

Project Head Start

ANNCR: Project Head Start – On today's Congressional Moment

The Head Start program was one of ten federal programs established by Congress in The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Project Head Start was originally launched as an eight-week summer experiment.

Part of the Johnson administration's "War on Poverty," it was designed to offer preschool children of low-income families — and their parents — a variety of programs to meet their emotional, social, nutritional, psychological and health needs, so that the children could start school better equipped to succeed.

It was well received by parents, educators, child development specialists and community leaders. As a result, Project Head Start continued beyond its first eight weeks. Congress expanded its budget, and it grew in size and scope.

In 1969, it became a permanent government program and was moved to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The Head Start program currently serves over 900,000 children annually, in all 50 States.

There is some controversy about the long-term benefits of Head Start to students, and discussion about what sort of follow through is needed to keep children at this higher level once they've left the program. Yet it remains a model for early educational assistance and development. It has enrolled more than 22 million low-income children since its modest beginning in 1965... including both an NFL superstar and a current member of the U.S. Congress.

CLOSING: This is Lee Hamilton. Congressional decisions impact all our lives. To find out more about how Congress works or to get involved in your government, visit the Center on Congress website at congress.indiana.edu.