

**“Making it Count: The Impact of Head Start on Latino Children  
and their Families”  
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Hispanic-Americans are currently the most educationally disadvantaged group in America.<sup>1</sup> Minority children and those living below the poverty line enter kindergarten lacking basic literacy and social skills that middle class children develop early on at home.<sup>2</sup> This initial gap persists as children progress through school, often resulting in lower test scores, higher drop out rates, and more restricted economic opportunities<sup>3</sup>. In Washington, Latino children are more likely to be raised in poverty and to later have lower test scores and higher drop out rates than any other group of students. For the past forty years Head Start has been the nation's largest preschool provider for poor children; the proportion of its students who are Latino continues to grow, as does the potential for the program to positively impact the wider Hispanic community if it implemented appropriately. This study evaluates the success of Washington state Head Start operators in the program's two stated areas of focus: preparing children for kindergarten and empowering parents with the skills necessary to become advocates for their families.

I researched published information and studies on the benefits of preschool, the Head Start program, and the educational barriers which face minority and poor children. I collected and compared last school year's National Reporting System test scores from several programs throughout the state, to both each other and to averages from Head Start programs across the country. I also conducted a survey of Walla Walla Head Start parents and two local interviews to supplement discussion of Head Start's impact on the academic performance and home learning environment of Latino students.

My data suggests that Head Start improves the preparation of Latino children for kindergarten by improving letter recognition and vocabulary at relatively the same rate as non-Latino students. In addition, the Walla Walla Head Start program employs successful strategies to improve the ability of parents to support for the education of their children. However, a gap persists between Latino and non-Latino students' test scores in virtually every category tested, particularly English language ability. The data presented here cannot demonstrate that enrollment in Head Start will necessarily prevent poor test performance or low achievement later on; however it can contribute to the argument for a long term impact study which follows program graduates in the interest of exploring such connections. I discuss a few of the specific challenges facing Latino students in Washington and conclude with recommendations to policy makers to improve the ability of Head Start to empower its families to advocate for themselves and for the needs of their children.

## **From Luxury to Necessity**

Just over seventy years ago, only a tiny fraction of the nation's elite youth spent time in a preschool program. Today, the growing consensus among education experts is that participation in early childhood development programs is crucial to preparation for academic success. It is particularly important for poor children, who often lack basic abilities which their middle class peers learn early on. Many have short attention spans,

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa Roderick "Hispanics and Education" in *Hispanics in the United States: An Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Ed. Cafferty & Engstrom

<sup>2</sup> Kristina Kafer, "A Head Start for Poor Children" Heritage Foundation Reports May 4, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Roderick

lack language skills, and have difficulty listening to directions.<sup>4</sup> Even at the early age of 4, their vocabulary skills lag behind those of middle class students; this gap continues to grow the longer these students remain in school. The average standardized test scores of students living below the poverty line are lower in every subject in any given year. Literacy, math, and social skills are generally weaker among children living in poverty, weakest of all among poor minority children.<sup>5</sup> The disadvantage poor children are placed at is widely attributed to home environments which are focused on making ends meet and often less conducive to early intellectual development. Given only this general information, the case for preschool can loosely be made: enrollment provides poor children with the opportunity to develop skills crucial to success in kindergarten, which will lead to achievement in later years as well.

One of the few long term impact studies on preschool's influence on the development of poor children is the Perry Preschool Project. The High/Scope Perry study started in 1962 in Ypsilanti, Michigan; over two years one hundred twenty three poor black children were enrolled in a preschool program emphasizing the development of critical life and basic academic skills, in the hopes that it would lead to better academic performances later. Parents and teachers had weekly home visits during which parents were encouraged to have their children count change while shopping and to read to them at night.<sup>6</sup> Enrollment in preschool had drastic short term effects on the performance of these students, in addition to more long term benefits.

The attitudes both of the student and parents towards education improved considerably over time. Preschool attendees were less likely to end up in special education classes, had higher grade point averages, and graduated from high school at a rate twenty one percent higher than those that had not gone to preschool.<sup>7</sup> In their late twenties, Perry graduates performed better on literacy tests, and they have gone onto have higher employment, home and care ownership, and savings account rates<sup>8</sup>. Their odds of being violent offenders have plummeted, and they have done jail time at a rate half of the control group.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey L. Katz "For a Brief Part of Each Day, Children Find an Oasis as Head Start" CQ Weekly March 5, 1994

<sup>5</sup> Kafer

<sup>6</sup> David L. Kirp "Life Way After Head Start" The New York Times November 21, 2004

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence J. Schweinhart "The High/Scope Perry Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions" High/Scope Educational Research Foundation  
<http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/PerryAge40SumWeb.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Schweinhart.

<sup>9</sup> Schweinhart.

**Table 1**

**High/Scope Perry Study 1962-2000: Selected Results**

	<b>Perry Students</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
High School Graduation Rate	66%	45%
Employment Rate	76%	62%
Incarceration Rate	28%	52%
Average Income	\$20,800	\$15,300

Source: “The High/Scope Perry Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions” Lawrence J. Schweinhart High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

*The ongoing Perry Study highlights the long term benefits of preschool attendance for poor minority children and the need for more long term research on the subject.*

A similar study conducted by the Chicago Child Parent Center found that preschool graduates were more likely to have finished high school, less likely to have been held back, and less likely to have been arrested for a crime.<sup>10</sup> Both studies estimated that the investment in preschool provides society with substantial returns, in the forms of higher income and reduced costs of remedial teaching and justice expenditures; the Chicago Study’s estimate was \$7.00 for each dollar invested and the Perry Study’s was \$17.07<sup>11</sup>

**Missing Out**

In spite of a growing consensus among education experts that preschool is crucial to development in the years before kindergarten, poor children are still enrolling in programs to receive preschool and related services at only a fraction of the rate that they are eligible to do so. Estimates are that only one seventh of the children who qualify for federal child care assistance receive it.<sup>12</sup> This is especially true for Latino children, who enroll in early childhood education programs at rates lower than black or white children. In 2001, “36.2% of poor Hispanic children ages three to five were enrolled in early childhood care and education programs, while 60.1% of black and 46.1% of white children of the same age group were enrolled in these programs.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory <http://www.nrwel.org>

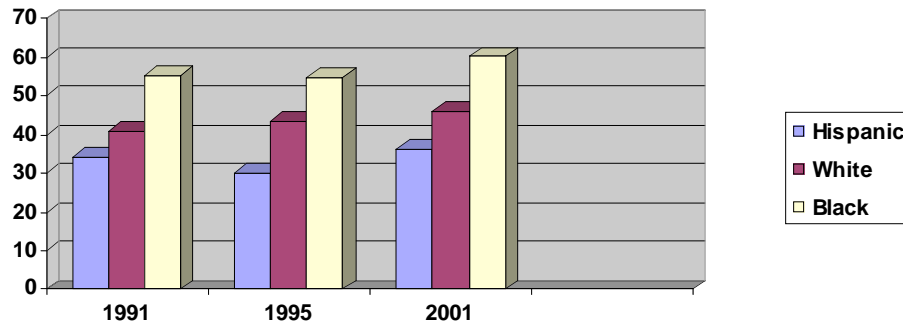
<sup>11</sup> Schweinhart. The differences in the estimated returns to society can at least be partially attributed to the lengths of the studies; return was only calculated through age 20 in the Chicago study, and continues to be calculated in the Perry study.

<sup>12</sup> Center for Law and Social Policy June 2002

<sup>13</sup> National Council of La Raza “Latino Issues and Universal Preschool”

**Chart 1**

**Percentage of Low-Income Children Ages 3-5 Enrolled in Center-Based Early Childhood Care and Education Programs, by Race/Ethnicity 1991,1995, 2001**



	1991	1995	2001
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>34.4%</b>	<b>30.1%</b>	<b>36.2%</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>41.0%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>	<b>46.1%</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>55.4%</b>	<b>54.9%</b>	<b>60.1%</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. National Household Education Surveys Program, “Parent Interview” Survey, selected years.

*While preschool enrollment has generally increased since 1991, Hispanic children still enroll at rates far below those of Black and White students.*

While Latino children are less likely than White or Black children to attend preschool<sup>14</sup>, they are twice as likely to be eligible for federally funded anti-poverty programs such as Head Start. This means that they are more likely to be living in poverty, less likely to have adequate housing, and their parents are likely to be employed in low wage or seasonal work.<sup>15</sup> A Latino child in the West is the least likely of any child in America to be enrolled in preschool; in the 1998-1999 school year, 62% of all children in the West attended preschool the previous year. This is the lowest rate in the country, and Hispanics were the least likely of all ethnic groups to have participated. On average they spent three more hours a week in school than the Midwest’s Hispanic population, but the percentage of participants was 6% smaller in the West.<sup>16</sup> These statistics demonstrate that Hispanic children are not participating in preschool at the rates of their peers, which can have important and immediate implications for their school performance. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study suggests that 49% of Hispanic English-speaking children cannot identify letters at the start of kindergarten, double the rate for white English-speaking students.<sup>17</sup>

The national trends and challenges which face Latinos in America are increasingly salient in Washington, the state with the tenth largest Latino population in

<sup>14</sup> Claudia Bustamante “Preschool Gap Among Latinos” The Press Enterprise August 26, 2005

<sup>15</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet: Washington

<sup>16</sup> National Center for Education Statistics “Regional Differences in Kindergarteners’ Early Education Experiences” June 2005

<sup>17</sup> Miriam E. Calderon “NCLR Head Start Reauthorization: Enhancing School Readiness for Hispanic Children” June 2005

the country. 478,824 Latinos currently live in the state and the population is growing at a rate double the national average. Latinos are twice as likely as the general population to meet the federal standard for poverty and Latino children are three times more likely to live in poverty than other children their age.<sup>18</sup> That Hispanic unemployment is virtually identical to that of the larger population points to the low wage, low mobility service and seasonal work which are the only employment options for many families. Because an entire family is impacted by the employment of the adult worker, a “child’s development, health, and overall well being is impacted by the life experience of the adult members in their families”<sup>19</sup>; a parent’s long hours and short amount of free time can significantly influence the early development and later educational experience of their child.

**Table 2**

**Selected Washington State Quality of Life Statistics**

	<b>Hispanics</b>	<b>General Population</b>
<b>Living under the poverty line</b>	24%	11%
<b>Children Living in Poverty</b>	55, 649	203,274
<b>% of Children Living in Poverty</b>	31.2%	13.9%
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	7.8%	7.5%
<b>% Uninsured</b>	36.0%	16.5%
<b>% That are Homeowners</b>	41.5%	64.3%

Source: National Council of La Raza and U.S. Census information as compiled by NCLR.

*Washington’s Latinos are disproportionately more likely to live below the poverty line, lack insurance, and not own their home. This can impact the access a child has preschool and to the quality of their education.*

That Latino children are less likely than White or Black children to be read a story or taken to the library delineates the tangible effects of a lower quality of life on education<sup>20</sup>. The large education gap between poor and middle class students only becomes more striking when comparing Latino students and their peers. Seventy seven percent of Washington Hispanics are Mexican, the Hispanic subgroup with the lowest average education level<sup>21</sup>, and nearly forty percent of the Hispanic population is under the age of 19<sup>22</sup>. As the Latino population continues to grow, the educational performance of Hispanic students will continue to be a critical issue both for schools and for families. The high poverty rates of Latinos make them more likely to live in areas with under funded schools, remedial coursework, and unqualified teachers; often, Latino parents are

<sup>18</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet Washington

<sup>19</sup> Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Quality Improvement Center “Migrant and Seasonal Children and Families—Statistics”

<sup>20</sup> National Center for Education Statistics “Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics” April 2003. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003008.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Melissa Roderick “Hispanics and Education” in *Hispanics in the United States* Ed. Caffter & Engstrom

<sup>22</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet: Washington

not equipped with the resources to help their children or the knowledge to effectively advocate for them when necessary.<sup>23</sup>

**Table 3**  
**Percent of 3-5 year olds not yet enrolled in kindergarten who participated in various home literacy activities with a family member, by race/ethnicity selected years 1991-99.**

Activity/Year	Total	White non-Hispanic	Black non-Hispanic	Hispanic
<b>Read to</b>				
1991	72	79	58	<b>53</b>
1995	84	89	74	<b>60</b>
1999	81	89	71	<b>61</b>
<b>Told a Story</b>				
1991	39	40	35	<b>37</b>
1995	50	53	43	<b>42</b>
1999	50	53	45	<b>40</b>
<b>Taken to the Library</b>				
1991	35	40	25	<b>23</b>
1995	39	43	33	<b>27</b>
1999	36	39	35	<b>25</b>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics “Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics” April 2003. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003008.pdf>

*Latino children are the least likely to participate in home literacy activities which build the foundation for later interest and success in education.*

The disbursement of the Latino population to states beyond California, Texas, and New York presents its own challenges. For these parents, there is a much weaker social safety net than in traditionally Hispanic areas, which can put them in an even more tenuous position. It is not surprising that Hispanics complete high school at a rate of 64.1%, compared to 83.7% of Blacks and 91.8% of Whites.<sup>24</sup> Some expect that the introduction of the English-only Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) will only serve to increase the rate at which Latino students drop out of Washington’s high schools.<sup>25</sup>

### Meeting the Challenge

Head Start was created to address the very issues which Latinos are facing today in ever growing numbers. It was to provide disadvantaged children with access to early education and social services, in an effort to help them begin kindergarten on an equal footing with their classmates. Since its establishment as part of the Johnson Administration’s educational reforms in 1964, over twenty one million children have

<sup>23</sup> National Council of La Raza “The State of Hispanic America” 2005

<sup>24</sup> NCLR “State of Hispanic America”

<sup>25</sup> For an in depth discussion on this topic, see the chapter on K-12 education in this report

graduated from the program<sup>26</sup>. Most programs now serve children for a half-day or school day eight or nine months of the year. A quarter of the programs operate full-day, year-round programs<sup>27</sup>. Head Start programs are locally operated by public agencies, school systems, and private organizations with federal grants distributed by the Administration for Children and Families.<sup>28</sup> The primary qualification to enroll is to be living at 100% of the poverty level or below, and since minorities are more likely than Whites to live below the poverty line, it is not surprising that a disproportionate percentage of Head Start students nationally are Black or Latino. For the 2003-2004 school year 908,851 children enrolled: 31.2% were Hispanic, 31.1% Black, and 26.9% White.<sup>29</sup> In Walla Walla, nearly 50% of the students are Hispanic—a rate several times higher than the overall percentage of the population which identifies as Latino.<sup>30</sup>

Head Start's mandate is neither to be just a preschool or a day care. It is expected to be a place for families to gain access to crucial services like health care, food stamps, housing assistance, and counseling. The majority of families which qualify for the program are unable to provide any combination of these services for their families, and Head Start staff work with parents to secure them for the short term and to strategize for keeping them in the long term. Family advocates are assigned to a family with whom they meet once a month; family advocates keep updated on the health status, nutritional intake, and emotional well being of the children as well as the parents. They are the primary connection to social and medical services and maintain close contact with families during their enrollment.<sup>31</sup>

There have been several studies conducted by various organizations on the ability of Head Start to raise test scores and the health status of their pupils. Summarized findings include:

- The Head Start Synthesis Project, 1985: An analysis of over 200 separate studies and reports found that Head Start students made significant short term gains in cognitive and social-emotional test scores and health status. However, the long term scores of Head Start and non-Head Start students did not remain as distinct as in the years immediately following enrollment.
- Head Start students were less likely to be retained or placed in special education, and on average received more medical services<sup>32</sup>
- Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES): 4 year olds enrolled in Head Start in 1997 and 2000 showed some improvement after one year, but the majority still tested below the 23<sup>rd</sup> percentile in basic academic skills like vocabulary, writing, and early math mathematics.

A longstanding lawmaker concern was the lack of research on the long term benefits of Head Start enrollment for children and their families. The 1998 Head Start reauthorization mandated that such a study be conducted and the results presented to Congress before more funding would be approved. The National Head Start Impact Study, which started in 2002 and will end in 2006, aims to determine if students have

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<sup>26</sup> Kafer.

<sup>27</sup> Kafer.

<sup>28</sup> Head Start Program Fact Sheet Fiscal Year 2004. Administration for Children and Families.

<sup>29</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet: Washington

<sup>30</sup> Demographic statistics provided by the Walla Walla program administration.

<sup>31</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>32</sup> Kafer

“improved cognitive, social, and emotional development; communication and motor skills, knowledge; and health when compared to non-participants. Researchers will also examine head start’s impact on families and will identify best practices”.<sup>33</sup>

The executive summary of the study so far was released in June 2005; some of its main findings include:

- Head Start reduces the achievement gap in the areas of pre-reading, pre-writing, and vocabulary skills;
- There is a small positive impact on problem behaviors;
- Children enrolled in the program report both improved health status and access to health care.<sup>34</sup>

While these studies suggest that Head Start can positively impact the health status and cognitive development of its students, none of them include long term impact studies which can substantively prove the long term benefits of the program. My work presented here aims to lend support for such research.

Melissa Roderick summarizes the factors which research on this topic generally points to as contributing to poor academic trends among Hispanic students: differences in family resources for education, differences in quality of schools, and cultural differences in views of childrearing and education<sup>35</sup>. In this study the quality of education is less emphasized since all Head Start programs are held to the same quality standards. The influence of cultural differences on educational practices is discussed, but I focus primarily on the ability of Head Start to address the factors which can limit a family’s resources for education. When a child grows up in a home that can provide educational resources, she is more likely to be successful in school and graduate. The use of parenting strategies which promote critical thinking and daily interaction between parent and child around schoolwork are both indications that the family is providing educational resources at home. As I have discussed, Hispanic children are less likely to grow up in this sort of environment, for several reasons. The low average educational level of the parent impacts this in two ways: first, by requiring them to work long hours which keeps them away from their homes and second, by limiting the amount of disposable income available to purchase educational tools like books.

These parents are unlikely to have the time to volunteer as a chaperone or to attend parent-teacher conferences, further distancing them from the education of their children. Limited English abilities can directly impact the ability of a child to gain access to preschool, especially for a program like Head Start for which enrollment is primarily based on income. Furthermore, a general unfamiliarity with the American education

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<sup>33</sup> Kafer

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings

<sup>35</sup> Roderick in Cafferty and Engstrom

system makes it all but impossible to learn practices for creating an environment which encourages academic success.<sup>36</sup>

Since Head Start's mission is to assist parents in creating the very kind of environment that Roderick describes as central to academic success, it is crucial to evaluate the program's effectiveness in this arena as well. Included in this report is an analysis of Head Start's ability to

- give parents the confidence and tools to contribute to their children's education
- put families in contact with educational materials in the home
- provide opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education outside of the home.

## **Methods**

I contacted Head Start programs throughout the state; from those that responded, I requested their National Reporting System results from August 2005 and any available anonymous demographic information that the program had collected. The NRS reports used included Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 assessments of Head Start students as mandated by the federal government, in addition to national mean scores and averages as provided by the NRS. It took several weeks for many of the programs to get back to me and so, due to the time constraints placed on this research, my discussion includes four programs instead of all of Washington State Head Start. Furthermore, some of the faxed reports were of low quality and some statistics were illegible; in other cases, only the Spring 2005 assessments were included and Fall 2004 assessments were omitted. This made it challenging to compare the data; however it was still possible to draw some conclusions about the performance of Latino Head Start students on the NRS tests.

There are some strong critiques of the National Reporting System in particular being voiced by program administrators. One program refused to send them to me, saying that it was not based in research and provided no information about the accomplishments of Head Start students. Others have suggested that instead of improving performance, tests like the NRS will only drive students away from school and increase drop out rates. With these concerns in mind, I chose to include the test results in my study for two reasons. The first is that they are the most recent program wide sets of data. As flawed as they might be, those tests are the only sets of numbers that many programs have in common. The demographic information collected by programs varies from one to the next and, as the first required standardized testing Head Start has ever conducted, it is important to evaluate it. Analysis of the testing material also demonstrates the growing divide between program administrators and the federal government in regards to the goals and outcomes of the program. Certainly for the rest of the current administration, if not beyond, this will be one of the most compelling conversations had about Head Start and more broadly about the performance expectations of American students. The programs selected for discussion in this report highlight the educational challenges for poor and

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<sup>36</sup> Roderick

minority children, in addition to the need for long term impact studies on the impact of Head Start on school performance through high school.

For my analysis of the Walla Walla program, I supplemented testing results with a bilingual survey sent out to all parents of current students. Responses to statements about Head Start's accessibility and the opportunities it is perceived to provide were tabulated by English, Spanish, and overall program responses. These surveys were sent out right before school was recessed for parent-teacher conferences, which I believe contributed to my lower than expected response rate of about 15%. I also analyzed demographic information provided by the administrators, which I used to evaluate the ability of Head Start to put families in touch with needed social and medical services. This information was also used in conjunction with interview statements to delineate the challenges facing enrolled families and to connect those challenges at home with school performance.

My quantitative research was complemented by two interviews conducted in Walla Walla. On the advice of Jan Foster, I interviewed former Head Start parents Juan and Andrea Pedroza on November 7, 2005 from 7:00-8:45 pm at McDonald's. The interview was tape recorded, conducted in English and Spanish, and translated into English by myself. Walla Walla Head Start Family Services Coordinator Diana Cox agreed to arrange an interview between her and me, in addition to one of the Family Advocates, Maggie. The interview took place on November 16, 2005 from 3:00-4:00 at Blue Ridge Elementary School. This interview was held entirely in English. The Pedroza interview provided me with valuable parental insight into the value of education for Latino children in addition to the perceived obstacles which face the community. The families advocate interview expanded my understanding of Head Start's program goals and their vision for its future role in education.

Walla Walla program coordinator Donna Painter and teacher Elisa Weinman-Pogue were my first research contacts. Meetings with them helped narrow the scope of my research and become familiar with the Head Start program; Donna also assisted me in the dissemination and collection of the parent surveys. Jan Foster and those responded to my information requests were all invaluable community contacts that often went out of their way to aid my research. Thomas Kost provided valuable editorial and data collection contributions as my research came to a close.

## **Data Presentation**

### *National Reporting System Results*

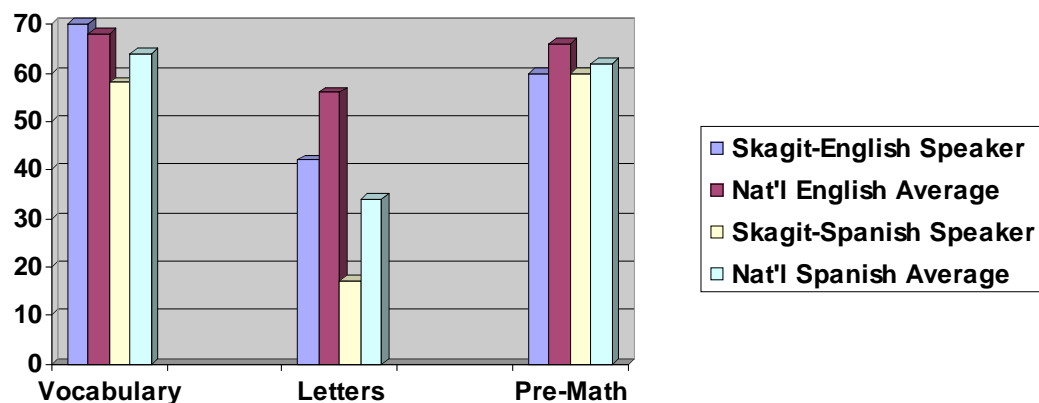
National Reporting System scores from Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 were collected from Skagit/Island, Yakima, Walla Walla, and Bremerton Head Start programs. Bremerton tested no Spanish speaking children, Skagit/Island tested about a third of its students in Spanish, while Walla Walla tested nearly half its children in Spanish and Yakima two thirds. An analysis of these scores demonstrates great strides in preparing English and Spanish speakers for kindergarten; however, it also shows the great disadvantage of Head Start students and the limitations of having a child for only two years.

**Skagit/Islands:** The Spring 2005 Assessment results placed English test takers on average at level 5 (of 6) in two categories: vocabulary (70% correct) and pre-math skills

(60%). On average Skagit/Islands students placed at level 3 in letter identification (42%). English test results stayed at or above the national Head Start mean score in vocabulary and pre-math skills. Those who tested in Spanish scored at level 3 (58%) in vocabulary, level 2 (17%) in letter recognition, and level 3 (60%) in pre-math skills. Spanish speakers stayed about 2% below the national Spanish average in vocabulary and math all year, but did improve. By the end of the year Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students were meeting the mean score for English assessments vocabulary and were just a few percentage points behind the math skills.<sup>37</sup> There were 140 children who took the test in English and 57 who took it in English and Spanish. Both native and LEP speakers are behind the national average in letter recognition.

**Chart 2**

**Skagit/Islands National Reporting System Results: Spring 2005**



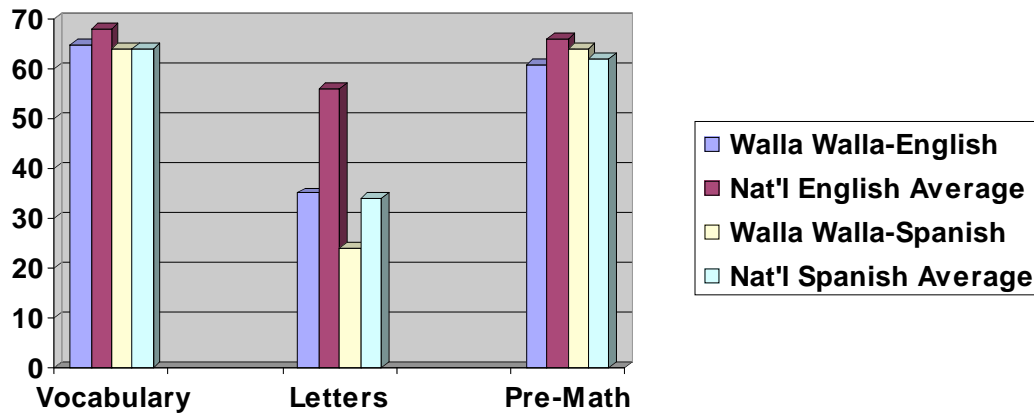
**Walla Walla<sup>38</sup>:** The Spring 2005 Assessment results placed English test takers on average at level 4 in vocabulary (65%) and pre-math skills (61%), and level 3 (35%) in letter recognition. These results were 3% below the Head Start national average in vocabulary and 5% below national scores in pre-math; the letter recognition score was 17% below the national mean. Those who tested in Spanish scored at level 4 (64%) in vocabulary, level 3 (24%) in letter recognition, and level 3 (64%) in pre-math skills. These students met the national mean in vocabulary and exceeded it in math. English language learners remained just a few percentage points behind averages for English vocabulary and math skills. There were 32 children who took the test in English and 32 who took it in English and Spanish, with 1 testing only in Spanish. Both native and LEP speakers are behind the national average in letter recognition.

<sup>37</sup> Head Start National Reporting System 2004-2005 Program Report Skagit/Islands Head Start August 2005

<sup>38</sup> Head Start National Reporting System 2004-2005 Program Report Walla Walla Head Start August 2005

**Chart 3**

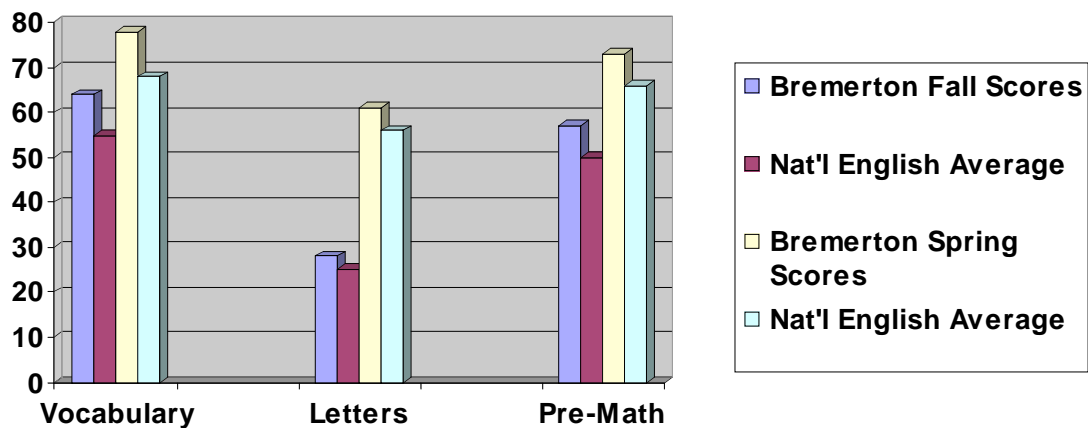
**Walla Walla National Reporting System Results: Spring 2005**



**Bremerton**<sup>39</sup>: Fall 2004 Assessment results placed English test takers on average at level 4 in vocabulary (64%), and in the spring the average score was a level 6 (78%), a score 10% above the national average. Fall letter recognition was at level 3 (28%) and improved to level 5 (61%) by the end of the year, 6% above average. Early math skills began at level 3 (57%) and progressed to level 5 (73%). There were no children who tested in Spanish.

**Chart 4**

**Bremerton National Reporting System Results Fall 2004/Spring 2005**

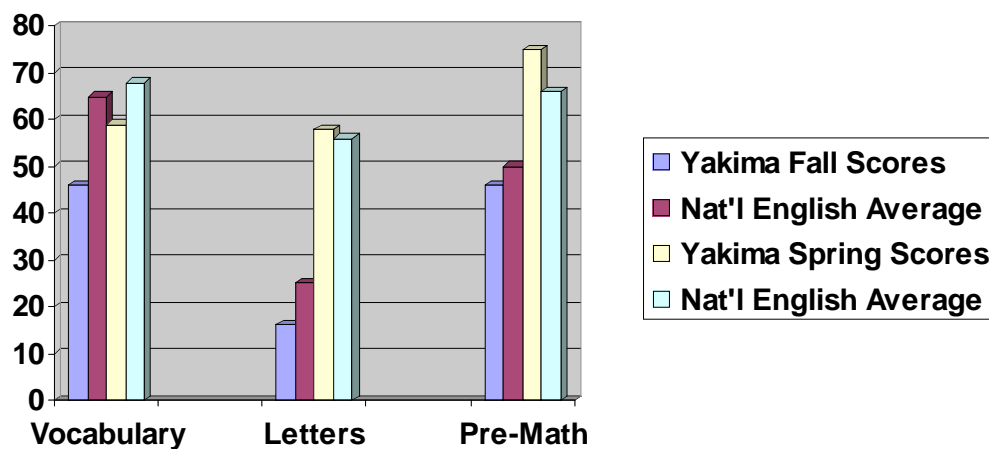


<sup>39</sup> Head Start National Reporting System 2004-2005 Program Report Olympic ESD Head Start August 2005

**Yakima**<sup>40</sup>: English language learners had Fall English scores of: 42% (vocabulary), 20% (letters), and 48% (math); by the spring, those scores had risen to 55%, 60%, and 50%, respectively. Average English test results for vocabulary improved from 46% to 59% over the course of the year; letter recognition moved from 16% to 58%; and early math skills developed from 46% to 65% correct responses. Average Spanish test results for vocabulary went from 54% to 62% correct; letter recognition improved from 15% to 50%; and math scores improved from 43% to 65%. 170 children were assessed, 52 in English and 118 in Spanish.

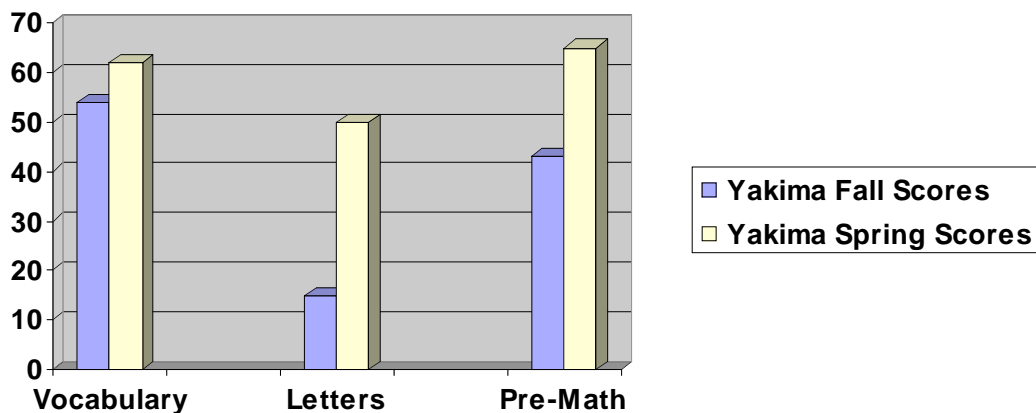
**Chart 5**

**Yakima National Reporting System Results English Speakers**



**Chart 6**

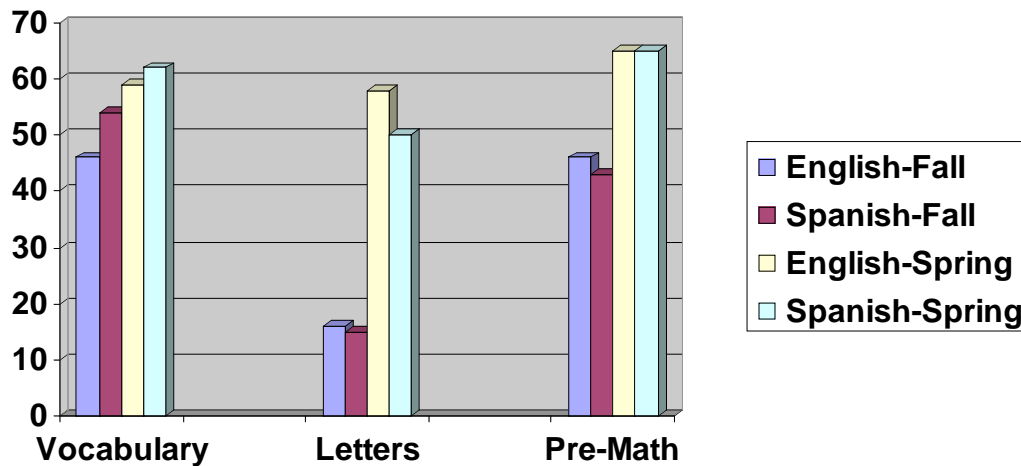
**Yakima National Reporting System Results Spanish Speakers**



<sup>40</sup> Head Start National Reporting System 2004-2005 Program Report Washington Migrant Council Head Start August 2005

Chart 7

**Yakima English and Spanish Results Compared**



These numbers are difficult to follow, abstract, and many argue not helpful at all to Head Start teachers and coordinators. There are two key pieces of information to take from them:

- Head Start is able to improve basic pre-academic skills over the course of a year
- Latino students improve, but their test results suggest that they will remain at a disadvantage when they enter kindergarten

*Parent Survey Results*

Bilingual surveys were distributed to parents with children currently enrolled in Walla Walla Head Start.<sup>41</sup> The responses were sorted by the language in which they were filled out, in addition to an overall program compilation.<sup>42</sup> The following compares the responses of parents to some of the statements.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Appendix E

<sup>42</sup> Appendix F

<sup>43</sup> Refer to Appendix F for complete survey results.

Percentage of Parents who Responded '9' or '10'\* to Selected Survey Questions

	<i>All</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>English</i>
I am able to contribute to my child's education and help them with their homework.	86.6%	99.9%	80.8%
Head Start teaches skills that my child would not have otherwise.	53.3%	66.6%	47.6%
Going to preschool will lead to better performance in school later in life.	89.9%	99.9%	85.6%
Equal access to education is a right of all children.	83.3%	99.9%	80.9%
Education will provide my child with opportunities that they would not have otherwise.	76.6%	88.8%	76.2%
I have read to my child in the last month.	100%	100%	100%
I have played with my child in the last month.	100%	100%	100%
Source: Survey sent to	Walla Walla Head	Start parents by	Author Nov. 2005

\* Parents were asked to respond to the survey on a scale of 1-10, with 9 and 10 being coded as "I agree completely".

*A sample of the responses received to a parent survey distributed in Walla Walla. Parents overwhelmingly agree that education is crucial to their child's success, and Hispanic parents were even more likely to attribute that success to skills promoted and reinforced by Head Start.*

Latino parents on average felt more strongly about the connection between education and expanded opportunities than White parents did. Roderick argues that such a response is indicative of the different frames of reference immigrant communities often have.<sup>44</sup> Even for those who were raised in the United States by immigrant parents, current choices are presented as better than any of the options available in the country of origin. Latino parents, therefore, are more likely to envision education as a sure way for their children to succeed. Juan's comments echoed that sentiment:

"In Mexico the rich get their way and the Hispanics here are used to not being equal. What brought them here was a need for a better life; they weren't equal where they came from and even here they get looked down on... If you go to college you get a better job and there are more opportunities for you. That is what we expect will happen. It is an opportunity to be equal to others. The less opportunity you have the worse off you'll be, that's just how it is."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Roderick

<sup>45</sup> Appendix B

Overall, parents were overwhelmingly optimistic about the opportunities enrollment in Head Start would open up for their children. They also reported reading to them at a rate five times the national average.<sup>46</sup> They did not report taking their children to the library at the rates I anticipated, which I attribute to the lending library operated by Head Start in Walla Walla.

### **Case Study: Walla Walla Head Start/ ECEAP**

What makes Head Start stand out among early education programs is its commitment to the cognitive, emotional and social development of its students and families. In order to clearly discuss the methods of the program to encourage this multi-faceted development, this case study divides Head Start's efforts into three roles: Head Start as a space for education, Head Start as a space for services, and Head Start as a space for political empowerment. The program has a long tradition of delivering comprehensive and high quality services designed to spur the development of low-income children. It provides a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, and mental health; nutrition, and parent involvement. In addition, the entire range of services is responsive and appropriate to each child's and family's developmental, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage and experience<sup>47</sup>

#### *Head Start as a Space for Education*

Walla Walla's Head Start program is run in conjunction with the Washington state funded Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP). It operates out of Blue Ridge Elementary School, with one classroom at Green Park Elementary. There are about two hundred students, the majority of them four year olds. There are two half day sessions four days a week, and each session includes a meal and a snack. There is a great emphasis put on routine and developing skills like brushing teeth, wiping hands, and putting away toys. Each classroom is bilingual and there is always a Spanish speaking volunteer in the classroom; Head Start's emphasis is on intellectual development in a student's primary language versus teaching them a new one.

The program also focuses on individual development and while there are some general outcomes, family advocates work with parents and teachers to assess growth based on the child. For example, even a program wide outcome like 'improved reading' is based on the initial abilities of the student. At the ages during which children are enrolled in Head Start, the developmental differences between a 3 and a 4 year old can either be minute or gargantuan—it depends on the child. During our interview Diana Cox described the different abilities of Head Start students:

“Sometimes we get a four year old for one year, going to kindergarten next year. Get an active parent, a child with few traumas, and we know that [when they leave] they read faster and they're socially and emotionally ready to learn. And if we get a three year old...based on the family life...you never know. At this program we stick very close the mission of Head Start in the sense that we take the neediest of the needy. We help make

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<sup>46</sup> National Center for Education Statistics “Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics” April 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Head Start Information and Publication Center

these kids socially and emotionally sound—and ok, sometimes they won't learn eleven letters of the alphabet.”<sup>48</sup>

As our conversation continued, the family advocates and teachers I spoke with made it very clear that Head Start is not a day care—it is preschool, and it prepares children for Kindergarten. However, the program's emphasis is on the education of the whole child, and that includes social and emotional preparation. When asked what that kind of preparation looks like, the reply was “the kid who knows he's loved, he's safe, that there's roof over his head...that knows he can express himself, solve problems, be given choices...[he interacts] with others and is not in fear”.

### *Head Start as a Space for Social Services*

Head Start families have a widespread need for assistance in meeting the basic needs of their families. While this may not be unexpected considering the economic qualifications for enrollment, Head Start staffs are alarmed by the impact on school performance of growing up impoverished and without access to basic services. Dental and basic ongoing care are the biggest challenges facing families, according to staff members; not surprisingly it is also a challenge for many families to meet basic daily needs like having enough food, money for rent, and ongoing heating. A Walla Walla family advocate noted during an interview that, “We have families with parents that are seasonal workers; when it's good it's real good and when it's bad it's tough. And there are families where both parents are working and they still qualify for WIC.”<sup>49</sup> Head Start puts its families in touch with whatever it is that they are having trouble securing on their own, whether that is mental health services, adequate nutrition, ESL classes, or affordable housing. However, the program's goal is to give parents the skills and resources to secure these services on their own in the future, the implications of which will be discussed in the following section. During her interview Diana Cox articulated Head Start's goal to “not just get them food so that they're not hungry right now, we want them to plan on avoiding in the future...our goal is teaching parents how to advocate for themselves and their children.”<sup>50</sup> Head Start does not try to do things *for* its parents; instead, the long term goal is to equip parents with the skills and contacts needed to be able to seek out the help they need on their own.

The type of outreach which Head Start provides is largely accomplished via its family advocates. In Walla Walla, each advocate has a caseload of about thirty-five families with whom they visit once a month. In addition, each November the program closes for four days so that teachers can accompany family advocates on home visits to each of their students' homes. These annual visits focus exclusively on the educational goals and progress of students, and the monthly visits conducted by the family advocate serve to monitor the progress of the family in other arenas. For example, when a child enters the program the advocate has a two hour intake meeting which includes a nutritional assessment and a discussion of the child's developmental history; each month that information is updated and provided to parents, in addition to a conversation about academic performance and classroom demeanor. According to the family advocates I

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<sup>48</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>49</sup> Appendix D.

<sup>50</sup> Appendix D.

interviewed, a great deal of their time both during and outside home visits is spent coordinating and securing social services for their families. These staff members play a crucial role in making parents see the education of their children as something they can contribute to; in addition, it is a conversation with an advocate that is most likely to drive home the Head Start emphasis on setting goals towards self-sufficiency. One advocate during her interview told me that "...families know we aren't going to tell them that they're bad people. We want them to have success and to give them the resources to do that."<sup>51</sup>

### *Head Start as a Space for Political Engagement*

Head Start is an extremely accessible space for parents, and the program views parental engagement as fundamental to the successful education of their children. Furthermore Head Start serves as a key site of political participation for parents who are unlikely to be politically active in other venues. This can generally be attributed to more pressing basic needs concerns; inflexible work schedules which do not permit time for voting or attending a board meeting; or a general sense that there is not a political space which will respect these parents as advocates of their rights and families. Head Start's concerted effort to create opportunities for parents to participate and make decisions about the education of their children makes it a unique site for participation.

Head Start parents are offered a wide range of opportunities to meet the participation requirement of the program. The policy council which makes all final decisions about the Walla Walla program is set up to include a parent majority. Below the policy council are a variety of committees which parents can join, and parents are welcome to volunteer in a classroom whenever they have time. There is no requirement that they come at the same time every week. Once a month there is a parent meeting during which parents meet as classrooms to talk about what is going well and what might be improved; surveys returned by parents during enrollment determine the trainings the staff puts on, covering issues like stress management, child development, and positive discipline. Every meeting that takes place at night never is longer than an hour and a half, always has childcare and food, and concludes with a parent-child activity—all conscious decisions to make it as easy as possible for parents to participate. For parents that are unable to attend such events there are always opportunities to take projects home and return them to school; cutting out paper hearts for art the following day, for example. When asked about the ways parents are involved at Head Start, Diana Cox replied that,

"Involvement doesn't mean coming into the classroom during the day. If you can do that, that's great. But involvement also means getting your kids on the bus. For some parents that the kind of involvement they are capable of. When we meet with them we tell them that involvement in their child's education means modeling good behavior or sitting on the policy council. There is a great respect for parents here, and they know they are welcome anytime."

The implications of this type of approach to engagement benefits both parent and student. A parent who participates in monthly classroom meetings is likely to look for a similar opportunity in their child's elementary school. The father that is able to see taking

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<sup>51</sup> Appendix D.

his child to the bus every morning as contributing to their educational success will probably closely follow the grades and reports that child brings home. Perhaps down the road political participation will expand beyond their children's schools and include issues which the parent is passionate about; maybe that parent will register to vote or offer to sit on a community board. Irregardless, Head Start parents often leave as advocates for the interests of their children and themselves. The political benefits of Head Start extend to the student as well, though it may take a few more years to see them. A child leaves Head Start prepared to do well in school; if they can avoid the sand traps which the public education system is riddled with they are more likely to graduate and stay out of the detention system. A high school diploma opens up a range of economic opportunities which directly increases the likelihood that that individual will vote. We can see here how the Head Start program *can potentially* transform a family into one of politically active and enfranchised citizens.

### **Interview Discussion**

Throughout my interviews there were several issues of concern which were raised, and I have chosen to present two here for further discussion.

#### *Standardized Testing*

Head Start staff are not the only educators faced with the prospect of federally mandated standardized testing—they're just the latest. In 2002 under the Bush Administration No Child Left Behind Act, Head Start was for the first time required to give a standardized test to 400,000 4 and 5 year olds in the program. The National Reporting System has been extremely controversial since its implementation; that a program I contacted refused to even send me their program's scores speaks to the strong sentiments on the matter. Some lawmakers are currently working on a bill that would require the National Academy of Sciences to review the test and within a year provide Congress with its recommendations to improve it.<sup>52</sup> Proponents argue that "Head start has lost interest in educational results" and that the NRS is simply the equivalent of a quality control measure, while those on the other side believe that Head Start's "success over the years can be tied to its broad focus on children's emotional, physical and social growth, as well as their cognitive development."<sup>53</sup>

I can identify some problems with the NRS as it currently is implemented. The first is that it evaluates only a part of Head Start's stated program outcomes. It assesses cognitive development exclusively but does not take into account the socio-emotional development which is the hallmark of the program.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps some would argue that the program's outcomes need to be reevaluated, but as it stands the test does not evaluate over half of the program's goals. Secondly, it has garnered wide spread critiques from education experts for being poorly designed and not researched based. Furthermore, it is practically useless to teachers because it only provides program averages. In a program that emphasizes individual goals and progress, a program average of 56% in letter

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<sup>52</sup> Bill Swindell CQ Weekly Fall Agenda: Head Start Reauthorization 9/5/05

<sup>53</sup> Sara Rimer "Now, Standardized Achievement Tests in Head Start" The New York Times 10/29/03

<sup>54</sup> Linda Borg Providence Journal—Bullentin (RI) Experts Disagree Over Best Way to Evaluate 4 Year Olds in Nation's Head Start 11/24/03

recognition tells the teacher almost nothing. Family advocates interviewed expressed concerns that a shift away from emotional and social growth in the interest of memorizing letters will only hinder their students' progress. "Are you educated if you know eleven letters?" they asked.

### *Challenges facing Latino Families*

I asked both Head Start staff and parents if they thought there were any specific barriers to educational success facing the Latino community. The two most commonly mentioned are discussed here, but it is important to note that just as often discussed were the barriers faced by anyone living in poverty. Minorities are disproportionately living in poverty, but the challenge of meeting basic needs and a lack of disposable income are issues which face a wide, largely invisible community.

#### **- Low institutional expectations of Latino students**

"When they get to WaHi [Walla Walla High School]...every kid from Garrison is placed in basic English without any testing. If kids aren't pushed they'll be satisfied with that placement. There are some really sharp kids that can do well. Maybe it's not explicitly against them, but they are being denied an opportunity." Juan Pedroza's comments highlight the reality that the education system often lets students fall through the cracks. At every level from K-12, all students deserve support from their educators. This includes access to quality bilingual programs through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the length of time linguistic experts estimate it takes to develop intellectually in two languages. Low expectations only serve to reinforce poor performance and early exits from education.

#### **- Limited English abilities and economic mobility of parents**

When a parent cannot speak the language their child is being educated in, it is almost certain that the parent will not participate in their schooling. If they are not put in touch with the resources to improve that capacity, the home environment will not necessarily be as conducive to education as one with an active parent might be. Furthermore, limited language ability is often tied to lower waged employment, which means that the pressure of meeting basic needs will provide little opportunity for a parent to attend a classroom meeting, even if it is bilingual. Andrea Pedroza's experience with farm workers confirms this. "Well lots of these parents didn't speak English and they worked so much—10 hours a day easily, if not more—and they didn't even know what was going on with their kid's school. Education is important, everyone knows it, and you lose a lot when you can't be there."

The limited English ability and economic mobility which burdens the Latino community can influence the educational opportunities of their children in very direct ways. Diana Cox described the way that the cycle of low education-limited economic opportunity perpetuates itself in the Latino community in Walla Walla.

"When people come to apply, they bring in income verification, a shot record, and a birth certificate. Then we look at things like if they got ...points for if they are a single parent, for total number of children, for disabilities. But this all comes only after the income has been verified. And that's a problem for Hispanic families sometimes, because they're getting paid in cash under the table. No stubs, no income tax...and sometimes they have

an income tax but they've only claimed four kids and the enrollment paperwork says six. And they tell me there are six kids in the house and I ask them why they didn't claim them and they say that the person who helped them with their income tax told them not too. Sometimes they 'loan' a child out for the tax forms...they just don't know. And then they have to explain where these 'extra' kids are coming from."<sup>55</sup>

Just like that, a family can be disqualified from enrolling—in spite of the fact that they are the most in need of the education and social linkages which Head Start provides.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

I based my analysis of Head Start as “effectively” preparing Latino children and their families for success around four key questions: How do they score on standardized tests? Are parents equipped to contribute to their child's education? Are families able to provide educational materials in their home? Are parents able to participate in the education of their children outside of the home? I concluded that the scores on the NRS tests indicate that Latino students make great progress in their time at Head Start, in areas covered and those left unaddressed by the current test. However, I believe Diana Cox is correct in saying that it is impossible for Head Start to, in two years, undo all previous traumas. It can make a start, but Latino children still lag behind their similarly impoverished White classmates after one year in the program.

If Walla Walla is an appropriate representation of the types of services offered and staff trained to work with families, then I would conclude that Head Start provides homes with educational materials gives parents ample opportunity to participate in education both at home and at school. The rates at which Walla Walla parents reported reading and playing with their children, and feeling able to contribute to their learning, are all strong indications that Head Start can successfully create the kinds of environments which support academic achievement.

My recommendations are as follows:

- Evaluate the program in the long term: Even the Impact Study currently underway only follows children through first grade. I argue that it takes more than two years to see the full range of benefits preschool can offer its students and their families. While such a study might be expensive on such a long term scale the findings would likely mirror those of the Perry and Chicago studies, contributing to the stability of funding in the future.
- Re-evaluate the National Reporting System Test: As it stands, it is an inconvenience with little beneficial information for program operators. A research based test which evaluates the pre academic as well as the social-emotional outcomes of Head Start is what teachers need; some might argue that they need no tests at all, since so much of the progress made happens on an individual level.
- Increase funding for teachers to improve their credentials: We cannot increase the demands on our teachers without increasing the resources at their disposal. More pressing than a B.A. for many programs are

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<sup>55</sup> Appendix D.

bilingual teachers; in Walla Walla, there is not a single teacher fluent in Spanish in spite of the fact that nearly half the children speak it as their primary language. Furthermore, it is important to actively recruit and retain qualified Hispanic teachers who can serve as institutional role models for Latino families who enroll.

Many parents, teachers, and staff have suggested that the failure of Head Start to achieve long term results has less to do with Head Start and more to do with the educational experience available to students in the years that follow. Perhaps, they say, we send grade schools children who are socially and emotionally ready and excited to be successful students—and they lose them in the classrooms of thirty five and the sea of standardized tests. The Latino children who graduate from Head Start and enter kindergarten seem to be a far cry from the 40% of Hispanic high schoolers who drop out; it is in their best interest as well as in our own to find out what is happening in between. As one of Walla Walla's family advocates put it: "Of course we need performance standards but...when we meet people's needs then they will learn. Are you educated if you know eleven letters?". The administrators and funders of the public education system needs to reevaluate its criteria for progress, skills, and what it means to be an educated citizen. As long as we continue to pursue statistics over real, long term change in the status of the Latino population of Washington, we will be selling our communities short. Now is the time for real progress—now is the time to start supporting our children and those that serve us by educating them.

Appendix A.

Interview Questions: Parent Interview

Why did you decide to enroll your children in Head Start?

Was the enrollment process difficult to understand?

Why is preschool important?

Why is preschool important for Latino children?

What do you think about bilingual education?

Were you able to help your child with their homework?

What is your opinion about standardized testing?

Do you think a child's enrollment in preschool helps their family make connections in the community?

## Appendix B.

Parent Interview—November 7, 2005

Juan and Andrea Pedroza

Danielle Alvarado: How did you first hear about Head Start and what was your family's experience with it?

Andrea Pedroza: I worked for Head Start while I worked at the Farm Labor Camp. My oldest daughter Luisa went to the Migrant Head Start program, and then to preschool at Kid's Place. She went to each for one year, since I only worked at the labor camp for one season, from March until November. My two younger children didn't go and I could tell that they were much less advanced.

DA: Why do you think that Head Start, and preschool in general, is important for Latino children?

AP: Well lots of these parents didn't speak English and they worked so much—10 hours a day easily, if not more—and they didn't even know what was going on with their kid's school. Education is important, everyone knows it, and you lose a lot when you can't be there. You can see the difference very early in the kids who go to Head Start. They are more prepared, they know their colors and shapes, just things like that that ...don't even think about...but when they go home, there is no one to help them. Being able to go to Head Start, it helps both kids and their parents. The best part is that kids have access to books, letters...materials that they don't have otherwise. Blue Ridge used to be on the outside but now they have a good program. Prospect has no program and I can see that the kids struggle. Sharpstein is trying and doing better, and I don't know about Green Park.

DA: What do you think about teaching in both Spanish and English?

AP: I think it helps the kids a lot, to be ready and excited for school when they go to kindergarten. Maybe they still have a lot to learn, but at least they'll know the colors and days of the week in English. Even when the elementary schools say they have bilingual programs, that's not the case for every single classroom. So it's best that they learn as much as possible. It used to be that Head Start was taught only in English, and that was better for Luisa because at home we only spoke Spanish. Some things are better for different kids, and some struggle because they just speak Spanish. Once they learn a little English they do better, but a lot of kids really struggle.

DA: Since your daughter Luisa was learning in English, did you feel able to help her with her homework?

Juan Pedroza: She was already exposed to English from neighbors and cartoons. At that time there wasn't very much...nothing really...in Spanish on TV. I don't think it affects them. Experience varies by child, even within the same family. Luisa had no trouble, but

our youngest still struggles with Spanish. Luisa came home and spoke English to them, I think maybe that's part of it.

AP: And now there are a lot of kids that can understand Spanish because they grew up with it, but now they can't speak it well or sometimes not at all. They can't communicate with their own parents. With my sister she speaks only Spanish and when she talks to her children they understand but they can't respond to her in Spanish.

DA: Why is it important that your children speak Spanish?

AP: My English is limited, so it's best for me that they speak Spanish.

JP: Well yes that's true but I think it's more than that. What Andrea also means is that it is about heritage and family. Speaking Spanish allows my children the ability to communicate with others. We want them to be able to communicate with their grandparents. My parents, and Andrea's too, they still live in Mexico and they don't speak any English. So there's no other way for them to talk to each other...And here, even if you are unable to speak Spanish you still look Hispanic. You cannot hide looking Hispanic, and when someone comes up to you on the street and starts talking to you...and you just look away and shake your head it looks bad. You look uptight.

AP: A few weeks ago I was at Super 1 and there was a man in the front of the line who didn't have enough money to pay for all his groceries. He didn't speak any English and he was trying to tell the worker to just take something away from his bags. My son was looking at the toys and this man he saw my son and grabbed him to help talk to the cashier. My son he of course looks Mexican but he got nervous—he's the one whose Spanish is still so bad even now. He felt bad that he couldn't talk to this man and he called me over and then it was ok. But still, a sad situation both for that man and for my son.

JP: Teaching Spanish early on is very helpful, otherwise you end up with more high schoolers and young adults that maybe are bilingual but are illiterate. Jasmin, she took high school Spanish and learned a lot from her friends who didn't speak any English, so that made her Spanish a lot better. But see, that just shows how it is different for every kid. Jasmin is outgoing—her personality helped a lot.

DA: Now you know about the WASL, and now with the No Child Left Behind Act four year olds are tested twice a year. What do you think about standardized testing?

JP: It's unfair, and I don't know how to make it fair. Kids won't be exposed to the same things and expectations are different, even within families. For the kids at the labor camp they can't get any help at home with their homework; they have no transportation, no parents to pick them up...their parents can't speak English and can't help them like other parents can. When they get to WaHi...every kid from Garrison is placed in basic English without any testing. If kids aren't pushed they'll be satisfied with that placement. There

are some really sharp kids that can do well. Maybe it's not explicitly against them, but they are being denied an opportunity.

DA: Do you think that, in general, schools have lower expectations of Latino students?

JP: I think that is often the case. Hispanics are at a disadvantage because of monetary issues. That spills over to anything education related—like having no money for new basketball shoes for the child who wants to play on the team. At the labor camp, there is no way for kids to get to games. And they know it's not possible. Already, they are young but they already know what they cannot do because they are at a disadvantage. And with lots of parents they themselves are not educated, and they don't value education enough to help. Most have three or four years of school; if they are well educated, then you can see that their kids are doing well.

AP: My sister works full time and of course she wants her kids to be in Head Start but she can't meet the time requirements. She works at a nursing home and her schedule is rotating. She can't make a commitment to the same time every week so her kids are not in the program. And she can see her daughter in kindergarten now, and she's struggling. There is no simple solution, but it is a good program and it is important; taking funding will hurt kids. Luisa only got to go because I was working at the labor camp. At that time there was someone working there just to help with the paperwork for getting kids enrolled in Head Start. There are lots of people who want their kids in the program, but they have to make the choice between money for milk and sending their kids to Head Start. My sister knows it would help her kids do better, but she has no choice. I volunteer in a kindergarten class now, and I can tell which ones went to Head Start and which ones went straight to kinder. They can't cut paper, we send their unfinished work home. I'm no expert but it doesn't take much to notice.

DA: Do you think a child's enrollment in preschool helps their family make connections in the community?

JP: It helps you meet people, but it isn't necessarily an anchor which is going to keep a family here on its own. It's always good to know people so that there will be more people to help you when you have a need. But an undocumented family will never confidently go and make waves. They know that someone can easily do something to their ability to work and have peace of mind. It is extremely rare for them to demand a right—they don't feel secure enough to demand it. In Mexico the rich get their way and the Hispanics here are used to not being equal. What brought them here was a need for a better life; they weren't equal where they came from and even here they get looked down on. WaHi doesn't give equal treatment. Maybe we are supposed to think that yes it does, but talented basketball players...there's so much competition and they say that they pick the best athlete. But I am suspicious because it seems like it is always the affluent white kids with political attachment. Maybe I'm a cynic, but the disadvantaged will always be disadvantaged. The confidence to change that, it is the same confidence that comes from knowing your shapes and colors. No one wants to feel stupid. And it's like the kid that

hates kindergarten because they don't know the word for 'yellow' in English—it happens to adults at every level. No one wants to feel incompetent.

AP: It's like with catechism, do you remember Juan? The kids who were not doing their homework?...These kids showed up every week with their homework not done and the coordinator, she got frustrated. And she said to them 'Hey, you can do the work or we don't need you to be here.' And then she talked to the parents of these kids and we found out that the parents couldn't read or write either. It's rare when both parents cannot read or write but it happens. And you could see it, those kids didn't advance in the same way with half their homework done. And with one family it turned out that they were completely dependent on their kids; it was their eighteen year old son who drove them to work every day. They couldn't drive themselves, they couldn't read the signs.

AP: My dad couldn't read or write at all and my mom could barely write her name down. It was hard for me to learn, I wanted to but there was no one to help me at home. My mom went to first grade for a few months I think.

JP: My parents didn't go to school either, maybe for a few months.

AP: My mom told us to go to at least 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My dad, he didn't think it was important. He said that girls didn't need an education to change diapers; my mom should keep us around the house and eventually we would get married. That made me want to go to school. Education is important.

DA: Why is education important?

AP: Going to college means you have better opportunities. Hopefully it will make the difference. I hope a Hispanic will go to Congress sometime soon.

JP: When Andrea talks about success, that is not necessarily monetary success, but the ability to feel useful to society. Education gives a voice to the Hispanic community and lets them be heard. It makes it possible for them to share in the decision making process of an important entity—city council, school boards—without feeling stupid because they don't know what's going on. I am invited, and others too, to sit on boards all the time. What happens to kindergarten happens on boards. Everyone else knows what's going on and you feel stupid. They say that we are not interested in what's going on, and that's not the case. I think lots of parents just don't want to look stupid.

AP: And lots of Hispanic parents just don't have the same kind of free time. Working 6 am to 7 pm; where's the time to serve on a board or take your kids to play on a soccer team? It's not realistic.

JP: When we say we want our kids to have an education, it is because we look at it as a minute way to change the expectations of the Hispanic community as a whole in the US. Hispanics are generalized enough already: the smuggler, the rapist. They are well known. But there is very little said about the parent who works two jobs so that their kids can go

to school or take a sports class. If more kids are able to go to college, their kids will later have a better capacity to take piano lessons—that's a dream for most people. We know how much it costs, how much time it takes. For lots of people it's normal, but for us Hispanics it sounds ridiculous. We think about the cost and time commitment, and that's time and money needed for food. If you go to college you get a better job and there are more opportunities for you. That is what we expect will happen. It is an opportunity to be equal to others. The less opportunity you have the worse off you'll be, that's just how it is.

## Appendix C.

### Interview Questions: Family Advocates

How does the family advocate system work?

- frequency
- issues focused on
- role of the family advocate in the Head Start program

Have you noticed in your visits issues that seem to affect Latino families more than others?

What services does Head Start offer parents?

- Employment?
- Training?
- Financial?
- 

How do parents fulfill their time commitment obligation?

What is your opinion of the National Reporting System and the standardized testing introduced by the No Child Left Behind Act?

- Is it helpful to local program administrators?
- Is it accurate?

Does Head Start prepare children for kindergarten?

- How do you define preparation?

What are two or three areas of growth for Head Start?

How many children in Walla Walla cannot attend Head Start because the program has reached capacity?

- Waiting list?
- Estimated?

Appendix D.

Family Advocate Interview—November 15, 2005

Participants: Diana Cox, Director of Family Services for Head Start/ECEAP Walla Walla  
Maggie, Family Advocate Head Start/ECEAP Walla Walla

Danielle Alvarado: How does the family advocate and home visit system work?

Maggie: Well last week we just finished the educational home visits. Those happen once a year and the family advocates and teachers meet with parents about the educational progress of their children. So that's once a year and then [family advocates] visit once a month. Each advocate has about thirty two or thirty five cases. We talk about their strengths and goals and what they need to do next. During the enrollment process we have a meeting with the parents that will last two hours. That's more intake: their child's developmental history, a nutritional assessment, and also a review of program services.

DA: Could you talk a little bit about the services Head Start offers or puts families in touch with?

Diana Cox: Health, nutrition...

FA: ...mental health...

DC: ...Mental health, right...Anything they seem to need help with. Housing, food is another one. But we want to not just get them food so that they're not hungry right now, we want them to plan on avoiding in the future. So we get them in touch with WIC. Our goal is teaching parents how to advocate for themselves and their children.

FA: Medical coupons, dental, ongoing care...

DC: And if they can get to Garrison for night school or ESL...services are lacking but...we do what we can to see them in the community more.

DA: Is it difficult for parents to meet the involvement level Head Start expects of its parents, considering work demands?

DC: Involvement doesn't mean coming into the classroom during the day. If you can do that, that's great. But involvement also means getting your kids on the bus. For some parents that the kind of involvement they are capable of. When we meet with them we tell them that involvement in their child's education means modeling good behavior or sitting on the policy council. They can be on a committee, they can volunteer, they can take projects home and send them back. Sometimes after work you want to do something mindless and cutting out one hundred paper hearts is what you can do. And because of that there are kids painting them the next day in class. The policy council is made up of parents and community members with parents having the majority vote. It's our governing body and we don't do anything without them. Each night that has a meeting or

activity, childcare and food is provided. There is a great respect for parents here, and they know they are welcome anytime.

FA: Going back to your question about the home visits. The monthly visits family advocates conduct independently. They include health and nutrition follow-ups. We look at the goals the family has made and see where progress is happening. The visits are a time to share information from the teacher with the parent, and vice versa too; if there is anything the teacher needs to know we find out then. And it's not just bad things—oh, listen to what your kid did today—it's their achievements too.

DC: And you know, literacy can't just happen here. We let them know that reading is important, modeling, reading together and sharing time with their children. The lending library helps. Every classroom has a set of books in English and Spanish and the kids keep track of what they read. It's not a big deal if some don't make it back; then we know they are being used. And some parents don't need as much as others do. Some parents are needy and the family advocate is someone to learn on. They know there's not going to be any judgment, just someone to listen to them.

FA: Families know we aren't going to tell them that they're bad people. We want them to have success and to give them the resources to do that.

DA: In your experience, what are the biggest challenges facing the families Head Start works with?

DC: Biggest challenges? Dental care and meeting basic, daily needs. Hands down.

FA: We have families with parents that are seasonal workers; when it's good it's real good and when it's bad it's tough. And there are families where both parents are working and they still qualify for WIC.

DA: Are there any barriers unique to Latino families?

DC: Not speaking English. Maybe it's not such a big deal when the kid is three but later, I think, children take advantage of that. And the biases against them. That they are working here, taking away jobs and not paying taxes. And that's not true at all. Most of our Latino families are intact, two parent families. They have great respect for education.

FA: That's true, and they want their children to learn and have it better than they do now. They don't want their children to work in the fields; not because it's not honorable work, but because they don't want them to have to work that hard. They are appreciative, and they work hard. And they are less and less migrant, people are settling out. People settle as kids grow up—moving around makes education hard. Education is important and they know that, and parents put that first ahead of moving for work.

DA: Diana, do you have any estimate how many children there are in Walla Walla that qualify for Head Start but do not participate because the program is full? Are there other reasons besides limited capacity for qualified families choosing to not enroll?

DC: Right now I have a waitlist of twelve to fifteen, and I'd say there's a couple hundred out there that could be in the program. Sometimes it's because Head Start kids need half day and not full day childcare; many providers only want to full day kids. Transportation isn't really an issue because the buses go everywhere...there's a stereotype of Blue Ridge being the special ed or Hispanic school. I mean you just have to walk down here to see that that's not the case but still...and then there's the idea floating out there that you have to be potty trained. I don't know where that comes from. But families become very dedicated to the program. Some kids go to Migrant Head Start [MSHS] from May through the summer and come back here in the fall.

FA: The parents really do their best to make it work. We form amazing bonds with families.

DA: What kind of programs and services are available to Head Start parents?

DC: There are parent group meetings with trainings...health and nutrition, child development, positive discipline, stress management...they're based on surveys parents take during enrollment.

DA: Who puts on these trainings?

DC: Us, sometimes we collaborate with other groups, sometimes we just bring in outside organizations. There's one a month, and like I said, everything at night ends with a family activity. So, maybe you'll have the parents from two classrooms and they'll meet as parents, talking about how it's going and what their ideas are. Then there's some kind of training and at the end they're reunited for a parent-child activity. And these whole things don't go longer than an hour and a half.

DA: What kind of outreach do you use to let people know about the program and how to enroll?

DC: In March I put out flyers for the next fall. I go to social service agencies, laundry mats, convenience stores, clinics, ads in Byline...sometimes on the free cable channel...I put out about four thousand flyers. And people tell their neighbors and relatives about the program, so we get a lot of word of mouth. When people come to apply, they bring in income verification, a shot record, and a birth certificate. Then we look at things like if they got a referral from Child Protective Services or a doctor, or from Early Head Start...they get points for all of this...points for if they are a single parent, for total number of children, for disabilities. But this all comes only after the income has been verified. And that's a problem for Hispanic families sometimes, because they're getting paid in cash under the table. No stubs, no income tax...and sometimes they have an income tax but they've only claimed four kids and the enrollment paperwork says six.

And they tell me there are six kids in the house and I ask them why they didn't claim them and they say that the person who helped them with their income tax told them not too. Sometimes they 'loan' a child out for the tax forms...they just don't know. And then they have to explain where these 'extra' kids are coming from. Getting documentation for the feds, it's necessary but...it's hard to have to tell someone they made too much to qualify. They get mad! "How much extra did I make?" they'll ask me. And when I tell them two hundred dollars they can't stand it "But we're poor!". I know you are.

DA: What is your view on the NRS testing instituted recently under the No Child Left Behind Act?

DC: Are you writing this down [laughter]...Ok well here come my politics. Our teachers are highly qualified and you can believe that we teach them lots of stuff. But how much testing can you give a three year old? Why do we need to push kids to learn so much so fast?

FA: It seems like, to me, that it's moving away from social and emotional preparation to academics. And that worries me.

DC: Are you educated if you know 11 letters? I understand teaching writing and reading...but teaching to a test will just contribute to drop out rates. Kids won't want to go.

FA: Teenagers get frustrated and then they go to carpentry and they can do different things and they're good at it.

DC: I know I hated school...it didn't relate to my life. I had a messed up childhood and I wasn't learning what would help me.

FA: And I think what happens is self esteem goes down and they drop out to act out. If kids withdraw socially they won't be ready to learn and they won't do well...A child can't sit down and learn when they don't know where they are going to sleep.

DC: I think that public schools were shifting to be like Head Start, with counselors and crisis counselors...but now funding is being cut and those programs are going to be phased out. The need is still there for social services.

FA: Yes, that's true. That need is still there.

DC: And you have teachers acting as social workers and there's a ripple effect...

DA: What would you suggest as better ways to measure achievement besides standardized tests?

DC: Sometimes we get a four year old for one year, going to kindergarten next year. Get an active parent, a child with few traumas, and we know that [when they leave] they read

faster and they're socially and emotionally ready to learn. And if we get a three year old...based on the family life...you never know. At this program we stick very close the mission of Head Start in the sense that we take the neediest of the needy. We help make these kids socially and emotionally sound—and ok, sometimes they won't learn eleven letters of the alphabet. And you know, welfare reform hasn't come around to allow people to adjust and find a new way of life. Welfare became a way of life for a lot of people...and now they have one year to turn around with no supports. No day care, by the way you can have a \$7.85 an hour job while it takes \$15 a day for your three kids. And no medical care. If kids don't have to deal with all this crap, then they can learn. They are dealing with more and more crap and a younger age...even still in middle and high school. We make kids resilient and make them want something more.

FA: What about the kid who knows he's loved, he's safe, that there's roof over his head...that knows he can express himself, solve problems, be given choices...These kids are swimming and feel lost when parents can't stop for them. I'm not blaming the parents because I know it's hard but we try to remind them that it's important to stop and love their children, to pay attention and show affection to them...It's really nice to see them when they get here and the way they look at you, they know they are safe. And if they act out, it's because they know this is a safe place to do it.

DC: Being safe, finding someone to talk to, that's part of being socially and emotionally ready. Interacting with others and not being in fear.

FA: Using words, saying what they need...[instead of] hitting. Some of these kids come from homes with bad relationships, with an abusive boyfriend or husband and it's what they see. Now we don't have a lot of bad parents here. There are lots of parents who are trying hard and...who want to learn as much as [they want their children to]. They don't want to be their own parents.

DA: What are ways you would suggest to improve education once children leave Head Start?

DC: Head Start is a place to get ready to learn. We need educated teachers and good programs. Of course we need performance standards but...when we meet people's needs then they will learn. If you have smaller classes, with different ways to learn...not everybody learns the same and in a classroom of thirty five not everyone gets paid attention to. Less demand to conform.

FA: I think it's important to remind ourselves why we're here. We get caught up and get busy, but it's good to touch base.

DC: And teachers keep learning even after six years of college. I don't care what kind of degree they have, they need to keep their education current. The model that was so popular last year is now totally outdated—what's the new one? Head Start is a model for the education system.

DA: Is it possible for teachers to do that, even with the pressures to meet performance standards?

DC: With Head Start it is...Look, you can't undo all the trauma a child has experienced in just two years, and you can't prepare them for the next twelve years' challenges either. Head Start is here to encourage families to really be the best they can be...to improve their quality of life...and to learn to appreciate each other. I see families that have changed. I see parents who graduated from Head Start enrolling their kids and you can see gains in their families.

FA: There is one family here that is doing really good, even though the father was in jail recently. Both parents graduated from Head Start and they are determined to not be like their parents. They took the same parenting course—he from jail and she from home...that's what they requested—and they came to one of our classes last year. And last year, she couldn't function without him...now she's going to school. She has goals, and a nice place and her two girls. She started working, got her GED and drivers license. When I go over there I congratulate her on her own progress. We can look at test scores but we gave her something...she is ready to do some things for herself. That saying "it takes a village"? Well it's true.

Appendix E.

**Survey for Head Start Parents**

This survey is part of research being conducted by Whitman College students about preschool access in Washington State. Please answer each question as accurately as you can—all responses are anonymous. 1 means you do not agree with the statement at all; 10 means you agree completely. Thank you!

1. **It was difficult to find out about Head Start and to know if my family qualified.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
2. **It is easy for me to balance working and participating in my child's education.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
3. **It is important that education incorporate the student's language and culture.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
4. **Education will provide my child with opportunities that they would not have otherwise.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
5. **Equal access to education is a right of all children.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
6. **It is the responsibility of the federal government to provide that education.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
7. **It is the responsibility of the state government to provide that education.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
8. **Going to preschool will lead to better performance in school later in life.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
9. **Head Start teaches skills that my child would not have otherwise.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
10. **Head Start provides parents with resources they would not have otherwise.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
11. **Because my child is in Head Start, I feel more connected to other families in Walla Walla.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
12. **I am able to contribute to my child's education and help them with their homework.**  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10
13. **I have read to my child in the last month.**                      Yes                      No
14. **I have played with my child in the last month.**                      Yes                      No
15. **I have taken my child to a library in the last month.**                      Yes                      No
16. **I have told my child a story in the last month.**                      Yes                      No