



Hispanic Education Coalition

May 29, 2003

Honorable George Miller
United States House of Representatives
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Lynn Woolsey
United States House of Representatives 2205
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Miller & Congresswoman Woolsey:

On behalf of the Hispanic Education Coalition (HEC), an *ad hoc* coalition of national organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for over 40 million Hispanics living in the United States and Puerto Rico, we write to discuss an issue of great importance to the Latino community, the reauthorization of the Head Start Act. The HEC believes that Head Start is a very successful program and that the reauthorization should focus on strategic improvements, particularly for Latino and English language learner (ELL) children and families. The debate to further improve Head Start must take into account the changing Head Start eligible child population and strive to successfully meet the demands of an increasingly diverse nation.

Latinos represent the fastest growing school-age population in the nation. As the 2000 Census revealed, Latinos are the nation's largest ethnic minority group with new estimates of the U.S. population showing that the Latino population grew 4.7% since the 2000 Census. Moreover, a larger proportion of Latinos (35.0%) are under the age of 18 compared with the national average of other Americans (25.7%), and of these Latino children, nearly 12% are younger than age five.

Furthermore, over the past decade, dramatic shifts have occurred in the immigrant population in the United States, particularly among Hispanic immigrants. Many Hispanic immigrants have settled in areas where their presence had previously been virtually invisible. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau determined that the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) experienced a 93% increase in its Hispanic population from 1990 to 1998, far outpacing growth in "traditional" Hispanic states like California, New York, and Texas, where increases hovered around 32%. Taken together, these figures show that increasingly, Latino and English language learner (ELL) children represent our nation's future students, leaders, and workers. They require purposeful and thoughtful actions to prepare them with language, pre-literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills needed to enter their local schools "ready to learn."

While the Head Start program made steady progress throughout the last decade to respond to these demographic changes by increasing Hispanic children's participation, Latino children remain underrepresented in the program. Latino children constitute 30.4% of low-income children in our nation. Yet, only 25.7% of Head Start enrollees are Hispanic. In addition, the recent phenomenon of "emerging" Hispanic communities mentioned above poses a challenge to Head Start providers and participants. As Latinos move into areas of the U.S. where there have been Head Start programs operating, but without precedent in serving Latino and ELL children, the need for targeted, effective outreach strategies will continue to grow.



Moreover, the need for linguistic and culturally competent service delivery, across all Head Start service components is essential for improving outcomes for Latino and ELL children. Our language and cultural differences often serve as a barrier to participation in the broad array of Head Start services. Again, this problem is most evident in communities with emergent Latino and ELL populations. For example, a 2000 Head Start study found that translators are not consistently available at every site or meeting. Furthermore, the findings noted that many programs have difficulty coordinating access to low-cost healthcare providers for multicultural families and understanding relevant issues related to their healthcare needs.

Additionally, the need to further examine the participation and quality of services in the Early Head Start (EHS) program is critical given the youthfulness of our community and the mounting evidence that the earliest years, from birth to three years of age, are crucial to children's growth and development. In particular, this time period is recognized as optimal for language development, which is also found to be a predictor of later school success.

Lastly, but certainly not in order of importance, is the need for a renewed commitment to serve some of the most vulnerable children in the nation, the children of families working in seasonal agriculture. The most critical issue facing the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs is the funding shortfall that prevents more than 80% of eligible children from receiving services. Over the last eight years, the MSHS program has consistently received less than 4% of the Head Start annual appropriation and has been denied access to Early Head Start funds even though the majority of children served by the MSHS are infants and toddlers. In addition, the program's commitment to serve families with unique needs must be accommodated in the development and enforcement of quality standards and practices. MSHS programs face barriers to the successful retention and development of teachers and program staff imposed by the realities of a shorter operating year and a limited bicultural, bilingual applicant pool.

Upon careful review of the "School Readiness Act of 2003" (H.R. 2210), the HEC is concerned that the proposed reauthorization legislation fails to meet the educational and developmental needs of Latino and ELL children and families. We are grateful for your past leadership, as Ranking Members and strong education advocates, on behalf of the educational needs of Latinos and ELLs. We urge you to set the reauthorization on the right path by making Latino and ELL children and families a focal point of the debate.

The HEC strongly believes that our recommendations outlined below represent a framework for taking meaningful steps towards ensuring that Latino and ELL children enter their local schools "ready to learn." We fully support actions to improve educational quality through linguistic and culturally responsive curricula, increased professional development opportunities targeted to meeting the needs of Latino and ELL children, and the provision of culturally competent family services. In addition, the HEC endorses increased actions towards improving program accountability through appropriate assessments of ELLs and a commitment to research and data collection methods that allow for increased access to and quality of services for Latino and ELL populations. And finally, the HEC considers the expansion of MSHS a high priority for the Head Start reauthorization.

Educational Quality for Latino and ELL children

Further strengthening the academic component of Head Start for Latinos and ELLs, requires a focus on the quality of instruction and appropriateness of curricula. Thus, we recommend that the reauthorized Head Start:

- Provide existing Head Start grantees with funds to subcontract technical assistance services from providers with expertise and experience in curricula and pedagogy for Latino and ELL populations.
- Make funds available for the implementation of demonstration sites with the skills and capacity to serve Latino and ELL communities. These sites will contribute to a knowledge base of effective linguistic and culturally-relevant pedagogy, assessment tools, and testing practices.

Professional Development

Quality instruction begins with well-prepared teachers. In particular, the HEC recommends that the reauthorization work to increase the pool of high-quality bilingual instructors and personnel with expertise in working with Latino and ELL families, including the following:

- Increase training and professional development appropriations to create a career ladder program that aggressively recruits bilingual, bicultural teachers and assists instructors in receiving bilingual certification.
- Make funds available for cultural diversity training that fosters understanding of Latino and ELL populations for Head Start program administrators, teachers, and staff.
- Provide adequate funds for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) staff development activities and parent training programs specific to the needs of monolingual Spanish-speakers who face limited availability of linguistic and culturally competent early childhood educational opportunities.

Linguistic and Culturally Responsive Family Services

One of the many strengths of Head Start programs is their successful parental involvement activities. However, these can be further improved for Latino and ELL families. Thus, the HEC recommends that the reauthorized Head Start Act:

- Maintain a strong technical assistance component and target technical assistance funds to enhance grantees' capacity to provide for meaningful ELL parent participation in Head Start governance functions. Activities should include increasing access to translation/interpretation services and bilingual materials for ELL families.
- Fund a pilot program to demonstrate effective, innovative programming that meets the nutritional, health, and unique social service needs of Latino and ELL populations.

Accountability in Head Start

As with all federally-funded programs, Head Start must include a rigorous and sensible accountability system. Such a system should be designed to ensure improved quality of services, rather than burdening Head Start providers with unnecessary and onerous requirements. In addition, accountability systems must include measures appropriate for ELL and migrant and seasonal worker communities. The HEC recommends that the Head Start program:

- Allow for consideration of the needs of ELLs in the implementation of the Head Start National Reporting System by:
 - Delaying assessment of ELL cohort for at least one year to allow for special planning.
 - Prohibiting the Department from dictating the assessment to be used to evaluate the success of Head Start programs. The use of inappropriate assessments can only serve to exacerbate the difficulties in providing ELL children with effective linguistic and culturally-relevant pedagogy. Each program should be free to choose an appropriate assessment tool based on its population of children.
 - Providing funds for a regional grants program that allows grantees to contract with local experts to advise on selection and implementation of assessment tools for ELLs.
 - Requesting the GAO to conduct a review of the Head Start National Reporting System after three years to report on the progress and issues associated with implementation and testing of ELLs, the quality and success of instructional programs, and whether or not the tests being used are culturally-and-linguistically relevant and effective in measuring progress for ELLs.
 - Designating a Head Start Bureau liaison who will be accessible to grantees during the design and implementation phase of assessing the ELL cohort.
- Allow additional time for MSHS programs to comply with teacher qualification standards if a program can show they have a plan in place, given the staff retention challenges imposed by a shorter operating year and a limited bilingual, bicultural applicant pool.

Research and Data Collection

While some research and data on Latino, ELL, and migrant children and families exists, it is often of inadequate quality and insufficient scope. In addition, there is not enough research and data specific to these communities. Thus, the HEC recommends that Head Start:

- Ensure that rigorous data collection methods and full utilization of community assessments among Regional Head Start (RHS) & Early Head Start (EHS) grantees are implemented to better report on quality and access of services.
- Develop a national clearinghouse to coordinate the development and dissemination of research on Latino and ELL children and families.
- Review existing evaluation studies, or conduct a new study if necessary, to report on the effectiveness of Head Start in producing Latino and ELL children who enter school “ready to learn.”

- In the EHS program, disaggregate data similar to RHS, which allows for reporting on number of children served by various demographic characteristics.

Increasing Access to Head Start Programs

As noted above, Latinos are underrepresented in Head Start. In addition, the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program is unable to meet the needs of the vast majority of eligible families due to insufficient funding. MSHS programs serve 19% of the eligible child population whereas RHS serves approximately 60% of their eligible population. Moreover, the funding for MSHS is currently at the discretion of the Department of Health and Human Services, and programs have never received more than 4% of the funds appropriated annually. To remedy this, the HEC recommends that the reauthorized Head Start:

- Achieve parity between RHS and MSHS programs by increasing current funding for MSHS to at minimum one billion dollars. Such an increase would enable MSHS to serve 60% of the eligible population. Affirmative, interim actions to expand MSHS should include:
 - Language in the Head Start Act explicitly stating that MSHS shall receive 5% of the annual Head Start appropriations.
 - Ensure that EHS program funds are available to a variety of Head Start program models, including short-term programs.
- Make funds available for the implementation of demonstration sites – in places where there has been a significant increase in the ELL population – to programs with the skills and capacity to serve Latino and ELL communities. These sites will allow for more targeted RHS & EHS expansion efforts.
- Provide existing EHS & RHS grantees with funds to subcontract technical assistance services from providers with expertise and experience in outreach to and recruitment of Latino and ELL populations.
- Create a demonstration program to assist MSHS, RHS, and EHS providers in obtaining facilities or to bring current facilities up to Head Start standards.

The HEC is pleased that the MSHS program was excluded from the state demonstration program outlined in the “School Readiness Act of 2003.” However, we remain concerned that the proposal to devolve Head Start to the states does nothing to ensure access to and quality of programs for Latino and ELL children and families.

The HEC looks forward to working together on a successful Head Start reauthorization. We would appreciate an opportunity to further discuss the ways in which your commitment to preserving and improving the program includes the best possible outcomes for our children and families. Please contact HEC co-chairs Melissa Lazarin at (202) 776-1751 or Maryln McAdam at (202) 862-8514 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Melissa Lazarin
National Council of La Raza
HEC Co-Chair



Maryln McAdam
National HEP-CAMP Association
HEC Co-Chair

On behalf of:

Intercultural Development Research Association
League of United Latin American Citizens
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Migrant Legal Action Program
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Association

cc: Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Honorable Rubén Hinojosa
Honorable Ciro D. Rodriguez, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Chair