



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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Statement by  
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Before the

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Education Reform Subcommittee  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to share information on the Head Start Program. As the very recently confirmed Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, I would like to convey my strong interest in working with this subcommittee in addressing early childhood development issues.

Head Start is the Nation's largest early childhood education program. Its mission is to help low-income children start school ready to learn by providing a range of comprehensive educational, child development, health, and social services. Since 1965, local Head Start programs across the country have served more than 19 million children. This year's appropriation alone will allow us to serve approximately 916,000 children -- 861,000 in the Head Start program and 55,000 in the Early Head Start program.

In addition to expanding Head Start services to many more children, recent major Head Start initiatives, guided by bipartisan legislation, focused a steady investment of funding on strengthening program quality and increasing staff compensation. The result is classrooms where teachers are better trained and proficient in engaging children individually

and in helping them develop vocabulary, pre-literacy, and social skills.

Complementing the focus on learning is the provision of comprehensive services, such as medical, dental, mental health, and nutrition services, so that children are ready and able to learn. Other key elements of this program include parental involvement and grounding in the community. Over 1,500 public and private nonprofit community agencies, including religious-based organizations, manage Head Start programs, guided by a common framework of national standards and policies.

I believe that we all would agree that Head Start has a long history of success. But if the program is to continue to have a positive impact, we must integrate some of the new research findings about childhood learning into the program. This shift in the focus on learning can -- and should -- be accomplished without sacrificing the comprehensive nature of the program.

President Bush has made clear that he expects much more emphasis on the development of literacy skills in the Head Start program. As part of this initiative, the President has proposed moving Head Start from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Education, where it can be more closely

aligned with compensatory education programs, such as the Title I programs, when Head Start students begin formal schooling. This issue will be addressed appropriately with the Congress during the next reauthorization of the Head Start program.

In the meantime, both the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education will coordinate an interagency task force to translate research on learning readiness into action through Head Start and other programs for preschoolers. The formation of this task force was announced by Secretary Thompson and Secretary Paige at the White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development that was hosted by the First Lady last week. We are committed to working together to make the President's vision a reality--to ensure that the focus on both child and family literacy becomes an integral part of every Head Start program.

As requested by the subcommittee, my testimony today will focus on recent and planned efforts to integrate emerging research findings into the program in order to improve outcomes for children enrolled in Head Start.

Improving Head Start's Early Education Services

Head Start is implementing the following three core strategies to strengthen teaching, learning and child outcomes in more than 46,000 classrooms nationwide: setting high standards for early childhood education services and child outcomes; training teachers and managers; and establishing partnerships with State and national early literacy initiatives.

*Setting high standards for early childhood education services  
and child outcomes*

Every local Head Start program is required to adhere to national Program Performance Standards, which include specific requirements in health and disabilities services, family and community partnerships, and early childhood education. Performance standards in education include requirements that programs select a curriculum that addresses such goals as cognitive development, literacy, numeracy and language development; administer individualized screening and ongoing assessment of each child's learning and development; provide family literacy services to enhance parents' ability to read and contribute to their children's literacy; and work with local elementary schools to help children and families make a successful transition from Head Start into kindergarten.

Additional standards cover class size, adult-child ratios, and teacher training requirements.

To ensure that local programs meet these standards, we conduct rigorous on-site monitoring reviews of every Head Start agency at least once every three years. If program-quality problems are discovered, the local agency is required to correct them or else its funding is terminated and a new community agency is selected to run the Head Start program. Roughly 90 percent of all programs are successful in meeting the Head Start standards. However, we have replaced more than 160 grantees in the last 10 years.

Augmenting the Program Performance Standards and Federal program monitoring is a new Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. Head Start needs to focus more on such indicators of early literacy as children's knowledge of letters. While it is not appropriate to take curricula designed for first grade and use it for four-year-olds, we must challenge ourselves to ensure that when children leave Head Start they know more than only one or two letters, particularly given what we know about the predictive power of letter and number recognition for later school success.

Therefore, under this new initiative, each local Head Start agency is required to gather and analyze assessment data on children's progress and accomplishments in eight domains of early learning and child development and thirteen specific congressionally-mandated indicators of early literacy, language development, and numeracy skills. Programs will use this information to plan improvements in their curricula and teaching - and federal program monitoring teams will begin this year to review program implementation of these new requirements.

*Training teachers and managers*

Head Start is working to improve the credentials and compensation of teachers, in order to meet the national requirement established in the 1998 reauthorization of the Head Start Act that at least 50 percent of all teachers have a degree in early childhood education by 2003. The percentage of teachers with at least an Associate's degree has increased from 32 percent in 1997 to 41 percent in 2000, supported by an investment of nearly \$80 million to pay for training costs and salary increases. In order to attract and retain more highly trained teachers, programs are allocating funds to increase staff compensation and fringe benefits. Over the past decade, teacher salaries have increased from less than \$14,000 to an

estimated average of \$22,500, and staff turnover is reported at a relatively low and stable rate of less than 10 percent annually.

We also are working with institutions of higher education to align college courses and degree programs with emerging challenges for Head Start teachers, such as the large number of children who enter Head Start from non-English speaking families.

Another major Head Start priority is to strengthen the knowledge and skills of education coordinators and program directors who supervise teachers and make decisions about local program curricula, assessment systems, and ongoing professional development. A National Head Start Child Development Institute convened last year provided training to 3,500 local program managers and supervisors in research-based teaching strategies to foster children's progress in literacy, language development, mathematics, science, and social-emotional development.

In addition, the Head Start Family Literacy Project is providing training and technical assistance to local programs to enhance children's literacy learning in classrooms, adult education for parents, and parent-child interactions in Head Start centers and



at home. We must work to increase the number of parents who read to their children at home on a daily basis -- a key support for the work of preschool and kindergarten teachers. In fact, a critical component of the Family Literacy Project is the focus on collaboration with the Department of Education's newly-expanding Even Start program, public libraries, adult education programs and other related community programs.

*Establishing partnerships with state and national early literacy initiatives*

Head Start programs are participating in a wide range of efforts to improve children's early literacy learning and school readiness. For example:

- The State of Texas's Head Start Educational Component Grant Program is providing \$15 million over two years to improve curricula and teaching in 20 local Head Start programs. Five hundred teachers are receiving training through the University of Texas Health Science Center in research-based strategies to enhance children's language enrichment, print and book awareness, motivation to read, phonological awareness,

letter and early word recognition, and written expression.

- As part of Ohio's Literacy Campaign, local Head Start programs have designated a literacy specialist in each program, and are conducting summer training institutes for nearly 500 teachers, parents, and program directors.
- Several hundred Head Start programs nationwide are participating in HeadsUp! Reading sponsored by the National Head Start Association and RISE Learning Solutions. This 44-hour early-literacy training course is delivered to teachers via satellite television.

At the Federal level, the Head Start program collaborates closely with the Department of Education, emphasizing two areas of common concern: reading readiness and research. For example, the Head Start Bureau has joined with the Department of Education and the Corporation for National Service to disseminate materials on reading readiness.

These initiatives and many others complement and expand the impact of our early education improvement efforts.

I would like to turn now to a brief discussion of what we know about the current status of early childhood education and child outcomes in Head Start.

#### Research on Head Start Program Quality and Child Outcomes

Head Start serves as a national laboratory for early childhood education, with a research agenda to identify state-of-the-art approaches to assess and accelerate progress on all dimensions of school readiness. Through a strong research agenda, Head Start continues to make progress toward developing an outcome-oriented program.

The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) is an ongoing longitudinal study of the Head Start program, drawing upon a nationally stratified random sample of 3,200 children. FACES provides, for the first time, the ability for Head Start to examine important aspects of outcomes and quality. Further, we have linked the FACES study with the large Department of Education early childhood longitudinal studies to provide more comprehensive information on Head Start outcomes.

Findings from FACES show that Head Start children start far behind the average child but demonstrated progress in some early literacy skills. In addition, based on both teacher and parent ratings, children in Head Start improve in social skills that are important to success in school, including better interactions with peers and lower rates of problems such as hyperactivity.

However, the average performance of Head Start children remains below national norms of school readiness. The same FACES study showed that Head Start children do not make any gains in letter recognition during their Head Start experience. Therefore, we must do more so that Head Start children enter kindergarten with stronger literacy skills.

Ongoing research will guide further efforts to strengthen Head Start programs, teaching, and partnerships with parents. Research and evaluation efforts will be expanded through a new set of Quality Research Centers that are evaluating the effectiveness of a variety of early literacy curricula and teacher training models in local Head Start programs. These Quality Research Centers will promote the school readiness of

preschool children in Head Start through partnerships between academic researchers and Head Start programs.

### Conclusion

While children and families clearly benefit from Head Start's education and comprehensive services, many challenges remain. In order to better prepare Head Start children for their entry into school, we must place a much stronger emphasis on both child and family literacy. We must continue to provide national leadership to Head Start staff, managers, families, and community partners as they work to find better ways to educate each child and support every Head Start family.

As part of this national leadership role, we will continue to draw upon results from ongoing and expanded research. In addition, we will listen to and learn from knowledgeable researchers and educators throughout the country. The White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development provided an important first step in translating research findings into improvements in early childhood education. As I mentioned earlier, during the proceedings Secretary Thompson joined Secretary Paige in launching a task force to improve early reading and math skills in pre-school programs, including Head

Start, to ensure that research-based strategies are considered as we endeavor to better prepare children for academic success.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and look forward to working closely with the Congress as we continue to improve Head Start in the years ahead.