

THE SCHOOL OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND HEAD START WORKING TOGETHER

Research and Practice Issue Brief

Beth Lapin and Anna Jo Bodurtha Smith

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The School of the 21st Century (21C) and Head Start (HS) have many commonalities, among them the same founder—Edward Zigler—and a similar goal—the optimal development of children. Both 21C and HS are national programs with multiple components and a strong focus on early childhood experiences, parent involvement, physical and mental health, and nutrition.

The programs have some differences, however. 21C offers continuity in family support services, starting from the birth of the child through age 12 and beyond. 21C also provides universal access to its programs. HS programs, on the other hand, focus on children until they enter school and are income-based in their ability to service families. Generally, 21C uses the school to provide services. HS can be implemented in a variety of settings including schools and community action programs.

Although there were early difficulties in the two programs working together, recent positive changes, such as flexibility in HS regulations and increased standards, facilitate improved connections. School districts and HS can do well by integrating programs.



This issue brief provides an overview of each program and describes ways to connect 21C schools and HS programs. Fostering such associations benefits families involved and allows children a successful transition to school and beyond.

HEAD START

Since its founding in 1965, Head Start has enrolled more than 25 million American children, providing the children and their families with comprehensive child development services and social services to parents, as well as opportunities for parent and community empowerment¹ to promote social competence and school readiness of every participating child.² Head Start's priority is children with family incomes below 100% of the federal poverty line (recent detailed regulations related to eligibility of services provide some flexibility on income).³ Each program must use at least 10% of its slots for children with disabilities.⁴



As a comprehensive child development program, Head Start works to build children's language development and literacy, social and emotional development, creative arts, physical health and development, mathematics and science, and approaches to learning.⁵ Through Head Start, children aged three to five receive quality preschool, immunizations, dental and mental health screenings, nutrition education, and other necessary educational, health, and social services at no cost to their family.⁶ Services at each site, such as job training, are tailored to enrolled children and families. Parents assist Head Start center staff plan and implement activities and many serve on policy councils, attend classes on child development, and volunteer in their child's program.

Similar to Head Start, Early Head Start (EHS) is a comprehensive program to promote whole child and family development for children from birth to the age of three. Women, who may enroll in Early Head Start while pregnant, may chose from home or center-based options or both.⁷ Services include access to prenatal and pediatric care, child development classes for parents, early diagnostic screening and treatment, home visits, and family support services.⁸

The federal government grants funds to local organizations to provide these services for 49,400 Head Start classrooms and additional family child care homes nationwide (as of 2008). Grantees and delegate agencies include:

- Community action agencies (32%)
- Non-profit organizations (37%)
- Public or private school systems (17%)
- Tribal governments or consortia (7%)
- Government agencies (6%)
- For-profit organizations (1%)

Federal funds provide 80% of the annual cost of these services, while grantee organizations cover the remaining 20% from state or local matches or “in-kind” contributions, such as volunteer hours and donations of goods and services.⁹ However, Head Start and Early Head Start enroll only a fraction (50% and 3% respectively) of income-eligible children, due to budget constraints and access barriers.

SCHOOL OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Quality early education supports children’s socio-emotional development and school readiness and working parents. Yet many families have difficulty accessing and paying for early care and education

programs to benefit their child. The School of the 21st Century model works to overcome these barriers by transforming the school building from a purely academic institution into a year-round, multi-service center that provides a comprehensive and continuous system of learning support to meet the needs of its children and families. The rationale underlying 21C is that families often need some kind of support when their children are growing and that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, at times need help to perform well in school.

Edward Zigler at Yale University conceptualized 21C in 1987 and Matia Finn-Stevenson, also at Yale, developed it as a national model. The first 21C school was established in 1988; since then, 21C has grown and is now in more than 1,300 schools around the country. The majority of 21C schools have been in operation for close to two decades, attesting to the sustainability of the model, as well as its popularity among parents, teachers, and educational leaders.



Implementation of 21C is based on circumstances and resources at the local level, so each program is unique.

All 21C programs, however, share a common goal—the optimal development of all children by providing preschool education and care and family support—and adhere to the same guiding principles: providing non-compulsory year-round services, with access open to all students, that focus on whole child development (physical, social, emotional, and academic) and encouraging and maintaining strong parental support, while providing high quality

services with advancement and training opportunities for program staff. Together these principles form a scaffold for educators when creating student services within their respective schools.



To encourage positive parental involvement, 21C schools provide home visitation, access to parent educators, and regular in-school meetings for parents of children from birth and beyond. Schools also provide classes on child development and information and referral services for parents. Since physical and emotional well-being are fundamental to a child's ability to learn and perform to the best of his or her ability, 21C schools also offer nutrition and mental health services, as well as health, dental, and fitness programs on-site or linked to local clinics. Through parent outreach programs and school-based support networks for all child care providers, 21C schools provide support to improve the quality of child care in non-school settings. One of the most essential 21C components is the early childhood program, which includes child care and education services (often ranging from birth to age five) provided to families with a focus on optimal child development and school readiness. Since working families often have school-age child care needs, many 21C schools provide before- and after-school programs for children aged 5 to 12, with a balance of academic, recreational, and enrichment activities. Studies indicate that 21C early education and school-aged child care programs have a dramatic positive impact on academic performance, absenteeism, and socio-emotional development.^{10,11} Through many of their services, 21C programs encourage connections among the school, families, and community.

PROGRAM SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

As discussed previously, both Head Start and 21C schools have many similarities in their provision of early childhood programs that focus on optimal child development and school readiness. Both also include parent involvement and health and nutrition services.

In contrast to Head Start, 21C programs are open year-round to all members of the school community, regardless of income level. Child care and education fees are set on a sliding scale to ensure all families can access the care their child needs. Services are funded by parent fees, public and private subsidies, such as the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant and Title I, and state special education funds.¹² This commitment to universal access allows 21C programs to provide high quality, affordable early care and education to families across the economic spectrum which particularly benefits lower income children.¹³

In addition, the School of the 21st Century model extends beyond the age range of Head Start. 21C provides a continuity of support services from the conception of a child through age 12 and beyond, which promotes successful transitions and may also help prevent the fading effects of preschool intervention.¹⁴

STRATEGIES FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN 21C AND HEAD START

With their shared goals, Head Start and 21C programs can build community partnerships to support quality and accessibility of each program, enhance parent education and resources, and improve children's transition from preschool to kindergarten. The value of this collaboration to children, teachers, and parents has

been reported by 21C staff and researchers.^{15,16} Successful collaboration strategies include school-based services, professional development opportunities for staff, services offered to children, and methods of involving and educating parents. Tips for positive partnerships are described below.

SCHOOL-BASED OR SCHOOL-AFFILIATED HEAD START

Head Start children can be incorporated into school-based 21C programs through the use of physical space provided by the district. Ways in which this can happen include:

- *Provide wrap-around care for children in Head Start through 21C child care programs.*

Many Head Start programs are half-day, part-week, or partial school year. 21C school-based programs, which are often open year-round from 7 am to 6 pm, offer wrap-around child care for Head Start children. Child care subsidies and parent fees fund this wrap-around care.

- *Lease/share school space for Head Start classrooms.*

With a private agency as the Head Start grantee, Head Start classrooms are housed in a school district building. This provides children with many transition advantages, such as familiarity with the cafeteria and easy access to school-based programs. It also facilitates Head Start-kindergarten teacher communication (described on following pages).

BRAIDING HEAD START AND SCHOOL-BASED EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Spotlight on Independence School District, MO

“The quality programming of Head Start is what we want for every child. Whatever we provide for a child in Head Start, we provide for a child in our school-based program.”

-Patti Simcosky, Director of Early Childhood Education

The Independence School District serves as a delegate of its regional Head Start grantee, allowing it to run local Head Start programs. Realizing that the mandated programming of Head Start complemented its goals from the 21C model, Independence decided to braid its school-based early child care and education and Head Start grant into one joint school-based program. All 18 elementary schools in Independence have preschool classrooms where a child’s spot may be funded by parent fee, Head Start, child care subsidies, or Missouri Department of Social Services. An additional early education center provides multiple services including full time infant/toddler care, and part-time, full time, and special education preschool.

Since classrooms are entirely merged, the Independence preschool program provides Head Start-mandated comprehensive education, health, and social services to all children. The program uses Head Start performance standards and approved curriculum in all classrooms and all staff meet Head Start staff qualifications. All children, including those in special education, receive physicals, a required component of Head Start services, and immunizations, lead screening, and dental services as needed. Regardless of income level, parents of infants and toddlers are eligible for home visits as in Early Head Start. Each school has a family service specialist on site who works to connect families in the early education program with necessary community resources.

In addition, the Independence early education program strives for high parental involvement as mandated by Head Start performance standards. All parents are eligible to serve on the policy committee, which is a vocal advocate for the program. The school holds four Parent- Teacher conferences, two at the school and two in the home, each year. Independence also provides trained early education staff and technical assistance to several other school districts in Missouri that are working to braid their own school child care and Head Start programs.¹⁷

- *Encourage Head Start to use school facilities for parent meetings.*

Offering school meeting space for appropriate Head Start activities will familiarize parents with the building and encourage dialog and communication between school staff and HS parents.

- *Merge Head Start and 21C preschool classrooms.*

Children in Head Start attend the same preschool as children in 21C child care programs, providing high quality early education for all enrolled children. In this scenario, the school district is the grantee of the HS programs.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

Continued professional development is key for providing quality early childhood programs. Studies demonstrate that children are better prepared for school when their providers have advanced education and participate in training.¹⁸ Increased communication between Head Start and district staff will facilitate student readiness. The following methods move these objectives forward:

- *Design and develop joint HS/21C professional training.*

Many professional development needs of teachers from each program are similar. Before establishing a year's training program, administrators from both HS and 21C can meet to identify overlap of needs and schedule these as joint trainings. This not only saves funds but provides opportunities for staff to interact and develop connections.

- *Incorporate Head Start teachers into 21C child care teacher training.*



Many school districts provide staff professional development and training for their

early childhood personnel. Head Start teachers and staff participate in these school-based professional development workshops along side district teachers. This encourages informal communication between HS and district personnel.

- *Include Head Start staff in training and professional development offered to local providers by school districts.*

To improve quality, many 21C schools offer workshops, training, support groups, and newsletters for local child care providers, including HS.

- *Include Head Start administrators in appropriate school district meetings.*



District superintendents and principals meet at a regional level to discuss

issues within their geographic area or at a district-level to address local issues. Inclusion of Head Start administrators facilitates kindergarten transition and provides opportunities for cross development of awareness and solutions to obstacles.

Spotlight on Little Rock School District, AR

“These children will be entering our schools as kindergartners, and we want to give them the best early foundation possible by supporting their child care providers.”

- Glenda Nugent, 21C Coordinator

Over the last decade, the Little Rock School District (LRSD), part of the Arkansas 21C Network, has worked closely with its local Head Start grantee, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), to provide high-quality professional development and technical assistance to local child care providers. The UAMS Head Start program serves more than 1,130 children at 23 sites across the county.¹⁹ The school district also provides early childhood education programs for 1,450 children at 26 elementary schools, serving children of all income levels, including 150 children who are income-eligible for Head Start. Recognizing that their programs serve a similar purpose—providing quality early education—and often the same children, UAMS Head Start and the LRSD Early Childhood Education Program established several collaborative programs to maximize the potential of each to best serve their children, parents, and teachers.

Joint opportunities for professional development and technical assistance are a key to this collaboration. Sharing knowledge and training increases opportunities for both school and Head Start personnel to develop professionally and improve quality of care. Head Start teachers and staff participate in school-based professional development workshops and are also invited to relevant school district meetings. Staff from UAMS Head Start visit LRSD child care programs regularly to provide family education resources, such as information on nutrition, dental health, and local social services.

Additionally, through an Early Reading First grant, LRSD runs three early literacy model sites, two of which are UAMS Head Start programs and one is an elementary school-based child care program.²⁰ LRSD donated refurbished computers so that each classroom has two computers to support early literacy. These centers serve as model classrooms for the county that teachers from LRSD and Head Start can visit and observe. Early literacy coaches at each center provide professional development to their teachers and technical assistance, trainings, and materials on early literacy to teachers from all local programs. As with their other collaborative programs, these centers integrate Head Start and school personnel in professional development and technical assistance services provided.²¹

- *Develop Head Start-Kindergarten teacher relationships.*

Familiarity with kindergarten expectations and challenges help Head Start teachers adequately prepare their children for future grades. Opportunities to develop relationships between HS and kindergarten teachers foster this communication.

CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Receiving aligned quality early care and education and familiarity with a school environment (through transition activities, such as meeting potential teachers and eating in the cafeteria) help children move from preschool to kindergarten. Some ways to ensure that preschool children are ready for school include:

- *Share direct services through creative funding strategies.*

Braid district and HS funds to provide services, such as dental screenings, inoculations, and vision exams, to all community preschool students.

- *Develop an integrated and shared referral system.*

Both agencies share information on referral options and, to the extent possible, integrate services. This is particularly helpful for families with both preschool and school-age children.

- *Write meaningful transition plans.*

To best serve the children involved, HS and school staff collaborate to develop transition plans that include joint preschool activities and opportunities for children and families to become familiar with their elementary school and staff.

- *Facilitate kindergarten registration.*

Through coordinated efforts, HS teachers and staff work with parents to compile necessary documents

and complete kindergarten registration forms. This streamlines the registration process and ensures that HS students are ready for the first day of school.

- *Host an open house for HS students who will be entering kindergarten.*

Schools provide an opportunity for HS students to visit their intended elementary school, become familiar with the buildings, teachers, and play grounds and ride the school bus (when HS safety standards are met). Activities include visiting operating kindergarten classes and participating in on-going activities.

- *Invite HS children to school-based preK activities and programs.*

School-based preschools invite HS children to join special activities or programs that are not space-limited. When feasible, HS staff members work with school preschool personnel to design mutually beneficial activities.

- *Provide academic enrichment materials to children in Head Start.*

School districts distribute enrichment materials to non-school-based children. They also provide HS children with an opportunity to visit the elementary school library and obtain library cards (with parental approval).

- *Offer a summer enrichment camp to children in Head Start entering kindergarten.*

School district personnel provide a summer enrichment program, including tutoring and family support services, to five year-olds in Head Start preparing to enter kindergarten. Grouping by anticipated class with the intended teacher eases difficulties on the first day of school.

WELCOMING HEAD START CHILDREN AND FAMILIES INTO SCHOOLS

Spotlight on Boyd County School District, KY

“Quality programming, such as that which Head Start provides each preschool student, will help to ensure their future success as a Boyd County graduate. Anything that our school district can do to enhance this program through collaboration is critical not only to our district but our entire community.”

-Norma Meek, District Administrator

In Boyd County, the district’s Family Resource Center (FRC) works closely with Head Start families to ensure Head Start children are ready—and excited—to enter kindergarten. Through a grant to the school district from Reading is Fundamental, all Head Start students select their own free book three times during the year, which they take home and share with their families. The FRC provides literacy activities for the children to do at home with their parents.

The FRC, collaborating with the local Kiwanis Club, sponsors a “Terrific Kids” program in which every Head Start student receives a certificate, pencil, and bumper sticker for their parent’s car. “Terrific Kids” encourage children to do their best academically and socially at school and continues into elementary school. Head Start students entering kindergarten also receive new backpacks, school supplies, and clothing through community donations to the school’s annual Pack-a-Backpack program.

In addition to supporting academic readiness, the school district sponsors several programs to integrate Head Start children and families into the school community. The FRC, Head Start, and other community agencies jointly host a *New School Year Celebration*, an evening of free educational entertainment and information booths for family exploration that draws more than 1,000 individuals each year.

Head Start children participate in school contests, such as the annual *Eat Dinner with Your Family* contest in which children draw a picture of eating dinner with their family and have a chance to win a gift certificate to eat with their family at a local restaurant. Head Start and the FRC also collaborate to host four annual Parent University classes at the school. Parents of children in Head Start and the elementary school are invited to attend presentations by local community partners. Free food and child care are provided during the evening class to facilitate attendance.²²

- *Supply back-to-school materials for children in Head Start.*

Schools provide supplies that are critical for starting school, such as backpacks, to families in need. Schools host a first day of school event to share all necessary information and resources to families entering school.

- *Monitor the kindergarten progress of children entering from Head Start.*

School districts collect information on kindergarten student achievement and convey this data to HS providers. Based on results, HS staff members adjust their curriculum and services to better prepare children for kindergarten.

- *Include HS teachers in the first week of kindergarten classes.*

Some schools begin kindergarten a week before HS sessions and ask HS teachers to attend the first week of kindergarten classes to smooth the transition for HS students. Double teacher coverage eases disruptions that can occur during that stressful period.

PARENT EDUCATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Both 21C schools and Head Start encourage parent involvement in their preschool programs and educate parents about child development. Parent involvement is a key indicator of student success.^{23, 24} Given this common goal, some examples of collaboration are:

- *Include Head Start families in school's celebrations and activities.*

Children in local Head Start programs and 21C preschool participate in the elementary school's annual activities. They are invited to Family Fun Nights, kindergarten family events, and general school functions, all of which integrate these

families into the school prior to their children's arrival as students.

- *Present joint child development classes and materials for parents of children in Head Start and 21C preschool.*



Many 21C programs offer parent education programs that focus on preschool children; these

programs are offered to all parents in the community, regardless of their child care provider. Some 21C programs distribute parenting materials—such as newsletters or monthly tips—regularly to all interested families. Increasing parenting skills helps prepare children for school, which benefits all involved. Sessions that are held at school familiarize parents with the physical plant and key staff at the school, which facilitates parent involvement during future school years.

- *Offer volunteer and staff positions in school districts to preschooler parents.*

School districts include parents of preschool children (regardless of their child care provider) on relevant committees and appropriate staff positions. This bridges the gap between families and schools and gives parents a voice in school activities that relate to their children.

- *Open school facilities to Head Start parents.*

Schools that offer parents access to computers, libraries, gyms, and other school facilities extend this option to Head Start parents. This includes high school libraries, if appropriate.

BOTTOM LINE

21C schools are well-positioned to build and sustain successful partnerships with local Head Start grantees, in addition to managing Head Start grants directly. Through collaboration, Schools of the 21st Century and Head Start can improve the quality and accessibility of early education services and enhance parent involvement and education to more children and families than each individually serve.

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The School of the 21st Century, Yale University
310 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511-2187
Phone: (203) 432-9944, Fax: (203) 432-9945
Email: yale21c@yale.edu
www.yale.edu/21C