A child’s developmental progress is as unique as their personality or physical appearance. Early development is shaped by genetic make-up, neonatal influences, and day to day interactions with caregivers from birth. Head Start uses research-based assessment tools to measure child development and help parents understand how to boost their children’s physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth. Tools that measure child development can yield numbers—data—but the data must be translated into the language of child development. This report provides data and stories of children’s developmental progress in Minnesota Head Start.

Minnesota Head Start’s Journey toward School Readiness

During the 2013 school year, an independent analysis of child assessment data on 4 year olds enrolled in Head Start was conducted to inform instruction and to set realistic goals for children entering kindergarten. Head Start programs voluntarily participated to identify characteristics of children or programming that could impact outcomes. The data represent a large sample of children (n=3062) enrolled in 19 different Minnesota Head Start programs with a rural and urban mix. The sample represents 42% of all 4 year olds enrolled in Head Start programming. The sample reflected the overall characteristics of the Head Start population served in Minnesota during the year (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of sample and overall Head Start enrollment, 2012–2013 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=3062 Four year olds</th>
<th>Racially diverse</th>
<th>Primary language is not English</th>
<th>Diagnosed with a disability</th>
<th>Homeless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregated Sample</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Enrollment</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

88% Meeting Developmental Targets for Kindergarten

Head Start programs use three research-based assessment tools, each with a unique point system and target for kindergarten readiness:

- **Teaching Strategies Gold**: target is the point at which the blue and purple bands meet
- **High Scope/COR**: target is a score of 4 on each of 32 indicators
- **Work Sampling**: target is 75% of total points

Children enrolled in Head Start demonstrated significant progress toward kindergarten readiness. On each assessment, nearly 88% of children met the developmental target for kindergarten upon exiting Head Start (Graph 1).
**Gains for Children (4 years old)**

Children who met the target for kindergarten had higher scores at Head Start entry and larger gains throughout the year. Graph 2 illustrates the large gains most children achieve while in Head Start.

**Graph 2: Average Growth for 4 year olds meeting and not meeting Targets, Teaching Strategies Gold, n=2086**

- **92.3 point gain**
  - *88% of children*
  - *Fall, Winter, Spring*
- **57.6 point gain**
  - *12% of children*
  - *target @ exit*

**Characteristics related to Higher Growth**

Certain child and family characteristics were found to be related to higher achievement growth including:
- *Girls and older children*
- *Racial minorities*
- *Children with higher attendance*
- *Children whose parents had more than a high school education*

**Classroom Characteristics and Child Progress**

Factors in the child’s classroom were also related to achievement growth including:
- *More hours of service per day, coupled with appropriate meals*
- *Teachers’ aggregated Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) scores*
- *Teachers’ experience and education*
- *Smaller class sizes*

**Access to Comprehensive Programming is Critical for Minnesota’s At Risk Pre-Schoolers**

Head Start’s extensive services for both families and their young children make the difference in children’s developmental progress and lives. Services targeted to the needs of children include:
- *Developmental screening and assessment*
- *Attendance monitoring*
- *Transportation*
- *Nutrition supports*
- *Health evaluation and follow-up*
- *On-site disability services*
- *On-site mental health supports*
- *Family home visits and goal setting*

Examples of how these services impact child progress are illustrated in stories of real families on pages 3–4.
Data and Families’ Stories Illustrate how Comprehensive Programming Improves Child Outcomes

Graph 3 illustrates that children scoring in the bottom 25th percentile for social emotional development start far behind their peers in overall development. Head Start offers developmental screening, and as needed, targeted social emotional and mental health supports to ensure children can regulate their emotions and build trusted relationships that promote learning.

Graph 3: Impacts on Gains: Social Emotional Needs, Teaching Strategies Gold, n=2086

Helping Tyler’s Family Heal

Tyler, his mother and two siblings lived in the Homeless Shelter for protection from domestic violence. Tyler was referred to Head Start by the shelter social worker and was immediately enrolled with transportation to and from the shelter to Head Start.

At Tyler’s screening his mother indicated some real concerns about Tyler’s social/emotional development. Head Start’s mental health consultant met with the family to determine a plan of support. Tyler and his mother both participated in a comprehensive social emotional training offered through Head Start known as Incredible Years.

Tyler’s mother also received support from Head Start’s Family Support team to accomplish her family goal for housing. Within 6 months she was accepted into a permanent housing program and the family is now in stable housing and Tyler’s mother is employed full-time.

Tyler struggled with his social/emotional development which hindered his gains in other areas of development. With classroom individualization and parent engagement, by the end of the year Tyler was catching up with his peers.

Identifying Johnny’s Health Barriers to Learning

Johnny entered Head Start after his 5th birthday. Upon entrance to the program the children are screened for health, developmental and social emotional delays. Head Start staff knew Johnny was having difficulties. He had to put his face close to the sand table when he played with the toys. He had difficulties attending to visual cues and he had significant (or untreated) tooth decay. Johnny had not been seen by a doctor since infancy.

Staff worked in partnership with Johnny’s mother and within a short amount of time he had eye glasses and dental treatment and soon Johnny was a new child. In addition, a referral was made to the school district for developmental delays.

Johnny is so proud that he can see! He raises and lowers his glasses and says, “blurry – clear.” He’s able to participate more in class and is catching up to his peers.
Data and Families’ Stories Illustrate how Family Engagement Improves Child Outcomes

Graph 4 demonstrates the importance of attendance on child outcomes. Children missing 15% of days had significantly slower developmental growth than children who attend Head Start more regularly. Head Start staff engage with families on home visits, parent conferences and in family goal setting to ensure parents understand the importance of regular attendance and their involvement in their children’s education.

Graph 4: Impact on Gains: Average Daily Attendance, Teaching Strategies Gold, n=2086

Engaging Cindy’s Parents for School Success

Cindy was an English Language Learner (ELL) in Head Start as a 3 year old. In her first few weeks of enrollment, her attendance was less than 48% and her teacher took immediate action. She scheduled home visits with the family to offer her assistance. A number of factors were causing transportation issues for the family. Cindy’s teacher worked with the parents, stressing the importance of getting Cindy to school every day. Together with the Head Start office, they worked out a plan to find a more reliable transportation option.

Cindy’s parents made it a priority to improve her attendance. Dad and Mom worked together to make sure Cindy got to school. As a result, Cindy’s assessment scores improved and she exceeded the expectations for her age group. At the beginning of her second year of Head Start Cindy had 100% attendance and is well on her way to being ready for kindergarten.

For more information about this analysis of Minnesota Head Start data, please contact:

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