

Region VII Head Start Association Position on Head Start Reauthorization

Region VII Head Start Association supports and will advocate for the following position in the reauthorization of the Head Start program. This position is based on legislation considered in the last session of Congress and on issues we anticipate to emerge in the current session.

- **Head Start should remain a federal to local program.** In its nearly 40 years of existence, Head Start has been continually showcased as a model program for preparing young children from low-income families for success in school and in life. Head Start is constantly improving through its emphasis on research-based best practices, professional development, and high quality standards. To dismantle this structure in favor of an untested alternative (e.g., moving to state control of administration and funding) would compromise the quality and effectiveness of the program. Head Start has demonstrated connections to state systems in early care and education through the support of the Head Start State Collaboration Offices in each state. Additionally, the federal to local structure promotes community decision-making and collaboration, and ensures that dollars go directly into services for children, not into state administration. The current system of funding allows for maximum resources to deliver program services to children and families.
- **Maintain parent involvement as a critical and unique component of Head Start.** Parents and family members are empowered for lifelong learning and economic success through participation in program governance activities, as well as activities that support their child's learning experience.
- **Head Start embraces accountability through effective quality measures, including the performance standards and a rigorous monitoring system.** Federal Head Start Performance Standards are among the most rigorous in the country and set uniform national benchmarks for individual programs and their partners. Programs are monitored through an intensive review process using these standards, and poor-performing programs are replaced as necessary.
- **The National Reporting System (NRS) should be evaluated for revisions to include comprehensive child development needs.** 100% of Region VII grantees and 98% of grantees nationally participated in the NRS and demonstrated progress in meeting child outcomes. This NRS data is one of the many pieces of information used by Head Start programs for individual program planning and program improvement. NRS measures should include items to address the comprehensive nature of child development and to create a more credible, reliable, and valid instrument.

- **Head Start teachers should have degrees in early childhood education, but funding must be provided to help programs reach that goal.** Beginning in 1998, new funding allowed Head Start to meet the Congressional goal of 50% of teachers attaining associate's degrees by 2003. Continued funding is necessary for all teachers to obtain AA and BA degrees and to address equitable compensation and retention of degreed teachers.
- **Eligibility should be updated so more families at the margin of poverty can be served.** Eligibility guidelines have not been raised since 1965, and are far below the levels generally considered to be a living wage. Children in these families need Head Start to mitigate the impacts of living in poverty. In many Region VII rural communities children and families do not have access to quality, affordable early childhood education programs.
- **Early Head Start should be expanded.** Research clearly demonstrates that the earliest intervention has the greatest impact on children's lives, but only 3% of eligible infants and toddlers are being served by Early Head Start. Additional funding should be targeted to Early Head Start, and qualified programs should be permitted to serve more children birth to three if they are already reaching all eligible 3- and 4-year olds in their communities.
- **Continuous program improvement can be further enhanced through quality initiatives.** Adequate funding is necessary for successful implementation of Head Start Bureau, Administration and legislative initiatives.

