



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Myth of the Fade-Out Effect

Myth: Head Start (HS) produces a wide range of child educational, health, and law enforcement benefits. The myth is that all of these benefits disappear a few years after the child graduates from HS.

Facts: The fade-out effect myth originated with the findings of a 40-year-old study of HS conducted by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University in 1969. Subsequent analysis by researchers found that this cross-sectional study was methodologically flawed.¹ Nevertheless, several researchers in several studies have reported that some educational gains made by children who attended HS or other preschool programs fade-out by third grade.² A frequently cited explanation for this fade-out among many HS graduates is that they attend elementary schools of poor quality.³

Despite the fact that many HS graduates attend poor quality elementary schools HS children overcome this challenge and experience long-term favorable educational, health, and law enforcement benefits:

- Reliable studies demonstrate that HS children experience increased achievement test scores and that HS children experience favorable long-term effects with decreased grade repetition and reduced need for special education in elementary and secondary schools.⁴
- Econometric analysis suggests that HS reduces the high school drop out rate.⁵
- Recent research reports that HS reduced the mortality rates for 5- to 9-year-old children that are 33 to 50 percent lower than for comparable children who were not enrolled in HS. These rates were reduced to the national average of mortality rates for all 5- to 9-year-old children.⁶
- Along with improving the health of its children and families, HS benefits its children and society-at-large by reducing crime and its costs to crime victims.⁷ HS children are significantly less likely to have been charged with a crime than their siblings who did not participate in HS.⁸

1651 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: (703) 739-0875 - Fax: (703) 739-0878 - www.nhsa.org

The National Head Start Association, an independent membership organization, advocates on behalf of the entire Head Start community and provides training and resources to Head Start programs nationwide.

¹ Barnett, W. S. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows. Presentation at a Science and Public Policy Briefing Sponsored by the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences; Campbell, D. T. and Erlebacher, A. 1970. How Regression Artifacts in Quasi-Experiments Can Mistakenly Make Compensatory Education Look Harmful. In *the Disadvantaged Child*, ed. J. Helmuth, New York: Brunner-Mazel, 185-210.

² Lee, V., Brooks-Gunn, J., Schur, E., and Liaw, F. (1990). Are Head Start Effects Sustained? A Longitudinal Follow-up Comparison of Disadvantaged Children Attending Head Start, No Pre School, and Other Preschool Programs. *Child Development*, 61(2): 495-507; Magnuson, K., Ruhm, C., and Waldfogel. (2007). The Persistence of Preschool Effects: Do Subsequent Classroom Experiences Matter? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22 (1): 18-38.

³ Lee et al. (1990). Are Head Start Effects Sustained? A Longitudinal Follow-up Comparison of Disadvantaged Children Attending Head Start, No Pre School, and Other Preschool Programs, 495-507; Currie, J. and Thomas, D. (2000). School Quality and the Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *Journal of Human Resources*, 35 (4): 755-774.

⁴ Barnett, W. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows.; Garces, E., Thomas, D. and Currie, J. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92 (4): 999-1012.

⁵ Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fight Crime: Invest In Kids. (2004). Quality Pre-Kindergarten: Key to Crime Prevention and School Success. Available at <http://www.fightcrime.org/> on July 23, 2004, 1.

⁸ Garces et al. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start, 999-1012.