

Prepared Statement of Ellen Frede, Ph.D., Co-Director, National Institute for Early Education Research (NIERR), Rutgers University

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Ellen Frede, Co-Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University and Associate Professor at The College of New Jersey. I am pleased to be invited to present testimony on coordination between Head Start programs and state-funded pre-kindergarten. Collaboration is possible, it is happening throughout the nation, it enhances services to children and it could be facilitated by continuing to increase the quality of Head Start. I include information reported by NIEER on the national picture and draw on my recent experience as the pre-k administrator for the state of New Jersey.

My experience with early childhood education programs began as a summer volunteer in the early days of Head Start and progressed through teaching in child care, public school, and Head Start classrooms to teacher education, research and most recently, to administering state-funded preschool programs in New Jersey which collaborate with Head Start agencies. Thus, I bring a multi-faceted view to the issue of mixed delivery of preschool.

In two weeks, the National Institute for Early Education Research will release the sixth annual report on state funded preschool drawing a picture of preschool throughout the country and on a state-by-state basis. This report will show that pre-k enrollment continues to grow across the nation.

It also shows that all but two of the 38 states funding pre-k collaborated with Head Start agencies. These collaborations take varying forms from state to state.

- Thirteen states supplement Head Start agencies' funding so that they can serve more children.

- Others layer funding to increase the hours from half-day to full-day. This enhances the educational value of the program and better meets the needs of families. Often, agencies also provide wrap around care using state child care dollars. At present only 47% of Head Start children are served in full-day programs. But of the 11 states where over 75% of the children served in Head Start are in full day programs, 9 have substantial collaborations with state pre-k.

- Many states fund Head Start to augment quality, for example, reducing class size, enhancing professional development, adding classroom materials, and paying for teachers certified in early childhood education. The need for highly qualified teachers in all programs for young children is clear. To attract and keep highly qualified teachers salaries must be adequate. In 2005-2006, the average pay nationally for Head Start teachers with a college degree was just over \$30,000. Compare this to the average pay of public school teachers which was over \$47,000. And this does not account for benefit disparities.

- Agencies that provide Head Start may also provide the state pre-k program in separate classrooms where federal and state funds are not co-mingled.

- In some states, pre-k funding goes directly to the Head Start agency and in others it flows through the local school district.

Through coordination, Head Start programs are able to be part of the larger early learning community and provide a more seamless experience for children especially as they transition to kindergarten. In addition to serving more children and augmenting hours and educational effectiveness, the collaborations offer opportunities such as:

- Professional development for Head Start staff on state early learning standards and district curriculum leading to more effective transition to the kindergarten;

- Professional development for district kindergarten and primary grade staff in developmentally appropriate expectations and effective education for young children leading to schools that are ready for the diverse abilities of children that come from Head Start programs; and

- Better integrated services for children with disabilities.

However, collaboration presents a complex funding situation and results in tortuous accounting systems and time consuming reporting requirements. Adding even more complexity are the disparate and sometimes contradictory program standards imposed by the different funding streams.

For example:

- Head Start requires that the parent policy council help determine what curriculum should be used in the classrooms, yet for many state pre-k programs the district board of education makes this decision.

- State or local districts may require specific child assessment or program evaluation systems while the Office of Head Start requires others. This leaves teachers and administrators spending excessive time on redundant and unhelpful assessment that could be spent on teaching.
- Particularly troubling for states where the pre-k program is universally available or the income eligibility is less stringent than Head Start is the necessity of segregating children by income or restricting parent choice in order to partner with Head Start.
- It is especially challenging for Head Start agencies that use child care dollars to extend the day to handle the conflict created when a child's parent loses her eligibility for the child care slot because she has lost her job. For the sake of the child, they do not want to deny that child the full day program and for the sake of their budget, they can't fill a half-day slot.

Head Start directors and other staff members throughout the country are struggling to meet these challenges. For the most part, they welcome the opportunity because they believe Head Start provides a special service to young children from low income families and coordination with state pre-k and child care can enhance this service.

Ultimately, high quality Head Start programs are the key to making these collaborations work effectively. I have the following suggestions for what Head Start reauthorization can do to facilitate collaboration by helping to ensure that this critical and valuable program continues to improve.

1. Require that 50% of the Head Start teachers get a BA degree and training in early childhood education, and ensure that funding is available for salaries comparable to those of public school teachers.
2. Encourage and allow flexibility so that children can be served in mixed income classrooms as long as they receive all mandated, comprehensive Head Start services.
3. Allow Head Start agencies that use child care dollars to provide an extended day to count this subsidy toward their local match. States should ensure that the subsidy continues as long as the child is eligible for Head Start.
4. Provide incentives and flexibility to ensure an ample pool of high quality applicants for Head Start grants. In New Jersey and most state pre-k programs mixed delivery systems of public school, not-for-profit and for-profit programs working together have shown good results.
5. Funds should be made available for research to establish the effects of augmented quality and duration of Head Start. A randomized trial could compare Head Start programs that meet current performance standards to "super" Head Start with class size of no more than 16 children and better paid, certified teachers. Other studies could compare length of day and number of years. Such investigations will make full use of Head Start as the nation's "laboratory" for developing effective early education.

Collaboration between Head Start and state pre-k is valuable. Effective partnerships are happening throughout the nation that enhance services for children. These could be facilitated by continuing to increase the quality of Head Start.