

Dear Colleague,

Right now, there is a growing realization among business leaders and policy makers that investment in early childhood is key to the future success of our nation. There is also a greater understanding of the importance in the development of character during the first five years of life and a greater appreciation of the long term benefits to society from investing in high quality programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start. In recent weeks, national media coverage has made mention of Head Start repeatedly. We have always seen the value of the work we do, but it's exciting to see others sit up and take note! We wanted to share some stories with you that you may enjoy and that may be useful to you in educating others in your community about Head Start.

Research has always been important to Head Start, both to support policy positions and as a window into the impact of Head Start and Early Head Start programs on children, families and communities. NHSA is committed to informing the field about this research, and we'll be periodically bringing you research digests to keep you up to date on the latest developments. We hope that this is useful and welcome your feedback as to how we might make it even more useful; contact Emmalie Dropkin (edropkin@nhsa.org) with your thoughts.

[Occupy the Classroom](#)

by Nicholas Kristof for the New York Times

In this timely op-ed, Kristof discusses how taxing billionaires would do little to fundamentally change our society--if we want real change, he says, we need to invest in early childhood education. He also deftly dispenses with past criticism of Head Start by explaining Deming's results that children who participate in Head Start have better outcomes throughout their lives. The piece ends by pointing out the need to further invest in Head Start and early childhood education.

[From Kindergarten to College Completion](#)

by Judith Scott-Clayton for the New York Times' Economix Blog

Scott-Clayton, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, responds to the push for getting kids into college by raising the question of early childhood education. She makes an eloquent case that while programs to help high school students do some good, it's also critical to start with the very youngest children and give them a good foundation. Like Kristof, she responds to the issue of fade-out by pointing to long-term benefits from programs like Head Start. It contains some good language with which to respond to criticism.

[It Takes a Village](#)

by Charles M. Blow for the New York Times

In this opinion piece, Blow writes about visiting the Head Start program located in the Dorothy Day Apartments in Harlem, New York--an apartment complex that offers public housing to low-income and formerly homeless families. He describes with great enthusiasm how the building, through Head Start and other comprehensive services, has made impressive strides in improving outcomes for residents. While the topic seems light, this is a powerful story, and is worth sharing with those who are curious (or sceptical) about Head Start.

Does Head Start Do Any Lasting Good?

A Working Paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research by Chloe Gibbs, Jens Ludwig and Doug Miller

This paper by researchers from the University of Chicago and the University of California, Davis, reviews previous Head Start research and discusses why some research studies show a fade out and whether we're measuring the right thing in the first place. The authors begin by discussing research on Head Start that has shown that students' academic scores fade over time. They respond in two ways.

First, they point out that in the long-term, social/emotional benefits of Head Start may be far more important than academic benefits, and research isn't measuring those. The authors recommend: (1) We need to find tools and conduct research to measure students' social/emotional gains from Head Start. (2) We need to be cautious in reforming Head Start to make it more academic when it's possible that social/emotional goals are the real benefit of the program. (3) Any accountability system should include social/emotional measures.

Second, the authors note that the reason Head Start students' scores get closer to other students' after a few years may not be fade out but catch up--elementary school teachers may be devoting more time to non-Head Start students and bringing them up to the level of the Head Start kids. They conclude that if we're seeing fade out, we need better elementary schools--but if we're seeing catch up, we need higher Head Start enrollment. Their point, in essence, is that we shouldn't be rushing to change Head Start until we know more.

The Harrisburg Preschool Program Evaluation: Final Report

by Mark T. Greenberg & Celene E. Domitrovich of the Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University

The Harrisburg Preschool Program Evaluation report presents a longitudinal study that tracked students who participated in a preschool program which is a collaboration between the Harrisburg School District and Head Start. Students who began the program during 2002 and 2003 at the ages of 3 and 4 has been tracked through 4th grade and the older cohort through 5th grade. The researchers examined both the impact of the program in general, the relative impact from one or two years of service, the social-emotional impact of the program, and parents' perceptions regarding the effects of the program.

The major finding is impressive: "In 5th grade children who participated in the HPP program had higher mean scores than those without exposure to the program on all academic and executive function outcomes." Among the students old enough to have taken the PA state tests for 5th graders, 35% scored proficient or advanced at reading, compared to 19% of the children who did not attend HPP, and 22% scored proficient or advanced at math, compared to 8% of the control group. Social-emotional benefits were smaller but present, and students who had had two years of preschool reported feeling more connected to school and teachers and communicating better with their parents.

The conclusions of this report are that the benefits of early childhood education do not wash out

or fade out, and that there are significant benefits to having two years of Head Start instead of one. The authors are clear that both of these conclusions should be considered in any policy decision made about early childhood programs.