

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

April Britton: Hello, my name is April. I am a parent of a five-year-old at Dumfries Elementary in Dumfries, Virginia. He is my second child in Head Start. My experience with Head Start actually started three years ago when my daughter first attended. We enjoy doing things together as a family, but Head Start has also helped us to encourage our learning together as a family. It's helped us to take every opportunity, such as going to the grocery store, shopping, getting dressed in the morning --

...turning those experiences into things of learning, like teaching my child to help me search for the fruits and vegetables, healthy learning, numbers, counting. Simple things such as going up and down the stairs with my child has become a learning experience. He's learned his numbers, his alphabet. He's also learned confidence, as -- so did my daughter.

We actually had an experience yesterday with Saint Patrick's Day, and she reminded her brother, who is the Head Start attendee now, of what she did on Saint Patrick's Day with her teacher and how they learned about counting through going on a scavenger hunt and searching for things. And this was something that took place three years ago, but even today she talks about it as though it was yesterday. Her -- as a person, she bloomed during Head Start.

She started off Head Start being a child who was very shy, very withdrawn, very scared, and now she is a first grader, at Dumfries Elementary also, and now she's very outgoing. And the same thing I see happening with my son Tonio, who has become a very outgoing boy. And I have a three-year-old who is hoping to attend next year and is extremely excited because he hears his brother and his sister talking about how much fun they have and all the things they get to do and the things that they've learned.

And simple things like breakfast has turned into another growing experience for all of us because they like to talk about the healthy foods that they eat. And if they see someone else eating something that's not exceptionally healthy, they're very quick to point out, "Oh, you shouldn't eat that; that's not healthy. Our teacher tells us we should have fruits and vegetables, and you need to eat your grains," you know. Things you usually wouldn't hear four- and five-year-olds talking about, they're very excited in talking about.

We've also done lots of things like the weekly activity sheets that they give us. It helps me as a parent to realize that little things I can do with my child can become big things in the long run -- teaching them to be excited about learning. And the green sheets are something that all parents should make sure to do because not only does it help with your child's learning, it also helps with volunteer hours -- with your volunteering if you're not able to get into the classroom because you're working, like -- I do work full time. It helps me to still be part of my child's learning experience.

I know what they're doing in school because it follows over to home activities in the evenings. So I'm still able to participate and be an active participant in my child's learning. I also get to do things with my child one-on-one, but there are things in the family activity kit that helps me to include my other children so I don't always feel like I'm only focusing on the one child.

As a single parent, it's hard to feel like you can make learning experiences valuable and special to all of your children, but these activities that they send home in the family kits help me to build my confidence also as a parent. I've also participated during the time that my child was in the Head Start, my older daughter. I was on the Policy Council, which was very -- very joyful experience for me because it was also something I was able to put on my resume when I started looking for a job, that I participated in the Policy Council.

I learned a little bit about how the budget was made, the decisions for different things that were going to impact not

just my child's school but the whole program together. And I also got to be kind of behind the scenes to see all the work that is involved in helping our kids learn. And I know that there's talk about taking away funding for Head Start, and that saddens me because if I didn't have Head Start I would not have been able to work, number one, because that was also kind of almost a time where I knew my child was going to be safe when he was in Head Start.

He was going to be learning and not just sitting at home with some babysitter, you know, watching TV all day. He was at school learning. My daughter was at school learning. It gave me peace of mind to know that they were being taken care of. And I tell people all the time I would trust the people in Head Start with my children's lives. They do such a wonderful job with the kids. They help them bloom like flowers. And I know I'm rambling, going from one thing to another, but I'm very excited. I love Head Start.

It's something that I can only speak positive about. I don't think I've ever had a negative experience. Whenever my daughter was in school at Head Start, I would go and volunteer because during that time I wasn't working, and I would go into the classroom and get to see all the fun things that they were doing. And I wish that whenever I was younger there was a program like that, and I think my -- my future would have been a lot brighter.

And I hope that they don't ever think about taking away funding because without that people like myself who work in the school system but cannot afford to put my child in a daycare or a preschool -- if it wasn't for Head Start, my child would be behind when he started kindergarten because I can't afford to put him into a preschool. And now I know that my child has got that jump ahead for when he starts kindergarten. I know that he's going to be right in there with the other kids who did get to go to preschool because he was in a preschool.

Head Start is probably better than preschools. They turn everything into a learning experience. And I just think that the best thing that we can do is to support Head Start. Write government, write whoever you need to. Be involved. You know, they have computer classes for parents, sewing classes for parents, the Policy Council, family days. There's just -- it's such a family atmosphere from your worker right down to your teachers.

Everyone together, it's like one big, happy family, and that's probably the best way to describe Head Start.
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