of Head Start: center-based, home-based, and a combination of center and home-based. The study found that there was no difference in children's cognitive development across the delivery models.<sup>66</sup> They did, however, find differences in how parents engaged with their children depending on the model,

Parents enrolled in the home-based model demonstrated greater gains in academic stimulation of their children in the use of toys, games, and reading material; and in encouraging their children to learn. Home-based

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<sup>64</sup> Lauren Bauer and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, "The Long-term Impact of the Head Start Program." Brookings Institution. August 19, 2016, accessed November 02, 2016.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-long-term-impact-of-the-head-start-program/>.

<sup>65</sup> Lauren Bauer and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, "The Long-term Impact of the Head Start Program." Brookings Institution. August 19, 2016, accessed November 02, 2016.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-long-term-impact-of-the-head-start-program/>.

<sup>66</sup> "Head Start: What Do We Know About What Works?" Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. 2015, accessed October 20, 2016.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/head-start-what-do-we-know-about-what-works>.

parents also demonstrated greater growth in knowledge of child development and parent empowerment.<sup>67</sup>

The HHS Office of Program Research and Evaluation conducted a Head Start Impact Study in 2014 on whether impacts are larger or more persistent for children who participate in high quality Head Start programs. The report found that there was little evidence that quality matters to impacts of Head Start lasting into third grade.<sup>68</sup>

A 2014 study by Christopher Walters, Professor of Economics at University of California at Berkeley, found that full-day Head Start programs impact cognitive skills more than others and Head Start centers with frequent home visiting are especially effective in increasing socio-emotional skills.<sup>69</sup> The study also found that Head Start is more effective for children with less-educated mothers. Overall, Walter concluded that key inputs, including curriculum, teacher education, and class size are not associated with increased effectiveness in Head Start.

Another difficulty in program evaluation of Head Start is that there are 45 federal programs that allow funding to be directed to children from birth to age five. Among these, 33 programs are not mainly focused on early childhood education, such as the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF provides significant

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<sup>67</sup> "Head Start: What Do We Know About What Works?" Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. 2015, accessed October 20, 2016. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/head-start-what-do-we-know-about-what-works>.

<sup>68</sup> "The Role of Program Quality in Determining Head Start's Impact on Child Development: Third Grade Follow-Up to the Head Start Impact Study." Office of Planning and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Service. October 2014, accessed November 15, 2016. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/hs\\_quality\\_report\\_4\\_28\\_14\\_final.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/hs_quality_report_4_28_14_final.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Walters, "Inputs in the Production of Early Childhood Human Capital: Evidence from Head Start." National Bureau of Economic Research. October 2014, accessed November 16, 2016. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20639.pdf>.

funding for child care for low-income families in the form of block grants to states, but early childhood care is not the main purpose of program. The remaining 12 programs do have a stated purpose of providing early child care and learning services. The challenge is measuring impact of Head Start programs if children are receiving services from a dozen different government programs. In evaluating Head Start programs' impact on children, it is important to be aware of whether they may be receiving additional services from any of the 45 different federal programs.

Throughout the fifty years of Head Start's existence, there have been numerous studies on its effectiveness. Given the diversity of research findings on its effectiveness, it is clear, that there is not a rousing consensus that Head Start has significant and lasting impact on its participants. Head Start, however, continues to receive wide-ranging popularity as a program from the public as well as from both political parties.

### Chapter 3: Popularity of Head Start

Head Start has remained popular compared with other programs created by the War on Poverty, such as the Food Stamp Act of 1964, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Social Security Act of 1965.<sup>70</sup> A 2011 public opinion survey by the Democracy Corps found that 73 percent of the public opposed cutting funding from Head Start.<sup>71</sup> Head Start brought diverse people together from various political ideologies to advocate for increased resources for children growing up in poverty, bringing leaders as politically at odds as Jesse Jackson and Orrin Hatch to support the mission.<sup>72</sup>

The social research of J. McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom about the importance of the first five years in growing children's IQ led to widespread grassroots support for Head Start.<sup>73</sup> Liberals and conservatives were brought together to promote equality of opportunity through providing services for disadvantaged children.

Head Start was born in a period of optimism about the federal government's ability to address issues of poverty and inequality.<sup>74</sup> Yet there was also scrutiny from some members of Congress on War on Poverty programs, and Sargent Shriver was in

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<sup>70</sup> Washington & Oyemade 8.

<sup>71</sup> "The American Public Strongly Opposes Education Cuts." Committee for Education Funding, accessed October 15, 2016.

[https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http://www.thompson.com/images/thompson/nclb/openresources/the\\_public\\_opposes\\_education\\_cuts.doc](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http://www.thompson.com/images/thompson/nclb/openresources/the_public_opposes_education_cuts.doc)

<sup>72</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 1.

<sup>73</sup> Rose 15.

<sup>74</sup> Rose 13.

search of the best way to spend the rest of the money allocated to the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).<sup>75</sup> The Community Action Program (CAP) did not have the participation rate from local agencies that OEO expected, with local government officials being wary of CAP dollars. With Head Start, Shriver knew that the program would build support for the War on Poverty in Congress and in local communities.<sup>76</sup> He recalled thinking:

In our society there is a bias against helping adults... but there is a contrary bias in favor of helping children. Even in the black belt of the deepest South, there's always been a prejudice in favor of little black children... I hoped that we could overcome a lot of hostility in our society against the poor in general, and specifically against black people who are poor, by aiming for the children.<sup>77</sup>

Zigler and Muenchow also say that Head Start's popularity depended on the program's beneficiaries, "Poor children were far more appealing victims than their parents. No one could accuse preschool children of being lazy or responsible for their own financial miseries. A War on Poverty that would benefit children, regardless of their race or ethnicity, was a war most Americans would want to fight."<sup>78</sup> The mission of Head Start to support school readiness of children ages birth to five growing up in low-income families by providing them with social services was one that hardly anyone could object

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<sup>75</sup> Rose 15.

<sup>76</sup> Rose 15.

<sup>77</sup> Rose 15.

<sup>78</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 4.

to.<sup>79</sup> Conservatives supported Head Start because it benefited a vulnerable and identifiable population, compared with less popular welfare programs for able-bodied adults.

Historically the U.S. has not followed Western European countries in creating a strong welfare state. Theda Skocpol writes in her book examining the political origins of social policy that although the U.S. has avoided creating a paternalistic welfare state, it has come “close to forging a maternalistic welfare state, with female-dominated public agencies implementing regulations and benefits for the good of women and their children.”<sup>80</sup> From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the American Civil War, political parties supported expansion of benefits for Union Civil War veterans and their families. This pattern has continued with the increase of social spending in the 20<sup>th</sup> century starting from the 1900s to the 1920s with a wide array of protective labor regulations and social benefits to help women as mothers or as potential mothers.<sup>81</sup> The U.S. has continued since then to come together in support of social programs that benefit veterans, mothers, and children.

Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) is a prime example of someone who won bipartisan support for government social programs, particularly healthcare, by including programs for disadvantaged children. For example, in 1996 Senator Kennedy led the initiative for a national health insurance plan, the Health Insurance Portability and

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<sup>79</sup> “Head Start: What We Do.” Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 26, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/what-we-do>.

<sup>80</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>81</sup> Skocpol, 2.

Accountability Act. To get enough Republican support, Senator Kennedy worked with Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) to create the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), health insurance for uninsured children in low-income families.<sup>82</sup> This approach created the bipartisan support needed to get the bill signed into law. Again in 2006, Senator Kennedy and Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) worked together to pass the Family Opportunity Act, providing states with the flexibility to expand Medicaid coverage to children with special needs.<sup>83</sup> Conservatives have historically supported expanding social programs targeted at disadvantaged children, compared with other programs targeted at a more general population.

Peter Skerry discusses the ideological appeal of the program that crosses political boundaries, "Head Start sits astride an intellectual divide, contradicting much liberal and conservative social policy dogma."<sup>84</sup> Liberals viewed Head Start as one of their own programs because of its inception through LBJ's War on Poverty. Many conservatives supported the program because of its focus on giving control to local administrators to set program goals, depending on communities' needs.

Despite liberal support for Head Start, Skerry writes that the program undermines the "liberal faith in centralized government" and "this loose administrative arrangement is entirely consistent with the Reagan Administration's New Federalism initiative."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "Fighting for Quality, Affordable Health Care." Senator Edward M. Kennedy, accessed October 28, 2016. [http://www.tedkennedy.org/service/item/health\\_care](http://www.tedkennedy.org/service/item/health_care).

<sup>83</sup> "Fighting for Quality, Affordable Health Care." Senator Edward M. Kennedy, accessed October 28, 2016. [http://www.tedkennedy.org/service/item/health\\_care](http://www.tedkennedy.org/service/item/health_care).

<sup>84</sup> Peter Skerry, "The Charmed Life of Head Start." *National Affairs*, no. 73 (Fall 1983): 18-38. [http://www.nationalaffairs.com/doclib/20060407\\_issue\\_073\\_article\\_2.pdf](http://www.nationalaffairs.com/doclib/20060407_issue_073_article_2.pdf), 20.

<sup>85</sup> Skerry 30.

Although critics reason that the Reagan Administration used this framework to cut the federal budget, President Reagan protected Head Start as one of the social safety net programs exempted from budget cuts.<sup>86</sup>

When Head Start was initiated by the Johnson Administration, Shriver was determined to make the program as wide-reaching as possible to ensure its longevity and public support. Elizabeth Rose, Library Director at the Fairfield Museum and History Center, writes that “Shriver insisted on a big program with big publicity and big numbers.”<sup>87</sup> Although respected psychologist Jerome Bruner proposed launching Head Start as a small pilot program serving about 2,500 children, Shriver rejected this proposal and decided on an initiative that would serve 100,000 children. President Johnson then decided to triple the program to serve 300,000 children.<sup>88</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, Cornell University psychologist and a member of the Head Start committee remembers Shriver declaring, “We’re going to write Head Start across the face of this nation so that no Congress and no president can ever destroy it.”<sup>89</sup> Shriver was partly driven by the disappointing results of other OEO programs. His biographer Scott Stossel writes, “Bruised by the mounting assaults on Community Action and Job Corps, Shriver was desperate for the OEO to have a political triumph. Head Start seems to fit the bill.”<sup>90</sup>

Conservatives also realized that the political cost of attacking Head Start was not worth the policy benefit. Shriver’s strategy had worked. Head Start was now operating at

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<sup>86</sup> Skerry 18.

<sup>87</sup> Rose 17.

<sup>88</sup> Rose 17.

<sup>89</sup> Rose 17.

<sup>90</sup> Rose 17.

a massive scale that had resulted in a broad base of political support. In part, Nixon recognized the political support of Head Start and decided to place it under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in the newly created Office of Child Development (OCD), even while other War on Poverty programs were dismantled along with the OEO itself in the Nixon Administration.<sup>91</sup>

There were, however, some early challenges to Head Start due to several evaluation studies that cast doubt on the program's effectiveness. Washington and Oyemade describe that while during the Johnson Administration, Head Start's value as an "effective instrument of early education was widely accepted by the public, by Congress, and by social scientists," there were several studies released by 1969 during President Nixon's administration, particularly the Westinghouse study, that cast doubt on its effectiveness. They write that the response to the Westinghouse report was "mixed, far-reaching, and controversial."<sup>92</sup> Edward Zigler, who was appointed by President Nixon as the first director of OCD to oversee Head Start, described the negative impact of the Westinghouse report as so powerful that his first job was to "fight to keep the program alive."<sup>93</sup> He believed that there was no hope of a significant Head Start expansion.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless Head Start was strongly defended amidst some skeptical sentiment. The Westinghouse report did not lead Nixon to cancel Head Start. Some may view that the decision was largely due to the political costs as the program remained popular

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<sup>91</sup> Rose 30.

<sup>92</sup> Washington & Oyemade 8.

<sup>93</sup> Washington & Oyemade 8.

<sup>94</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 150.

among participants and acceptable to Congress.<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Rose writes that Nixon, “calculating that the political costs of eliminating the popular program were too high,” continued the program with level funding. Nixon’s domestic adviser John Erlichman included in his notes for his meeting with Nixon in May 1969 that “it may be too late to abolish” Head Start, which was supported by powerful members of Congress, but no increases should be considered.<sup>96</sup>

There is, however, reason to believe that Nixon was seriously committed to antipoverty programs and believed in the potential of Head Start. He appointed Daniel P. Moynihan, who had also served in the Kennedy Administration, as Counselor to the President for Urban Affairs to advise him on poverty. In his speech to Congress on February 1969, Nixon even used the “first five years” rhetoric promoted by early childhood education advocates, saying,

So crucial is the matter of early growth that we must make a national commitment to providing all American children an opportunity for healthful and stimulating development during the first five years of life. In delegating Head Start to the Department of HEW, I pledge myself to that commitment.<sup>97</sup>

Head Start’s wide array of services has made it difficult for scholars and researchers to have a critical lens of its effectiveness. Head Start services are broad,

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<sup>95</sup> Washington & Oyemade 9.

<sup>96</sup> Rose 33.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on the Nation's Antipoverty Programs." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, the American Presidency Project. February 19, 1969, accessed November 10, 2016. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2397>.

focusing on language and literacy skills, cognition and general knowledge, physical development and health, social and emotional development, and approaches to learning. According to Skerry, the program's multi-faceted character has resulted in few who "have bothered to examine Head Start as a coherent whole."<sup>98</sup> When critics would question the effectiveness of one component of the program, advocates of Head Start could quickly point to another component of the program that is allegedly making a real difference in children's lives.

Moreover, in the area of government social programs for children from low-income families, personal anecdotes often trump data. Generally, people are much more moved by "Head Start Success Stories," narratives of families who have benefited from enrolling their children in Head Start than results based on data that puts into question the program's effects on children's lasting educational outcomes.<sup>99</sup> The compelling mission of Head Start of providing low-income children with an array of resources and support because of their already disadvantaged backgrounds has sustained the popularity of the program for over 50 years.

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<sup>98</sup> Skerry 19.

<sup>99</sup> "Head Start Success Stories." New England Head Start Association, accessed October 15, 2016. <http://www.newenglandheadstart.org/stories.html>.

#### **Chapter 4: Lack of Political and Academic Consensus on Improving Head Start**

Although there is consensus on the need for improvements to Head Start, proposed reforms differ across the political spectrum. There have been calls by some to disband the program altogether. Darcy Ann Olson, Cato's director of education and child policy writes, "After 35 years without success, it's time politicians reconsider the wisdom of Head Start. When they do, it will be time to let the program go."<sup>100</sup> On the other end, there have been proposals to increase current funding for Head Start, so the program can reach all of its eligible population. Joan Lombardi, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, believes that the program "isn't reaching enough children early enough or for long enough."<sup>101</sup> She argues that the reason for the disappointing results in Head Start impact studies is the program has been underfunded. If Head Start were to serve every eligible child at the current rate of spending, it would cost at least double the \$9.2 billion spent to serve about 1 million children in the 2016 fiscal year. Most experts, however, believe that the answer is not as easy as drastically increasing Head Start funding nor getting rid of the program. A more in-depth analysis of the debate surrounding Head Start reveals that there is not as much of a stark divide on proposed reforms and suggests hope for finding common ground.

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<sup>100</sup> Darcy Ann Olson, "It's Time to Stop Head Start." Cato Institute. September 01, 2000, accessed October 02, 2016. <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/its-time-stop-head-start>.

<sup>101</sup> Lillian Mongeau, "The Never-Ending Struggle to Improve Head Start." *The Atlantic*. August 9, 2016, accessed November 02, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/is-head-start-a-failure/494942/>.

Head Start is unique compared with other government social programs, with conservative and liberal scholars not having clearly differentiated views about Head Start. Among right-leaning and conservative scholars and experts, there are few calls to scrap the program. In part, the reason may be political. Head Start has enjoyed strong public support from the beginning and the endorsement of Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. Beyond political reasons, the program has been an exception for conservative scholars who are often skeptical of government programs' effectiveness in addressing poverty. Peter Skerry discusses how Head Start's approach and structure can be thought of as promoting conservative values and goals. He writes,

[Head Start] demonstrates the validity of their concerns with self-help, individual sacrifice, and private initiative. Yet it is also true that Head Start's very existence demonstrates that these, as well as other, conservative goals can sometimes coexist with – even be fostered by – government programs... As a result, the program has much more to teach liberals and conservatives alike than either has recognized.<sup>102</sup>

Head Start is structured to give control to local administrators who know about local needs and capabilities. Programs are located in child care centers and family child care homes. Some Head Start programs offer home-based services with staff conducting weekly visits to children in their own homes and working with parents. Each Head Start program must have a policy council as the program's governing body, composed of

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<sup>102</sup> Skerry 20.

parents and community representatives.<sup>103</sup> At least 51 percent of the council must be parents of currently enrolled children. The parent members go through annual elections. The policy council makes decisions on program functions, staff hires, and budget and spending. Skerry writes that “this loose administrative arrangement is entirely consistent with the Reagan administration’s New Federalism initiative.”<sup>104</sup>

Although there is an ideological appeal to Head Start for both liberals and conservatives, many scholars would disagree with Lombardi’s proposal that the solution to improving the program is to simply increase the number of children enrolled. Russ Whitehurst is the director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. Before taking on his role at Brookings, he was the founding director of the Institute of Education Sciences within the U.S. Department of Education, and prior to that he was a developmental psychologist conducting research on programs to enhance the cognitive development of young children. Whitehurst argues that underfunding is not the problem. In his testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce, Whitehurst said,

The question for me is not whether the federal government should support the learning and care of young children from economically disadvantaged homes and otherwise vulnerable status but how it should do so. The current system, a mishmash of 45 separate, incoherent, and largely

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<sup>103</sup> "Head Start Governance and Management Composition Requirements." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. April 22, 2014, accessed November 15, 2016. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/certification/governance-entities-diagram.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> Skerry 30.

ineffective programs, fails to serve the broader public and certainly is less than optimal for the children and families to which it is directed.<sup>105</sup>

Whitehurst argues that we are not getting our money's worth from current federal expenditures on early childhood services. A study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office suggests the need to integrate funding that is given to multiple government programs for the purposes of early care and education.<sup>106</sup> It discusses that having so many programs serving the same population creates inefficiencies and can lead to challenges in trying to improve overall quality of services for the beneficiaries.

In his testimony, Whitehurst also points to the only long-term study of Head Start, the 2010 Impact Study which began following children enrolled in Head Start in 2002 until they were in the third grade. The study found that there were very few impacts by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in cognitive, social-emotional, health, and parenting practices. Whitehurst claims, however, that these results have been mostly ignored:

The study went virtually unnoticed. You can't find anything about it in the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* or any other media outlet that serves the general public. The Post has 11 reporters covering education. Why isn't a report on the effectiveness of the nation's largest federally administered education program, one that serves

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<sup>105</sup> Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, "Whitehurst Testimony on Early Childhood Education to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce." Brookings Institution. February 5, 2014, accessed November 03, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/whitehurst-testimony-on-early-childhood-education-to-the-house-committee-on-education-and-the-workforce/>.

<sup>106</sup> "Child Care: Information on Integrating Early Care and Education Funding." U.S. Government Accountability Office. October 14, 2016, accessed November 28, 2016. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-775R>.

thousands of needy children within the Post's metro area, deemed worthy of newsprint? Is Head Start so sacrosanct that bad news about it is to be ignored?<sup>107</sup>

These Head Start evaluations have not compelled policymakers to take a step back and assess the program. Instead, the budget authority for Head Start increased to \$8.6 billion under the 2014 Omnibus Appropriations Act, an increase of \$612 million to the 2013 enacted level.<sup>108</sup> The popularity of Head Start has continued to be driven by developmental psychologists who began propagating the importance of the environment in early childhood development. Skerry writes, however, that the actual results have been "far less impressive," and mostly ignored.<sup>109</sup> There was a very similar response to the 1969 Westinghouse study forty years back. Elizabeth Rose writes,

Almost no mention was made of the Westinghouse study in the Congressional Record when it was released, or the following year.

Researcher Jeanne Ellsworth noted that the study was not covered by the national newsmagazines at all and was dismissed by some in congressional hearings, where increasing amounts of times were given over to testimonials from parents or graduates.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, "Is Head Start Working for American Students?" Brookings Institution. January 21, 2010, accessed December 03, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2010/01/21/is-head-start-working-for-american-students/>.

<sup>108</sup> Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, "Whitehurst Testimony on Early Childhood Education to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce." Brookings Institution. February 5, 2014, accessed November 03, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/whitehurst-testimony-on-early-childhood-education-to-the-house-committee-on-education-and-the-workforce/>.

<sup>109</sup> Skerry 21.

<sup>110</sup> Rose 33.

Russ Whitehurst also believes that only some children need pre-K services to be ready for school and life. He writes that “most young children do not need to experience organized center-based care in order to develop normally, profit from later educational opportunities, and live happy and productive lives.”<sup>111</sup> He argues that while children from impoverished families can be raised in circumstances that are pathogenic, some childcare settings are also pathogenic. Whitehurst gives the example of a childcare center that is unsanitary, has too many children per staff, has high staff turnover that prevents any continuity in adult-child relationships, and no curriculum other than custody.

While many children from low-income families may benefit from being in a structured environment where they can acquire English and develop socio-emotional skills, many of these children may also fare better at home than in a preschool classroom.<sup>112</sup> At home, children may have more opportunities to interact with loving and caring adults to support cognitive and socio-emotional growth.

Although a practical goal may not be serving all of Head Start’s eligible population, many still argue for increased funding. In 2006, when the initial results of the Head Start Impact Study were released, the reforms that were proposed included requiring better-educated teachers, a stronger focus on academics, and more stringent

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<sup>111</sup> Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, "Whitehurst Testimony on Early Childhood Education to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce." Brookings Institution. February 5, 2014, accessed November 03, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/whitehurst-testimony-on-early-childhood-education-to-the-house-committee-on-education-and-the-workforce/>.

<sup>112</sup> Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, "Whitehurst Testimony on Early Childhood Education to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce." Brookings Institution. February 5, 2014, accessed November 03, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/whitehurst-testimony-on-early-childhood-education-to-the-house-committee-on-education-and-the-workforce/>.

requirements for local agencies to re-qualify for their grant money.<sup>113</sup> Even those who challenged the research design and findings of the Impact Study agreed that the proposals made from the study were positive ones.<sup>114</sup>

In part, the implementation of these proposals require paying teachers better. In 1988, even Head Start teachers who had a B.A. in early childhood education received an average starting salary that was 63 percent of the average starting salary for a public school kindergarten teacher. Zigler and Muenchow argue that this has led to the high turnover of Head Start teachers, with one in every five teachers leaving each year.<sup>115</sup> The calls to improve the pay for Head Start teachers have not had much impact. In 2015, the average salary for a Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree was \$33,072.<sup>116</sup> The 2015 median pay for kindergarten and elementary school teachers was \$54,000.<sup>117</sup> Marcy Whitebook, director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at U.C. Berkeley, claims "You can't solve this problem without putting more money into it."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Lillian Mongeau, "The Never-Ending Struggle to Improve Head Start." *The Atlantic*. August 9, 2016, accessed November 02, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/is-head-start-a-failure/494942>.

<sup>114</sup> Lillian Mongeau, "The Never-Ending Struggle to Improve Head Start." *The Atlantic*. August 9, 2016, accessed November 02, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/is-head-start-a-failure/494942>.

<sup>115</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 214.

<sup>116</sup> Marcy Whitebook, Caitln McLean, and Lea J.E. Austin, "Early Childhood Workforce Index - 2016." Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, University of California, Berkeley, accessed November 20, 2016. <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2016/Early-Childhood-Workforce-Index-2016.pdf>.

<sup>117</sup> "Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers: Occupational Outlook Handbook 2016-2017 Edition." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. December 17, 2015, accessed November 20, 2016. <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/mobile/kindergarten-and-elementary-school-teachers.htm>.

<sup>118</sup> Lillian Mongeau, "The Never-Ending Struggle to Improve Head Start." *The Atlantic*. August 9, 2016, accessed November 02, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/is-head-start-a-failure/494942>.

Demands for increased Head Start funding, however, have not fallen on deaf years, and the Obama Administration has recently responded to address these problems. Advocates for increased funding have highlighted the issue of the programs' long wait lists, providers serving children for only a few hours a day, and programs that do not even provide services for the entire school year. They have argue that these problems can be solved with more funding. In 2016, President Obama proposed an increase of \$434 million for Head Start for a total funding of \$9.6 billion. The National Head Start Association published that the funding increase would go toward:

\$142 million for a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to support the Head Start workforce and reduce turnover – which would be dedicated to the recent Early Head Start expansion and EHS – Child Care Partnerships... \$292 million to expand the duration of the Head Start 3- and 4-year old services to full school day, full school year. This would build on the increase of \$294 million that was appropriated to Head Start last year by Congress.<sup>119</sup>

While some promote increasing funding for Head Start to pay teachers and staff better and extend the duration and length of program services, many scholars also argue that there has been too much focus on the educational component of the program. Jeanette Valentine, the Director for Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging

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<sup>119</sup> Thomas Sheridan, "A Bite out of the Federal Budget." National Head Start Association. February 11, 2016, accessed November 22, 2016. <https://www.nhsa.org/bite-out-federal-budget>.

Research at Rutgers University, claims that Head Start has a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to supporting the child's development.

Head Start advocates, such as Valentine, also praise Head Start for its function as a "national laboratory." Valentine describes how the Head Start research and demonstration activities have provided "a vast range of comprehensive social services, health care, and educational services to thousands of poor families and children of all ages."<sup>120</sup> They call it a misconception that Head Start is strictly a "center-based, preschool educational program for poor children ages three to five."<sup>121</sup> There have been nearly 100 demonstration programs to provide comprehensive social services, health care, and educational services to Head Start families.<sup>122</sup> Other scholars have also commented on Head Start's role in increasing resources and services for families of low-income children, partly through coordinating efforts between government agencies.

When Edward Zigler became director of the Office of Child Development (OCD) under President Nixon, he focused on introducing demonstration projects for two reasons. First, he said that it was important to "dazzle people with all types of new demonstration projects" in maintaining the program's popularity.<sup>123</sup> Second, he wanted "Congress and the public to associate both Head Start and OCD with such a blur of useful activity that the administration would not dare close them down."<sup>124</sup> Advocates who share Zigler's

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<sup>120</sup> Zigler & Valentine 249.

<sup>121</sup> Zigler & Valentine 249.

<sup>122</sup> Zigler & Valentine 350.

<sup>123</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 150.

<sup>124</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 150.

vision that Head Start should be a “national laboratory” that is not a static program but an evolving concept support the program as an experimental social reform.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Zigler & Muenchow 150-151.

## Chapter 5: Recent Reforms

Although conservative and liberal scholars on social policy may disagree on matters such as increasing funding for Head Start, scholars from diverse ideological backgrounds agree on treating Head Start as a national laboratory to see what programs create results for children. Recent reforms to Head Start build on this spirit of envisioning the program as an experimental social reform. The 2007 Head Start reauthorization embodied a major step toward this approach of evidence-based policymaking.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 changed the funding and grants structure to require low-performing Head Start programs to compete for funding. The reauthorization was passed through a bipartisan effort by a Democratic-controlled Congress and the Bush Administration in 2007. On the day he signed the Head Start reauthorization bill into law, President George W. Bush said, “I am pleased that this bill addresses several longstanding Administration priorities, such as increased competition among Head Start providers.”<sup>126</sup> He spoke positively about competition between Head Start providers as a way “help ensure that we offer the highest quality programs to our nation’s most vulnerable young children.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Signs ‘Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007’ Into Law.” The White House. December 12, 2007, accessed November 22, 2016. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071212-3.html>.

<sup>127</sup> George W. Bush, “President Bush Signs ‘Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007’ Into Law.” The White House. December 12, 2007, accessed November 22, 2016. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071212-3.html>.

The 2007 reauthorization changed the structure of grants and funding to have all providers apply for five year grants.<sup>128</sup> Before, Head Start grants went to providers continuously, as long as they were not violating federal standards. With the reauthorization, each provider's performance and quality is reviewed and determined whether the provider meets benchmarks or must compete with local providers to receive another grant for the next five years.

It took until 2011 for the Obama Administration to finalize the rules for this component in the law that keeps Head Start providers more accountable.<sup>129</sup> The White House Office of the Press Secretary, in outlining the new rules for Head Start programs, estimated one-third of all providers to be required to re-compete for continued funding.<sup>130</sup> President Obama's White House education adviser, Roberto Rodriguez explained, "Many of the grantees have been funded since the '60s and '70s, and there weren't a lot of opportunities for new approaches into the programs." Speaking positively of the new structure of awarding grants, he said, "If you are a grantee that does not measure up, you will face an open competition."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> "H.R. 1429 – 110<sup>th</sup> Congress: Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007." Govtrack.org. 2007, accessed November 24, 2016. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hr1429>.

<sup>129</sup> "We Can't Wait: President Obama Takes Action to Improve Quality and Promote Accountability in Head Start Programs." Office of the Press Secretary, the White House. November 08, 2011, accessed November 24, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/08/we-cant-wait-president-obama-takes-action-improve-quality-and-promote-ac>.

<sup>130</sup> "We Can't Wait: President Obama Takes Action to Improve Quality and Promote Accountability in Head Start Programs." Office of the Press Secretary, the White House. November 08, 2011, accessed November 24, 2016. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/08/we-cant-wait-president-obama-takes-action-improve-quality-and-promote-ac>.

<sup>131</sup> Sophie Quinton, "Head Start, Meet Accountability." *The Atlantic*. April 24, 2014, accessed November 16, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/the-accountability-revolution-comes-to-head-start/361161/>

The evaluation of Head Start providers would be based on seven performance criteria. Five criteria that are administrative, one involves setting and meeting goals for preparing children for kindergarten, and the last is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). CLASS is used to assess how teachers and staff interact with children and rates programs in three areas: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. CLASS does not directly measure learning outcomes, but high scores are correlated with better learning.<sup>132</sup>

Providers must surpass a benchmark set by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the three areas and must fall above the bottom 10 percent of CLASS scores among Head Start programs nationwide. Sara Mead of Bellwether Education Partners says that about 40 percent of grantees were required to compete for funding partly because of low CLASS scores in the second round of federal reviews.<sup>133</sup> Experts say that low CLASS scores will likely be the main reason Head Start programs will be forced to compete for funding. Out of 388 Head Start programs that the federal government assessed in 2012, the average instructional support score was 2.98 out of a possible 7.<sup>134</sup> In the same year, 80 among 125 providers that competed for their grants kept their grants, with the rest losing partial or all funding to another organization.

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<sup>132</sup> “Delivering on the Promise of CLASS.” Teachstone. Accessed November 20, 2016. <http://teachstone.com/classroom-assessment-scoring-system/>

<sup>133</sup> Sophie Quinton, “Head Start, Meet Accountability.” *The Atlantic*. April 24, 2014, accessed November 16, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/the-accountability-revolution-comes-to-head-start/361161/>

<sup>134</sup> Sophie Quinton, “Head Start, Meet Accountability.” *The Atlantic*. April 24, 2014, accessed November 16, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/the-accountability-revolution-comes-to-head-start/361161/>

A 2014 *Atlantic* article describes Head Start since its implementation of new rules in 2011 as having experienced more change in the past three years than in the previous 40.<sup>135</sup> Other reforms of the 2007 Head Start reauthorization included improved coordination of early childhood delivery systems by requiring each state to have a State Advisory Councils on Early Care and Education. The 2007 reauthorization also required higher qualifications for Head Start teachers.<sup>136</sup> It required that 50 percent of Head Start teachers have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, or in a related field with experience, by 2013. Head Start providers were successful in meeting this goal, with 66 percent of Head Start teachers having a BA or higher in early childhood education in 2013.<sup>137</sup> As of 2014, 71 percent had a BA or higher.<sup>138</sup>

The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act added \$2.1 billion of funding to Head Start that expanded enrollment and increased investment to better support Head Start teachers professionally. The Early Mentor and Coach grants were awarded to 131 Head Start programs in 47 states. The Office of Head Start describes the program as providing on-the-job guidance, training, mentoring, and technical assistance to Head Start teachers and staff.<sup>139</sup> Although ensuring higher qualifications for Head

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<sup>135</sup> Sophie Quinton, "Head Start, Meet Accountability." *The Atlantic*. April 24, 2014, accessed November 16, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/the-accountability-revolution-comes-to-head-start/361161/>

<sup>136</sup> "H.R. 1429 – 110<sup>th</sup> Congress: Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007." Govtrack.org. 2007, accessed November 24, 2016. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hr1429>.

<sup>137</sup> "Head Start Timeline." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed November 24, 2016. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/50th-anniversary/docs/hs-50th-timeline.pdf>.

<sup>138</sup> "Head Start Timeline." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed November 24, 2016. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/50th-anniversary/docs/hs-50th-timeline.pdf>.

<sup>139</sup> "Head Start Timeline." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed November 24, 2016. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/50th-anniversary/docs/hs-50th-timeline.pdf>.

Start teachers and providing them with improved professional development have been important pieces to the 2007 reauthorization, a research study directed by the HHS Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and conducted by Mathematica Policy Research found that trends in classroom quality between 2006 and 2014 could not be attributed to policy changes on teacher characteristics, such as credentials and professional development activities.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Nikki Aikens, Charles Bush, Philip Gleason, Lizabeth Malone, and Louisa Tarullo, “Tracking Quality in Head Start Classrooms: FACES 2006 to FACES 2014.” Mathematica Policy Research. October 2016, accessed November 22, 2016.  
[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/faces\\_tracking\\_quality\\_in\\_head\\_start\\_100716\\_b508.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/faces_tracking_quality_in_head_start_100716_b508.pdf)

## Conclusion

Having just passed its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2015, Head Start has been a program that has been questioned for decades by research studies on its effectiveness but nevertheless beloved for its mission to serve young children from low-income families. Research conducted by government agencies, think tanks, and academics have suggested mixed results regarding the effectiveness of Head Start in participants' educational gains. While there are more publicized research challenging Head Start programs' impact than those supporting it, there have been recent research based on longitudinal studies suggesting the long-term effects of Head Start on its beneficiaries. The studies as a whole, however, do not present a compelling case for Head Start having a significant impact on its participants.

Nevertheless, Head Start has been strongly supported by the public and both political parties for decades. The popularity of Head Start has many roots: well-publicized studies in the 1960s that challenged the idea that IQ is fixed at birth and promoted the importance of the environment in early childhood development, the compelling personal narratives of "Head Start babies" that often overshadowed the results from the program's impact studies, and the attractiveness of the program in targeting services to a vulnerable population. The program has also received the support of both liberals and conservatives. While it was birthed during President Johnson's War on Poverty, an agenda fueled by liberals, Head Start has been supported by both Nixon and Reagan and many conservative scholars and experts for its decentralized structure

and local control. As Skerry describes it, Head Start “has much more to teach liberals and conservatives alike than either has recognized.”<sup>141</sup>

At first glance, there may seem to be a political divide among reforms to Head Start particularly regarding expansion of the program. While liberals have supported increasing funding and expanding the program to reach more of its eligible population, there have been many moderate and conservative scholars and experts calling for more stringent evaluation of Head Start programs and keeping providers more accountable for program quality. Fueled by its popularity in Congress and among the public, Head Start has been steadily expanding through the decades. The program experienced notable growth in the 90s, with the introduction of Early Head Start in 1994 and full-day and full-year programs in 1998.<sup>142</sup> Many scholars, such as Elizabeth Rose, Peter Skerry, Russ Whithurst, have noted frustrations regarding the dismissiveness of the Head Start program evaluation studies by politicians, the media, and other experts in the field.

Finally in 2007, Head Start was reauthorized to make providers more accountable for program quality through an evidence-based approach. The rules requiring five year performance evaluations of providers were implemented starting 2012, and many Head Start providers are feeling the pressure to receive high enough Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) instructional support scores. These reforms that introduce more

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<sup>141</sup> Skerry 20.

<sup>142</sup> "History of Head Start." Office of Head Start, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 02, 2016. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>.

accountability to Head Start providers are positive ones that should be continued and not be implemented in a lax manner.

It will be important to know, however, whether these reforms will lead to a lack of innovation with less providers taking risks to change their curriculum or structure. This may be particularly true for Head Start programs that already pass the bar in federal review standards but may have the potential to provide better quality services. Additionally, the evidence-based approach of prioritizing grants to organizations that can prove their effectiveness may favor large organizations, like schools districts, compared to home-based child care providers.

With President-elect Trump in the White House starting January 2017, it can be somewhat difficult to predict how his administration will approach overseeing Head Start. President-elect Trump has nominated Representative Tom Price (R-GA) for U.S. Secretary for Health and Human Services (HHS). Rep. Price has previously advocated for state control of Head Start. In the 2007 reauthorization, Price introduced a failed amendment that would have created demonstration programs for states to use their Head Start funding to coordinate with their existing state-run preschool programs.<sup>143</sup> However, the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start was a bipartisan effort between a Democratic-controlled Congress and a Republican president, and the reforms have the support of many experts in early childhood development and scholars in social policy. While

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<sup>143</sup> Christina Samuels, "Trump's Pick for HHS Secretary Advocated for State Control of Head Start." *Education Week*. November 29, 2016, accessed December 2, 2016. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early\\_years/2016/11/trumps\\_health\\_and\\_human\\_services\\_pick\\_advocated\\_for\\_state\\_control\\_of\\_head\\_start.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early_years/2016/11/trumps_health_and_human_services_pick_advocated_for_state_control_of_head_start.html)

President-elect Trump may be resistant to increasing funding to Head Start programs as President Obama has in recent years, if the President-elect and Rep. Price brings in respected and established experts and social scientists for leadership roles in HHS, there will most likely not be significant changes to the current implementation of the 2007 Head Start reauthorization.

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