

Highlighting The Success of Head Start Programs in California



CCSESA

California County Superintendents
Educational Services Association

The 58 California county superintendents of schools are state constitutional officers who collectively work to ensure the equitable implementation of statewide curriculum and services for California's more than 6 million students.

Approximately 1/3 of the California county offices of education operate a Head Start, Early Head Start, and/or Migrant Head Start program. Additionally, many county superintendents provide assistance and support to Head Start grant recipients in their county.

This publication highlights a handful of Head Start programs operated by, or in collaboration with, California county superintendents of schools.



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ALAMEDA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

REACH Ashland Youth Center

If it weren't for free on-site child care, Amanda Majail-Blanco could not have returned to her part-time job after the birth of her twin sons.

Amanda graduated from San Leandro High and was in her freshman year of college last fall when she and her partner, Lamont Thompson, learned she was pregnant — with twins. A severe and prolonged case of morning sickness forced her to go on early maternity leave and drop out of school. Without Amanda's part-time job, the couple had to rely solely on Lamont's paycheck.

During her pregnancy, Amanda and Lamont stayed alternatively with her father, her mother, and Thompson's mother, bouncing between Hayward and San Leandro. It's not a great arrangement, she said, but since going on maternity leave they have not had the money for their own place.

Her sons, Major and Jeshua Thompson-Blanco, were born March 25; Amanda was able to carry them to full term.

Although the unexpected pregnancy pushed her back, both with her family and her career plans, Amanda said she is determined to not let it keep her behind forever. But without the free child care, she would have had to put her plans to return to work on hold.



"Things have been really tight," Amanda said. "With all-day child care, I will be able to work full time."

In August, the REACH Ashland Youth Center's child care center, called The Nest, expanded its Early Head Start program for young parents, allowing Amanda to resume college and pursue her dream of a better life.

"I'm excited to be back working," the 18-year-old said. Now that she is again earning a paycheck, the couple have started looking for a place of their own.

The Nest is one of five sites in central and southern Alameda County where the Early Head Start program is expanding, funded by a \$1.2 million five-year federal grant. The money will pay for 89 Early Head Start slots, including 18 at the youth center. Early Head Start provides care and instruction for children ages newborn to 3; their parents must be low income to qualify.

"Throughout Alameda County there is a huge need for subsidized infant-toddler care," said Rosemary Almand, of Community Association for Preschool Education, or CAPE, which received the grant. The Nest fills a critical child care need in Ashland, a low-income unincorporated area between San Leandro and Hayward.

Free child care is crucial for many young people to be able to succeed, said Jamie Hintzke, community relations coordinator at the center. "Child care is so expensive, and these young people are not at a place where they can earn a lot, because they don't have the skills yet," she said.

PLACER COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

KidZKount



The Placer Community Action Council's KidZKount non-profit is joining the nation in marking 50 years of Head Start. The program offers pre-natal to pre-kindergarten support in the health, education, nutrition and parent engagement to 650 children in Nevada and Placer Counties.

The local group employs 120 educators and support staff and has an annual budget of \$9.1 million. KidZKount operates Head Start and Early Head Start programs that are federally funded and primarily serve children whose families earn less than the federal poverty level – \$23,550 for a family of four.

Based on High Street on the edge of Downtown Auburn, KidZKount has administered Head Start and Early Head Start programs for 46 years. Over that time, it has served more than 20,000 children in the two counties, including the North Tahoe Basin area.

Nationally, since the summer of 1965, more than 31 million children and their families have benefitted from Head Starts services – from NBA great Shaquille O'Neal to teachers, lawyers, mayors, members of Congress, foundation presidents, Grammy-winning musicians, poets and parents.

"After 50 years, we're seeing some of these folks come up," KidZKount/Placer Community Action Council Executive Director Denyse Cardoza said. The local organization's goal is to empower children and their families to maximize their full potential through opportunities for growth and change.

"We're satisfied with the work we've done but we're also always looking for improvement," Cardoza said. "We've never felt we've ever been where we're supposed to be."

With an eye toward the future, Cardoza – who has been with Head Start for 30 years – serves on the National Head Start Association board and is president of Region 9, which takes in Arizona, Hawaii, California, Nevada and the other Pacific area.

Cardoza said the local Head Start group will be linking its anniversary activities to many taking place nationally and around the state.

"We're celebrating families and children," Cardoza said. "And we're celebrating the partnerships we have in the community."

Jonathan Shingle, who has a 5-year-old son in Head Start, said he's really enjoying the foundation for future education that structuring playtime and education activities is providing. Shingle serves as male "ambassador" for the Auburn Head Start location, providing input to the Head Start policy council and relaying information back to parents.

"My son absolutely loves it and looks forward to going to school every day," Shingle said. "And I appreciate that Head Start gets parents involved."



LOS ANGELES COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

LA Head Start—Parent Testimonials



In 2012, Sergio Morales enrolled his oldest daughter (now 8) in ABC USD Head Start because his wife was told about the program from his son's elementary school. However, it was not until his youngest daughter (now 5) started Head Start that he really began to understand all the positive effects the program would have on him and his family. Morales knew that Head Start had a good curriculum because his 8-year-old daughter was more advanced in school than kids her age and always very helpful with her younger sister. But he had never explored the services Head Start offered him. Now, he has learned how to be more involved in his children's studies—both with his daughters and his teenage sons. "My sons were not involved in Head Start and I wish that I knew then how to be more involved in their schooling. Maybe they wouldn't have struggled as much in high school if I were more involved earlier," stated Morales. Morales credits Head Start with helping him become more engaged in his children's lives and starting to volunteer. "I was less in the moment with my children and I was more about work," he said. As an active father on the Policy Council, Morales suggests that other fathers in the program go to workshops offered, because sometimes it is more helpful to hear advice from someone else. Also, he strongly advocates volunteering and becoming involved at your child's school. "The committees can be time consuming, but it is worth it when you see the progress in your kids," he explained. Morales has taken multiple health and nutrition classes, which he plans to continue because he wants to promote these habits in his family. Additionally, he wants to maintain what he learned as a Head Start parent and be there for his daughters (both now in elementary school) and his sons (in high school and college). He stated, "Working isn't the most important thing in my life; that isn't the only thing that I need to do to be a good provider for my family. Providing time is also important."

Laisa "Chica" Caldwell first learned of Head Start in 2002 when she saw signs for a preschool at her neighborhood elementary school. She was initially attracted to the program for her eldest daughter, Angel, who was two and a half years old—but she soon realized the program could assist her with much more. Soon after Caldwell's daughter started Head Start, Angel's speech impairment was identified and the center assisted her with getting the services she needed. This same process was repeated a few years later when Caldwell's son was also diagnosed with a speech impairment. Because the caring teachers and staff ensured that her children's special needs were met, Caldwell ultimately had all four of her children attend her local Head Start program. "Head Start knows how to teach kids to get ready for kindergarten. They set up goals for my kids and made sure that they met each one," she said. Caldwell also credits the program with teaching her to appreciate and adjust to diversity, while also providing her formal education in early childhood education through the Family Development Credential. The critical skills she gained now serve her vast community work with Watts Neighborhood Council, First 5 LA Leadership Board, Carver Elementary School and Crenshaw High School Parent Councils, Nickerson Gardens Neighborhood Council, and as a den mother in Boy Scout, Nickerson Gardens Pack. Although all of Caldwell's children have graduated from Head Start, she continues to be an advocate for the program. Empowered by her Head Start experiences, she plans to continue her education to become a public servant, and maybe even get into politics... quite possibly becoming "the next Maxine Waters, but of Watts!"

NEVADA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Young Parents Program

A program that for the past three decades has helped Nevada County pregnant and parenting students succeed in school and in life will be eliminated in June.

"This has been an outstanding program in our community for more than 30 years," said Dr. Louise Johnson, Superintendent of the Nevada Joint Union High School District. "Eliminating it is counter-productive. It benefits the entire community when we have good educational programs to help young parents have a chance to finish their educations and prepare themselves for high-paying, professional jobs."



The Young Parents Program — also known as the Adolescent Family Life Program — is a partnership between Early Head Start and 7 school districts in Nevada County. The program provides child care services that help students meet the demands of raising a child while, in many ways, still children themselves. The program also addresses and improves high school graduation rates, birth control use, mental and physical health, reduction of repeat pregnancy, college enrollment, child development education and employment.

Kris Youngman, District Nurse and program director, said the program changes lives. "There are hundreds of students who benefitted from the program who would not otherwise have earned their High School Equivalency, Proficiency Certificate, or high school diploma," Youngman said.

Deanna Estrada, a 17-year-old senior at Silver Springs High School, said she is able to balance motherhood and school work because of the support she receives from her case manager, Jolene Hardin. "It's good because without Jolene's help, I'd probably not be going to school, let alone doing my school work," said Estrada, as she cuddled with her one-year-old daughter, Kambree." Jolene helps me through whatever problems I have, whether it's with the baby or with school. She always has great advice."

"If I didn't have that program, I wouldn't still be in school," said 16-year-old Cloey Peterson, mother of six-month-old Peyton. "Peyton goes to the Infant Toddler Center on my school campus. I get to see her during the day. The staff is nice there and I really trust them." Peterson's fiancé, 18-year-old Noah Cole, said he's thankful for Hardin's guidance. "She helped us get Peyton into the day care. She's great at giving advice. She's always been there for us. If we've ever needed anything, she helps. She's even driven Cloey and Peyton to a doctor's appointment," said Cole.

Silver Springs Principal Marty Mathiesen is one of dozens of people lobbying to save the program in Nevada County. "Without this program, most, if not all of these kids — because they are still kids — would not attend school, nor would they receive the assistance necessary to break the cycle of family issues and the dysfunction they've generally been raised in themselves," said Mathiesen. "Without the Young Parents Program, these students will, most likely, not earn a high school diploma, have no chance of a job, and rely on government assistance."

STANISLAUS COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Stonum Road Head Start

At the Margaret L. Annear Head Start center in south Modesto, kids are playing dress-up and talking about clothes. The topic seemed to be of interest, said early childhood master teacher Carmen Alvarez, and she has learned to take her cues from the kids.

But fashion week in Alvarez's class goes beyond costumes and well-dressed dolls. Sorting by sizes and colors. Practicing hanging up, folding and putting away. Exploring books about clothes. Pinching clothes pins. Gluing buttons while counting to four. Even clothes have an academic side – who knew?

"Preschool has changed. It's not just play anymore," Alvarez said, looking around at the youngsters tracing their names using chubby dry-erase pens. But where preschools really shine are with nonacademic skills.

"Preschool is important for transitioning away from the family, getting used to being in a group. Being here just really prepares them for the next step. It's the difference between crying when they're dropped off or not. Being socially ready. Making friends. Following routines. Solving problems," she said.

The Stonum Road Head Start, run by the Stanislaus County Office of Education, serves a number of children with special needs in its regular program.

"It helps both sides. It's not just the child with disabilities. When (nondisabled kids) help, they get that empathy – that's so important," Alvarez said. "In early education, they have really moved from 'No' to 'Yes, we can get you support.'" "We're here to have the whole family succeed," she said.

Across town at Martone Elementary, a full-day Head Start run by Modesto City Schools has a family service specialist on site. Mayra Toledo checks in with families every six to eight weeks, talking about needs and setting personal goals with parents to get often chaotic lives moving forward.

"I'm always busy," said Toledo with grin. She works one-on-one with families to solve everyday problems, like getting a working car or finding a low-cost dentist, and larger issues, like mental health or substance-abuse counseling. "The hardest (need to fill) would be affordable housing. Those waiting lists go on for years," she said. There is a high need for counseling services for children as well. Bad behavior can be a lingering effect of trauma kids live with, like domestic violence or watching a parent be arrested.

"There's this misconception. People think that [Head Start] is child care, but if you could see what happens in the classroom. We involve parents. There's a parent committee that makes decisions on the budget and hiring – there's a lot to it," Toledo said.

"Some of these families were working and lost their jobs, lost their homes. Times were hard, and if they didn't have Head Start, I don't know what they'd do," Toledo said.

No matter what is happening at home, Head Start offers kids a stable, structured day. Hand washing happens before breakfast and lunch, served family style. Youngsters pass bowls and dish food onto their own plates. A teacher or aide sits at each table, leading the way with "Pleases" and "Thank yous." Tooth-brushing follows.

"When you talk about school readiness, it's not just cognitive skills. It's: Are they healthy? Do they have the social-emotional (skills)?" said Mickey Boelter, head of the Modesto City Schools child development program. Providing intensive preschool help not only helps the kids and families, she added, "it helps the schools be prepared for the students we have."

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CONTRA COSTA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Head Start Contra Costa



Head Start, the child care and development program that serves thousands of Contra Costa families, is celebrating 50 years. Created in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," the federally subsidized centers have helped countless American women go back to work after having children.

In October 2016, the local chapter of Head Start held a community celebration at the George Miller III Childcare Center in Richmond, near the former site of a similar facility where "Rosie the Riveters," the women who worked in the Kaiser shipyards during World War II, sent their children.

"We want to celebrate but also raise awareness about why this is so needed," said Camilla Rand, the director of Head Start Contra Costa. "It's so unique and unlike any other child care program in the country." "A lot of research has shown the importance of quality of early education and a return on investment of \$7 for every dollar spent in terms of fewer people who are incarcerated, unemployed or rely on public health care," Rand said.

Head Start serves some 3,000 children annually at 15 centers throughout the county. All are low-income, with families earning under \$24,000 to qualify.

Despite proven results, funding for Head Start is an ongoing challenge, said Rand, with 6,000 children in Contra Costa County on the wait list in 2015. But in 2016, thanks to the advocacy efforts of U.S. Reps. Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11) and Mike Thompson (CA-5), the county received \$4.5 million of federal grant money to support Head Start services throughout Contra Costa County.

"If our goal is a well-educated citizenry, early education is where we need to start. Research shows that for every dollar we invest in early childhood education, there is a \$14 return on investment. As a former Head Start Commissioner, I have witnessed firsthand the positive effects these programs have on exciting students, empowering communities, and strengthening the future of America," said Rep. DeSaulnier.

"Head Start and Early Head Start programs are of tremendous value to our community," said Rep. Thompson. "I am proud to have helped secure these federal funds, which will help make sure all students, regardless of where they live or how much money their parents make, have equal access to a quality education from the day they first step foot in a classroom."

"There are many winners as a result of this grant for Contra Costa County's Head Start program," said Candace Andersen, Chair of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors. "A clear benefit, though, is to strengthen existing child care programs and expand their reach. Dozens more children will be brought into the program at an age where high quality early learning has such a major impact."

COLUSA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Footsteps 2 Brilliance

On February 12, students and teachers at the Colusa Head Start had a first-hand, hands-on look at the first-of-its-kind preschool technology program slated to be launched in Colusa County.

The Colusa County Office of Education is in the infancy of a transformative new program called Footsteps 2 Brilliance (F2B).

"F2B is a breakthrough early learning solution that helps children become proficient readers by 3rd grade, and provides equitable access for every child and parent in our community," said Colusa County Superintendent of Schools Michael West.

During the demonstration of Promethean and F2B, students were allowed not only to see what the program could do, but were invited to take an interactive part.

West commented that there will be a countywide training in participating school districts. The training will be in both English and Spanish. The system includes a windows computer with a drawing element. Students as a whole participate in the lesson which is produced on an interactive flat panel display.



Head Start teacher Parveen Charma said that she could see how excited the students were by the learning opportunity they saw on Friday.

"It's a great opportunity for the kids especially with technology changing everyday of their lives.

This is an educational and fun learning experience for the students and for me as well," she said.

Teacher Tammy Arce said she thinks that once they know how to use the program it is going to be good.

"It gives the students more of an interactive method and empowerment to learn their own way," she said.



KINGS COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Kings Community Action Organization

As with many places in the country still reeling from the recession, the residents of Kings County, aren't in a position to absorb new cuts. Nearly one in five people in the county lives in poverty, with many earning subsistence wages harvesting crops or working in the dairies that dot the countryside.

On a bright April afternoon, Eva Rodriguez is at her spacious home where she has run a daycare center for the last seven years. Three children are seated at a table in the backyard, making pancakes out of Play-Doh beneath a poster that reads Bully Free Zone. A wooden cabinet is overflowing with art supplies that promise messy fun—glitter, paste, paints—while a nearby canopy shelters a gymnastics area with tumbling mats.

In the past, Rodriguez has received children through Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, administered by the Kings Community Action Organization. Unlike traditional Head Start, which is pegged to the school year, the migrant program operates on the farmworkers' season, beginning on April 29 and running through December. And unlike Head Start centers, the family care option provides more flexible hours. This is critical, as many local agricultural jobs—such as those in the packing sheds—have irregular schedules. Workers typically arrive at the job with little idea of how long they'll be needed, and their shifts sometimes extend for well over twelve hours.



"I spent twenty years in the fields," says Rodriguez, who came to the United States from Mexico in 1975. "So I know what it means for parents with young children. When you work in the fields, you can't afford to pay anyone to watch them." Back when she was a twentysomething working mother with two small children, she was forced to bring her daughter and son—then age 4 and 5—to the fields, where she would try to keep an eye on them while harvesting peaches and grapes.

"Parents are already calling," Rodriguez adds. "Just an hour ago, a woman called looking for a spot. They're beginning peaches next week, and she's got two kids and a baby. She has no idea what she's going to do." For farmworkers, there are few quality childcare options: those who don't bring their kids to the fields are often forced to leave them in unlicensed centers, which are frequently crowded and may offer little more than hours of uninterrupted television watching. Rodriguez, on the other hand, is a certified teacher's assistant and, since her center is a Head Start placement site, the kids here follow a schedule that includes everything from twice-daily teeth brushing to instructional play. "We give them free food, diapers, books," she says. "You can tell the difference when the kids get to kindergarten: they're ready."

This year, the childcare crisis for local farmworkers promises to be especially grave. The Kings Community Action Organization usually has ninety-six home daycare slots for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start; but the sequester—which is carving \$75,000 from the program—will force them to drop up to fifty kids. At the moment, the agency is looking over its waiting list and will soon start breaking the bad news to a number of parents. "I've got parents calling me all the time, trying to find out if they're going to get in," says Veronica Muñoz, the organization's family childcare coordinator. "All I can say to them is that they have to wait."

One of the parents who could be dropped is Silvina Ruiz, a 42-year-old single mother of three from Nayarit, Mexico. Last year, while she packed boxes of cherries and garlic, she was able to drop off her infant son at a home daycare center through the program. At the moment, a friend is watching her son, who is now 1, but the cost of childcare—\$125 every two weeks—adds significantly to her living expenses. Currently making \$10 an hour, she has been forced to rent out two rooms in her three-bedroom house to make ends meet.

When asked if she has any savings, Ruiz rolls her eyes. "Economically, it doesn't work," she says in Spanish. "That's why Head Start is such a big help. And it's good for the kids. My daycare worker was great: she taught my son how to do new things, she gave him food, she spoke to him all day. What are we going to do if we don't have this program?"

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