



## **Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007** *Facts and Recommendations*

On December 13, 2007, U.S. President George W. Bush signed into law a renewal of Head Start through 2012. The Head Start reauthorization intends to help more children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed by setting clear standards and measures for Head Start programs, improving coordination with other early childhood education programs, and strengthening program accountability. The controversial assessment, the Head Start National Reporting System, has been suspended.

Of interest to IRA members are the following new provisions:

### **Improvement in Classroom and Teacher Quality**

- Requires each Head Start agency to ensure that all of its teachers receive ongoing training in language and emergent literacy; adds text detailing use of training funds to support enhanced early language and preliteracy development of children in Head Start programs
- Improves teacher qualifications by requiring half of all Head Start teachers to hold bachelor's degrees by 2013 (but does not penalize programs that do not meet this goal)
- Sets aside 40 % of Head Start funds for improving teacher salaries and supporting professional development
- Requires Head Start agencies to implement research-based early childhood curricula that promote young children's school readiness in the areas of language and early reading
- Provides for the establishment of up to 200 exemplary Head Start agencies as "Centers of Excellence in Early Childhood," to receive bonus grants of at least \$200,000 per year

### **Focus on School Readiness**

- Elaborates on purpose by supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in a learning environment that supports growth in language and literacy
- Requires the use of best practices to support children's emerging literacy and vocabulary skills
- Requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to re-evaluate and update current early learning standards and assessments based on the best available research into child development
- Aligns Head Start performance standards with state early learning standards

## **Stronger Quality Standards**

- Requires scientifically based and developmentally appropriate education standards that develop and demonstrate knowledge and skills in language (including oral language and listening comprehension) and literacy (including phonological awareness, print awareness and skills, and alphabetic knowledge)
- Establishes the need to demonstrate competent financial management and delivery of a high-quality, developmentally appropriate program based on scientifically based research and measures
- Emphasizes the use of scientifically based research as a basis for formulating educational measures for children and developing appropriate curricula that will lead to positive outcomes

## **Coordination and Collaboration With Other Early Childhood Programs, Including State Prekindergartens**

- Aligns Head Start goals and expectations with those of schools in which Head Start children will later enroll
- Improves coordination between Head Start and local early education program
- Increases coordination with state prekindergarten programs so that resources and planning efforts are effectively shared
- Strengthens the state Head Start collaboration offices to promote better coordination between Head Start programs and other state and local early childhood services
- Provides funds for state Advisory Councils or Early Learning Councils to enhance early childhood program quality and coordination

Educators who work with young children should keep the following in mind:

- Children's language and literacy development must be embedded in literacy activities across the curriculum and program. There must be more organized and systematic instruction, as well as free-choice times, so that each child can reach his or her full potential.
- Teachers need not only knowledge of how children acquire literacy but also effective teaching and assessment strategies to support children's language and literacy development.
- Effective professional development should include on-site assistance to teachers in planning and implementing the literacy curriculum and activities. Professional development should demonstrate appropriate teaching strategies for each stage of children's development.
- Screening assessments must effectively identify preschool children who may be at high risk for delayed development or lack of school preparedness and in need of further diagnosis and additional services.
- Multiple assessments to determine each child's achievement should guide instruction.