



2025

HEAD START: ILLINOIS

Head Start is a federal program that includes **Head Start Preschool**, which serves children ages 3 to 5, and **Early Head Start**, which supports infants, toddlers under age three, pregnant women, and their families. Both programs provide comprehensive, high-quality services that support early learning, health, nutrition, and family well-being. Children are eligible if their family income is below the federal poverty line (\$32,150 for a family of four), they are in foster care, or they are experiencing homelessness.

Head Start reflects the needs of each community it serves. Federal funds go directly to local grantees who operate programs in rural, urban, and suburban communities in a variety of settings, including centers, family child care, churches, and schools. Each program relies on input from parents and community members to ensure services are tailored and effective. This flexibility also allows programs to draw on other local, state, and federal funding to maximize their reach and impact.

Illinois received **\$475,475,061** for Head Start and Early Head Start in FY2024¹ offering services at **480 program sites**.²

Head Start's impact extends beyond the program itself. Many state and local early learning systems are built around Head Start, relying on these grants, paired with other funding sources, to serve children from a variety of backgrounds. In this way, Head Start has become inextricable from child care and preschool programs in cities and states nationwide.

ENROLLMENT AT-A-GLANCE

Children Enrolled³

Early Head Start: 11,377

Head Start Preschool: 16,831

Total: 28,208

Foster Care⁴

Early Head Start: 398

Head Start Preschool: 678

Total: 1,076

Experiencing Homelessness⁵

Early Head Start: 861

Head Start Preschool: 1,367

Total: 2,228

IDEA* services for developmental delays and special education⁶

Early Head Start: 1,708

Head Start Preschool: 2,328

Total: 4,036

*The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers who have developmental delays and special education services to preschool aged children. With its robust developmental screenings and requirement to reserve at least 10% of enrollment for children with disabilities, Head Start plays a crucial role in helping children and families access IDEA services.



Head Start provides **early learning, health, nutrition, and family well-being services** for young children.

HEAD START'S IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Head Start touches many aspects of children's development and well-being. While enrolled in Head Start, children receive high-quality early learning and care that encourages learning through play and physical activity. Programs also provide healthy meals and snacks, as well as medical, dental, hearing, vision, and behavioral health screenings.

Families are engaged as essential partners in their child's success, and Head Start's wrap-around services remove logistical hurdles allowing parents to earn a living or finish their education. This is particularly true in rural communities, where a lack of child care options, transportation, and other factors often create additional barriers for parents.

Of the families served in **Illinois, 17,465** have one or more parents employed, in school, or in job training.⁷

 As a result, **Head Start alumni** are more likely to be **kindergarten ready, graduate from high school, and secure stable jobs.**⁸

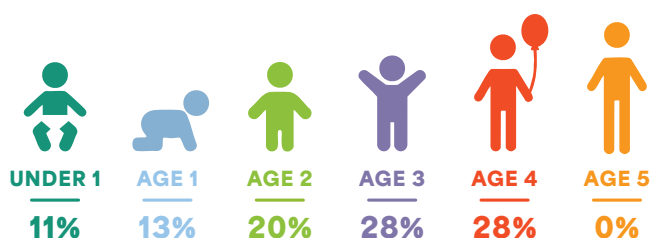
Head Start families are also more **engaged in their children's learning**⁹ and are more likely to **advance their own education.**¹⁰

BREAKDOWN OF PROVIDER TYPES IN ILLINOIS¹¹

	HEAD START PRESCHOOL	EARLY HEAD START
CENTER-BASED	97%	61%
HOME-BASED	2%	36%
FAMILY CHILD CARE	1%	2%
LOCALLY DESIGNED	0%	1%



PROGRAM ENROLLMENT BY AGE IN ILLINOIS¹²



HEAD START'S IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

Head Start has a positive impact on the communities where it operates. In addition to employing Head Start staff, programs partner with local businesses and schools for everything from purchasing food and supplies to supporting the transition to kindergarten.

In Illinois, Head Start programs:

- Employ **3,095 teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors.**¹³
- Have **547 partnerships** to serve children with disabilities¹⁴ and
- **404 partnerships** to support the transition to kindergarten.¹⁵

UNMET NEED

Even with the many local, state, and federal partnerships, there are not enough slots to serve all the children who qualify. In Illinois, only **16% of Early Head Start** eligible children and **24% of Head Start Preschool** eligible children are currently being served.¹⁶



Scan or click the QR code for full references and links.

For more information visit [FFYF's interactive Head Start maps](#) or contact FFYF at mail@ffyf.org.