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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

SUBJECT: Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

INFORMATION:

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 requires that the Office of Head Start (OHS) include in the monitoring reviews of Head Start agencies a valid and reliable research-based observational instrument that assesses classroom quality, including the assessment of multiple dimensions of teacher-child interactions that are linked to positive child outcomes and later achievement. The conference report accompanying the Act suggests that OHS consider using existing research-based methods such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for this purpose.

The CLASS is an observational instrument developed at the University of Virginia to assess quality in pre-school classrooms. It has been validated in over 2,000 pre-school classrooms and can be used to reliably assess classroom quality in Head Start.

The CLASS assesses interactions between children and teachers in three broad domains of classroom quality: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. The Office of Head Start believes that the domains of quality measured by the CLASS remain central to its approach to child development and education and serve as important indicators of the future school readiness of all Head Start children.

We are eager to explore the use of CLASS in monitoring and quality improvement efforts. However, grantees are in no way required to use the CLASS in their programs or to purchase CLASS materials.

Professional Development Training for all Head Start Grantees and Delegates

Beginning early in FY 2009, regionally based trainings will be conducted on the CLASS instrument and how it can be used by programs in professional development and quality improvement efforts. Programs are not required to participate in these trainings, however all costs, including travel for participants, will be covered by the Office of Head Start. At least one staff member from every Head Start grantee and delegate agency will be able to participate in these trainings.

The training is designed for staff whose responsibilities include the supervision and/or professional development of teaching staff (i.e. education coordinators or similar positions). The training will give participants the capacity to use the CLASS instrument to assess and improve classroom quality in their programs.

The trainings will be three full days in length. The first two days of training will be on the CLASS instrument with each participant working to become a reliable CLASS assessor. The third day will focus on how participants can use such a tool in professional development. Participants will receive a CLASS manual and other materials as well as access to professional development materials for use in their programs.

Head Start programs serving less than 500 children will be able send one staff member to these trainings. Programs serving between 500 and 1,000 children will be able to send two staff members, those with 1,001-2,000 children will be able to send three staff members; and programs serving more than 2,000 children will be able to send four staff members. All participants should have responsibility for classroom observation, supervision and/or professional development of teaching staff.

The Office of Head Start views this training as an effort to increase familiarity with a tool that may be part of monitoring in the near future and to introduce a research-based classroom observational system that is linked to professional development to all programs. This training is not intended to fully equip most programs to implement CLASS in their programs nor are programs in anyway required to do so.

The trainings will begin late fall in 2008 and continue through the summer of 2009. Regional Offices will be in contact with programs on the specifics of this training opportunity, including when and where trainings will be offered in your regions. We will also be planning opportunities for directors and other staff to become familiar with these tools through a webcast and conference sessions.

Monitoring Pilot

In addition, the Office of Head Start will pilot the CLASS as part of monitoring in a sample of grantees undergoing their triennial review in 2009, consistent with reauthorization. The results of the CLASS will not be part of the official reports but will be shared with grantees after the review. The purpose of the pilot is to help OHS determine if the CLASS is an appropriate instrument to satisfy the requirements of reauthorization and if so, to understand how best to implement it fully.

We look forward to learning from both of these efforts to improve our monitoring and to enhance the quality of Head Start classrooms. We appreciate all of your efforts to make this successful.

/Patricia E. Brown/

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