

HEAD START REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES

Improve Head Start accountability for serving Hispanic and limited-English-proficient (LEP) children and families. For Hispanic children, accountability begins with access to Head Start programs. Despite steady improvements throughout the last decade, Latino children continue to be underrepresented in Head Start, particularly in regions on the country where the 2000 Census noted large increases in the Hispanic population, such as the Southeast and Midwest. This can be addressed through greater accountability in Head Start. Under current law, Head Start grantees are required to conduct an annual community needs assessment. NCLR recommends that Head Start reauthorization strengthen Head Start monitoring to include an evaluation of how well providers serve the populations identified in annual assessments.

Strengthen the educational component of Head Start, particularly with respect to LEP children. Quality instruction begins with well-prepared teachers, including teachers with the language skills to serve Head Start's linguistically-diverse children. Approximately 28% of Head Start children do not speak English as their first language. NCLR believes that reauthorization legislation should work to increase the pool of highly-qualified bilingual instructors and personnel with expertise in working with LEP children and families.

Increase access to Head Start for the children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs make Head Start services available to our nation's farmworking families. The most critical issue facing Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs is funding, which is currently at the discretion of the Secretary of Health and Human Services; these programs have never received more than 4% of the funds appropriated annually. This has resulted in only 19% of the eligible children having access to the program. NCLR recommends that reauthorization legislation include a minimum of 5% of the annual Head Start appropriation be designated for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start.

Promote a sound, quality Head Start assessment system, particularly for LEP children. While NCLR recognizes that assessment is an important component of quality education programs, the Head Start National Reporting System (HSNRS) as currently designed contains serious flaws that limit the program's ability to demonstrate the educational gains made by LEP children. This could have the collateral effect of creating a disincentive for LEP children to be served by Head Start; programs could decide that assessing these children is a complex endeavor and thus not worth the risk of a possible corrective action situation. NCLR urges Congress to postpone the NRS until the National Academy of Sciences can advise on appropriate assessments and testing protocols, particularly for LEP children.

Expand Early Head Start. Early Head Start has shown great promise in helping families support the development of their children from birth. Unfortunately, this valuable program is only available to a small fraction of the eligible population, and it is largely unavailable to the migrant and seasonal farmworker community. NCLR recommends doubling the resources available to Early Head Start and allowing short-term programs, such as Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, to compete for the funding.

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	Eligible	Served	Percentage Served
U.S.	161,639	31,400	19%
Alabama	1,259	261	21%
Alaska	No Data	NA	NA
Arizona	5,545	684	12%
Arkansas	2,556	391	15%
California	46,972	4,872	10%
Colorado	3,196	675	21%
Connecticut	528	0	0%
Delaware	121	30	25%
Florida	11,191	4,814	43%
Georgia	2,970	270	9%
Hawaii	No Data	NA	NA
Idaho	4,103	732	18%
Illinois	3,085	520	17%
Indiana	1,655	361	22%
Iowa	1,491	0	0%
Kansas	1,539	0	0%
Kentucky	869	0	0
Louisiana	2,092	60	3%
Maine	270	112	41%
Maryland	397	138	35%
Massachusetts	482	0	0
Michigan	3,317	1,565	47%
Minnesota	1618	541	33%
Mississippi	1,909	0	0%
Missouri	1,615	0	0%
Montana	1293	0	0%
Nebraska	1491	105	7%
Nevada	499	0	0%
New Hampshire	128	0	0%
New Jersey	998	216	22%
New Mexico	1,546	0	0%
New York	1177	489	42%
North Carolina	2,419	821	34%
North Dakota	1057	184	17%
Ohio	2,729	712	26%
Oklahoma	1,901	0	0%
Oregon	9,044	2,619	29%
Pennsylvania	1,856	313	17%
Rhode Island	67	0	0%
South Carolina	1,716	463	27%
South Dakota	697	0	0%
Tennessee	830	241	29%
Texas	15,730	5,200	33%
Utah	590	542	92%
Vermont	55	0	0%
Virginia	902	264	29%
Washington	13,946	2,604	19%
West Virginia	83	0	0%
Wisconsin	1,782	394	22%
Wyoming	323	207	64%

Source: Head Start Bureau, Descriptive Study of Seasonal Farmworker Families, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, September 2001. Percentages calculated by NCLR.