

Testimony to the Vermont House Ways and Means Committee

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Impact of Federal Sequestration on Vermont Head Start Programs

Vermont Head Start Programs. Seven Head Start programs serve all 14 counties; four of these programs offer Early Head Start services for families with children from pregnancy to age 3. Central Vermont, Champlain Valley, Northeast Kingdom, and Southeastern Vermont are housed in community action agencies. Bennington and Rutland are housed in community mental health agencies. Brattleboro, serving Windham County, is part of the Brattleboro Supervisory Union.

- Currently funded to serve about 1,329 children in FY14, down 233 from 1,562 in FY13 because of federal sequestration.
- Federal funding for FY14 (post sequester) is \$14,345,224, down \$798,199 from \$15,143,423 in FY13. Although the annualized cut was 5.27% in FY13, the impact was higher in programs that were already mid-way through their fiscal years.
- Children received 4,845 fewer days of service in 2012-2013 as a result of programs suspending services, closing earlier, or starting later because of sequestration.
- 32.5 jobs, both management and direct service, were eliminated due to budget cuts.
- Staff retention at the end of the 2012-2013 program year decreased with staff seeking other employment they perceived to be more secure. Some qualified teachers migrate to public elementary schools seeking greater job security and higher wages.
- Staff morale continues to be adversely affected due to on-going uncertainty about the federal budget, further sequestration cuts, and job security.

Head Start Philosophy: Comprehensive Services Approach. Head Start was established in 1965 to serve the nation's low-income children and families so as to break the generational cycle of poverty. Part of the innovation of Head Start was the comprehensive services approach, which addresses not only the child's early education, but the child's overall health status and the family's social service needs. The Head Start philosophy maintains that long-term, positive outcomes for low-income children, both in school and later in life, are predicated on safe and healthy children, and families not beset with ongoing crises attributable to poverty.

Head Start Basics. Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded child and family development programs which provide comprehensive services for pregnant women, low-income families and their children. Head Start serves children ages three to five years and their families. Early Head Start serves pregnant women and children from birth to age three and their families.

Head Start offers an educational program comprised of learning experiences to foster children's intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth and support parents as the most important educators in their children's lives. The goal of Head Start is promote children's social competence and school readiness. Early Head Start also promotes healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women. Head Start child and family services are provided in either center-based or home-based settings, and include:

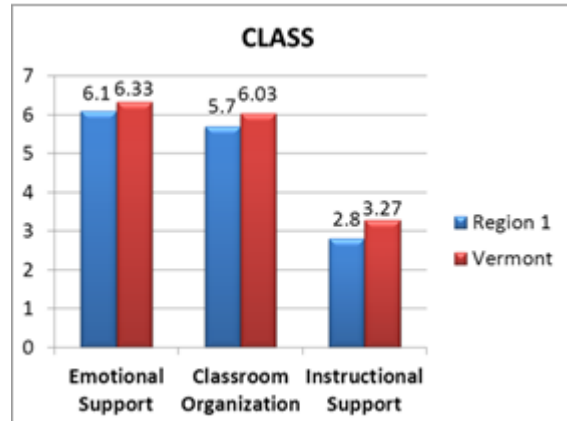
- a comprehensive health program for children that includes immunizations, medical, dental, mental health, and nutritional services;
- services for children with special needs;
- parental engagement that includes parenting education, leadership and family development; and
- social services responsive to families' individual needs.

Eligibility. Pregnant women and/or age-eligible children may participate in Head Start or Early Head Start if:

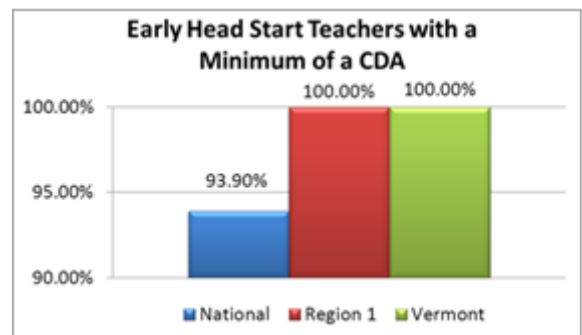
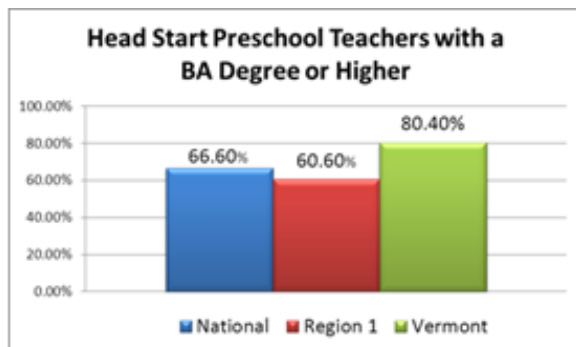
- the family income is within federal poverty guidelines (up to 130%); or
- the family receives public assistance benefits; or
- the child is a foster child; or
- the family is homeless.

Vermont Head Start Programs are High Quality.

Part of the federal monitoring system, CLASS is an instrument created by the University of Virginia that the Office of Head Start uses to score the quality of teacher-child interaction in a preschool classroom. The three domains assessed are emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. The average scores of Vermont Head Start programs reviewed in FY13 were higher than the average regional scores. (The release of national average scores has been delayed by the government shutdown.)



Not surprisingly, Vermont Head Start programs have the highest percentage of qualified preschool teachers and infant/toddler teachers compared to other New England programs and Head Start programs nationally. Head Start requires a major or the equivalent of a major in early childhood education as the minimum qualification for teachers. The minimum qualification for infant/toddler teachers is a Child Development Associate certificate; many of our Early Head Start teachers hold A.A. and B.A. degrees in early childhood education.



A Solid Investment: Head Start delivers 80% of the benefits of the Perry Preschool and the Abecedarian Program early childhood development models at 60% of the cost.

- A higher proportion of Head Start parents read to their children more frequently than parents of children who were not enrolled in Head Start
- Head Start children perform better on cognitive, language, and health measures than their comparison group counterparts.

- Head Start children experience increased achievement test scores and favorable long-term effects on grade repetition, special education, and graduation rates.
- During 2012-2013, Vermont Head Start programs served 388 children with diagnosed disabilities. The majority of these children were diagnosed with speech or language impairment, or non-categorical developmental delay; 86 infants/toddlers with diagnosed disabilities. This reduces demands on special education in elementary school.
- Early Head Start children, according to a 2002 study using a control group, had a higher cognitive development score, at age 3 had larger vocabularies, and demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development.
- Head Start reduces the frequency and severity of problem behavior as reported by parents. 305 children received mental health services
- Head Start provides health and dental services to children and families who otherwise might not have them. A much higher proportion of Head Start children received dental care than those who did not receive Head Start services.
- Statewide the Vermont Head Start Association has focused on oral health for children, promoting healthy nutrition and physical activity, and smoking cessation for parents through partnerships with the Vermont Department of Health, Vermont Dental Society, Northeast Delta Dental, and the American Legacy Foundation.
- Head Start parents are found to have greater quality of life satisfaction, increased coping skills, and decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and sickness.
- In FY13, 1,053 parents received parenting education, 1,112 parents received health education, 224 families received housing assistance; 293, mental health services; 343, emergency/crisis intervention such as food, clothing, and temporary shelter. One hundred sixty-four parents accessed adult education.
- Head Start children are at least 8% more likely to have had their immunizations than children who did not attend preschool. Similarly, Early Head Start children had a higher immunization rate than children in a control group.

Head Start Programs Collaborate

- Two programs, Northeast Kingdom and Brattleboro, are also home to state-funded parent child centers.
- Head Start and the Department for Children and Families have an MOU to improve the coordination of services to children and families and to strengthen relationships between agencies and programs.
- Head Start programs and the Agencies of Education and Human Services have a long-standing agreement about coordination of services to children with disabilities.

- Head Start is an important partner in the pre-K continuum. Most Head Start programs work actively with their local elementary schools. Collaboration ranges from shared classrooms to transitioning children from Head Start to kindergarten to transferring Head Start medical, dental, and developmental information to schools.
- Head Start and Child Care Financial Assistance partner to provide full-day, full year care to children whose parents are working or in school.
- Head Start accesses USDA funds to provide healthy meals and snacks.

As Vermont moves forward with action planning to implement the Governor’s Early Childhood Framework, it is imperative that Head Start and Early Head Start are an integral part of the early care and education system.

