

Spending deal revives Head Start program

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The proposed \$1.1 trillion spending bill rolled out by House-Senate negotiators on Monday night restores funding to the Head Start program, but is the program actually worth the cost?

Proposed in the 1,582 page budget deal is an \$8.6 billion investment in Head Start, a key domestic priority for the Obama administration.

The funding is a \$1 billion — or 13 percent increase — from current spending levels.

Head Start began 49 years ago as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” While the goals of the program have changed over time, becoming progressively less ambitious, the current goal of the program is to promote “the school readiness of young children in low-income families.”

Primary overview of the program established by the the Department of Health and Human Services in 1985 and then by the non-partisan General Accounting Office in 1997 proved to be inconclusive.

Current literature remains challenged by “sloppy study and amateur methodological errors so riddle the literature that any claims about the success or failure of the program are not convincing”, according to the Cato Institute.

Dr. W. Steven Barnett and Dr. Jason T. Hustedt of the National Institute for Early Education Research conclude, in their 2005 study “Head Start’s Lasting Benefits,” that “Head Start’s benefits for children seem likely to be only modest in size.”

“One constant is that initial gains in IQ fade over time,” the pair found.

Valerie E. Lee and Susana Loeb, professors of education in the School of Education at the University of Michigan, claim, in “Where do Head Start Attendees End Up? One Reason Why Preschool Effects Fade Out,” “though the program may be seen as a major solution for many of the problems affecting children growing up in poverty, the facts suggest that stratification in school quality by geographic condition — a practice our government allows by way of local (districting) control is the real issue.”