



## THE NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

### HEAD START IN THE TRANSITION AGENDA: CORNERSTONE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

#### OUR VISION FOR HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

- Head Start and Early Head Start (collectively “Head Start”) are crucial to America’s long-term success. Research has consistently shown that the comprehensive services provided by these programs substantially improves the lives of children and families living in poverty.
- As the country moves deeper into recession, the need for Head Start services will only increase. Yet today, Head Start agencies are reeling from years of funding cuts and countless unnecessary and burdensome requirements.
- For the first time in years, we have an opportunity for a collaborative and visionary approach that will allow the Head Start program to reach its full potential. Our hope is that the Obama Administration will work with NHS A to build upon the decades of federal investment in Head Start totaling nearly \$110 billion to expand and strengthen the safety net for our neediest children and families by:
  - Injecting needed funds into Head Start programs quickly through economic stimulus and long-term through adequate appropriations;
  - Encouraging states to use Head Start agencies as the foundation for birth to 5 early childhood education systems by removing legal barriers to integration of state and federal funds;
  - Providing visionary and cooperative leadership at the Office of Head Start (“OHS”) that collaborates and consults with NHS A and the affected community long before new guidance, interpretations, and regulations become public, as required by the Head Start Act; and
  - Eliminating as quickly as possible duplicative and unnecessary programmatic requirements.
- We look forward with great excitement to working with the new Administration and agree with *Barack Obama and Joe Biden’s Plan for Lifetime Success through Education* that “we should invest more” in Head Start and Early Head Start.<sup>1</sup>

#### WHAT IS HEAD START?

- Head Start is the cornerstone for early childhood services in this country. Since 1965 for Head Start and 1994 for Early Head Start, these programs have served more than 25 million low-income and at-risk children and families by providing child care, education, health, nutrition, social, family support, and other services.



- The Head Start model is a comprehensive one, and by empowering families, helping to alleviate poverty, and engaging actively in communities, it goes far beyond solely providing early childhood education.
- As the safety net for early childhood services, Head Start acts as the only reliable funding stream for these services. This is important because over the last several years during budget crises, many states have cut pre-K funding while others have never provided it at all.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- Head Start works. Recent studies show that the benefits of Head Start include the following:
  - Our society receives nearly \$9 in benefits for every \$1 dollar invested in Head Start children, according to the preliminary results of a longitudinal study of more than 600 Head Start graduates in San Bernardino County, California.<sup>2</sup> These projected benefits include increased earnings, employment, and family stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education.
  - In addition, Head Start has been shown to benefit participating children and society at large by reducing crime and its costs to crime victims.<sup>3</sup>
  - Substantial research demonstrates that Head Start children experience increased achievement test scores and favorable long-term effects in terms of less grade repetition and special education, and higher school graduation rates.<sup>4</sup>
  - Recent research suggests that Head Start reduced the mortality rates for 5- to 9-year-old children from causes that could have been affected by their participation in Head Start when they were 3- and 4-year-olds.<sup>5</sup>
  - Children attending Head Start have increased access to dental care and have higher immunizations rates than non-Head Start children do.<sup>6</sup>
  - Early Head Start children at age 3 had larger vocabularies and a higher level of social-emotional development than their peers did.<sup>7</sup>
- In addition, reliable research demonstrates that quality early childhood programs, such as Head Start, are effective as part of a smart workforce development strategy and as anti-poverty tools.<sup>8</sup>
  - Head Start's emphasis on parental involvement contributes to positive growth and the upward mobility of Head Start parents by helping to move them out of poverty.<sup>9</sup>
  - The national Early Head Start Impact Study found that Early Head Start parents were more likely than control group parents to ever be employed or participate in an education or job training program.<sup>10</sup>
  - Early Head Start parents were also more likely than control group parents to work more hours each week and participate in any education or training program.<sup>11</sup>
- In short, Head Start empowers families, helps to alleviate poverty, improves health, and prepares children as they grow.



## CHALLENGES TO HEAD START

- Congress showed its support for the program when it reauthorized Head Start last year in December (2007). Yet at that time, the programmatic requirements grew significantly. Congress's additional statutory requirements call for copious additions to the already existing implementing regulations.
- Before the addition of any new items from reauthorization, there were already approximately 1,800 program regulations. They are exhaustive and go far beyond the requirements of typical federal grant programs by focusing on prescriptive operational details.
- While in theory the content of many of these requirements is acceptable, they have become burdensome to day-to-day operations and deny Head Start programs the ability to tailor their operations based on best practices, common sense, and in some cases, state requirements.
- Head Start agencies must be in compliance with each and every one of these hundreds of requirements at all times and are extensively monitored by the Office of Head Start ("OHS"). Agencies across the country report spending increasing amounts of time trying to ensure compliance for monitoring purposes at the cost of serving children and families. As a result, Head Start agencies' effectiveness is lessened.
- In addition, for at least the past few years, there has been a compromised relationship between the Head Start grant community and the Administration for Children and Families' ("ACF's") OHS, embodied by limited interaction, unclear guidance, and lack of community input.
- At the same time, Head Start has been short- or underfunded for years now. The program had a FY 2008 appropriations cut and experienced a 13 percent real cut in funding from FY 2002 to 2008.
- This combination of excessively burdensome requirements, poor interactions with OHS, and inadequate funding is, at best, preventing the Head Start program from working as well as it can, and at worst, putting low-income children and families—populations most in need—at risk.
- Further, as a result of its inadequate funding and burdensome regulatory requirements, Head Start has, in certain circumstances, become isolated rather than effectively integrated and leveraged in cutting-edge collaborative models.

## CLEAR SOLUTIONS

- Head Start should be the cornerstone of any early childhood efforts by the federal government. Over the past 43 years, the federal government has invested billions of dollars into Head Start agencies. These agencies have proven track records of high-quality services, developed infrastructure and significant expertise. The lessons learned over the years in the Head Start program are invaluable.



- To strengthen Head Start and build upon it, appropriate levels of funding for the Head Start program must be ensured, states should be encouraged to leverage Head Start's assets, the program should have visionary and collaborative leadership, and the program's duplicative and unnecessary requirements should be eliminated.

## **Boosting Funding**

- Head Start desperately needs a \$1.3 billion boost from the pending economic stimulus package. This \$1.3 billion would include \$832 million for one-time funds to cover critical items for Head Start programs (such as deferred maintenance, upgrading technologies, and a down payment to help teachers meet the new B.A. degree requirements), and \$500 million for new construction of facilities to replace crumbling ones.
- Head Start also needs an increase of \$832 million over its current appropriation for FY 2009. More than 1 million children and families served by Head Start and the 215,000 teachers and staff working in Head Start agencies across the country need this just to prevent additional Head Start reductions. This would reverse the FY 2008 appropriations cut, meet the FY 2008 authorized funding target, and begin to make up for the 13 percent real cut in funding experienced by Head Start from FY 2002 to 2008.
- Finally, for FY 2010, Head Start needs at least a \$3.3 billion increase, which will help make Head Start whole by allowing Head Start's funding to keep pace with inflation and enabling the program to begin to meet the promises of the incoming Obama Administration to quadruple the number of children in Early Head Start, increase Head Start funding and improve quality for both.

## **Leveraging Head Start's Assets**

- The Administration should encourage states to use Head Start agencies as the foundation for birth to 5 systems of early childhood education and remove legal barriers to the integration of state and federal funds.
- Also, Head Start agencies should be categorically eligible for any federal early childhood education funding allocated to states, allowing more children to be served using existing infrastructure and resources.

## **Strengthening Visionary and Collaborative Leadership**

- Visionary and collaborative leadership at OHS is needed. NHSA and the affected community should be consulted long before new guidance, interpretations, and regulations become public, as required by the Head Start Act.

## **Eliminating Unnecessary or Duplicative Requirements**

- To ease or lift the burdensome requirements, the existing Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 C.F.R. § 1301 *et seq.*) — as well as the pending changes to these regulations — must be carefully revised with an eye towards lessening programs' burdens. Such revision will require extensive input on the front end from the Head Start community—something that has been met with resistance over the past few years and is now required by the amended Head Start Act.



- During this process, it is critical that the decision-making role of the Policy Council, a hallmark of Head Start programs, endures as new regulations are promulgated.
- Importantly, eliminating unnecessary or duplicative requirements does not mean that agencies will compromise quality. Rather, this streamlining of burdensome restrictions means that agencies will be able to better encourage promising approaches rather than being bogged down by cumbersome unnecessary and duplicative requirements.

## CONCLUSION

- The future of America's children is at stake. With a strong birth to 5 early childhood education program built upon Head Start's strong foundation, it will be possible to serve every needy child in America. The choice is ours and the time is now.
- NHSA looks forward to working closely with the Obama Administration to build upon Head Start's successes and help all children and families—especially those most at-risk—achieve.
- NHSA hopes to further address these issues with the Obama Administration Transition Team. To do so, please contact Michael McGrady at (703) 739-0875 or [mmcgrady@nhsa.org](mailto:mmcgrady@nhsa.org).

*The National Head Start Association ([www.nhsa.org](http://www.nhsa.org)) is a private not-for-profit membership organization dedicated exclusively to meeting the needs of Head Start children and their families. It represents more than 1 million children, 200,000 staff and nearly 2,600 Head Start programs in the United States. The Association provides support for the entire Head Start community by advocating for policies that strengthen services to Head Start children and their families; by providing extensive training and professional development to Head Start staff; and by developing and disseminating research, information, and resources that enrich Head Start program delivery.*

<sup>1</sup> [www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/PreK-12EducationFactSheet.pdf](http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/PreK-12EducationFactSheet.pdf), page 3, accessed on 12/3/2008.

<sup>2</sup> Meier, J. (2003, June 20). Interim Report. Kindergarten Readiness Study: Head Start Success. Preschool Service Department, San Bernardino County, California.

<sup>3</sup> Fight Crime: Invest In Kids. (2004). Quality Pre-Kindergarten: Key to Crime Prevention and School Success. Available at <http://www.fightcrime.org/> on July 23, 2004, p. 1; Garces, E., Thomas, D., and Currie, J. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *The American Economic Review*. 92(4): 1011.

<sup>4</sup> Barnett, W. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows. Presentation at a Science and Public Policy Briefing Sponsored by the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences; Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2005, June). Executive Summary, Head Start Impact Study First Year Findings, xv; Currie, J. and Thomas, D. (1995, June). Does Head Start Make a Difference?. *The American Economic Review*. 85, 3: 360.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002, June). Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start, Executive Summary, p. 3; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). Research Practice, Talking Points: Overall Findings Presentation "Long Version." Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Slide 12.

<sup>8</sup> Heckman, J. (2006, July 17). *The Technology and neuroscience of skill formation*. Slide presentation to the Invest in Kids Working Group, Center for Economic Development, Partnership for America's Economic Success. Retrieved from

[http://www.ced.org/docs/ivk/iikmeeting\\_slides200607heckman.pdf](http://www.ced.org/docs/ivk/iikmeeting_slides200607heckman.pdf); Meier, J. (2003, June 20). Interim Report. Kindergarten Readiness Study: Head Start Success. Preschool Service Department, San Bernardino County, California; Oyemade, U., V.

Washington, and D. Gullo. (1989). The Relationship between Head Start Parental Involvement and the Economic and Social Self-Sufficiency of Head Start Families. *Journal of Negro Education*. 58, 1, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Oyemade, U., V. Washington, and D. Gullo. (1989). The Relationship between Head Start Parental Involvement and the Economic and Social Self-Sufficiency of Head Start Families. *Journal of Negro Education*. 58, 1, 13.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. (2004). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The impacts of Early Head Start, Volume II: Final technical report appendices*. Washington, DC.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*