When evaluating the effectiveness of programs, logic models help to illustrate how programs are intended to address specified outcomes. A logic model provides a visual representation of the causal relationships between specific program activities (inputs) and the program outputs and participant outcomes as well as the role of outside influential factors.

Although we could not locate a formal Head Start logic model, researchers working on the federally-sponsored Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) have developed a conceptual model which highlights the relationships between Head Start’s core program elements and stated goals.\(^1\)

**Conceptual Model for FACES 2009**

The FACES model depicts a pathway in which community, state, and national environments, parent and family characteristics and child characteristics (outside influential factors) as well as the Head Start program, classrooms and teachers (program resources and activities), all contribute to the child’s growth and development and ultimately the child’s school readiness.
Long-term outcomes

Notably, the FACES conceptual model, Head Start legislation, and regulations all specify school readiness as the primary program goal rather than longer-term outcomes in adolescence or adulthood. Although some research finds that on average children who participate in early childhood education programs such as Head Start demonstrate better outcomes in adulthood (e.g. higher high school graduation rate, lower welfare use, better health outcomes\(^1\)), these potential benefits are beyond the scope of Head Start’s program goal of helping children become ready for school. For this reason, evaluations of Head Start’s success that are based on long-term outcomes may fail to capture how well the program achieves its primary goal. Thus, proper interpretation of the logic or conceptual model plays an important role in evaluating a program and measuring its success.

Subgroup outcomes

The FACES conceptual model includes child race/ethnicity, disability status, parent language and ethnicity, and community/neighborhood characteristics, recognizing that these factors play a role in achieving school readiness. Head Start legislation and regulations mandate specific attention to and support for diverse populations such as dual language learners and children with disabilities, both at the federal level (Office of Head Start) and at the Head Start agency level.\(^3\) Despite the acknowledgment that these factors influence a child’s school readiness (e.g. in the Head Start impact study subgroup analysis), the FACES conceptual model does not specify the ways or mechanisms in which they influence child outcomes. Research documents a racial/ethnic gap in school readiness (as measured by educational outcomes) which is not fully accounted for by family income.\(^4\) Therefore, it is important to investigate these racial/ethnic disparities in an effort to understand the factors that drive them.

Sources & notes: