



Head Start in Rural Mississippi

By Leila Schochet and Rasheed Malik April 12, 2018

Head Start helps fill a critical void in early childhood education and service delivery in Mississippi's rural communities. This fact sheet examines the scope of services that the Head Start program provides to Mississippi children and families, and highlights the key role that Head Start plays in the state's supply of quality child care.

Child poverty in Mississippi's rural counties

Rural children in Mississippi are facing significant and persistent poverty. Forty percent of rural Mississippi children under the age of 5 live in poverty, compared with 28 percent of children living in metropolitan areas. In Mississippi, there are 52 rural persistent child poverty counties, where the child poverty rate has been greater than 20 percent since 1980.¹

Family supports in rural counties

At the same time, access to many of the services that help combat child poverty—such as quality child care and health care—is very limited, particularly for low-income rural families in Mississippi. Fifty-five percent of rural families live in a child care desert, where the supply of licensed child care does not meet demand.² All rural counties in Mississippi are designated as a Health Service Professional Shortage area, where there is a shortage of primary care, dental, or mental health providers.

Head Start in Mississippi

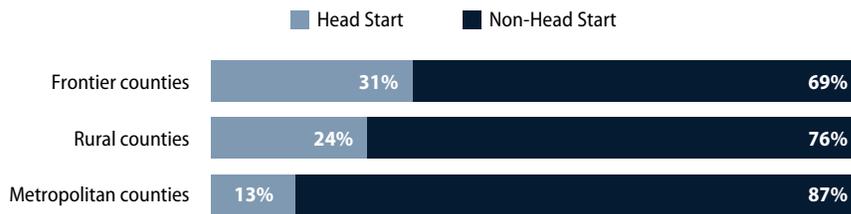
- Across rural Mississippi, Head Start operates 766 classrooms in 220 centers.
- Head Start funds enrollment for 22,424 children, 66 percent of whom attend rural programs.
- Head Start employs 5,483 staff, 68 percent of whom work in rural programs.

Head Start as a proportion of Mississippi's child care centers

Head Start plays an outsized role in filling Mississippi's rural child care shortage. In Mississippi, Head Start makes up one-quarter of the center-based programs in rural counties and nearly one-third of the center-based programs in frontier counties.³ In contrast, Head Start represents just 13 percent of center-based programs in metropolitan areas.

FIGURE 1
Head Start fills a child care gap in Mississippi's rural and frontier counties

Share of child care centers that are Head Start grantees, by type of county



Note: Metropolitan counties have a rural-urban continuum code of 1 through 4; rural counties are coded as 5, 6, or 7; frontier counties are coded as an 8 or 9.

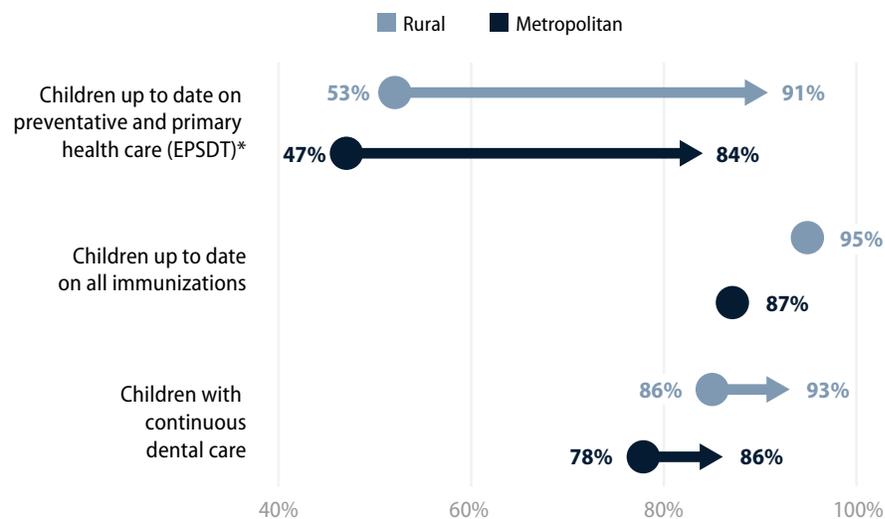
Source: Authors' analysis of Methodology in Rasheed Malik and Leila Schochet, "A Compass for Families: Head Start in Rural America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=448741>.

Head Start health and education service delivery

Head Start delivers health and education services to rural children who may not otherwise have access and makes significant progress in connecting children to these services over the school year.

FIGURE 2
Mississippi's children entering Head Start are often behind on health screenings

Head Start service receipt rates, beginning and end of year



*Note: "EPSDT" stands for Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment—the Medicaid program's comprehensive benefit for children.

Source: Authors' analysis of Methodology in Rasheed Malik and Leila Schochet, "A Compass for Families: Head Start in Rural America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=448741>.

Head Start provides critical family services to Mississippi families

Among families enrolled in Head Start, 68 percent of rural families and 70 percent of metropolitan families in Mississippi received some type of family service through Head Start. This includes services such as parenting education, health education, job training, and substance abuse prevention.

Endnotes

- 1 See Methodology in Rasheed Malik and Leila Schochet, "A Compass for Families: Head Start in Rural America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=448741>.
- 2 Rasheed Malik and Katie Hamm, "Mapping America's Child Care Deserts" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>.
- 3 Authors' note: Frontier counties are a subset of rural counties and can be understood as the most remote rural counties.