



Testimony of the Hispanic Education Coalition

Submitted to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

**Full Committee Hearing - Reauthorizing Head Start:
Preparing Children to Succeed in School and in Life**

Tuesday, July 22, 2003

Introduction

Chairman Gregg, Ranking Member Kennedy and Honorable Members of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, thank you for holding a hearing on an issue that is very important to the Latino community. On behalf of 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 respectfully submit testimony on the reauthorization of the Head Start Act.

The HEC testimony addresses a critical issue for improving Head Start: how can this already successful program better meet the unique needs of Latino, limited English proficient (LEP) and farmworker children? These children are the future of Head Start as they increasingly represent the eligible Head Start child population. Moreover, the mounting evidence demonstrating that a high quality early childhood education serves as a predictor of later academic success suggests that a focus on Latino, LEP, and farmworker children can serve to help these children enter school "ready to learn." The HEC believes that Head Start, the nation's premier early childhood education program, can meet the challenge of effectively preparing Latino, LEP, and farmworker children for academic success. Moreover, we believe that the pending renewal of Head Start is the best opportunity to embark on this endeavor. To this end, the Head Start reauthorization should work to increase access to the program for children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers, strengthen the educational component of Head Start, particularly for LEP children, and improve Head Start accountability mechanisms for Hispanic and LEP children and families.

Background (see Appendix 1)

The Latino community is the fastest growing school age population in the nation. As Census data shows, Latinos are the nation's largest ethnic minority group. In addition, Latinos are a young population, with nearly 12% of Latino children younger than age five. Moreover, a Head Start study conducted in 2000 found that Spanish is the second most common language spoken in Head Start. This same study also noted that in the period from 1993 to 1998, the overall



growth of LEP children in Head Start grew by 4%, and of these same children the largest increase was seen among native Spanish speakers (36%).

In addition, the phenomenon of “emerging” Latino communities poses a significant challenge for Head Start providers and participants. 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 many Southeastern and Midwestern states have experienced large increases in their Hispanic immigrant population, far outpacing growth in “traditional” Hispanic states like California, New York, and Texas. These “emerging” Latino communities often lack the experience and expertise in providing services to immigrant and LEP children and families. The HEC believes that the Head Start reauthorization is an important opportunity to direct additional resources to programs operating in these communities that help to ensure Latino and LEP children are prepared for academic success.

Increase access to migrant and seasonal farmworker children

The children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers are among the most vulnerable children in our nation. Many of these children are forced to accompany their parents in the fields while they work picking the fruit and vegetables that make their way to our supermarkets and dinner tables. The children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers are often exposed to dangerous pesticides and other occupational hazards that threaten their health and physical safety. These are the children served by the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program (MSHS). Unfortunately, too few are able to participate in this important program because it is under-funded.

The last Head Start reauthorization bill, the Coats Human Services Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-285), instructed the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to study the need and demand for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs. The HHS study, *The Descriptive Study of Seasonal Farmworker Families*, was released in September 2001, and documented that only 31, 400 out of 161, 400 (19%) eligible children and families are served through existing Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs. So, while Regional programs are able to serve approximately 60% of their eligible child population, MSHS programs can only serve 19% of our population.

Despite the findings of the HHS report, and language in the Act that instructs the Secretary to address the documented need, there has been no increase in the portion of the Head Start budget dedicated to MSHS. Over the last eight years, the MSHS program has consistently received less than 4% of the Head Start annual appropriation. Furthermore, MSHS has been denied access to Early Head Start funds although the majority of children served by the MSHS are infants and toddlers.

Recommendation: The HEC strongly supports an increased, reliable funding source for MSHS that ensures a floor of 5% of the annual Head Start appropriation. This modest 1% increase would allow for MSHS to serve approximately 10,000 more children. In addition, the HEC supports language in the Act that allows MSHS to compete for Early Head Start grants.

Strengthen the educational component of Head Start for Latino, LEP, and farmworker children (see Appendix 2)

Efforts to enhance Head Start program quality and improve child outcomes must focus on the needs of Latino and LEP. As noted above, approximately 30% of the children being served by Head Start speak a language other than English at home, and more than 140 languages are represented in Head Start programs nationwide. The diversity of children enrolled presents both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity to use the child's first language to build strong pre-literacy skills and a challenge to help these children acquire English as a second language while supporting the child's home language. This effort requires not only well-prepared teachers that can provide high quality instruction, but also teachers that possess the necessary skills to utilize the child's first language as a powerful primary vehicle to engage them in learning.

Recommendation: The HEC believes that the Head Start reauthorization should work to increase the pool of highly qualified bilingual instructors and personnel with expertise in working with diverse cultures and LEP children and families, particularly in rural communities and Southeastern and Midwestern states with "emerging" Hispanic communities. Specifically, we recommend creation of a "career ladder" program for bilingual Head Start instructors. In addition, the HEC believes that the reauthorization should preserve the integrity of MSHS programs by allowing sufficient time for programs to develop bilingual, bicultural teachers and to foster collaborations with local community colleges for such purposes.

Improve Head Start accountability mechanisms for Latino and LEP children

The historical gap in participation for Latino children must be addressed through increased Head Start accountability. For Latino children, accountability must begin with access to the program. As noted above, the Latino community is no longer a regional population, but a national one. This phenomenon, particularly in communities that have experienced very recent demographic changes will require purposeful efforts on behalf of programs to document and address the changing needs of their local communities. The community assessments required under Head Start should reflect these demographic shifts, and programs must be held accountable for serving children in their community.

Moreover, while it is recognized that assessment is an important component of quality educational programs, progress towards increased accountability systems in Head Start should be undertaken with caution given the paucity of early childhood education assessment tools, particularly for LEP children. Additionally, the lack of appropriate LEP assessment tools could potentially cause programs to conclude that accommodating LEP children's testing needs are burdensome and costly. Taken together, these factors could have the collateral effect of creating a disincentive for LEP children to be served by Head Start; programs could simply decide that assessing these children is not worth the risk of facing corrective action. Therefore, it is imperative that a Head Start assessment system be designed to ensure improved quality of services for all children, rather than burdening Head Start providers with unnecessary and onerous requirements and potentially negatively targeting a subgroup of Head Start children.

Recommendation: The HEC strongly supports language in the Act that strengthens Head Start monitoring including an evaluation of how well providers address the populations and community needs identified in these assessments. In addition, the HEC strongly believes that the reauthorization should work to prohibit the Head Start Bureau from dictating specific assessment tools and maintain local input in the design of a sound accountability system.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of approximately 231,637 Spanish speaking, 31,400 farmworker, and 320,619 Latino children and families served by Head Start. We look forward to working together throughout the reauthorization process.

Appendix 1

"Emerging" Hispanic Communities

The phenomenon of "emerging" Hispanic communities was revealed as a result of the 2000 Census, which demonstrated that over the last decade, dramatic shifts have occurred in the Hispanic immigrant population. Many Latinos have recently settled in parts of the country where their presence had previously been virtually invisible. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau determined that many Southeastern and Midwestern states have experienced large increases in their Hispanic immigrant population, far outpacing growth in "traditional" Hispanic states like California, New York, and Texas.

Hispanic Population in States with "Emerging" Communities 1990-2000

State	1990	Percent	2000	Percent	% Growth
Alabama	24,629	.6%	75,830	1.7%	208%
Arkansas	19,876	.8%	86,866	3.2%	337%
Georgia	108,922	1.7%	435,227	5.3%	300%
Iowa	32,647	1.2%	82,473	2.8%	153%
Nevada	124,419	10.4%	393,970	19.7%	217%
South Carolina	30,551	.9%	95,076	2.4%	211%
Tennessee	32,741	.7%	123,838	2.2%	278%

Hispanic Population in states with "Traditional" Communities 1990-2000

State	1990	Percent	2000	Percent	% Growth
California	7,687,938	25.8%	10,966,556	32.4%	42%
Florida	1,574,143	12.2%	2,682,715	16.8%	70%
Illinois	904,446	7.9%	1,530,262	12.3%	69%
New York	2,214,026	12.3%	2,867,583	15.1%	29%
Texas	4,339,905	25.5%	6,669,666	32%	53%

Appendix 2

Model ECE programs for bilingual, bicultural teacher development

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Portland Community College (PCC) offers Early Childhood Education (ECE) classes at various language levels for limited English proficient (LEP) individuals. Four beginning classes are offered in Spanish so students working toward associate degrees in ECE can begin learning ECE content while they simultaneously begin to learn English. Additional classes are offered bilingually with simultaneous translation. This allows students to complete their homework in their first language and also allows Spanish speaking and English speaking students to communicate more fully with others in class. Advanced classes are offered only in English but with simultaneous English language support. Upon completion of the program, LEP students have developed English language skills that allow them to pursue additional degrees and continue their education.

Aims Community College:

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Aims Community College provides support and mentoring to non-English speaking and limited English speaking Head Start staff to assist them in attaining their educational goals. Aims offers the GED preparation classes and the GED test in Spanish to enable Head Start parents and part-time staff to obtain an entry level classroom position with Regional or MSHS programs. LEP staff can take ESL classes based on individualized assessments. During their ESL classes, the TABE is used to assess their English competency and reading and writing skills. Students will be placed in Developmental English writing, Reading, and Math skills when their English Language proficiency will allow them to be successful. Aims continues to offer mentoring and tutoring support in a variety of modalities to support LEP students in the completion of their associates degree. In addition, all Head Start staff have their tuition and books paid for through a grant.