



## National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

*Voice for the children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers*

---

### BRIEFING PAPER FOR OBAMA TRANSITION TEAM MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START

#### Summary of Recommendations

The toil and sweat of migrant and seasonal agricultural workers puts safe, healthy, and affordable food on the nation's tables and helps keep our economy strong. Yet, despite their tireless efforts to make a better life for their children, many families urgently need fundamental support services—medical, dental, mental health, nutrition, housing, and education—to help improve the long-term well-being of their families. Below please find a summary of recommendations for strengthening the MSHS program:

1. Engage the MSHS community in a transparent and inclusive process to develop regulations required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act. Convene a working group of early childhood experts, MSHS practitioners and parents to work with the Department in crafting new. Any new regulations must take into consideration accommodations for MSHS programs so that services to children and families will not be disrupted.
2. Engage the MSHS community in developing the MSHS study required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act: the Secretary issue a competitive RFP requiring that a qualified applicant have a demonstrated history of conducting relevant evaluation and research as well as experience providing services to migrant and seasonal farmworker children and families.
3. Increase Head Start Funding to Allow for the Expansion of MSHS: The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act puts a Head Start funding formula in place that would provide up to \$50 million in additional funding for MSHS over the next five years (\$10 million/year) – IF AND ONLY IF – the annual Head Start appropriation is sufficient to provide a cost of living increase for all Head Start grantees.

MSHS programs are local providers of high quality childcare. We are experts in infant, toddler, and preschool care and education and we understand the unique strengths and challenges within the migrant farmworker culture. We partner with other local social and health service agencies to enhance and provide comprehensive services. We prepare children to enter school ready to learn and succeed. We help parents learn about the customs and values of local communities, learn English, and become strong advocates of their children's continuing education. Attached please find additional information and details regarding how MSHS works, legislative history and recommendations.



## HOW MIGRANT AND SEASONAL HEAD START (MSHS) WORKS

There are an estimated 3 to 5 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families in the United States. Within the family, the children are the first to feel the affects that the constant uprooting creates in their families' lives. For migrant and seasonal farmworkers, getting their children out of the fields is a starting point. Migrant and seasonal parents understand that the best opportunities for their children lie in education: learning English to find better jobs, gaining basic skills, and finishing high school.

The Migrant Head Start model was designed to address the unique needs and lifestyles of farmworker families who on average migrate 2-3 times a year in pursuit of agricultural work. Families tend to travel in three (3) traditional migrant streams (map attached) leaving their "home base" states which include Florida, Texas and California to pursue harvesting and processing work to the north and mid west including Washington, Oregon, Michigan, Ohio and northeast from Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York and Massachusetts. The majority of farmworker children and families are of Hispanic ethnicity and their primary language is Spanish.

MSHS was established in response to the needs of migrant and seasonal farmworker families; a population that has been and continues to be marginalized in the areas of health, education, housing and environment risks. In most states, local childcare resources are not accessible to migrant and seasonal farmworkers and may not even be available when migrant and seasonal farmworkers arrive in a community. This is especially true when it comes to childcare for infants and toddlers. When resources are not accessible or available, parents have no choice but to take their children with them to the fields where they are exposed to pesticides, hazardous equipment, extreme heat and other health dangers.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs serve children from farmworker families that on average earn less than \$10,000 a year and are without health benefits. Operating in 39 states, these programs serve 37,000 migrant children and nearly 2,500 seasonal children from birth to compulsory school age, with two-thirds of the children being under the age of three. MSHS programs provide services 5-7 days per week, inclusive of holidays, and operate for 8 to 14 hours per day. There are over 450 MSHS centers across the country, located mostly in rural areas of high agricultural work. Local MSHS centers were some of the first programs in the Head Start community to provide transportation for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY



Head Start was launched in 1965 and Migrant Head Start was started in 1969 to ensure that the children of migrant farmworkers had access to the same educational advantages available to other low income children through Head Start.

In 1998, as part of the Coats Human Services Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-285), Congress expanded Migrant Head Start to include services to seasonal farmworker families recognizing that children of farmworkers, whether migrants or seasonal, faced many of the same challenges and barriers to service. Unfortunately the expansion of Migrant Head Start to include seasonal workers was not accompanied by an increase in funding to serve the newly eligible children.

In 1998, Congress also mandated that a study of the MSHS programs be conducted to determine the number of eligible unserved children and how services were being provided. In response to this mandate, HHS produced *The Descriptive Study of Seasonal Farmworker Families* in September 2001 which reported that only 19% of eligible migrant and seasonal children were being served. At that point in time Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs were funded along with American Indian Head Start, children with disabilities, technical assistance, program review, and research and demonstration out of a 13 percent statutory set-aside from the annual Head Start Appropriation.

In FY 2001, when the HHS study was released, MSHS received \$244 million which was 3.9% of the total Head Start appropriation for the year. Funding for the MSHS program did not increase as a percentage of the overall Head Start appropriation between FY 2001 and FY 2006, despite the findings of the 2001 HHS study and report language that House and Senate appropriators included in the annual Labor, HHS Appropriations bills calling for HHS to address the issues of inadequate funding.

In 2005, in response to pressure from several Members of Congress, the Office of Head Start announced that \$35 million would be made available to qualified MSHS grantees to serve an additional 4,000 migrant children. These Head Start expansion funds were awarded in 2007 and as the attached funding chart illustrates, MSHS programs enjoyed their first significant funding boost in FY 2007.

In 2007, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (P.L. 110-134) reauthorizing and amending Head Start was signed into law. The Act puts a new Head Start funding formula in place that would provide up to \$50 million in additional funding for MSHS over the next five years (\$10 million/year) – IF AND ONLY IF – the annual Head Start appropriation is sufficient to provide a cost of living increase for all Head Start grantees. The language included in the Act demonstrates the clear Congressional intent to direct additional resources to MSHS programs.

In addition, the Act calls for the Secretary to undertake an MSHS Program Study to collect, report and share data with the goal of putting in place a coordinated system to ensure that MSHS programs have access to resources to adequately reach and serve



eligible children and their families. In addition, the Act recognizes the MSHS as a national program, provides for a Migrant and Seasonal Collaboration Director, and establishes a national technical and training system.

### **Recommendations Designed to Strengthen Migrant and Seasonal Head Start**

The National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association (NMSHSA), was incorporated in 2001. Our membership consists of a diverse group of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Directors, Staff, Parents, and Friends, all united for one common mission – “to advocate for and support quality services for migrant and seasonal farm worker children and their families.” The Association serves as the premier advocate for resources, the disseminator of information to the general public and the facilitator of partnerships to help member agencies provide quality, comprehensive services to all farmworker children and their families.

The NMSHSA worked with Congress to see that provisions were included in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 to direct additional resources to MSHS programs and to put in place systems within HHS to ensure that MSHS programs can effectively reach and serve the children that the program was established to serve.

1. **Engage the MSHS community in a transparent and inclusive process to develop regulations required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act.**

Convene a working group of early childhood experts, MSHS practitioners and parents to work with the Department in crafting new. Any new regulations must take into consideration accommodations for MSHS programs so that services to children and families will not be disrupted. It is imperative that continuity of services in these rural areas be maintained while meeting the intent of the law. For MSHS programs, the criteria used to determine any and all new regulations should take into account the following:

- length of operating period for each MSHS program (high impact, short-term, medium term, and/or typical regional Head Start operating period);
- summer operations (fewer resources are available during summer months as this is when educational institutions and other agencies typically have reduced staffing);
- operations during the summer season are limited or no LEA services available to manage children with disabilities makes it difficult for MSHS programs to have 10% of children with diagnosed disabilities;
- MSHS Programs that rely heavily upon seasonal teaching staff tend to experience high rates of employee turnover yearly. Many MSHS programs have teaching staff whose first language is not English and take many years to complete A.S. degree requirements. MSHS teachers who do achieve higher degrees of academic achievement



leave for teaching positions which offer longer periods of annual employment; and

- Timely acquisition of children/family records which are tied to service delivery outcomes can be affected by reduced summer staffing and services.
- MSHS program designs are generally complex in nature and sometimes cover large geographic territories, feature seasonal employment, intensive extended-day services, high proportions of infants/toddlers and almost universal enrollment of families whose language

2. **Engage the MSHS community in developing the MSHS study required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act:** In calling for the study, Congress was recognizing that there is no system in place to accurately quantify the demand for MSHS. Based on previous experiences, the NMSHSA has concerns about who conducts the study, how it is conducted and how the information gathered is used. Past studies conducted by federal agencies had limited understanding of the migrant farmworker community. In order to avoid repeating these mistakes, the NMSHSA recommends that the Secretary issue a competitive RFP requiring that a qualified applicant have a demonstrated history of conducting relevant evaluation and research as well as experience providing services to migrant and seasonal farmworker children and families. In addition, the Secretary should convene an advisory committee, as called for in the legislation authorizing the study, to work with the independent contractor in developing and implementing the MSHS Program Study.

3. **Increase Head Start Funding to Allow for the Expansion of MSHS:** The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act puts a Head Start funding formula in place that would provide up to \$50 million in additional funding for MSHS over the next five years (\$10 million/year) – IF AND ONLY IF – the annual Head Start appropriation is sufficient to provide a cost of living increase for all Head Start grantees.

We urge the Administration to support the \$7.1 billion funding level that the House and Senate Appropriators recommended for FY 2009. This funding level represents the first significant funding increase in Head Start in seven years and would provide a cost of living increase for all Head Start grantees, as well as an additional \$7 million in MSHS funding. While the NMSHSA recognizes that the President's FY 2009 budget request for Head Start falls well below what is needed to ensure that all eligible children can access Head Start, it is an important step in the right direction.

In support of our colleagues at the National Head Start Association, we recommend that at minimum the FY 2010 Budget request \$10 billion for Head Start to support the quality improvements authorized in the reauthorization, an



expansion of services for all Head Start program. This increase would allow HHS to provide a \$10 million increase in MSHS funding and a cost of living for all Head Start grantees.

### **Conclusion**

The families we serve believe in the American dream and work hard to achieve it. Everyday they work to put safe, healthy, and affordable food on America's tables. The Head Start we provide children saves public education funds by sending children who are prepared to succeed, with pride in their native languages and cultures, and a strong desire and foundation to be the future leaders of our country.