

Helping All Children Succeed in School and in Life

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007

CONFERENCE REPORT SUMMARY

Head Start has been the premiere early childhood education program in the U.S. for more than 40 years. It has served more than 20 million children and families in that time, and it remains a cornerstone in this country's efforts to close the achievement gap, combat poverty, and provide all Americans with the opportunity to thrive. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 will reinvigorate Head Start and help more children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed. The bipartisan legislation improves teacher and classroom quality, strengthens Head Start's focus on school readiness, expands access to Head Start for more children, ensures that centers are well-run, boosts coordination between Head Start and state and local programs, and improves comprehensive services that help children by helping their families.

Improving teacher and classroom quality

- ✓ Improves teacher qualifications: Half of teachers nationwide will have a bachelor's degree by 2013.
- ✓ Targets new funding toward improving teacher salaries and supporting professional development.
- ✓ Implements a classroom observation tool that will improve teaching practices.
- ✓ Ensures that classroom staff members receive better training to meet the needs of children with disabilities.
- ✓ Requires programs to develop career ladders and annual professional development plans for full-time staff.

Strengthening focus on school readiness

- ✓ Requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to reevaluate and update the current early learning standards and use of assessments with the best available research into child development.
- ✓ Requires the use of best practices to support children's emerging literacy and vocabulary skills.
- ✓ Terminates further use of an inappropriate and ineffective testing regime for 4-year-olds – a regime known as the National Reporting System.
- ✓ Increases funding to help more programs operate full-day and year-round.
- ✓ Aligns Head Start performance standards with State early learning standards.

Ensuring access to Head Start for more children

- ✓ Provides greater flexibility to serve children whose family income is just above the federal poverty line (up to 130 percent of the poverty line), while ensuring that serving the neediest children remains the program's top priority.
- ✓ Authorizes total funding of \$7.35 billion for fiscal year 2008, \$7.65 billion for fiscal year 2009, and \$7.99 billion for fiscal year 2010 and "such sums" thereafter – allowing tens of thousands more children access to the program.
- ✓ Prioritizes expansion for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and Indian Head Start.

- ✓ Prioritizes expansion for Early Head Start, which serves children from birth to age three, so more children can receive Head Start during the critical development years when their brains are growing the fastest.
- ✓ Ensures more participation of homeless children by removing barriers to their enrollment.
- ✓ Enhances opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in Head Start programs.
- ✓ Allows programs to convert preschool slots to serve children from birth through age three.

Ensuring that Head Start centers are well-run, effective, and fairly governed

- ✓ Requires programs failing to provide a high quality early education program to recompile for their grant using an application review process developed by an expert panel which will consider multiple measures of program performance.
- ✓ Allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to more quickly take funding away from bad programs.
- ✓ Strengthens the monitoring of programs by improving the quality of the review team, requiring inclusion of a detailed fiscal management protocol, and requiring follow-up site visits of deficient programs.
- ✓ Requires the active participation of the governing board at each agency and defines the board's responsibilities and authority; prohibits persons with a conflict of interest from serving on the board.
- ✓ Ensures that parents have a strong voice in how Head Start centers are run.

Boosting coordination between Head Start and other programs for children

- ✓ Improves coordination between Head Start and local early education programs to better meet the needs of working families.
- ✓ Strengthens Head Start's linkages with the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act and with state health services, mental health services, and family services.
- ✓ Increases coordination with state pre-k programs so that resources and planning efforts are shared and efficiencies are gained to better serve families in the community.
- ✓ Strengthens the State Head Start collaboration offices to promote better coordination between Head Start programs and other State and local early childhood services.
- ✓ Provides funds for State Advisory Councils to enhance early childhood program quality and coordination.

Strengthening comprehensive services for families of Head Start children

- ✓ Places greater emphasis on early identification of child and family mental health needs, including maternal depression, and on directing families to appropriate services.
- ✓ Requires programs to implement research-based best practices for family service workers and targets quality improvement dollars to decrease family service worker caseloads.