

Support Head Start Teacher Salaries

Talking Points for Head Start Directors

Introduction

Head Start California has been actively educating lawmakers on the importance of Head Start programs and why teachers are the heart of Head Start.

Without competitive pay, Head Start programs cannot offer our high-quality, whole-child whole family programming that has been demonstrated to lift families out of poverty and change lives. We need to make sure that members of the legislature know how integral Head Start programs are to our kids and families.

1. Head Start is a vital resource for California's most vulnerable families and children.

- We have nearly 150 Head Start agencies across California operating over 1,700 sites across California
- We serve approximately 100,000 children and their families annually
- We employ over 25,000 teachers and staff statewide
- Head Start takes a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of young children, with 4 major components: education, health, parental involvement, and social services
- Head Start programs are nationally recognized for high quality, whole-child, whole-family approach, and a foundation of increasing racial and economic equity

2. Head Start teachers are dramatically underpaid compared to their TK counterparts

- The average Head Start teacher with a BA makes \$41,000 a year compared to an average of \$66,000 for a kindergarten teacher – a \$25,000 difference.
- As TK expands and creates new jobs, many Head Start teachers will choose to shift to jobs with better pay and benefits.
- Some programs report having up to 100 teacher vacancies at a time. If programs cannot staff classrooms, enrollment will be limited and eligible children and families will go unserved. These children must then be served with State dollars or go without needed supports.
- Teacher pipeline is very limited. Community colleges indicate that they do not invest in ECE teacher preparation programs since they do not pay a living wage.

3. Investing in Head Start saves money for California:

- Head Start programs bring approximately \$1.3 billion in federal funding to California annually – funding that would need to be replaced with state funds if programs reduce enrollment due to lack of staff.
- The Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education recommended that California should “Expand effective access to Head Start for eligible 3 and 4-year old children by using state funds to expand HS program to full-day, full-year for all those meeting Head Start eligibility” and that the state should “Ensure California utilizes all available federal Head Start funds.”
- Since 2017, California’s funded Head Start enrollment has shrunk from 102,000 to 96,000, representing a decrease of 6,000 children. These children must be served with state funding, or go without needed services. Supporting teacher salaries means classrooms stay open, allowing programs to meet full enrollment – which keeps program slots in California.

4. Head Start supports California’s key budget priorities and supporting Head Start will help leverage federal dollars to meet California’s goals for families and children.

- The Governor has indicated that improving supports for early childhood mental health, dual language learners, and children with disabilities are key educational priorities, and has indicated that the California State Preschool Program should improve its services to these key populations to align to Head Start.
 - **Homeless families:** Governor Newsom indicates that addressing homelessness is one of his top five priorities for this budget year. Head Start is a leader in serving homeless families. In 2021, nearly 10% of the children we served were from families experiencing homelessness, and Head Start provided emergency supports to 28,266 families, helping to keep them housed.
 - **Children with Disabilities:** The Governor’s budget allocates funds so that California State Preschool Programs will serve at least 10% children with disabilities. This provision is modeled directly on existing Head Start program standards.
 - **Dual Language Learners:** The Governor’s budget allocates funding to provide additional supportive services to dual language learners in California State Preschool Program. Head Start is considered a model program for DLLs and served and we serve approximately 50,000 DLLs in the state annually.
 - **Early Mental Health:** The Governor’s budget allocates more than \$10M to support California Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. In 2021, Head Start and Early Head Start provided mental health consultation services to 4,359 enrolled children.

5. Other States are building their ECE Systems on Head Start and the federal Build Back Better Preschool proposal requires full Head Start utilization

- California is the only west coast state that doesn’t center Head Start in the ECE System:

- Oregon has built their well-regarded Oregon PreK System by expanding Head Start services to additional children with federal funds. In 2021, Oregon allocated nearly \$200M to support Head Start and Early Head Start programs. A proportionate investment in California would be equal to \$1 billion.
 - Washington State also funds Early Head Start and is working to make Early Head Start an entitlement by the start of school year 2023
- Massachusetts and Alaska devote state funding specifically to support Head Start teacher salaries.
- The federal preschool proposal included in Build Back Better was modeled on Head Start standards and would require states to maximize enrollment of eligible children in Head Start. An investment in Head Start now allows California to be prepared to accept federal investment if and when a federal preschool proposal passes in the upcoming years.