

The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act

Detailed Summary

The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act reauthorizes Head Start through 2008; strengthens the Head Start workforce; strengthens Head Start educational performance standards to better align with the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills incoming kindergarten students are expected to demonstrate; specifically improves Head Start preliteracy efforts; improves Head Start coordination and collaboration to more effectively coordinate state and local programs and resources to meet the needs of Head Start children and families; expands access to Head Start for all preschoolers; expands Early Head Start to more than double the number of infants and toddlers served over the next five years; and, improves program accountability.

The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act:

STRENGTHENS THE HEAD START WORKFORCE—

Strengthens the Head Start workforce by requiring a highly-qualified and well-compensated teacher with a bachelor's degree in every Head Start classroom within the next 8 years. Currently, only one-quarter of Head Start teachers hold a bachelor's degree, and compensation for such teachers is half that of kindergarten teachers. Current law requires half of Head Start teachers to hold at least an Associates degree. Under the Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act,

- All newly hired Head Start teachers must have a minimum of an Associate's degree (within 1 year after enactment)
- All classrooms must include at least one teacher with a Bachelor's degree (within 8 years or by a date specified by the Secretary).
- Each state shall have a plan in place to meet such requirements and Head Start agencies shall provide to the Secretary a report indicating the number and percentage of classroom instructors with child development associate credentials and associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degrees.
- All full-time staff must have a professional development plan, which includes a plan for teachers with an Associate's degree to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Facilitates Head Start's Ability to Attract and Retain High Quality Teachers:

- In order to comply with the minimum educational requirements of the Act, \$X billion is authorized over the next 5 years to be proportionately distributed to each Head Start agency in the same manner as such agencies receive their regular Head Start funding and cost-of-living adjustments.
- Each Head Start agency shall develop a plan to raise salaries of classroom teachers taking into consideration training, level of education, and experience to match average salaries of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers employed by the local school district in which the Head Start agency is located.
- The Secretary may use training funds to assist Head Start agencies located in high cost areas to help reduce the discrepancy between salaries that Head Start agencies can afford to offer and salaries for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers that are offered by local school districts.
- Of the \$X billion for high quality teachers, ____ percent shall be made available to the State Head Start Quality Improvement and Collaboration office. The state office shall work

in coordination with the state Department of Education, the state agency with oversight over state higher education, a representative of the state Head Start association so that each year more Head Start staff are working toward an associate's degree and more Head Start staff with an associate's degree are working toward a baccalaureate degree. Funds shall be used to—

- (i) assist 2 year community colleges and 4 year institutions of higher education to develop articulation agreements;
 - (ii) award grants to higher education institutions to develop model early childhood education (ECE) programs, which include a practicum or internship for students to spend time in a Head Start or prekindergarten classroom for a minimum of six months; and
 - (iii) provide grants to higher education institutions and Head Start agencies to cover the cost of attendance for qualified Head Start and preschool staff (including preschool staff in child care centers) to enroll in courses leading to an ECE degree.
- Qualified staff are staff who have been employed by a Head Start center or preschool for more than one program year. Such staff shall agree to continue teaching in their Head Start or child care provider for a minimum of three years upon completion of an ECE degree program. If such staff should terminate employment before three years with such entity, such staff must repay all associated costs for courses where the costs have been covered for them.
 - Of the \$X billion for high-quality teachers, _____ percent shall be made available to the Secretary in coordination with the Secretary of Education to—
 - (i) encourage Head Start or prekindergarten assistant teaching or classroom apprenticeships with Federal work-study aid;
 - (ii) expand federal loan forgiveness to include Head Start and prekindergarten teachers, restricted to teachers employed in low income areas; [modified Dodd/DeWine or Difi? 75 loan forgiveness for 5 year commitment]?
 - (iii) disseminate best practices in ECE degree programs to states, including working with states to collect information pertaining to model programs.
- (d) The requirements of Section 648A(2)(A) and (2)(C) are only triggered once appropriations are provided through 648B(a)(1). *[At what level? What should trigger requirements]?*

Expands the quality and scope of professional development for all Head Start personnel to build and improve skills. All Head Start personnel should have access to high-quality professional development and training opportunities to strengthen the quality of programs. The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act requires that:

- Professional development plans be established, in consultation with Head Start staff, for each full time employee interacting with children, which includes a plan for all teachers with an Associate's degree to obtain a bachelor's degree.
- All Head Start teachers shall receive on-going professional development in language and preliteracy skills.
- Not less than 50 percent of training funds under the bill are to be used by local Head Start agencies to comply with the performance standards and be used for training and related assistance.
- Professional development be provided designed to increase program participation for underserved populations of eligible children.

Strengthens Training and Technical Assistance. The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act:

- includes a setaside of at least 2 percent for training and technical assistance of which
 - (i) not less than 50 percent shall be made available to local Head Start agencies to comply with performance standards;
 - (ii) not more than 30 percent shall be made available to support training and technical assistance (in collaboration with the Secretary and regional offices);
 - (iii) not less than 10 percent shall be made available to support training, collaboration, and other literacy related activities described in Section 648C (new literacy section).
 - (iv) not more than 10 percent shall be made available to the Secretary to assist local programs to meet the performance standards described in 641A(a)(1); and
 - (v) not less than \$3,000,000 of the amount in clause (iii) appropriated for such fiscal year shall be made available to carry out activities described in section 648(c)(4).

STRENGTHENS HEAD START’S QUALITY, PARTICULARLY PRE-LITERACY

Strengthens children’s pre-literacy and language skills-- Head Start’s quality standards lead the field. In order to provide greater support for early language and preliteracy development of Head Start children and to provide Head Start children with high quality oral language and literature-rich environments, the Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act requires that:

- all Head Start teachers receive ongoing professional development in language and emergent literacy, including appropriate curricula and assessment to improve instruction and learning. Such training shall include methods to promote phonological and phonemic awareness and vocabulary development in an age appropriate and culturally appropriate manner.
- Literacy training be provided at the local level in order to be provided, to the extent feasible, in the context of the program and the children it serves and be tailored to training in early childhood literacy and experience of the teachers;
- Literacy training be culturally appropriate and support children’s development in their home language;
- Literacy training include how to work with parents to enhance positive language and early literacy development at home;
- Literacy training include specific methods to best address the needs of children who are English language learners, have speech and language delays, including problems with articulation, or other disabilities.

The result of such training is that Head Start programs use language and literacy activities based on scientifically-based research that supports the age appropriate development of—

- (i) recognition, leading to automatic recognition, of letters of the alphabet;
- (ii) knowledge of letter sounds, the blending of sounds, and the use of increasingly complex vocabularies;
- (iii) an understanding that written language is composed of phonemes and letters each representing 1 or more speech sounds that in combination make up syllables, words, and sentences;
- (iv) spoken language, including vocabulary, oral comprehension, oral presentation, and expression abilities; and
- (v) knowledge of the purposes and conventions of print.

Books in the Head Start Classroom. –

- Specific funds will be available to help Head Start agencies provide books for Head Start classrooms. By regulation, the Secretary shall recommend a minimum book-child ratio to ensure that every Head Start classroom contains sufficient children’s books to promote a literature rich environment meeting the needs of children in a multicultural and age appropriate manner.
- Library partnerships- Each Head Start agency shall collaborate with a local library (where available) to develop innovative programs to excite children about the world of books (such as taking children to the library for “story hour”, promoting library cards for families so that children can bring books home, entering into a financial agreement with libraries to supplement the Head Start classroom book collection with various themes of the week to foster fresh books in the classroom on a regular basis, developing a lending library within Head Start, or using a mobile library van, and other partnerships with libraries to promote literacy and excitement about the world of print).

Books in the home. –

- To promote parents as their children’s first teacher and to promote parental reading to children, the Secretary in consultation and coordination with State Head Start Quality Improvement and Collaboration offices shall award contracts with organizations to provide Head Start children with books (at a discount) to bring home.
- Such books would be made available in English and Spanish and could be offered to each Head Start child several times a year, to parents who attend parenting classes or otherwise receive services through Head Start, or through other means as determined by the Secretary.

Strengthens the partnership between Head Start and local schools to align the program with the skills children need to enter kindergarten. All Head Start programs should coordinate closely with schools to improve curriculum and teaching in the program (in an age appropriate manner), and to identify opportunities for greater collaboration (i.e. outreach, transportation, and support services). The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act requires that:

- Each Head Start agency coordinate specifically with the state child care agency, state prekindergarten programs, Early Reading First and Even Start programs, other preschool programs carried out under Title I, programs operated under Part C and section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and with local educational programs Head Start children will enter at the age of compulsory school attendance;
- Each Head Start agency coordinate and collaborate with the local educational agency serving the community involved to ensure that the curriculum and classroom experiences for Head Start are aligned with the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills that children entering kindergarten are expected to demonstrate;
- Each Head Start agency develop continuity of developmentally appropriate curricula and practice between Head Start and local educational agencies to ensure an effective transition and appropriate shared expectations for children transitioning to kindergarten;

Each Head Start agency to conduct an annual needs assessment to identify potential areas for collaboration and coordination with local educational agencies serving the county to improve services for children. Such services may include: collaborating on the shared use of transportation and facilities; collaborating to increase the program participation of underserved populations as eligible children; and exchanging information on the provision of services to such children.

Strengthens Head Start’s operations and ability to comply with the Performance Standards

- **Head Start Program Self-Assessments.**-- In order to monitor and improve program performance, with respect to program, administrative, financial management, and other requirements, at least once each program year, each Head Start agency shall conduct a self-assessment of its effectiveness and progress in meeting program goals and objectives, in implementing federal regulations, and in sustaining an effective management system for overall program consistency.
- Specifically with regard to reviewing the Head Start agency’s educational performance, a representative of the local school district be part of the self-assessment team reviewing the program’s compliance with performance measures and goals related to school readiness.
- Self-assessments be used to assist Head Start programs in continuous improvement of program plans and service delivery methods, and for the enhancement of program quality and timely responses to issues that arise in the community, the program, and among enrolled families.
- Technical assistance and training be available to help Head Start agencies conduct effective self-assessments and,
- Findings from the self-assessment shall be reported to the policy council, policy committee, parent committees, governing bodies, and regional office. Improvement plans shall be developed to strengthen areas identified as weaknesses or in need of improvement in coordination with the above entities.

****[To Be Revised] Improves the use and quality of child assessments in Head Start.** Child assessment in Head Start provides an important role in improving classroom instruction and services to meet the needs of Head Start children. Strong and comprehensive assessments that measure academic, social, emotional, and health development and progress are critical to ensuring quality services. The School Readiness and Coordination Act requires:

PANEL—The Secretary shall use contract with the Board on Children, Youth, and Families and the Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Research Council, in collaboration with the Institute of Medicine, to establish, within 90 days of the enactment of this Act, an independent panel of experts on early childhood assessment. The panel of experts shall consist of multiple experts in –

- Child development and education, including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, approaches to teaching and learning, and other domains of child development and learning; assessment of young children, including screening, diagnostic assessment, classroom-based instructional assessment, and assessment of child outcomes; Relevant methodologies and statistics; Head Start programs and populations served, especially low-income children and children with special needs, including children with disabilities and limited English proficient children.

REPORT—The panel shall review and synthesize research, theory and applications in the social, behavioral and biological sciences and the research on early childhood pedagogy and shall make recommendations with regard to:

- Developmentally appropriate Head Start school-readiness benchmarks and outcome constructs and indicators; developmentally and culturally appropriate assessments for children in Head Start; appropriate methodologies and sampling techniques for the assessment of young children in the context of Head Start; and, tThe identification of variables likely related to child outcomes in Head Start, including program and classroom variables; type, length, mix and intensity of services; and child and family characteristics.

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- Based on this report, the panel shall submit, not later than 16 months after the date of enactment of this Act, a written report on its findings that includes recommendations to the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House of Representatives and to the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee of the Senate.

DEVELOPMENT—The panel shall oversee the development of a new Head Start National Reporting System, which includes a developmentally and culturally appropriate assessment of school readiness for Head Start children. Such system shall—

- Be aimed at improving instruction, services and program quality across Head Start programs;
- Be standardized and aligned to the Head Start performance standards described in Section 641A of this Act;
- Adopt multiple methods, including but not limited to, systematic observations of the child and parent and provider interviews;
- Validly assess children’s change over time by repeating measurements;
- Assess child outcomes comprehensively, including language, literacy, math, science, creative arts, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical and health development;
- Make accommodations for children with disabilities;
- Be linguistically and culturally appropriate for limited English proficient children;
- Conform to Human Subjects protection standards, including requiring active parental consent;
- Be sensitive to assessment burdens put upon children, classrooms, and programs, for instance, by considering scientifically valid sampling strategies and compensating the individual programs for expenses incurred;
- Be developed and based on an implementation study to ensure—
 - i. Feasibility of such assessment;
 - ii. Validity, reliability and adequacy of specific items and the test as a whole;
 - iii. Items are free from racial, cultural or gender bias;
 - iv. The assessment addresses the needs of disabled and limited English proficient children and other special-needs children;
 - v. Testing conditions, including but not limited to physical environment, familiarity with assessor, and child well-being, are considered;
 - vi. Plans for data analysis and reporting are appropriately designed and aligned with data collection.

IMPLEMENTATION –

- The National Head Start Reporting System shall not be fully implemented in Head Start programs throughout the states until all of the requirements of paragraph (C) of this section have been fulfilled;
- The system shall be fully in place not later than 3 years after the date of submission of the written report;
- The Secretary shall provide adequate funding for the development and implementation of the National Head Start Reporting System from funds set aside under Section 640 (a)(2)(C)(iv) of this Act.

EXPANDS HEAD START ACCESS FOR ELIGIBLE CHILDREN.

Expands access to all eligible preschool-aged children in Head Start over 5 years. Head Start currently reaches only 6 out of every 10 eligible children. Under the Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act,

- _____ would be authorized over 5 years to expand access to all eligible preschool age children;
- Outreach would be strengthened and coordinated with local school districts to expand participation by under-enrolled children (i.e., children who are not English language proficient, homeless children, Native American children, children in migrant or seasonal-working families, and children with disabilities).

Expands access to Early Head Start to serve more infants and toddlers in need. Despite the research showing the benefits of early intervention, Early Head Start serves only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers. Under the Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act,

- the setaside for Early Head Start would increase from 10% to 20% over the next five years.
- additional funds for Early Head Start expansion may be provided from new funds every year (from funds exceeding the amounts necessary to adjust current programs for inflation, improve the quality of Head Start, and provide training and technical assistance)
- No grantee shall be permitted to operate Early Head Start unless such grantee—
 - (1) provides evidence of community need for such services;
 - (2) submits a written request to the Secretary that addresses how the needs of pregnant women and infants and toddlers will be addressed across the following areas as defined by regulations prescribed by the Secretary—
 - (i) approach to childhood development and health services;
 - (ii) approach to family and community partnerships; and
 - (iii) approach to program design and management;
 - (3) participates in technical assistance activities for newly funded and existing grantees; and
 - (4) meets the same eligibility and selection criteria as grantees under section 645A, the Early Head Start program. Any grantee under this section permitted to expand its grant to serve such persons eligible under section 645A shall be subject to the same rules, regulations, and conditions as might apply to grantees under section 645A for that portion of their grant which would otherwise be covered.

IMPROVES HEAD START’S COORDINATION and COLLABORATION.

Expands Head Start Collaboration Offices in the states to enhance coordination among Head Start programs and other state partners, and to promote school readiness for Head Start children. A Head Start collaboration office in each state currently facilitates the coordination of Head Start with other programs and services. Those offices should be expanded to enhance services to children, better align Head Start with state kindergarten classrooms, and expand opportunities for training Head Start teachers. The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act provides \$16 million for State Head Start Quality Improvement and Collaboration Offices and requires that the Office:

- coordinate with the state lead agency administering the Child Care and Development Block Grant and entities providing resource and referral services in the state to make full-working day and full-year services to children;
- promote alignment between Head Start and state school readiness standards, including academic achievement for K-12 education;

- promote better linkages between Head Start and other child and family agencies, including health, mental health, family services, and other child or family supports.
- conduct an assessment of the needs of Head Start programs in the state in collaborating and coordinating services and implement school readiness standards; and
- develop a strategic plan, based on assessments above, to provide technical assistance and resources to Head Start programs in the state to—
 - (i) better coordinate Head Start services with health care, welfare, child care, education, community service activities, family literacy services, activities related to children with disabilities, and services for homeless children in their local communities;
 - (ii) help Head Start programs develop a plan for the provision of full-working day, full calendar year services for children enrolled in their program;
 - (iii) help local Head Start programs align their services with other school readiness and K-12 standards;
 - (iv) better coordinate outreach to eligible families;
 - (v) better coordinate professional development opportunities available to Head Start staff and other staff working in early childhood education programs in the state;
 - (vi) promote partnerships between Head Start programs, schools, law enforcement, substance abuse, and mental health treatment agencies to strengthen family and community environments, and reduce the impact of substance abuse, child abuse, domestic violence, and other high risk behaviors that compromise healthy child development (such as Free To Grow Initiatives);
 - (vii) administer a state-based system in collaboration with the Secretary and regional offices delivering training and technical assistance, that improves the capacity of Head Start programs in the state to deliver services in accordance with all of the Head
 - (viii) identify other resources and organizations, public and private, to provide in-kind services in Head Start programs throughout the state; and
- assist each Head Start agency in developing a plan to improve coordination and improve outcomes and services for children and families

Promotes local flexibility:

- Pursuant to a need demonstrated by a local community needs assessment, programs may apply to regional offices to— convert part-day sessions, particularly double-back part-day sessions into full-day sessions; serve children who are in low income working families above the poverty line if—
 - (i) a local community assessment documents the need to serve over-income working poor families;
 - (ii) family income does not exceed the eligibility threshold the state sets under the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the number of over-income children does not exceed 25 percent of the total population served in the program; and
 - (iii) the program first demonstrates that it has conducted sufficient outreach and recruitment activities to all eligible families; orserve persons eligible under section 645A pursuant to being subject to the same rules, regulations, and conditions as might apply to grantees under section 645A for that portion of their grant which would otherwise be covered.
- A Head Start agency may use assistance to provide services to children who are enrolled in other Federal or State child care programs operated by the agency if—

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- (a) the agency receives funds other than Head Start funding sufficient to pay the incremental cost of providing these services;
- (b) the family income of children served in such program does not exceed the income threshold under the Child Care and Development Block Grant; and
- (c) the children receive the full range of Head Start services.

IMPROVES HEAD START ACCOUNTABILITY

Strengthens the monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance provided to Head Start programs to ensure quality services for all children. Head Start programs are currently reviewed every 3 years. More frequent monitoring and more effective evaluation will lead to better quality programs. The Head Start School Readiness and Coordination Act requires:

- Grantees to establish and implement procedures for the ongoing monitoring of their own Early Head Start and Head Start operations, as well as those of each of their delegate agencies, to ensure that these operations effectively work toward program goals and implement federal regulations.
- reviews of the programs to include a review and assessment of whether programs have adequately addressed the population and community needs (including populations of children with a limited English proficiency and children of migrant and seasonal farm-working families); and
- federal intensive reviews (PRISMs) every 2 years not 3 as currently required
- For the purpose of monitoring programs, the Secretary may conduct periodic monitoring visits without prior notice to the local agency or program.