

Richmond Times-Dispatch

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Head Start is more than an academic program

Editor, Times-Dispatch:

Your recent editorial, "Faith Heals," portrayed a superficial and biased view of Head Start. You argue broadly that Head Start is a failure, but you offer little evidence to support that view. The fact that the only evidence cited in the editorial referred to cognitive testing indicates an incomplete or a misguided understanding of the function of Head Start.

It is true that Head Start is intended to help disadvantaged children prepare for school, but this goal is accomplished in many more ways than simply academic instruction. Your article failed to mention anything about other indicators of program success — for example, the social and emotional development of the children, the health outcomes and the positive impacts on parenting.

Most young children in Head Start thrive because of the comprehensive services (health, mental health and parenting) that they receive — it has never been an entirely academic program. If we are truly concerned with the long-term success of disadvantaged children, then we should find a way to extend these comprehensive services beyond the early years and into the elementary and secondary years. These additional supports empower parents to provide a firmer foundation for their children, which is a necessary requirement for long-term success in school and life.

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