

# Head Start benefits children with disabilities

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Young children with multiple disabilities who are enrolled in Head Start have better literacy, reading and math scores than children who aren't in the federally funded program, indicates a new study by Michigan State University researchers.

Head Start provides early education services to nearly 1 million low-income children up to age 5 every year, and federal requirements require that children with disabilities comprise at least 10 percent of its enrollment.

The study is one of the first to investigate Head Start's impact on children with disabilities, which include speech/language, cognitive, behavioral/emotional, sensory and physical impairments.

"Our findings suggest that children who have multiple disabilities are doing better by kindergarten age in terms of their language and early academic skills compared to children with multiple disabilities who are not attending Head Start," said Kristin Rispoli, assistant professor in MSU's College of Education.

Rispoli and Kyunghee Lee, MSU associate professor of social work, analyzed the data of 570 children drawn from the Head Start Impact Study, a nationally representative study of about 5,000 children randomly assigned to Head Start or non-Head Start programs.

In addition to improved academic performance, the study found that [children](#) in Head Start were more likely to have multiple disabilities and

to have those disabilities verified by a doctor (as opposed to just the school district).

"This suggests that Head Start is more effectively connecting families to medical providers and psychologists in the community to assess a child when there is a concern that the child has a disability," Rispoli said.

"These findings align with Head Start's commitment to addressing the complete needs of the child and connecting families to community supports."

The study appears online in the *Journal of Social Service Research*.

Provided by Michigan State University

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