

**“Making it Count: The Impact of Head Start on Latino Children  
and their Families”**

**Danielle Alvarado**

**Politics 402, Whitman College**

**November 18, 2005**

## **Executive Summary**

Latino families are more likely to be living below the poverty line and to have the lowest level of education of any other group in the state. Their children enter school with undeveloped basic academic skills which frustrate their progress and contribute to an achievement gap that never closes. For the past forty years Head Start has been the federally funded answer to the academic challenges of disadvantaged children like this. It's ability to remain effective is tied to the program's ability to adapt to the needs of the growing Latino community in Washington .

An analysis of test results from four Washington State Head Start programs, in addition to parent surveys and interviews, concludes that Head Start can positively impact the performance of Latino children both in the short and long term. A case study of the programs offered by Walla Walla's Head Start program to parents demonstrates the influence of an educational approach which engages the parents. On its own, the data presented here cannot demonstrate that enrollment in Head Start will necessarily prevent poor test performance or low achievement. However, it can contribute to the case for a long term impact study which follows program graduates in the interest of exploring such connections.

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 State, those lower test scores and higher drop out rates are more likely to be those of Latino students than of any other racial group; similarly, Latino children are more likely to be raised in poverty than any other group in the state. For the past forty years Head Start has been the nation's largest provider of preschool for poor children, with the dual aims of preparing the child for kindergarten and connecting the parents with critically needed social services. This research evaluates the success of Washington state Head Start operators in the program's two stated areas of focus: preparing Latino 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 compared last school year's National Reporting System test scores from several programs throughout the state, to both each other and to national averages. I also compiled surveys from Walla Walla parents and conducted two local interviews to supplement my discussion of Head Start's impact on Latino students' educational performance and home learning environment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Melissa Roderick "Hispanics and Education" in *Hispanics in the United States: An Agenda for the 21st 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

My research 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. On its own, the data presented here cannot demonstrate that enrollment in Head Start will necessarily prevent poor test performance or low achievement. However, it can contribute to the case for a long term impact study which follows program graduates in the interest of exploring such connections.

I outline 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 their 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 skills which their middle class peers learn early on. Many have short attention spans, 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 scores of poor students on standardized tests are lower in every subject in any given year. Literacy,

---

<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

math, and social skills are generally weaker among children living in poverty, weakest of all among poor minority children.<sup>5</sup> We can see then the way in which a child's lack of preparation for kindergarten can literally set that child up for failure if they are not given the opportunity to develop these crucial skills.

One of the few long term impact studies on the influence of preschool on the development of poor children has been the Perry Study. 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 which emphasized 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 teachers to their children; they were told to have their children count change at the grocery store or read a story 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. Their odds of

---

<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> Ibid.

being violent offenders have plummeted, and they have done jail time at a rate half of the control group.<sup>8</sup>

**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: David L. Kirp “Life Way After Head Start” The New York Times  
November 21, 2004

*The 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>9</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 for each dollar invested and the Perry Study’s was \$17.<sup>10</sup>

Head Start’s mandate has been to provide disadvantaged children with early education and social services to help them begin kindergarten on an equal footing with

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory <http://www.nrwel.org>

<sup>10</sup> Kirp. 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.

their classmates. Since its establishment as part of the Johnson Administration's educational reforms in 1964, over twenty one million children have graduated from the program<sup>11</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 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>12</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>13</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>14</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>15</sup>

### **Missing Out**

In spite of a growing consensus among education experts that preschool is crucial to the development of children in the years before they enter kindergarten, poor children are still enrolling in programs to receive those 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>16</sup> This is especially true for Latino children, who enroll in early childhood education programs at rates lower than black or white

---

<sup>11</sup> Kafer.

<sup>12</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet: Washington

<sup>13</sup> Demographic statistics provided by the Walla Walla program administration.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

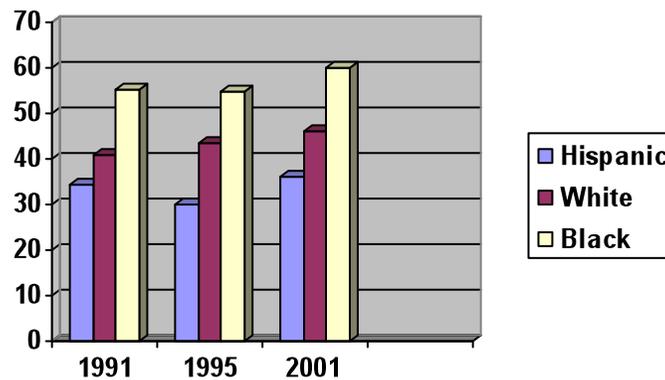
<sup>15</sup> Head Start Program Fact Sheet Fiscal Year 2004. Administration for Children and Families.

<sup>16</sup> Center for Law and Social Policy June 2002

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 black and 46.1 white children of the same age group were enrolled in these programs.”<sup>17</sup>

**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 children to attend preschool<sup>18</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>19</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

<sup>17</sup> National Council of La Raza “Latino Issues and Universal Preschool”

<sup>18</sup> Claudia Bustamante “Preschool Gap Among Latinos” The Press Enterprise August 26, 2005

<sup>19</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet: Washington

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 in preschool education programs. 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>20</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>21</sup>

Seventy seven percent of Washington Hispanics are Mexican, the Hispanic subgroup with the lowest average education level<sup>22</sup>, and nearly forty percent of the Hispanic population is under the age of 19<sup>23</sup>. The large education gap between poor and middle class students only becomes more extreme when comparing Latino students and their peers. 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 not equipped with the resources to help their children or the knowledge to effectively advocate for them when necessary.<sup>24</sup> The dispersal of the Latino population to states beyond California, Texas, and New York presents its own challenges. For these parents,

---

<sup>20</sup> National Center for Education Statistics "Regional Differences in Kindergarteners' Early Education Experiences" June 2005

<sup>21</sup> Miriam E. Calderon "NCLR Head Start Reauthorization: Enhancing School Readiness for Hispanic Children" June 2005

<sup>22</sup> Melissa Roderick "Hispanics and Education" in *Hispanics in the United States* Ed. Caffter & Engstrom

<sup>23</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet: Washington

<sup>24</sup> National Council of La Raza "The State of Hispanic America" 2005

there is a much weaker social safety net than in traditionally heavily Hispanic areas, which can put them in an even more tenuous position. It is no wonder that Hispanics complete high school at a rate of 64.1%, compared to 83.7% of Blacks and 91.8% of Whites.<sup>25</sup> It is expected that the introduction of the English-only WASL will only serve to increase the rate at which Latino students drop out of Washington's high schools.<sup>26</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 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 as likely to live in poverty than other children their age.<sup>27</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>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> NCLR "State of Hispanic America"

<sup>26</sup> For an in depth discussion on this topic, see the chapter on K-12 education in this report

<sup>27</sup> National Council of La Raza State Fact Sheet Washington

<sup>28</sup> Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Quality Improvement Center "Migrant and Seasonal Children and Families—Statistics"

**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.*

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>29</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 concern for lawmakers was the lack of research on the long term benefits of participation in Head Start for children and parents. The last reauthorization of the program in 1998 mandated that such a study be conducted and that the results be presented to Congress before permanent funding decisions would be made. The National Head Start Impact Study, which started in 2002 and will end in 2006, aims to determine if students have “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>30</sup> The executive summary of the study so far was released in June 2005; some of its main findings include: Head Start improves 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>31</sup>

Melissa Roderick argues that research on Hispanic educational performance has generally produced three general areas of concern: differences in family resources for education, differences in quality of schools, and cultural differences in views of

---

<sup>29</sup> Kafer

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings

childrearing and education. Although the other two are compelling and are undoubtedly worthy of investigation, this research focuses more 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 has been 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. During her interview Andrea Pedroza spoke about the challenges of farm workers whose children were enrolled in Head Start:

“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...”<sup>32</sup>

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. Diana Cox of Walla Walla commented that, “[The application] is 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

---

<sup>32</sup> Appendix B

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>33</sup> Furthermore, a general unfamiliarity with the American education system makes it all but impossible to learn practices for creating an environment which encourages academic success.<sup>34</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

---

<sup>33</sup> Appendix F

<sup>34</sup> Roderick

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

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>35</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.

**Walla Walla**<sup>36</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>35</sup> Head Start National Reporting System 2004-2005 Program Report Skagit/Islands Head Start August 2005

<sup>36</sup> Head Start National Reporting System 2004-2005 Program Report Walla Walla Head Start August 2005

**Bremerton**<sup>37</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.

**Yakima**<sup>38</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.

These numbers are difficult to follow, abstract, and many argue not helpful at all to Head Start teachers and coordinators. Two pieces can be taken from them:

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

### *Parent Survey Results*

---

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

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

Bilingual surveys were distributed to parents with children currently enrolled in Walla Walla Head Start.<sup>39</sup> The responses were sorted by the language in which they were filled out, in addition to an overall program compilation.<sup>40</sup> The chart below compares the responses of parents to some of the statements.

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

<sup>39</sup> Appendix E

<sup>40</sup> Appendix F

*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>41</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>42</sup>

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>43</sup> They did not report taking their children to the library at the rates anticipated, which I attribute to the lending library operated by Head Start.

### **Case Study: Walla Walla**

Walla Walla's Head Start/ECEAP program is run from Blue Ridge Elementary School, with one classroom operating from Green Park. There are about two hundred students, the majority of them four year olds. There are two half day sessions four days a

---

<sup>41</sup> Roderick

<sup>42</sup> Appendix B

<sup>43</sup> National Center for Education Statistics “Status and Trends in the Education of Hispanics” April 2003.

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. 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's family outreach is done by family advocates, each of whom have a caseload of about thirty five families with whom they visit once a month. Family advocates update parents on the child's progress and health status, and also addresses concerns from teachers.

The majority of family advocates' work is spent putting families in touch with the social services they are least likely to have and most often need. Dental and ongoing basic care are the two most cited challenges facing Head Start families, in addition to meeting daily needs. A 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." 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. Family advocates and parents sit down and make goals, not just for their children's progress but for their own. Classes and trainings are provided for parents based on surveys taken during enrollment in September; this year classes have covered stress management, positive discipline, health and nutrition, and child development.<sup>44</sup>

The way in which Head Start attempts to make its families self sufficient and its parents and children confident does not just look good on paper: it is exactly the kind of

---

<sup>44</sup> Appendix F

program necessary to create the type of environment Latino children need for academic success. When parents believe they can contribute to the development of their children, education becomes a part of family life. Time is made at night to read a story, and a parent might attend a parent meeting one night. The confidence children take from such an environment makes them ready to learn and eager to excel. During an interview a family advocate shared a story about a family that was doing just that.

“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.”

## **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 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.

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?".

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 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 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