

Education

Preschools

A child's cognitive, social, and psychological development is first and foremost dependent on the parents' involvement with the child. The time before formal schooling is critical in the success of the child in school. During this time, not only are learning skills initiated, they form the basis for later learning.

Parents all across the socio-economic spectra vary in parental skills and so help is needed in raising a child. The parents with the financial resources can easily accomplish this through formal pre-school programs but also through the normal activities that money can provide.

For those parents who want a little help there are many private pre-school programs. Some are co-operative in which the parents take part and others are independent of parents. For those without the financial means however, there are government programs. Head Start is a federal program for children of families living in poverty with an Early program for families with children under age 3 and the regular Head Start program. Michigan has a Great Start Readiness program for four-year olds in families up to 250% of poverty level. The aims of both are similar but Head Start has some additional benefits.

The Early Head Start year-round program helps children under age 3 and pregnant mothers. Both parents are taught skills to help their child develop during those very important first three years. In both Head Start programs, parents also learn important skills for them to reach their life goals. In addition to the poverty level guidelines, those Families who are expecting babies or have children under three years of age or children with Special Needs or chronic/terminal illnesses are eligible for Early Head Start.

There are 47 Head Start, 41 Early Head Start programs and two Migrant and Seasonal Head Start grantees in Michigan, serving more than 34,000 children and their families, according to the Michigan Head Start Association. Foster children are also eligible for both programs regardless of foster parents' income.

Teachers of Head Start do not have to be certified as teachers nor even have a BA degree although this was encouraged in 2007. As a result, in most states a majority have a degree, like in District of Columbia with over 60% certified, but in New Mexico only 12% are certified. Dr. Friedman-Krauss, an Assistant Research Professor at the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University, wrote, "All eligible children, regardless of geography, should have an equal opportunity to attend a high-quality Head Start where qualified teachers are adequately paid. Unfortunately, this is not the current state of Head Start. Rather, funding allocations are too low and not rationally distributed forcing Head Start programs into tradeoffs between enrolling more children, providing more hours of services, and employing qualified and adequately paid teachers."

Pre-school programs need to be fully funded and the services expanded.

- 1) "Early Head Start | OLHSA" www.olhsa.org/early-head-start
- 2) "Free pre-school programs for low-income families in Michigan" <https://www.metroparent.com/daily/education/early-childhood-education/free-preschool-for-low-income-families-in-michigan/>
- 3) Dr. Friedman-Krauss, "State(s) of Head Start: Funding, enrollment and quality are all over the map", December 14, 2016. <http://nieer.org/2016/12/14/states-head-start-funding-enrollment-quality-map>