The Head Start Program: A Policy Analysis
by Elizabeth Badskey

Abstract
• The Head Start program as part of the “war on poverty”
• Education was seen as the solution to poverty
• The purpose of the Head Start program is to reduce the educational expectation gap by providing support to families, increasing educational services, and preparing teachers with the newest teaching techniques
• The program has seen short-term effectiveness but the long-term effectiveness is largely unknown
• The Head Start program will continue to be in existence for the foreseeable future

Historical Background
• In 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson had a State of the Union message that declared a “war on poverty”
• The Economic Opportunity Act was passed and led to the creation of the Head Start program
• In 1965, the Head Start program began as a day summer camp
• By 1969, the Head Start program had become a year-long program available in all 50 states
• Head Start is now located under the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services
• The purpose of Head Start is to eliminate poverty through the use of education and a comprehensive system to support the emotional, social, nutritional, and psychological needs of disadvantaged preschool-aged children

Description of the Problem – Poverty
• At the creation of the Head Start program, one-fifth of the nation and nearly half of the nation’s African American population were poor
• The English Poor Laws of 1601 set up a dichotomy of deserving and undeserving poor
• The Economic Opportunity Act believed that education and other services would lead to the elimination of poverty
• Poverty was created in part by earning inequality. The Head Start program attempted to revise this inequality by having all students begin education at the same level

Policy Description
• The Head Start program receives its funding in the form of a federal grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services in the Administration for Children and Families
• Head Start provides training for educators through online educational resources and conferences, and provides training for parents on comprehensive parenting and at-home education techniques
• The Head Start program’s long term goal is to end poverty. The short-term goals are for students to receive quality care from birth to age 5, for the workforce to be strengthened, to provide quality tools of measurement for early academic success, and to support parents in providing for their children
• Head Start uses local communities to give out services. Families are required to apply for Head Start services
• Most politicians believe that Head Start is working to close the education gap
• The Head Start program impacts 927,275 enrolled children and families
• The Head Start program impacts 40,898 enrollees, in Illinois, with a budget of $321,387,029

Policy Analysis
• The Head Start program has been shown to be effective in meeting short term goals
• One meta-analysis shows gains in cognitive, social-emotional, and health scores; but a few years later those gains are lost
• In a cohort study, the group made gains but four years later those gains are lost
• The Head Start program is seen as a success because it surpasses the short-term goals, but because of the complexity of poverty it is difficult to see if Head Start is meeting its long term goal
• Overall, it has been noted that all gains made by Head Start participants are lost within a few years
• The Head Start program:
  Is aware of this problem and has been working to find a way to resolve it
  Contributes to greater social equality
  Works to create a better quality of life for the target population, low-income children

For More Information:
http://ilheadstart.org/

Conclusions
• The Head Start program is funded by the federal government but responsibility for the program is handled by each individual state
• The Head Start program is intended to benefit low-income families by providing support to the families, increased educational services, and by preparing teachers with the newest teaching methods.
• The Head Start program has great short-term effectiveness, but has difficulty with maintaining that success as the child grows older.
• The Head Start program continues to attempt to find a solution to that problem.

Recommendations
• The Head Start program should be bi-lingual to enhance the overall learning of all the students
• Increased support over the life course, this should lead to better long-term effectiveness.
• Increased funding to the program, allowing the Head Start program to find and implement long-term solutions to the effectiveness problem.

Contact Information
Elizabeth Badskey
ebadskey@gmail.com
847-513-3746

References
Available from author upon request