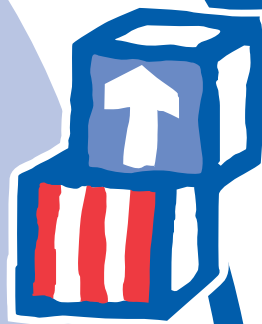


**Improving School Readiness &
Promoting Long-Term Success:
The Head Start Roadmap
to Excellence**



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Head Start



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Since 1965, Head Start programs have served millions of children and families across the country. Now, with new leadership and fresh tools provided by the Head Start reauthorization, The Department of Health and Human Services is implementing a quality initiative to promote positive, sustained child outcomes for the children it serves.

This roadmap lays out a set of specific actions that HHS is taking to improve school readiness outcomes among Head Start children and to promote their long-term success. These actions will improve the extent to which classroom activities – book reading, dramatic play, number games, music, and more – are not just fun and engaging, but also promote increased vocabulary, early math skills, problem solving abilities, and social skills so that children start kindergarten ready, and continue to learn. And, the actions will promote changes that integrate Head Start into a continuum of high-quality early care and education spanning from birth to age eight. This integration will foster cooperation between Head Start programs and elementary schools so that Head Start programs prepare children for what they will need to succeed in elementary school and so that schools are ready to take these children and help them build on what happened in Head Start.

Improving Head Start is one element of the Administration's broader strategy to improve educational outcomes by focusing on children from birth to age 8. A related element is a proposal, pending in Congress, to create the Early Learning Challenge Fund. This fund would provide grants to states to build on their current efforts to knit together all early care and education programs – including Head Start, public and private pre-kindergarten programs, and child care – into a seamless, high-quality system that prepares children for school success. This, coupled with efforts to improve children's transitions from preschool to kindergarten, and the effectiveness of primary grades in elementary school can put children on a path of opportunity.

I. INCREASING EVERY HEAD START CHILD'S EXPOSURE TO EFFECTIVE, APPROPRIATE LEARNING EXPERIENCES BOTH IN THE PROGRAM AND AT HOME

A key factor in promoting positive outcomes for young children is the dynamic interaction between a child and a caring adult. In the Head Start program, this means that teachers provide age-appropriate, classroom activities that provide children with meaningful experiences focused on specific learning objectives. At home, it means that Head Start programs work in partnership with families to help them support and reinforce the learning that goes on during a typical Head Start day. HHS will make certain that Head Start children are exposed to the types of learning experiences that promote school readiness and long-term success by: setting the highest expectations for teaching practices and family engagement; providing enhanced support to programs through professional development initiatives and a stronger Training and Technical Assistance system; and enacting stronger accountability provisions to ensure that expectations are met.

A. Raising Expectations for Teaching Practices and Family Engagement Through a Revision of Head Start Program Performance Standards

In 2007, Congress mandated a revision of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the regulations that govern all Head Start programs. HHS is using this opportunity to bring to bear information from the latest research, monitoring, and years of experience to redefine high-quality implementation for Head Start.

All Head Start and Early Head Start programs must comply with the Program Performance Standards. These standards establish requirements with respect to health, education, family involvement, and other Head Start services, as well as administrative and financial requirements, facilities, and other program areas.

Using the Performance Standards to Improve a Child's Learning Experience in the Program

The revised Performance Standards will incorporate the latest evidence on teacher-child interactions and predictors of school success. Changes to the Performance Standards, including those that cover staffing qualifications and training and the classroom activities children engage in everyday, will place an increased emphasis on foundational literacy, math, and science skills, as well as on promoting healthy social emotional and physical development in Head Start children.

Using the Performance Standards to Promote Family Engagement in Children's Learning

The revised Performance Standards will also incorporate new research showing that family engagement in children's learning is crucial to achieving positive educational outcomes for children. HHS will revise the current parent involvement and family and community partnerships Performance Standards so that they reflect the latest research and best practices on family engagement. For example, the standards will increase the emphasis on family literacy because research shows that having literate parents that sing, read aloud, and tell and retell stories to their children can have a large impact on the child's vocabulary and reading readiness.

B. Helping Programs Meet New Expectations through Professional Development Initiatives and a Stronger Training and Technical Assistance System

Even with the strongest Performance Standards, quality will not improve unless programs are supported in their efforts. Teachers and program directors must get the training and help they need to incorporate the best evidence into the day-to-day workings of the Head Start program. Many initiatives to support programs are moving forward, including implementation of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, the creation of new national resource centers, and an improved State system for providing effective training and technical assistance.

Implementing the Classroom Assessment Scoring System

In response to research findings that underscored the importance of teacher-child interactions, HHS launched a national initiative to support local program implementation of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) in the summer of 2008. This system allows programs to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning activities in the classroom, information that can then be used to identify areas for improvement. Since that time, more than 2,500 grantee staff have been trained in the use of the CLASS. Additional members of the Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Network will be trained on modules designed to be used with teachers and education managers to improve the quality of their interactions with children. Training and Technical Assistance specialists will use these modules as part of their work with Head Start program staff, partner agencies, and other early childhood educators in the states.

Developing National Centers of Early Childhood Excellence

HHS will create five new National Centers of Early Childhood Excellence designed to provide targeted information on critical aspects of the Head Start program. The five new National Centers include: National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning; National Center on Cultural

and Linguistic Responsiveness; National Center on Program Management, Design, and Fiscal Operations; National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement; and National Center on Health, Nutrition, Dental, and Mental Health. These five centers, along with the existing Early Head Start National Resource Center, will be charged with providing information about current research and best practices, as well as other professional development materials. These resources will be made available to Head Start grantees as well as other early childhood education teachers and program managers and to those who provide training and technical assistance to Head Start grantees and others. The goal is to infuse evidence-based practices into all early childhood education programs, including but not limited, to Head Start.

Improving the State Training and Technical Assistance System

The goal of the State Training and Technical Assistance System is to create a seamless, easily accessible team of professional development providers at the State and local level, who can work with Head Start programs to improve the quality of teaching and other services. In the coming months, HHS will work to improve the current system to better meet local program needs, including encouraging the State technical assistance providers to promote or build local resource coach networks and other tools for ensuring that programs can meet Performance Standards and provide effective learning experiences for children.

C. Holding Programs Accountable for Meeting New Expectations through Re-competition and Monitoring

If Head Start programs, even with the strongest standards and appropriate support, are not providing high-quality services, HHS will look for other providers that can. Every child in Head Start deserves a high-quality preschool program.

Re-competing Head Start Grants

HHS is fundamentally changing the structure of the Head Start grant process. In the past, the process has allowed Head Start programs to continue to receive their continued grant funding without competition except in cases of extremely poor performance. Now, as a result of Head Start reauthorization, HHS will re-compete a Head Start grant, unless it determines that the grantee is providing quality comprehensive services. To determine whether an existing program will have to compete for its grant, HHS will consider multiple sources of data using a process that is fair, consistent, and transparent. This structure provides a strong incentive for programs to strive for the highest quality ratings and, over time, will result in poorer performing programs being replaced with higher quality ones. This process will result in a stronger Head Start program nationally and improved services to children and families locally, with minimal disruption for children and families.

Enhancing Monitoring Practices

The monitoring of Head Start programs is essential to ensuring that programs are meeting Performance Standards and delivering quality programs.

HHS will revise the monitoring process to improve how quality is measured, and to reflect the higher standards expected of programs. Accordingly, new monitoring tools will help assess programs in areas most important to program goals. The current monitoring protocol collects data on multiple parts of the Head Start program operation which include Program Management, Health Services, Safe Environments, Nutrition, Early Childhood Education, and other service

areas in Head Start. The addition of new assessment instruments will provide the opportunity to look at other critical data, including teacher-child interactions.

II. ASSURING THE INTEGRATION OF HEAD START INTO A CONTINUUM OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION THAT SPANS FROM BIRTH TO AGE EIGHT

Head Start programs operate within a diverse system of early learning settings ranging from home-based infant and toddler programs to elementary school classrooms. Accordingly, it is important that Head Start be part of a continuum of high-quality early childhood education that spans from birth through age eight. By ensuring high-quality experiences in Early Head Start programs, improving Head Start's coordination with other early childhood entities at the state and local level, and fostering seamless transition of children and continuity of services between Head Start and elementary schools, HHS will begin to better integrate Head Start into a continuum of care that will positively impact the school readiness and long-term success of Head Start children.

A. Ensuring High-Quality Experiences for Children in Early Head Start

The Early Head Start program serves low-income children birth to three years old, pregnant women, and their families. The program provides early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services. It holds the promise of providing very young children the language-rich, stimulating environment they need to develop strong vocabularies and the capacity to master the early literacy, math, problem solving, and social interaction tasks of preschool. Or, stated more simply, the earlier children are in these language-rich environments, the less "catching up" preschool and elementary school programs have to do.

Given that this program serves as the first early childhood experience for thousands of children, it must provide a high-quality foundation upon which other programs can build. Accordingly, as with the Head Start program, the Performance Standards will be revised to set the highest expectations for Early Head Start program quality. For example, standards regarding the credentialing and training of Early Head Start staff and Home Visitors will focus on improving their core knowledge of child development with respect to children younger than three, as well as implementing evidence-based child development strategies and parent education. Additionally, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided \$1.1 billion for the expansion of the Early Head Start program. HHS has chosen among some of the best early childhood programs in the country to receive this funding and will focus on providing training and technical assistance to all new programs to ensure that the Performance Standards are fully implemented.

B. Strengthening Collaboration with Early Childhood Entities at Local, State, and Federal Levels

States are playing a major role in initiating systems-wide reforms in early childhood education. Such reforms are meant to align diverse early childhood programs including pre-K and child care on common program elements such as standards, data systems, curriculum, child and program assessment, and professional development opportunities. Head Start State Collaboration Offices and State Advisory Councils provide the means for the Head Start program to engage in collaboration efforts at the state level. Head Start State Collaboration Offices gather information and conduct needs assessments related to the coordination and collaboration of Head Start in state early childhood systems, while the State Advisory Councils bring together key early childhood decision-makers, including representatives of Head Start, to plan the development of state early childhood systems. HHS, in addition to being involved in systems reform discussions at the

national level, will use these state-level resources to collaborate in states and to encourage Head Start programs around the country to engage in state-level reform efforts.

Using Head Start State Collaboration Offices to Promote Head Start Participation in State and Local Early Childhood Systems Building

The Head Start State Collaboration Offices will work to promote interoperability between the Head Start data system(s) and those of state preschool and K–3 systems; collaborate with institutions of Higher Education to promote professional development through education and credentialing programs for early childhood providers in states; and work to encourage that Head Start Program Performance Standards are included in state efforts to rate the quality of programs (often called Quality Rating and Improvement Systems) and to support Head Start programs in participating in these rating efforts.

Strengthening Inter-Departmental Early Childhood Collaboration at the Federal Level to Support Early Childhood Systems Building

A new federal partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education is focused on supporting six key components of State early childhood systems reform including early learning standards, curriculum, and assessment; program standards including Quality Rating and Improvement Systems; early childhood workforce and professional development; data systems; health promotion; and parent and family engagement.

C. Supporting Seamless Transitions & Continuity through Head Start, Kindergarten and 3rd Grade

Supporting Programs to Build Relationships with Elementary Schools at the Local Level

The 2007 Head Start reauthorization included many new provisions requiring Head Start agencies to coordinate with school districts to promote continuity of services and effective transition of Head Start children into the school system. HHS will build on existing continuity and transition efforts to implement these provisions through improvements in the Head Start Program Performance Standards, including additional requirements around program outreach and coordination with the K–3 system.

Head Start programs will also receive greater support through improved training and technical assistance in their efforts to collaborate with schools. HHS will develop, disseminate information, and provide technical assistance on effective policies and promising practices related to continuity of services for Head Start children as they transition to public schools.

Encouraging Collaboration with Elementary Education Entities at the State Level

Under the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, Head Start State Collaboration Offices were given an increased role in supporting transition and continuity of services between Head Start and kindergarten and elementary school. For example, State Collaboration Offices now assist Head Start agencies in collaborating with entities involved in state and local planning processes.

In addition, State Advisory Councils are required to engage in activities to promote school preparedness of children from birth through school entry and support the transition of young children to school.

Strengthening Inter-Departmental Birth-to-Eight Collaboration at the Federal level

As part of the Administration's larger birth-to-eight strategy, the Department of Health and Human Services is collaborating extensively with the Department of Education, which provides leadership and policy direction to the nation's elementary schools. Although the Head Start program has been encouraged for many years to develop relationships with schools (through Memoranda of Understanding and other agreements), the renewed commitment by the two agencies to improve transition and continuity of services will result in increased buy-in and collaboration between school districts, schools, and early childhood programs.

The departments will work together to promote the adoption of promising practices and innovations to improve K-3 programs and the connection between preschool and K-3 programs. The Department of Education is currently engaged in a number of major education reform initiatives, including Race to the Top, the Investing in Innovation Fund (I3), and Promise Neighborhoods. These efforts will expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative and evidence-based practices to improve the quality and effectiveness of schools, including a focus on the connection between early education and elementary school success.