

# InFOCUS

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 Designed for low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers up to age 3, Early Head Start is a comprehensive, two-generation effort to enhance children's development while strengthening families. The program provides families with child development services delivered in home visits or child care settings, case management, parenting education, health care and referrals, and family support.  
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## Early Head Start: Survey Sheds Light on Development of 3-Year-Olds

Baby FACES, Mathematica's descriptive study of Early Head Start, builds on the success of the flagship study of Head Start, the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). Baby FACES, sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is designed to inform national and local decision-making on early childhood programs and policies.

In this summary of results from the third and final report on the study, we offer insight into the experiences and development of 3-year-old children in Early Head Start, and into what predicts family involvement and service quality. The study also reveals key information about how family characteristics, program experiences, and service quality relate to child outcomes.

### KEY FINDINGS

**Three-year-olds in Early Head Start showed improvement over time in terms of their language and social and emotional development, and they are in good health.** Children assessed in this study advanced socially and emotionally while in Early Head Start, according to their parents and program staff. The children approach national

norms on one measure of language development, but are below those norms on two other measures. They are healthy and have access to health care and health insurance, although about one-third are obese (similar to national rates).

**Families "take up" a large proportion of the services offered.** Children getting center-based services for a full year attend 85 percent of the center days available to them

### Families take advantage of center-based and home-based Early Head Start services at high rates



Families with children ages **1–2** participated in **85%** of available **center-based** services  
 Families with children ages **2–3** participated in **86%** of available **center-based** services



Families with children ages **1–2** participated in **77%** of available **home-based** services  
 Families with children ages **2–3** participated in **75%** of available **home-based** services

In 2007, the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its partners to implement Baby FACES, a six-year longitudinal study of 89 Early Head Start programs around the country. Baby FACES is designed to be a rich source of data on Early Head Start services, staff, children, and families.

between ages 1 and 2, on average, and 86 percent of the days available to them between ages 2 and 3. Families getting home-based services for a full year complete 77 percent of the home visits offered when the children are between ages 1 and 2, on average, and 75 percent of visits offered between ages 2 and 3. However, take-up is 12 to 15 percentage points lower among families who leave the program before their eligibility for it ends.

**Families that enroll before a baby is born stay in the program longer.** Families that enroll in Early Head Start during pregnancy stay with the program longer (33 months) compared with those that enroll after their baby is born (25 months).

**The quality of home visits is higher when parents spend more time interacting with their child during the visit and the visit goes according to plan.** This study finds the overall quality of home visits to be in the mid-range. Quality predictors for home visits are new to this report. The quality of a visit is higher when another adult is present, when more time is spent on parent-child activities, and when the visit aligns with the home visitor's plan.

**Overall, ratings of classroom quality, like ratings of home visit quality, are in the mid-range.** Classroom quality increases not only with the teacher's education level and job satisfaction but also with the quality of parent-teacher relationships.

**Greater family involvement in Early Head Start is associated with positive behavioral outcomes for children.** Children whose families are consistently rated as highly involved over the course of two years demonstrate more positive and fewer negative behaviors compared with children whose families are less involved with Early Head Start.

**The quality of Early Head Start centers is positively associated with children's language abilities at age 3.** Children whose classrooms are rated higher in quality have better scores on a standardized test of word knowledge compared with children whose

classrooms are rated lower in quality. Home visit quality, however, is not associated with outcomes for 3-year-olds overall, except in the case of Spanish-speaking children. Those whose home visits are of higher quality have better knowledge of the Spanish language than children whose visits are of lower quality.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Findings from the Baby FACES study can inform Early Head Start at both the federal and local levels. Federal officials can use the information in their planning and provision of technical assistance. Local program administrators can use the findings as they decide how to invest limited resources to improve program quality and better meet the needs of the children and families the program is designed to serve.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

This summary is based on the third and final report describing the experiences of families and children in Early Head Start when children were 3 years old. The first report provides baseline findings and in-depth information about the survey methodology; the second describes findings from data collected when the children were 2 years old. In addition to the three reports, a series of shorter reports and policy briefs are designed for a broader audience of program administrators, policymakers, state administrators, and other decision makers.

Full report: **Toddlers in Early Head Start: A Portrait of 3-Year-Olds, Their Families, and the Programs Serving Them.** Vogel, C.A., P. Caronongan, Y. Xue, J. Thomas, E. Bandel, N. Aikens, K. Boller, and L. Murphy (2015). OPRE Report 2015-28. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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