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ABSTRACT

This report examines whether Head Start and Even Start are substantially similar in key areas. At the request of a congressional subcommittee, the Government Accounting Office determined: (1) how similar the programs are in legal requirements and administration and the extent to which they have similar purposes, performance goals, and indicators; (2) how these programs differ operationally, particularly in terms of the services they provide, how those services are provided, and who receives them; (3) what is known about the relative effectiveness of the two programs; and (4) the extent to which opportunities exist for the programs to work more effectively with one another to meet the needs of program participants. Findings presented include the following: the programs share many common elements but differ in focus and design; grantees in both programs provided similar early childhood services to poor children but adult services differed; information about the effectiveness of Head Start and Even Start is limited; and opportunity exists for additional collaboration between the two programs. The report recommends that the secretaries of Health and Human Services and of Education direct the administrators of Head Start and Even Start to coordinate development of similar performance goals and indicators for adult education and literacy outcomes and that the effort include identification of indicators that specifically measure adult education and literacy. Comments from the Department of Education are appended. (EV)

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United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requester

ED 466 290

March 2002

HEAD START AND EVEN START

Greater Collaboration Needed on Measures of Adult Education and Literacy

PS 030425

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Abbreviations

ESPIRS	Education's Even Start Performance Information Reporting System
FACES	Family and Child Experiences Survey
GED	general equivalency diploma
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
PIR	Program Information Report

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March 29, 2002

The Honorable George V. Voinovich
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and the District of Columbia
Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Head Start and Even Start Family Literacy programs have for many years provided services intended to improve the educational and economic outcomes for millions of disadvantaged children and their families. Although the programs differ substantially in size—in fiscal year 2002, Head Start funding is over $6 billion while Even Start is $250 million—our earlier work highlighted some similarities between these two programs, which are administered by different federal agencies.[1] We have raised concerns that if such programs are designed to achieve similar outcomes for similar populations, but do not work together to address the needs of these targeted groups, then inefficiencies in administration and service delivery may result. Moreover, questions have arisen about the wisdom of having similar early childhood programs administered by different departments. Recently, President Bush, as part of his emphasis on child literacy and school readiness, has proposed transferring Head Start from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to the Department of Education (Education).

To determine whether Head Start and Even Start programs are substantially similar in key areas, you asked us to determine the following:

- How similar the programs are in legal requirements and administration and the extent to which they have similar purposes, performance goals, and indicators.

[1]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Early Education and Care: Overlap Indicates Need to Assess Crosscutting Programs*, GAO/HEHS-00-78 (Washington, D.C.: April 28, 2000).

- How these programs differ operationally, particularly in terms of the services they provide; how those services are provided; and who receives them.

- What is known about the relative effectiveness of the two programs.

- The extent to which opportunities exist for the programs to work more effectively with one another to meet the needs of program participants.

To answer these questions we collected and reviewed the most recent, national-level data for both programs summarizing the type of participants served, the services they receive, how the services are provided and who provides them. We reviewed the legislation governing both programs and several evaluative studies, including the interim results of recent impact studies by HHS and Education. We supplemented our understanding with site visits to Head Start and Even Start programs located in different types of communities–one densely populated urban city (Chicago, Illinois), two suburban cities, one located near Seattle, Washington (Renton) and another near Washington, D.C. (Frederick, Maryland) and a rural community (Niceville, Florida). We selected sites that demonstrated a variety of cooperative arrangements with one another and with other organizations in their communities. Some Head Start and Even Start programs we visited were formal partners with each other, some collaborated as needed, and others did not coordinate their efforts with each other. We performed our work between May 2001 and March 2002 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results in Brief

Head Start and Even Start were both designed to address the education and literacy needs of poor families with young children and are required to offer similar services when the needs of the families they serve are similar. However, in practice they served somewhat different populations with different education and literacy needs.

Although Head Start is a substantially larger program than Even Start, the separate legislation establishing them created programs with similar goals, target populations, and services. Head Start and Even Start both target disadvantaged populations to improve their educational outcomes. Moreover, both programs are required to offer education and literacy services to children and their families. Head Start's goal, however, is to ensure that young children are ready for school and program eligibility is tied to specific poverty income guidelines. In contrast, Even Start's goal is to improve family literacy and the educational opportunities of both

parents and their young children. Even Start eligibility is tied to parents' educational attainment. Although there are no income thresholds established for eligibility, local Even Start programs are required to recruit families most in need of such services as indicated by high levels of poverty and unemployment. Despite these differences, both programs are required to provide similar services for children and families when necessary. Both programs have developed some similar and some identical performance measures and outcome expectations for children, but not for parents. Only Even Start has identified measures that directly gauge educational attainment and literacy of participating adults. Finally, the federal government plays different roles in administering the two programs. The federal government administers Head Start and directly provides up to 80 percent of program funds to local Head Start programs. In contrast, the states administer Even Start and award federal funding to local Even Start programs, and the federal share of Even Start programs declines from a maximum of 90 percent in the first year of funding to a maximum of 35 percent in the ninth and subsequent years.

Head Start and Even Start grantees provided some similar services to young children and families, but the variations in how these programs served adults reflect the variations in the needs of the parents. In Head Start, about three quarters of the parents had high school diplomas. Therefore, Head Start grantees generally focused on early childhood education and enrolled only the child although the parents can receive adult education and literacy services if they require them. Head Start officials, as well as parents with children in the program, said that many of the parents who participated in Head Start did so primarily to obtain early childhood education for their young children. Even Start parents were much more likely than Head Start parents to lack a high school diploma and speak a language other than English. Thus, Even Start grantees enrolled both the parents and the child in the program and their core services included a range of adult education and literacy services, such as basic education and English language instruction. According to Education's data, many of the parents who participated in Even Start did so primarily to obtain education and literacy services for themselves.

No recent, definitive information exists on the effectiveness of either program and so it is difficult to determine which of the programs employs a more effective model for improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and their parents. Both HHS and Education have studies underway that will provide more definitive information on the extent to which each of these programs is achieving its intended goals. Both programs have been heavily studied in the past, providing

policymakers with information on how well the programs were implemented and how they could be improved. For example, the first Even Start study was largely an implementation study in which the findings served as a catalyst for changes in the program's legislation, including making teenage parents eligible for services.

In recognition of the similarities between the programs, both programs' legislation contain provisions that they coordinate services with one another. At the local level, differences in the needs of participants and the location of neighborhoods served by the two programs may mean some Head Start and Even Start grantees find only limited opportunities to work together. At the national level, HHS and Education have initiated several coordinating activities, including the funding of state-level organizations intended to improve collaboration among organizations serving poor children and their families in each state. Other national efforts have been to provide technical assistance, share information and develop a complementary outcome measurement system that reflects their common early childhood development goals. However, the two agencies have not collaborated as much on family literacy or developed similar measures of family literacy outcomes. We are recommending that they take action in this area.

Background

Head Start is administered by HHS and was begun in 1965 as part of the "War on Poverty." The program was built on the philosophy that effective intervention in children's lives could best be accomplished through family and community involvement, as evidenced by the broad range of services, which include educational, medical, dental, mental health, nutritional, and social services, offered to Head Start families. In 1992, the Congress added a requirement that Head Start offer family literacy services. Today Head Start dwarfs all other federal early childhood programs both in funding support and the size of the population served. In the year 2000, Head Start served about 846,000 families and about 923,000 children. Although it began as a summer program with a budget of $96.4 million, Head Start funding today totals more than $6 billion.[2] Head Start grantees operate programs in every state, primarily through locally based service providers. Recognizing that the years from conception to age three are critical to human development, the Congress established Early Head Start in 1994, a program that serves expectant mothers, as well as infants and toddlers.

[2]In this report, all dollar figures are in current dollars.

Over the course of its 36-year history, Head Start has served over 19 million children.

In contrast, Even Start is substantially smaller than Head Start. First funded in 1989 under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Even Start also has a much shorter history of serving needy children and families than its HHS counterpart. The program's approach is rooted in the philosophy that the educational attainment of parents in particular and the quality of the family's environment in general are central to a child's acquisition of literacy skills and success in school. Administered by Education, Even Start's budget has expanded considerably, from about $15 million at the program's beginning, to $250 million in the year 2002. During its 1999–2000 program year, Even Start served about 31,600 families and 41,600 children in programs around the country. In addition, the Congress established separate Head Start and Even Start migrant and Native American programs. These programs are not covered in this report.

See figure 1 for a comparison of the numbers of children and families served by both programs. See figure 2 for a comparison of Head Start and Even Start appropriations over the last decade, 1990–2002.

Figure 1: Comparison of Numbers of Children and Families Served by Head Start and Even Start, Program Year 2000

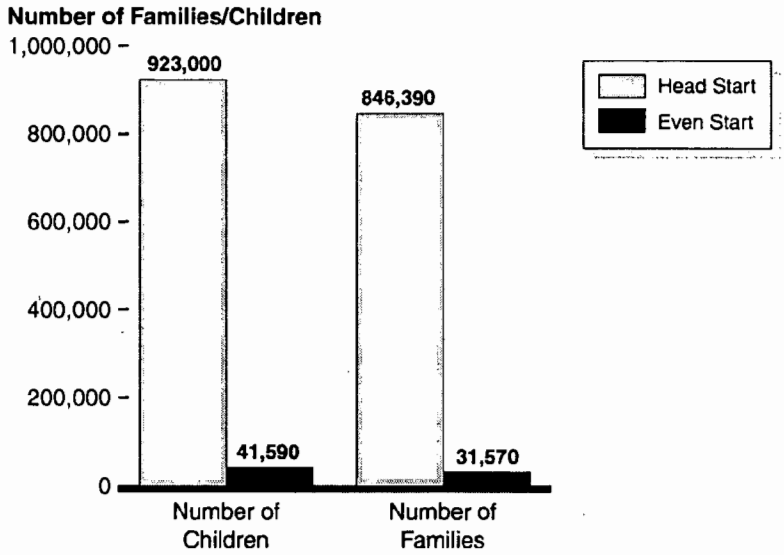

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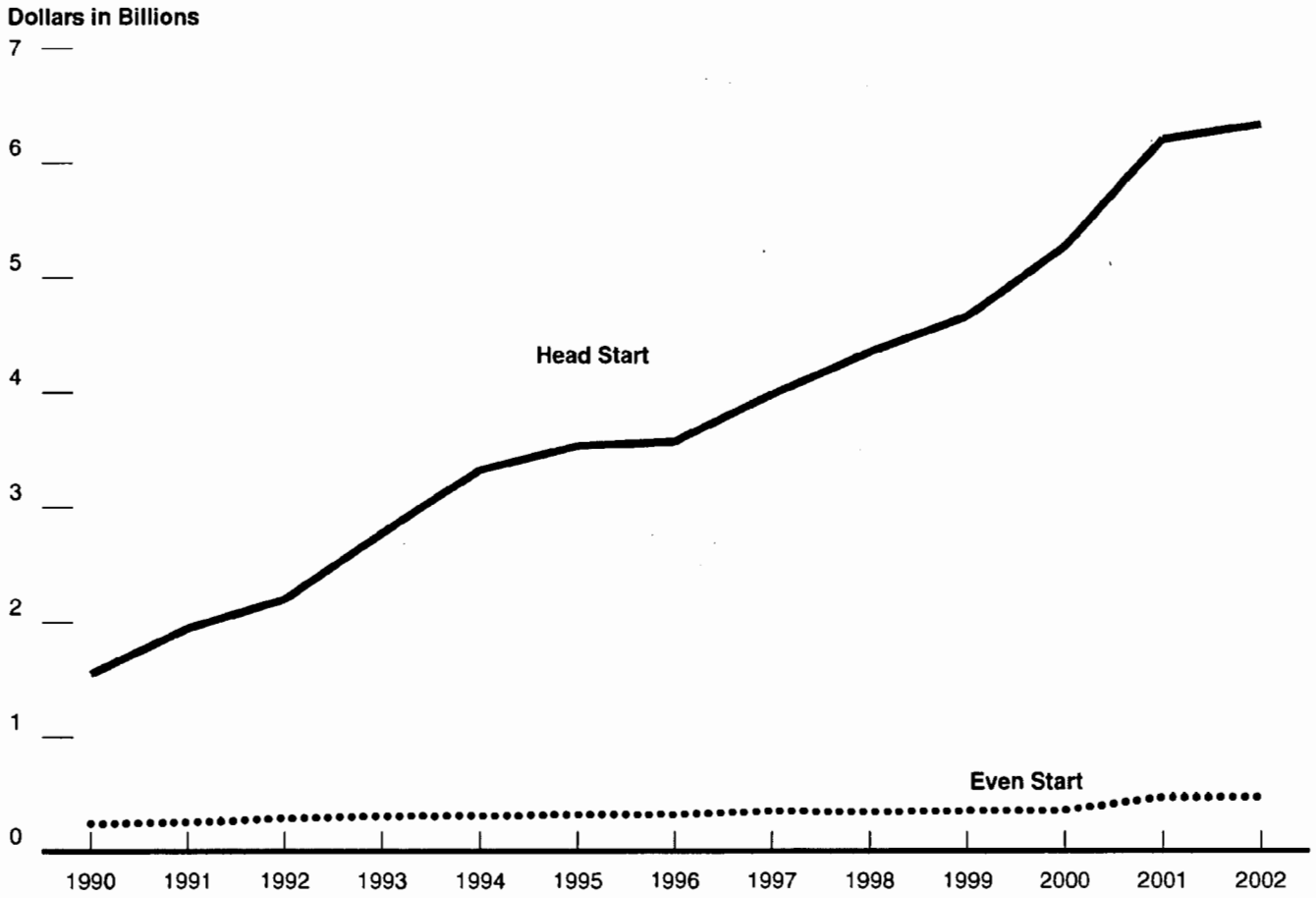
Figure 2: Comparison of Head Start and Even Start Federal Funding, 1990–2002 (Current Dollars)



Source: Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services

Although Head Start is administered by HHS, President Bush, as part of his emphasis on child literacy and school readiness, proposed transferring Head Start from HHS to Education. President Carter advocated a similar transfer in 1978. Opponents of the move argue that the social and human services component of Head Start is just as important as the educational program in achieving school readiness and the overall well being of the child. They have expressed concern that moving the program to Education would result in a narrower menu of services almost exclusively educational in nature.

Programs Share Many Common Elements, but Differ in Focus and Design

The separate legislation governing Head Start and Even Start established programs that overlap somewhat in goals, target population and services, but also have a number of significant differences. Even Start and Head Start similarly target disadvantaged populations, seeking to improve their educational outcomes. While both programs are required to provide education and literacy services to children and their families, Head Start's goal is to prepare children to enter school while Even Start's goal is to improve family literacy and education. Both programs measure achievement of their goals for children against similar criteria or measures, but only Even Start has developed measures to gauge adults' educational attainment and literacy. Although the programs have similar legislative provisions, the federal government administers Head Start and directly funds local Head Start programs while the states administer Even Start and allocate federal funds to local Even Start programs.

Head Start and Even Start Legislation Created Programs with Overlapping Goals, Populations, and Services

The separate legislation establishing Head Start and Even Start created overlapping programs, although there are many legislative differences between the two programs (see table 1). Both programs were created to address a similar problem, poor educational outcomes and economic prospects for low-income people. However, Head Start's goal is to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of low-income children. Even Start's goal is to improve the literacy and education in the nation's low-income families.

Table 1: Comparison of Major Head Start and Even Start Legislative Provisions

	Head Start	Even Start
Goal	Prepare children to enter school	Improve family literacy and educational opportunities
Target Population	Preschool age children (including infants and toddlers) and their families, as well as pregnant women (10 percent of enrollment is reserved for children with disabilities)	Parents who are not enrolled in school and their children, birth through age 7, who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, the basic skills necessary to function in society, or are unable to speak, read, or write English (No requirement to serve children with disabilities)
Income and poverty targeting provisions	Primarily children from families with income at or below federal poverty income guidelines or eligible for public assistance	Although having no specific income requirements, priority is given to families who are most in need of services as indicated by, among other things, high levels of poverty and unemployment
Services required to be offered		
Early childhood education		
Health	X[a]	X
Nutrition	X[a]	[c]
Social	X[a]	[c]
Substance abuse	X[a]	[c]
counseling	X	[c]
Adult literacy	X[b]	X
Adult basic education	X[a]	X[d]
Parenting education	X	X
Other necessary services	X[a]	X

[a]These services are identified in the Head Start legislation's statement of purpose, but are only to be provided as necessary.

[b]The legislation requires Head Start programs to offer (either directly or through referral to other entities) family literacy services, which are defined in the legislation to include "parent literacy training". We are using the term "adult literacy" to refer to parent literacy training.

[c]Although not mentioned, Even Start's legislation authorizes programs to provide support services when they are determined to be necessary to ensure program participation.

[d]This service is identified in the Even Start legislation's statement of purpose.

Source: GAO analysis of Head Start and Even Start legislation (42 USC 9831–9852a, 20 USC 6361–6370.

The legislation creating each program specifies the broad target group as low-income people; however, each program's legislation specifically targets a different group of low-income individuals. Consistent with its

school readiness goal, Head Start specifically targets poor preschool age children and their families. The regulations governing Head Start require that at least 90 percent of the children enrolled in Head Start come from families with incomes at or below the federal poverty guidelines[3] or from families eligible for public assistance. Consistent with its family literacy goal, Even Start is authorized to serve low-literate parents and their young children. To participate in Even Start, the parent or parents must be eligible for participation in adult education and literacy activities under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. For example, at least one parent must not be enrolled in school and must lack a high school diploma or its equivalent or lack the basic skills necessary to function in society.[4] The parent must also have a child who is below age 8. Although Even Start targets low-income families, its legislation does not specifically limit participation to low-income individuals nor does it define "low-income," as does Head Start. However, the legislation creating Even Start does require that priority for funding be given to families who are in need of such services as indicated by their poverty and unemployment status. In line with its focus on literacy, Even Start legislation does assign priority for funding to families who are in need of such services as indicated by parent illiteracy, limited-English proficiency and other need related indicators.

Although both programs target young children, there are differences in the ages the two programs are authorized to serve. Head Start is authorized to serve children at any age prior to compulsory school attendance. In 1994, as part of Head Start, the Congress established Early Head Start to ensure that infants and toddlers are served in greater numbers. This program is also authorized to provide services to pregnant women. Even Start is authorized to serve preschool age children as well, but unlike Head Start, it is also authorized to serve school-age children to age 8.[5] Even Start is not authorized to serve pregnant women who do not have children below the age of 8. Head Start grantees are also required to reserve 10 percent of their enrollment for children with disabilities. Even Start has no such requirement.

[3]For example, the federal poverty guideline was $17,050 for a family of four in fiscal year 2000.

[4]For school age parents, school districts are required to provide the basic education services.

[5]Children 8 and older can be served if services are provided in collaboration with Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, Part A services.

With respect to services, Head Start historically has been authorized to provide services that specifically support children's development, such as early childhood education, nutrition, health, and social services. Head Start legislation has long required that local programs provide parent involvement activities that ensure the direct participation of parents in the development, conduct, and overall program direction of local programs. However, in 1992, the Congress added a requirement that Head Start provide family literacy services, if these services are determined to be necessary. In the 1998 reauthorization of Head Start, the Congress clarified the definition of family literacy, requiring that Head Start family literacy services be of sufficient intensity and duration to make sustainable changes in a family. The legislation also required that family literacy programs integrate early childhood education, parenting education, parent and child interactive literacy activities, and adult literacy services. The same definition of family literacy services is found in Even Start's legislation. Even Start legislation also requires that it integrate early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.

Head Start and Even Start Have Similar Performance Expectations and Measures for Children, but Not for Adults

Head Start and Even Start have some similar measures to assess children's progress but different measures for adult literacy and educational attainment (see table 2).[6]

[6]Both programs have other measures of program and participant performance. For example, Head Start has measures for children's social emotional health, and Even Start has goals related to recruiting the most needy families and program quality.

Table 2: Comparison of Head Start and Even Start Performance Expectations and Measures for Children's Cognitive Growth and Adult Literacy and Education

	Head Start		Even Start	
Performance Category	**Expectation**	**Measure**	**Expectation***	**Measure**
Children's Cognitive Growth	Children show improvement in cognitive, emergent literacy, numeracy, and language skills	Language development, math skill, and letter identification	Improve children's language development and reading readiness	Language development
Adult Literacy and Education	Parents improve self-concept and emotional well being and make progress toward their education, literacy and employment goals	Number of parents who are employed as Head Start staff	Improve adult literacy and educational attainment	Math and reading skill Number earning high school diploma or equivalent

*Even Start has the same expectations and measures for both preschool and school age children.

Source: Department of Education, 2000 Performance Report and 2002 Program Annual Plan (Washington, D.C., 2000). Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Fiscal Year 2002 Annual Performance Plan and Fiscal Year 2001 Annual Performance Plan and Fiscal Year 2000 Annual Performance Report (Washington, D.C., 2000).

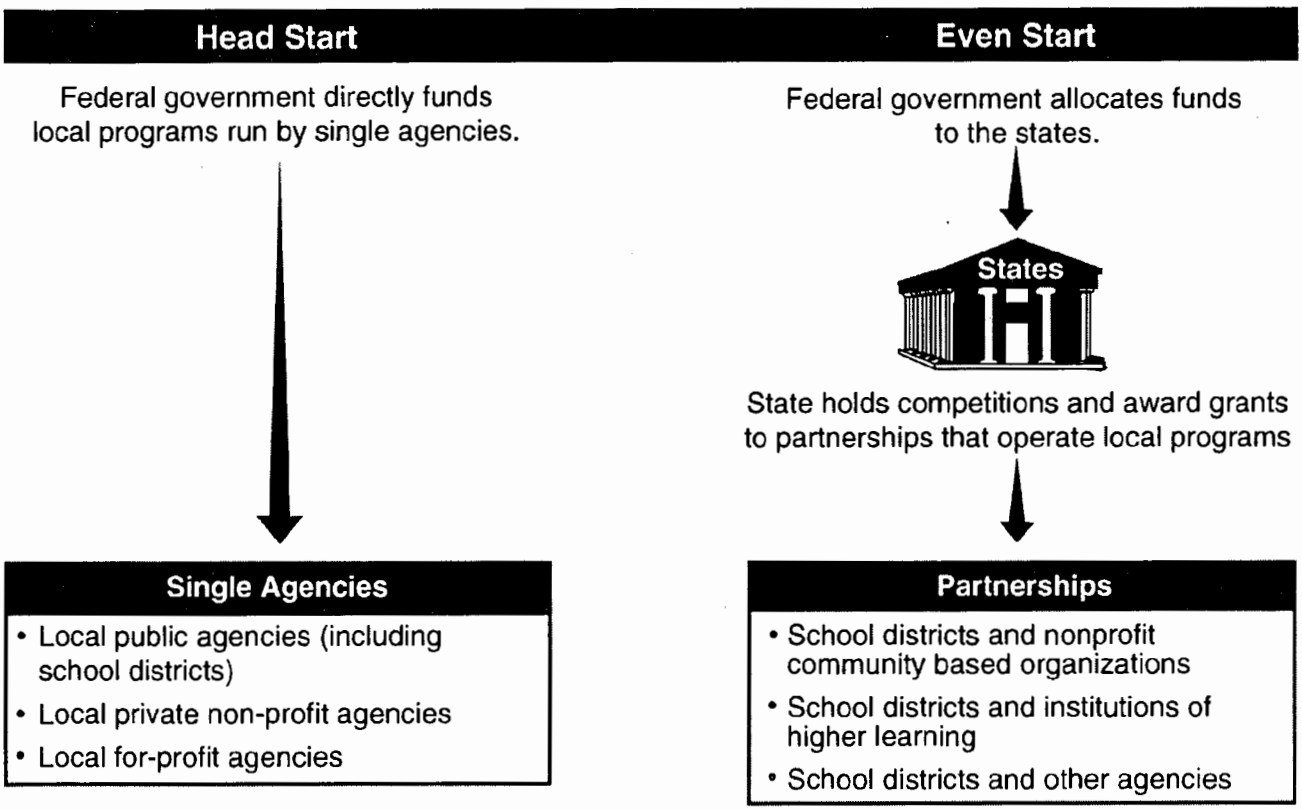
For example, to measure children's cognitive growth, both programs measure language development. As shown in table 2, Even Start measures adult literacy and educational attainment by measuring gains in math and reading and by counting the number of participants earning a high school diploma or its equivalent. Head Start measures adults' progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals, by the number who are employed as Head Start staff–not a direct measure of adult literacy or educational attainment. According to HHS performance standards, Head Start is an important place for employment opportunities for parents and a vehicle for providing additional skills for parents who are seeking employment or who are already employed.

Programs Operate Differently

Head Start and Even Start are managed and operated in fundamentally different ways (see fig. 3). First, Head Start is administered by the federal government and Even Start is administered by the states. Unlike some other social programs, the federal government (HHS) directly funds local Head Start programs. Many organizations that receive Head Start grant funding deliver services to Head Start participants. In some cases, the organization that receives the grant contracts with other organizations to deliver services to Head Start participants. HHS' 10 regional offices, which are geographically dispersed throughout the nation, are responsible for program oversight and management. Even Start is administered by the

states, with the federal government allocating the funds to the states. The states are responsible for oversight and management of local programs and make decisions about which programs to fund.

Figure 3: Comparison of Head Start and Even Start Program Funding and Service Delivery Structures



Source: GAO Analysis

Note: Head Start provides separate funding to the states to support the coordination activities of state Head Start collaboration offices.

Second, although Head Start and Even Start are both formula programs, the formulas for allocating funds differ. Although the formulas for both programs are multifaceted and complex, Head Start funding is based in part on the number of children in a state under age 5 living in poverty. The Even Start formula is based, in part, on the number of poor school-age children, ages 5 to 17, in a state.

Third, Head Start and Even Start legislation have different requirements for the types of local organizations that are eligible to receive funding. For Head Start, local community organizations are authorized to administer Head Start services. Even Start's legislation gives school districts a central role in delivering services. The law requires local organizations to form partnerships with school districts in order to receive funds. Thus, eligible entities are school districts in partnership with nonprofit community based organizations, institutions of higher education, or other nonprofit organizations.

Finally, Head Start and Even Start have different matching fund requirements and different requirements for the sources of these matching funds. Head Start grantees annually may receive up to 80 percent of total funding from the federal Head Start program funds. The remaining 20 percent must come from nonfederal sources and may include such in-kind contributions as space, staff, supplies and equipment. In contrast, Even Start grantees receive a maximum of 90 percent of their total funding in the first year from the federal Even Start program, but in subsequent years this share declines. In the ninth and subsequent years of the grant, the family literacy programs are expected to largely operate independent of Even Start funding, receiving only a maximum of 35 percent of total funding from the federal Even Start program (see table 3). However, matching funds, which also include in-kind contributions, may come from other non-Even Start federal sources, such as Adult Education Act funds.

Table 3: Maximum Percent of Head Start and Even Start Funding Received from Federal Program Appropriations Each Grant Year

Year of Grant	Head Start[a]	Even Start[b]
1st	80	90
2nd	80	80
3rd	80	70
4th	80	60
5th	80	50
6th	80	50
7th	80	50
8th	80	50
9th and subsequent years	80	35

[a]Matching funds must be from nonfederal sources

[b]Matching funds may include federal sources

Grantees in Both Programs Provided Similar Early Childhood Services to Poor Children, but Adult Services Differed

In 1999–2000, both Head Start and Even Start grantees served poor families with young children, but the parents they served had different education and literacy needs and the extent to which parents received services to meet those needs differed. Even Start parents were much more likely than Head Start parents to lack a high school diploma and speak a language other than English. According to agency data, parents who enrolled their children in Head Start expected primarily to receive education services for their young children, whereas Even Start parents sought education and literacy services for themselves as well. At the sites we visited, both programs provided early childhood development and education services, as well as health and nutrition support to young children, but we found that adults participating in Even Start programs were more likely to need and thus receive a range of adult education and literacy services.

Both Programs Served Poor Families with Young Children, but Participants Differed in Language and Education

According to agency data, both Head Start and Even Start grantees primarily served poor families with young children, although Even Start served infants and toddlers to a larger degree than Head Start.[7] Almost all Head Start children were under age 5–95 percent–and most were 4 years old. About one percent of the participants were pregnant women. About two-thirds of Even Start children were under age 5, and the remaining one-third were school-age children, 5 and older (see table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of Head Start and Even Start Participants by Characteristic

Percentage of participants		
Participant Characteristic	**Head Start**	**Even Start**
Parent has completed high school	73	14
Participant child age:		
0 through 2 years old	5	39
3 through 4 years old	90	28
5 years and older	5	33
Participant child has a physical disability	13	8
Family received public assistance[a]	27	31
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	27	44
African American	36	21
White	32	30
Primary language		
English	77	54
Spanish	19	31

[a]For Head Start, public assistance refers to families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and for Even Start, public assistance refers to families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, and other assistance.

Source: All information, except high school completion, reflect program year 1999–2000 data and were derived from Head Start's PIR and Education's ESPIRS databases. High school completion data were derived from Head Start's 1996–1997 FACES and Education's 1996–1997 ESPIRS databases.

[7]The national-level data were obtained from three separate databases. Head Start data were obtained primarily from Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) database, which covered program year 1999– 2000. We supplemented the PIR data with additional information from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), which covered program year 1996–1997. Even Start data were obtained from Education's Even Start Performance Information Reporting System (ESPIRS) database, which covered program years 1999–2000 and 1996–1997. Although we did not test the reliability of the data, they are commonly used by agencies and academic researchers.

In both programs, these young children came from very poor families. Most Head Start and Even Start families reported incomes of less than $15,000.[8] While Even Start participation is not restricted by income, grantees give priority for services to families at or below federal guidelines for poverty, families receiving public assistance, and families with no earned income. Almost one-third of the families served by Head Start and Even Start received government assistance, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, according to program year 1999–2000 data.

While both programs primarily served very poor families with young children, the families differed in their parent educational attainment, ethnicity and primary language. For example, the proportion of Even Start parents without high school diplomas was substantially higher than those participating in Head Start. About 86 percent of Even Start parents reported that they had not completed high school, compared to about 27 percent of Head Start parents.

Hispanic children represented about a quarter of the children attending Head Start programs and almost half of the children attending Even Start programs. These differences in ethnicity were accompanied by differences in the primary languages of children participating in each program. Even Start children were much less likely to speak English as their primary language than Head Start children, according to agency data. The vast majority–about three-fourths–of Head Start children spoke English as their primary language, compared to a little over half of Even Start children. For about one-third of Even Start children, Spanish was the primary language, compared to only one-fifth of Head Start children.

In part, the tendency of Even Start children to speak English as a second language may reflect their parents' immigration from non-English speaking countries. According to Education's data, about two-thirds of parents with children in Even Start have lived outside of the United States, about one-fifth have lived in the United States 5 years or less, and about a third of Even Start parents were educated outside the United States.

[8]Head Start and Even Start calculate family income differently, however. Therefore, income data are not directly comparable.

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Both Programs Provided Similar Early Childhood Services, but Extent to Which Adults Received Education and Literacy Services Differed

Head Start and Even Start both provided children with similar early learning and other developmental and support services. Head Start served primarily 3 and 4 year olds, while Even Start served a greater percentage of children below the age of 2. However, the extent to which parents of enrolled children received education and literacy services differed between these two programs. According to Head Start and Even Start program data, both programs provided young children with early childhood education services that included developmentally appropriate learning activities. Both programs offered home-based instruction and center-based, half-day programs several days per week, which often included meals, snacks, and health care support, such as mental health, vision, immunizations, and screenings. There are some differences, however, in services offered to children. For example, as we saw in Niceville, Florida, the Even Start program offered home-based, afterschool reading support and other learning activities for school-aged children.

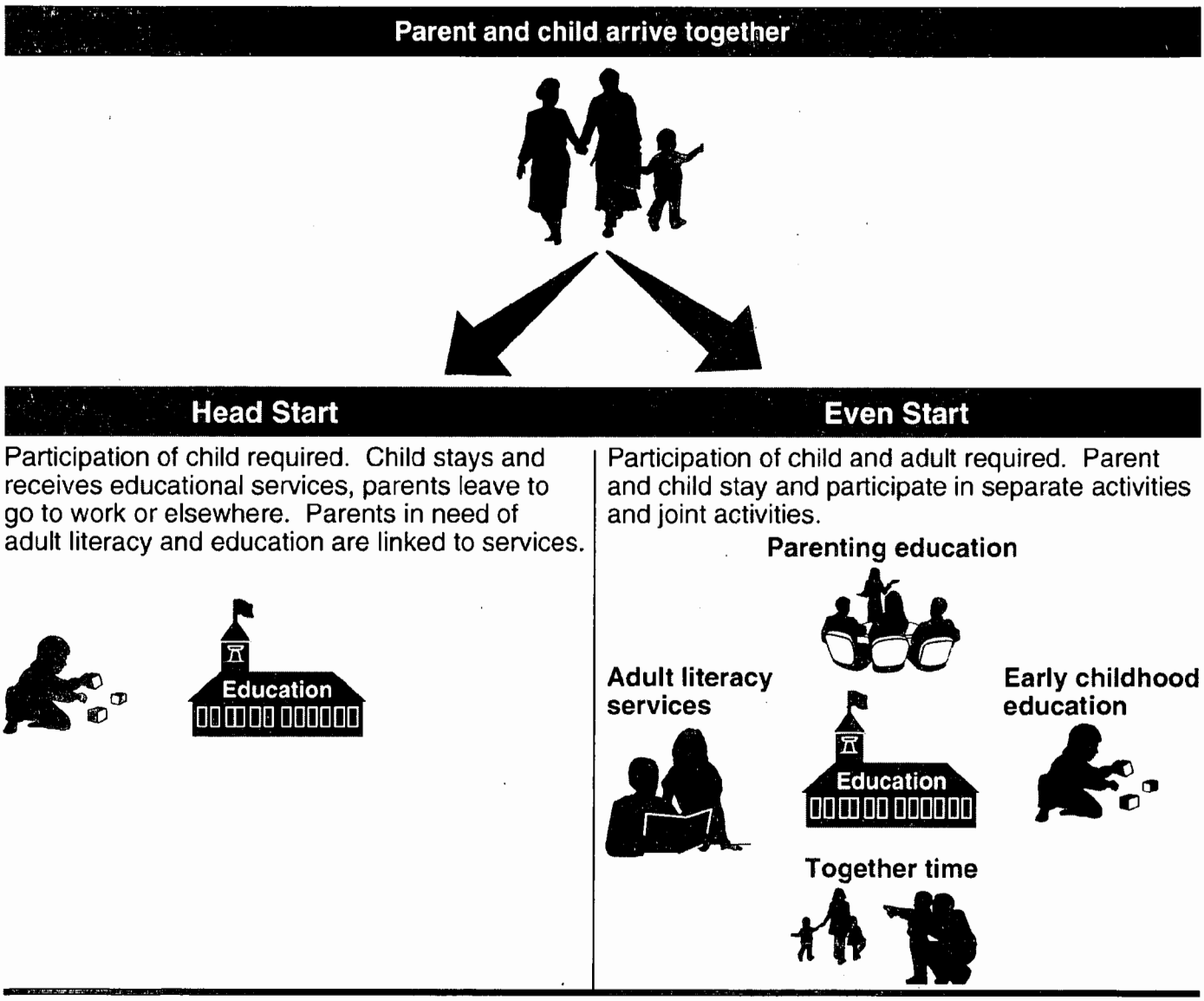
Although there were few differences in services for children, the major difference among these programs was the extent to which adults need and thus received education and literacy services. Only the Even Start programs we visited considered adult education and literacy services to be among their primary services. According to Education's data, Even Start grantees provided such services as basic adult education, adult secondary education services, general equivalency diploma (GED) preparation, and English language instruction.[9] Many Even Start programs provided flexible hours of instruction, such as evening and weekend instruction, to accommodate the scheduling needs of parents. Parents most often participated in GED preparation services and English language instruction. About half of the parents indicated that obtaining their GED was a primary reason for Even Start enrollment, although learning English, improving their chances of getting a job, improving parenting skills, and obtaining early learning experiences for their children were also important, according to Education's data. This was true of the eight Even Start parents we spoke with during our site visits who also told us that their primary reason for enrolling in Even Start was to obtain adult education

[9]In addition to the Even Start Family Literacy program, Education also administers the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (20 U.S.C 1201 et seq.). The objectives of this program are to create a partnership among the federal government, states and localities to provide, on a voluntary basis, adult education and literacy services, in order to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; assist adults who are parents to obtain the education skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children; and assist adults in the completion of a secondary school education.

and literacy services. Two of the Even Start programs we visited enrolled large numbers of primarily Spanish speaking parents and other sites we visited enrolled many recent immigrants with limited English skills. Many of these Even Start parents received English language instruction. In Frederick, Maryland for example, the Even Start official said that many parents with limited proficiency in English had enrolled in the program to improve their English language skills. Often, she said, parents participate only long enough to acquire the basic skills needed to find a job.

Most of the adults participating in Even Start–almost three quarters–were unemployed, according to Education's data, allowing Even Start programs to enroll both the parent and the child in a program that consisted of child and adult education and literacy, parenting education, and interactive literacy activities between the parent and child. At the Even Start sites we visited, adults often received instruction during the day as their children simultaneously received early childhood services nearby, often in the same building. They also participated in joint learning activities (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Comparison of Educational Components of Head Start and Even Start Center Programs



For example, at the Frederick, Maryland, Even Start program, parents and children arrived together at the community center, which houses both the child development center and adult and family literacy center. Parents dropped off their children at the child development center and attended either adult literacy or basic education classes taught by an Even Start

instructor. The parents later rejoined their children to participate in joint activities, such as reading, painting, or playing, often sharing lunch. In this way, the Even Start program integrated early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program. Not all Even Start programs we visited locate children and their parents in a single building; however, they all provided space at some location for joint child and parent activities and required the joint participation of parents and children in the program.

In contrast, 73 percent of the parents of children enrolled in Head Start had a high school diploma and thus may not have needed adult education and literacy services. Head Start programs did not require the joint participation of parents and children in the program. At the sites we visited, parents typically left the Head Start center after dropping off their children. For example, one Head Start parent told us that she thought of Head Start as an early learning program for children and had enrolled her child in Head Start to obtain early childhood education. This parent said she had completed high school and did not need adult education or literacy services. However, for those parents in need of adult education and literacy services, Head Start programs often referred them to the local public school district, local community college, or Even Start for help. For example, Head Start officials in Niceville, Florida told us that they refer adults in need of such services to Even Start. The Albany Park Community Center Head Start in Chicago offered an array of adult learning opportunities. However, unlike other sites we visited that received either a Head Start or an Even Start grant, Albany Park received both Head Start and Even Start grants, using funding from both to provide a unified family literacy program. Because Head Start does not currently collect data on the types of adult education or literacy services it provides, however, we could not determine the specific types of education and literacy services these parents received.

Information about the Effectiveness of Head Start and Even Start Is Limited

No recent, definitive, national-level research exists about the effectiveness of Head Start and Even Start for the families and children they serve. However, both programs have effectiveness studies underway using a methodology that many researchers consider to be the most definitive method of determining a program's effect on its participants. These studies reflect each program's primary focus and population of interest. For instance, consistent with Head Start's school readiness goal, its study focuses on children. Consistent with Even Start's family literacy goal, its study is focusing on children and adults. Although final results of these studies are not yet available, HHS and Education have conducted a

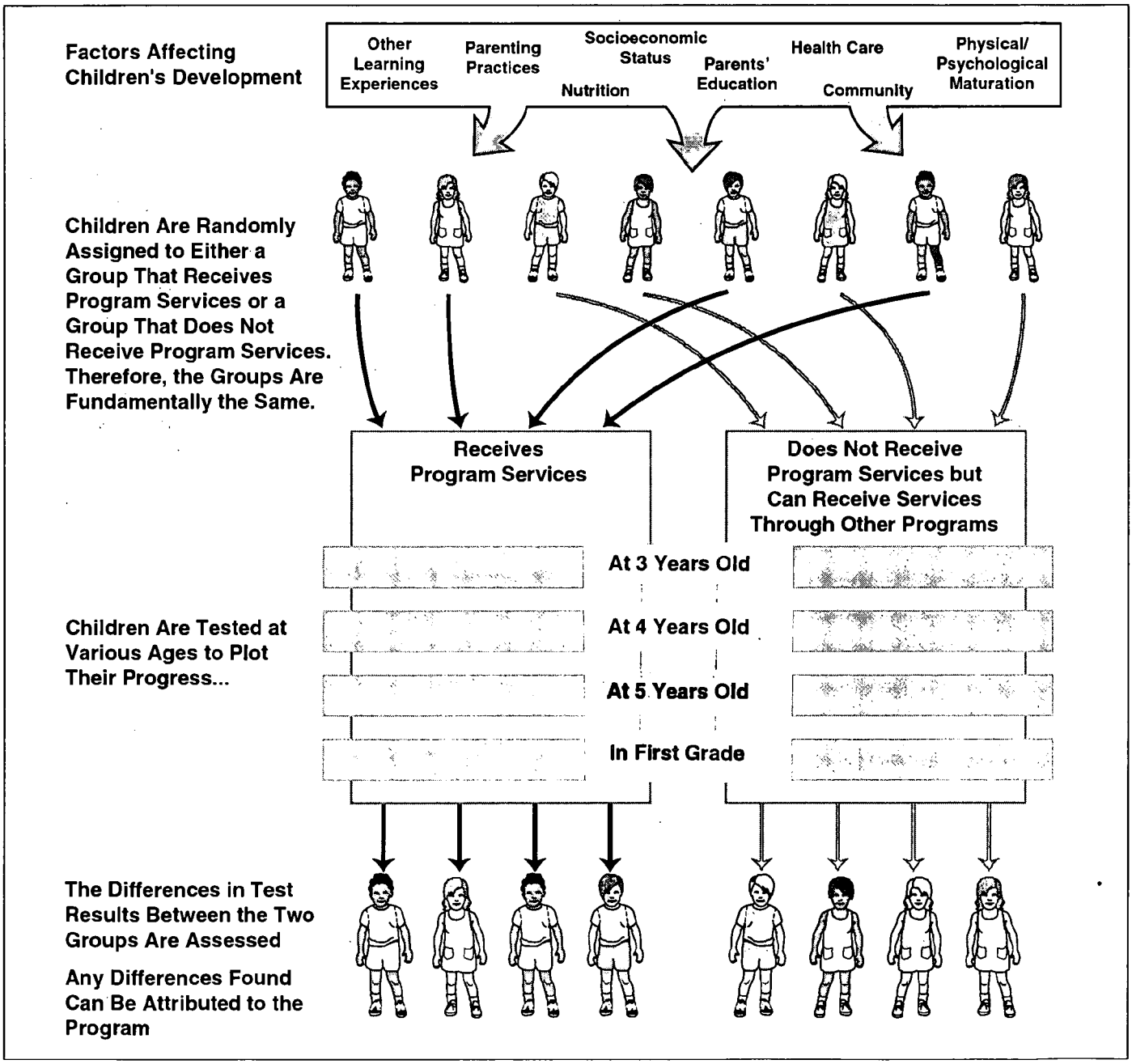
number of other studies that provide useful information about the Head Start and Even Start programs. These studies have prompted both legislative and programmatic changes intended to improve program operations.

Major Studies Underway to Assess Program Effectiveness

Although there is little definitive information about the effectiveness or relative effectiveness of Head Start and Even Start, both programs are undergoing rigorous evaluations that will provide more definitive information about their effectiveness. Both programs are currently being evaluated using an "experimental design" in which groups of children are randomly assigned either to a group that will receive program services or to a group that will not receive program services. This is an approach many researchers consider the best for assessing program effectiveness when factors other than the program are known to affect outcomes.[10] To illustrate, in the case of a child, many influences affect his or her development. Nutrition, health, family and community, in conjunction with education and care, play a role in his or her learning. In light of all these influences, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the effects of the program and the other factors that influence a child's learning. Figure 5 shows how this approach produces information that shows the effect of the program being studied, rather than the effects of other developmental influences on young children.

[10]See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Early Childhood Programs: The Use of Impact Evaluations to Assess Program Effects*, GAO-01-542 (Washington, D.C.: April 16, 2001).

Figure 5: Experimental Design for Early Childhood Program Impact Evaluations



Source: GAO Analysis.

Both HHS and Education are using experimental design impact studies performed by independent research firms to measure the effect of Head Start and Even Start on the populations they serve. The Head Start study focuses on children, while the Even Start study focuses on both children and their parents. Head Start has two studies underway: one for the Head Start program and a separate effort to evaluate Early Head Start. See table 5 for a summary of the objectives for these studies.

Table 5: Objectives of Ongoing Effectiveness Studies

Study	Objectives
The Head Start Study	To determine how Head Start affects school readiness in the following areas as compared to children not enrolled in Head Start: • cognitive development, • general knowledge, • approaches to learning, • social and emotional development, • communication skills, • fine and gross motor skills, and • physical well-being. To determine the conditions that make Head Start most effective, such as • characteristics of children (poverty, ethnicity), • home environments (single-parent, two-parent families), • if program is a home-based or a center-based program, and • characteristics of the program (staffing, curriculum, part- or full-day, one- or two-year, availability and quality of child care and preschool programs in a particular area).
The Early Head Start Study	To determine • how Early Head Start programs affect child, parent, and family outcomes; • how children perform on a wide range of cognitive, language and social-emotional development indicators; • whether Early Head Start parents demonstrate more supportive and stimulating parenting behaviors, greater knowledge of infant-toddler development; • whether Early Head Start families demonstrate more supportive home environments; • how different program approaches and community contexts affect these outcomes; • how program implementation and services affect outcomes; and • how the characteristics of children and families affect outcomes.
The Even Start Study	To determine • the gains children make on measures of school readiness, vocabulary, and language development; and • the gains adults make on measures of functional literacy, English acquisition, GED attainment, employment status, annual income, parent expectations, and parenting skills.

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The Head Start study is a $28.3 million, national impact evaluation that follows participants over time.[11] The study has been divided into two phases. The first phase, a pilot study designed to test various procedures and methods, was conducted last year. The second phase is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2002 and will entail data collection on 5,000 to 6,000 3 and 4 year-olds from 75 programs and communities across the country. The study will track subjects through the spring of their first grade year, and results are expected in December 2006. Although Head Start is scheduled to be reauthorized in 2003, an HHS official told us that the interim report scheduled for 2003 will likely not contain findings.

The Early Head Start evaluation is a 6-year, $21 million study enlisting 3,000 families and their children, a sample drawn from 17 different Early Head Start programs. Under the Early Head Start evaluation, study participants are assessed at 14, 24 and 36 months after birth. The final report is scheduled for completion in June 2002. The preliminary findings were released at the beginning of 2001. According to HHS officials, these early results suggest that participation in Early Head Start has positive effects on both children and their parents.

The Even Start study is expected to be a 6-year, $3.6 million study tracking 400 Even Start families from 18 program locations and focuses on measuring children's readiness for school and adult literacy. The final report is scheduled for completion in 2003. The current study is actually the second Even Start impact study conducted using an experimental design. The first evaluation examined Even Start programs operated by five grantees. As we observed in our earlier study, the small number of sites examined by the study and the lack of information on control group experiences did not permit conclusions about program effectiveness.[12]

[11]This study responds in part to a 1997 GAO recommendation that HHS conduct an assessment of the impact of regular Head Start programs. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Head Start: Research Provides Little Information on Impact of Current Program*, GAO/HEHS-97-59 (Washington, D.C.: April 15, 1997).

[12]U.S. General Accounting Office, *Early Childhood Programs: The Use of Impact Evaluations to Assess Program Effects*, GAO-01-542 (Washington, D.C.: April 16, 2001).

Studies to Date Inform HHS and Education about Program Implementation and Participant Outcomes but Reveal Little about Effectiveness

Although experimental-design impact evaluations are considered by many researchers to be the most definitive method of determining the effect of the program on participants, other types of studies have been conducted by HHS and Education that provide a wide variety of data valuable to program managers and policymakers. Often, to answer varied, complex, and interrelated questions, policymakers may need to use several different designs to assess a single program. Different study designs are used depending on the questions to be answered, the nature of the program being studied and the type of information needed.

For instance, Head Start is collecting outcome data on a nationally representative sample of Head Start children and families as part of its Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). FACES collects a range of data that includes cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of Head Start children; the well-being and accomplishments of Head Start families, and the quality of Head Start classrooms. Since this study does not employ an experimental design, researchers cannot attribute changes in children's performance to the Head Start program.

A study of Early Head Start, which assessed the degree to which the program is being administered as the Congress intended, has been completed. This study gathered information on the characteristics of participants and the services they received. Information from this study will be integrated with the results of the experimental design study.[13]

Since Even Start's first national evaluation,[14] Education has also made an effort to monitor Even Start's evolution in relation to its legislative mandate. For example, Even Start's first study was broad in scope and designed to examine the characteristics of Even Start participants and projects, and services provided to assess how closely they resembled what had been envisioned for the program. The study served as a catalyst for changes in the program's legislation, including a shift in focus on those most in need. As a result of the study, teen parents and previously ineligible family members can now participate.

[13]Department of Health and Human Services, *Building Their Futures: How Early Head Start Programs are Enhancing the Lives of Infants and Toddlers in Low-Income Families, Summary Report* (Washington, D.C, 2001).

[14]Robert G. St. Pierre and Janet P. Swartz and others, *Improving Family Literacy: Findings from the National Even Start Evaluation* (Abt Associates Inc., 1996).

Opportunity Exists for Additional Collaboration between the Two Programs

The Head Start and Even Start programs have similar goals and grantees in both programs provided similar services to children. However, the programs differ in the extent to which they served adults. Nevertheless, their common focus on improved educational outcomes for poor children and their families calls for coordination between the two programs. Indeed, federal law requires such coordination. Head Start and Even Start activities are coordinated with each other on many levels, with federal coordinating efforts more often focusing on the early childhood development aspects of the two programs, rather than on broader family literacy activities. While most Head Start and Even Start grantees have reported they collaborate with one another in some way, at the program sites we visited, we found that differences in participants and service areas may mean that collaboration involves only limited opportunities for program staff to work together.

Both Head Start and Even Start programs are required to coordinate with one another and with other organizations to provide child and family support services.[15] As a result, the programs are involved in several efforts to coordinate their activities with one another at the federal, state and local levels. Even Start's primary effort to coordinate directly with Head Start at the federal level focused on creating complementary systems for measuring developmental and educational outcomes for young children. Both programs have defined program goals and performance indicators for young children in consultation with each other and Even Start is also developing a new tool for collecting program data that will allow it to obtain information on early childhood and family outcomes similar to that collected by Head Start through a separate data collection effort.[16] Coordinated data collection is intended to help the HHS and Education compare programs and determine their combined contribution to children's school readiness. However, officials from both departments said that cooperation in developing outcome measures for other components of family literacy, such as parenting and adult education, has not occurred because Head Start has made only a limited effort to measure its performance in this area.

[15]20 U.S.C .6365(9); 42 U.S.C. 9837 (c).

[16]The Classroom Literacy Environment and Outcomes study, funded by the Department of Education's Planning and Evaluation Service, will evaluate the Even Start Family Literacy Program and the Title I Early Childhood Education Programs. The study is being coordinated with FACES.

In another federal collaborative effort, Even Start has provided about $250,000 in funding to support Head Start's family literacy initiative. The funding helps to support an evolving "promising practices" national network of Head Start family literacy programs as well as training on how to build a family literacy program.[17] Lessons learned from model family literacy initiatives and technical assistance are to be shared with Even Start grantees.

Other initiatives by Education and HHS support state and local coordination efforts. For example, HHS and Education have both awarded grants to states to create coordinating councils that include state-level administrators of federal and state-funded early childhood and human services agencies. Head Start has funded Head Start Collaboration Offices in each state,[18] while Even Start has funded an Even Start Consortium in 36 states. Membership in each Even Start consortium must include a representative from Head Start. Head Start Collaboration Offices are encouraged to forge links with organizations promoting family literacy, such as Even Start. In addition, Even Start and Head Start have jointly sponsored training for state and regional administrators on topics such as family literacy and interagency coordination. According to an Education contractor that provides the Even Start consortia with technical assistance, some state Even Start administrators have also collaborated with local Head Start officials to identify appropriate state-level performance indicators for children.[19]

At the local level, about 74 percent of Even Start grantees reported in program year 1999–2000 that they collaborated with Head Start in some way, including receiving cash funding, instructional or administrative support, technical assistance, and space or job training support from Head Start grantees. However, the type of support most often reported by Even Start grantees was technical assistance, especially public relations support in which Head Start helped to disseminate information about the program through the community. About one-third of Even Start grantees reported receiving direct instructional, administrative support or space from Head

[17]The Head Start Bureau has contracted with the National Center for Family Literacy to manage this program and provide technical assistance to Head Start and Even Start grantees.

[18]Collaboration Offices have been funded also in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

[19]All states were required to identify and submit state-level performance indicators to Education by June 30, 2001.

Start grantees. Instead, Even Start grantees more often received such support from the public schools.[20] About one-fourth of Even Start programs had formal partnerships with Head Start.

At program sites we visited, we observed that local coordination activities between Head Start and Even Start grantees seemed to be greater where grantees were trying to serve the same group of families living in the same geographic area. Grantees described less interaction between the programs where the families served were different and service areas did not overlap. For example, in the state of Washington, where a Head Start and Even Start program are formal partners and are both administered by the Renton Public Schools, only a few families are enrolled in both programs. Local officials said this is partly due to the location of the two sites in different neighborhoods several miles apart, differences in the ages of the children served by each program, and differences in the adult education needs of the families. Renton Head Start does not serve infants and toddlers, whereas Even Start does. Working Head Start parents can participate in adult education classes primarily in the evenings, whereas Even Start offers adult education classes during the day only. Cooperation between the programs has primarily focused on joint participation in training events and sharing information on the few families that are enrolled in both programs.

In contrast, in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago, the Even Start and Head Start programs are not only administered by the same grantee, but they also are located in the same community center building. Administrators told us that cooperation and collaboration is extensive, with a large proportion of families enrolled in both Head Start and Even Start programs. Albany Park staff said that Even Start and Head Start administrators work together extensively to coordinate the curriculum between the programs and to accommodate the work schedules and learning needs of the many families they serve together.

Conclusions

Although Head Start and Even Start both serve poor children, they differ because these children's parents differ substantially in their educational attainment and literacy. To meet the needs of parents who do not have

[20]Specifically, Even Start grantees reported receiving instructional staff, administrative support, technical staff, space and equipment more often from public school elementary education and public school adult education departments than from Head Start.

high school diplomas or who have literacy needs, Even Start, from the beginning, designed its program to include adult education and literacy as core services. It also established a system for measuring the progress of adults in attaining adult education and literacy skills. Although a much larger percentage of parents with children enrolled in Head Start have high school diplomas, Head Start is a much larger program. Thus, there are still thousands of Head Start parents who might need and benefit from education and literacy services.

Recognizing that these programs serve a similar population of children, Head Start and Even Start have jointly developed similar outcome measures for children. This common framework allows policymakers and program administrators to assess how well each program contributes to children's development. Joint development of indicators for adults' progress has not occurred. Head Start's current measure of adult literacy is not a direct measure of adult literacy skills and is not comparable with indicators used by Even Start. Lacking similar measures for assessing the educational and literacy level of parents, policymakers lack information on the relative contribution each program is making toward improving the education and literacy of the parents it serves.

Recommendation

We recommend that the secretaries of HHS and of Education direct the administrators of Head Start and Even Start to coordinate the development of similar performance goals and indicators for adult education and literacy outcomes and that the effort include the identification of indicators that specifically measure adult education and literacy.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

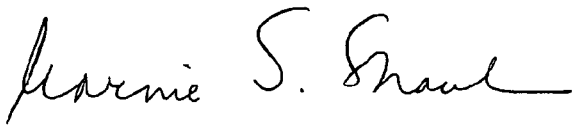
In commenting our report, Education observed that the report presents a comprehensive discussion of the similarities and differences between the Even Start Family Literacy program and the Head Start program. Education generally agreed with our presentation. However, since our recommendation focused on adult literacy indicators, Education thought it would be helpful if we included a discussion of adult education programs and the purpose of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. Moreover, Education suggested that we recommend that the Head Start Bureau should coordinate with the department's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, not just Even Start, in its development of adult education-related performance indicators. Education also pointed out that Even Start's family literacy goal encompasses school readiness for

participating children. (See app. I.) Education also gave us technical comments that were incorporated as appropriate.

We agree that some additional information on the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act would provide related contextual information and included a limited discussion of the act in the report. However, because the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act programs were not part of this review, we have kept our recommendation limited to the Head Start and Even Start programs. This should not be interpreted as precluding the Secretary of Education facilitating discussions between Head Start and any other office in Education that could be helpful in developing comparable indicators. Finally, although one could broadly interpret Even Start's family literacy goal as encompassing school readiness, this is not the stated goal of the program. Therefore we have not added anything to our discussion of the Even Start goal.

The Head Start Bureau, Administration of Children and Families, said HHS had no comments on the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the secretaries of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education and appropriate congressional committees. Copies will also be made available to other interested parties upon request. If you have questions regarding this report, please call me at (202) 512-7215 or Eleanor Johnson, assistant director, at (202) 512-7209. Other contributors can be found in appendix II.



Marnie S. Shaul
Director, Education, Workforce
and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Education

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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Ms. Marnie S. Shaul
Director
Education, Workforce, and
Income Security Issues
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Shaul:

This is in response to your letter to Secretary Paige requesting the Department of Education's comments on the draft report, *Head Start and Even Start: Greater Collaboration Needed on Measures of Adult Education and Literacy (GAO-02-348)*. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

The report presents a comprehensive discussion of the similarities and differences between the Even Start Family Literacy program and the Head Start program. It does not, however, include a discussion of adult education programs and the purpose of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). Since the recommendation in the report is related to the development of adult education measures, the inclusion of background on the AEFLA would provide the reader with a useful context for the recommendation.

In addition, the report compares the goals, the administrative structures, the evaluations, and the populations served by Even Start and Head Start. The report states "while both programs are required to provide education and literacy services to children and their families, Head Start's goal is to prepare children to enter school while Even Start's goal is to improve family literacy and education." I would like to point out that Even Start's family literacy goal encompasses school readiness for participating children. Even Start provides family-centered education services for families that include children from birth through age seven, and school readiness for participating preschool age children is an important aspect of improving the educational level of a family. In addition, all States are required to develop and use indicators of program quality that include an indicator related to children's reading ability or reading readiness.

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Page 2 - Marnie S. Shaul

The report also includes a recommendation for improved coordination between Head Start and Even Start on performance goals and indicators for adult education and literacy. Given the large number of Head Start parents in need of adult education services, I agree that such coordination is needed. The Even Start program has coordinated at the Federal and State levels with the adult education community, and many States have established common adult education performance indicators for Even Start and AEFLA programs. Therefore, we believe that the Head Start Bureau should coordinate with the Department's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, not just with Even Start, in its development of adult education-related performance indicators.

If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at (202) 401-0113.

Sincerely,

Susan B. Neuman, Ed.D.

Appendix II: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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Sherri Doughty (202) 512-7273, doughtys@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to those named above, Tiffany Boiman, James Rebbe, Stan Stenersen, and Jill Peterson made key contributions to this report.

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Related GAO Products

Bilingual Education: Four Overlapping Programs Could Be Consolidated GAO-01-657. Washington, D.C.: May 14, 2001.

Early Childhood Programs: Characteristics Affect the Availability of School Readiness Information. GAO/HEHS-00-38. Washington, D.C.: February 28, 2000.

Early Childhood Programs: The Use of Impact Evaluations to Assess Program Effects. GAO-01-542. Washington, D.C.: April 16, 2001.

Early Education and Care: Overlap Indicates Need to Assess Crosscutting Programs. GAO/HEHS-00-78. Washington, D.C.: April 28, 2000.

Evaluations of Even Start Family Literacy Program Effectiveness. GAO/HEHS-00-58R. Washington, D.C.: March 8, 2000.

Head Start: Challenges in Monitoring Program Quality and Demonstrating Results. GAO/HEHS-98-186. Washington, D.C.: June 30, 1998.

Head Start Programs: Participant Characteristics, Services, and Funding. GAO/HEHS-98-65. Washington, D.C.: March 31,1998.

Head Start: Research Provides Little Information on Impact of Current Program. GAO/HEHS-97-59. Washington, D.C.: April 15, 1997.

Title I Preschool Education: More Children Served but Gauging Effect on School Readiness Difficult. GAO/HEHS-00-171. Washington, D.C.: September 20, 2000.

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