



June 1, 2015

To: The Honorable John Kline  
Chairman  
U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: CLASP Head Start Reauthorization Comments in Response to Chairman Kline**

Dear Chairman Kline,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on ways to strengthen Head Start. The Head Start program is a critically important two-generational support for our country's poor children and their families. The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national, nonpartisan, anti-poverty organization advancing policy solutions that work for low-income people. We lift up the voices of poor and low-income children, families, and individuals, equip advocates with strategies that work, and help public officials put good ideas into practice. We advance federal and state policies that increase the number of low-income children with access to high-quality child care and early education that promotes positive child development and meets the needs of working parents.

Our comments draw on the work of experts at CLASP who have been deeply involved in Head Start policy for decades at many different levels, including as a key stakeholder organization in the most recent 2007 Congressional reauthorization. CLASP's Executive Director, Olivia Golden, served as Commissioner for Children, Youth, and Families and then as Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1993-2001), and was a key player in expanding and improving Head Start and creating Early Head Start.

Since its inception, Head Start's core has been a comprehensive approach to high-quality early education and a focus on the whole child—recognizing the importance of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Head Start children receive medical and developmental screenings and subsequent treatment for identified concerns. They also get regular medical and dental care. And their families receive parenting education, health education, and support services connecting them to education and jobs. Current research tells us that this full array of services is what early education programs should offer to have a positive effect on vulnerable children. Head Start's rigorous quality standards and monitoring processes, commitment to serving children with disabilities, and leadership in serving children from diverse backgrounds make it a model of a high-quality program and a foundational component of our early learning system.

We are pleased that your Committee recognizes Head Start as “one of the most significant early childhood education and development programs.” Please find below our comments in response to the specific questions posed in your request. We would be happy to answer additional questions and look forward to beginning a conversation to ensure that Head Start can be the strongest possible program for our youngest and most vulnerable children and their families.

**1. What role should the federal government play to promote the quality of learning within the Head Start program?**

The federal government plays a critical role in ensuring that poor children and their families, in every state, have access to high-quality, comprehensive early education services. The federal government should continue to respond to the needs of poor children through dedicated funding for Head Start tied to high-quality standards, including rigorous evidence-based standards; monitoring and accountability; training and professional development; and ongoing quality improvement. As demonstrated by Head Start’s history, this is effectively done through a federal to local funding stream, that allows for targeting to high-needs communities that might otherwise be unserved, as well as local adaptation (that maintains high-quality services) to meet the needs of local communities.

The federal government should continue to promote the quality of early learning in Head Start by providing increased support and resources for each component of Head Start. This includes ongoing professional development opportunities and living wages for staff; an effective training and technical assistance system; and a comprehensive monitoring system.

The 2007 Head Start reauthorization included the requirement that 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in Early Childhood Education or a baccalaureate or advanced degree in any subject, and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-age children. This goal was required to be met by September 30, 2013, yet it was surpassed in the 2012-2013 school year with 55 percent of teachers holding at least a baccalaureate degree.<sup>1</sup>

The federal government should continue to promote Head Start’s legacy of continuous quality improvement through a commitment to high-quality standards, training and professional development to meet standards, and monitoring of the implementation of those standards. As with any program intended to advance outcomes for our children, we should learn and adapt as new research expands our knowledge base and as the needs of children change over time. Head Start has been the subject of intensive research for five decades and much of what has been learned has been incorporated into the program through quality improvement. Head Start has evolved over time in various ways to meet families’ needs for full-day or year-round programs or to respond to local community needs with innovative models. Program standards, monitoring, and professional development have all been revised based on research and evaluation. A set of revised Head Start program performance standards will greatly enhance Head Start’s ability to build on its history of quality improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> CLASP, *United States Head Start by the Numbers 2013 PIR Profile*, 2014, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/HSDData2013US.pdf>.

## 2. What steps can agencies take to enhance coordination of existing early learning programs across the federal government?

Federal child care and early education programs, and those that provide ancillary supports to early learning programs, provide distinct services for diverse populations—all of which are important given the wide-ranging needs of parents and children. Yet millions of children, particularly poor children, lack access to child care and early education settings in the first years of life because of insufficient federal investments. Nationally, less than half (45 percent) of all eligible children are served by Head Start and only 4 percent of eligible children are served by Early Head Start.<sup>2</sup> With 25 percent of young children ages 0 through 5—or almost 6 million young children—in poverty,<sup>3</sup> current investments in Head Start are not sufficient to meet the great need among this country’s young children. And while, according to the GAO, there are 12 federal programs that have an explicit purpose of providing early learning or child care services, 9 of those 12 programs obligated less than \$500 million each in fiscal year 2010.<sup>4</sup>

An important role for federal agencies is clarifying the unique role that each child care and early learning program plays. For example, Head Start stands out as the *sole* dedicated funding stream to support the comprehensive early education of poor children and their parents. Federal agencies can help states, programs, and parents understand the unique role that each early learning program provides, including the distinct eligibility of children and families served, potential models of service delivery, and the goals of each program. Children and families fall across a broad spectrum of needs, including part-day versus full-day services. The most vulnerable families will always be best served by Head Start’s comprehensive approach of early childhood education as well as family goal setting and support to achieve stable housing, healthcare, food security, and education and employment opportunities.

Federal agencies can also play a technical assistance role to state and local entities to understand the ways that programs can be better coordinated under current law. For example, states have enormous flexibility under the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to set their child care policies, and many families require child care assistance to meet their child care needs outside of the hours of Head Start. State policies can facilitate coordination at the state and local level to better meet the needs of families.

## 3. What innovative steps are states taking to improve the quality of early education for their unique populations?

States have taken a number of innovative approaches to building on the success of Head Start. For example:

- According to a 2012 report authored by CLASP and Zero to Three, 23 states had at least one state initiative to build on Early Head Start including: extending the day or year of existing services through additional funding; expanding the capacity of EHS programs to serve more children;

<sup>2</sup> National Women’s Law Center calculation of Department of Health and Human Services Head Start Data and American Community Survey Data.

<sup>3</sup> CLASP Calculations of 2013 U.S. Census American Community Survey data.

<sup>4</sup> Kay E. Brown, “Early Learning and Child Care: Federal Funds Support Multiple Programs with Similar Goals,” Testimony to U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce, United States Government Accountability Office, February 5, 2014, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/660685.pdf>.

providing resources and assistance to child care providers to deliver EHS standards; and supporting partnerships between EHS and child care providers to improve the quality of care.<sup>5</sup>

- Louisiana and Oklahoma, for example, made substantive changes to their child care subsidy policies to support the success of Early Head Start-child care partnerships, which Congress funded in FY 2014. More states could follow their lead by reforming outdated and restrictive child care policies to better support coordination of services.
- States such as Washington and Oregon have modeled their pre-kindergarten programs after Head Start, and many other states operating mixed-delivery pre-kindergarten allow Head Start providers to be eligible as state pre-kindergarten providers.

Despite the innovative efforts to expand early learning opportunities at the state level, states are challenged by the need for additional resources. For example, between 2008 and 2012, six state-funded Early Head Start initiatives actually ended due to limited resources.<sup>6</sup> Between 2006 and 2013, 315,000 children lost access to child care assistance funded through CCDBG.<sup>7</sup> State-funded pre-K served 1,347,272 children in 2013-2014. State pre-kindergarten continues to be largely a program for 4-year-olds, with 4's accounting for more than 1.1 million, or about 86 percent, of the children enrolled. Total enrollment increased by 8,535 from the prior year. While the additional enrollment is positive, about half of it was need just to offset the previous year's cut in enrollment of 4,300.<sup>8</sup>

#### **4. How can the federal government best support states' efforts to maximize parental involvement in early childhood education? How can Congress ensure parents remain the ultimate decision-maker in the life of their child?**

Head Start should continue its historic commitment to meeting the needs of the “whole child” and the family. Head Start is a leader in parental involvement and family engagement due to its two-generation approach, which includes attention to the educational and economic needs and aspirations of parents. In fact, in the 2012-2013 school year, three-quarters of the families in Head Start accessed at least one type of service provided to families, such as parenting or health education.<sup>9</sup> Whether it is in the context of engaging parents individually with the Family Partnership Agreement, or collectively by sharing in program governance via the Policy Council, Head Start programs engage and develop parents' strengths well beyond the capacity of most other early learning programs. Congress can ensure families are well-equipped to make decisions about their children over their lifetimes by providing adequate funding for the two-generation supports delivered through Head Start - especially in the areas of parental education and job skills, housing, health care, and food security.

<sup>5</sup> Jamie Colvard and Stephanie Schmit, *Expanding access to Early Head Start: State Initiatives for Infants & Toddlers at Risk*, CLASP, 2012, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/ehsinitiatives.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Schmit and Rhiannon Reeves, *Child Care Assistance in 2013*, CLASP, 2015, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Spending-and-Participation-Final.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> The National Institute for Early Education Research, “State of Preschool Yearbook 2014” *Executive Summary*, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, 2015, [http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2014\\_executivesummary\\_1.pdf](http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2014_executivesummary_1.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> CLASP, *United States Head Start by the Numbers 2013 PIR Profile*, 2014, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/HSDData2013US.pdf>.

**5. What kind of information could the federal government provide to help parents understand the options available for their children's early care and education?**

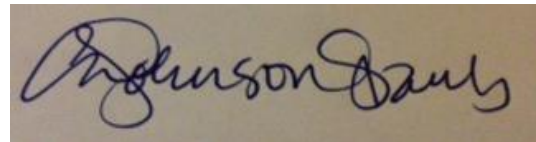
The CCDBG reauthorization of 2014 expanded consumer education requirements for states to ensure that parents understand the options available to them and have access to information about program quality. However, many children and their families who get child care assistance and are eligible for Head Start services may not know about the availability of Head Start. Agencies that administer CCDBG and/or determine eligibility for CCDBG should be encouraged through federal guidance to partner with Early Head Start and Head Start, among other early childhood programs, to ensure that families have access to the programs that best meet their needs. This may be done through coordinated referrals, information sharing or other models.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer input to your Committee's important work in supporting young children's access to high-quality Head Start programs. We hope these comments are helpful, and we would be delighted to offer further suggestions on relevant research and policy opportunities at your convenience. Please contact Christine Johnson-Staub at [cjohnsonstaub@clasp.org](mailto:cjohnsonstaub@clasp.org) if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



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