

Improving the Skills and Credentials of Migrant, Seasonal
and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Teachers:

BUILDING FROM WITHIN



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over four decades, the federal Head Start program has provided millions of young children from impoverished backgrounds with access to early childhood education and basic health services. By some important measures, Head Start has helped put children on the path to academic and economic success. Teachers in the Head Start program play a crucial role in this process, by laying the foundation for preschoolers' future academic and social development. Recognizing this, policymakers and early childhood advocates have made improving the academic caliber of Head Start, and boosting the overall qualifications of the program's teaching staff, a priority.

Yet many teachers and teacher assistants working in Head Start's migrant and seasonal and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities—among the nation's most economically disadvantaged populations—face significant obstacles in pursuing college degrees and professional training.

These obstacles include:

- Lack of access to two- and four-year colleges in their rural and remote communities;
- Difficulty transferring credits among those institutions;
- Lack of year-round employment in teaching, where programs are seasonal;
- An unfamiliarity with college processes and cultures; and in some cases,
- Lack of proficiency in English, which can make enrolling and succeeding in credit-bearing college courses extremely difficult.

These teachers are a crucial, and yet underutilized resource within the Head Start community. Migrant and seasonal and AIAN Head Start teachers bring distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds and skills—as well as an abiding passion and commitment—to their work with young children and families. Many of these teachers grew up in the Head Start communities they now serve. They enrolled their own children in these programs. They speak the language and know the needs of parents. Today, as policymakers and early childhood education advocates look for strategies to tailor instruction and services to the needs of the multilingual, multiethnic Head Start population, migrant, seasonal and AIAN educators can play a leading role in fulfilling this mission—if given the necessary support and encouragement.

This paper describes the hurdles that teachers in these communities face in pursuing degrees and credentials; puts the challenges they face in context; and offers promising practices and recommendations that can strengthen this teacher corps and build the Head Start program's cultural and linguistic expertise.



When federal lawmakers reauthorized the Head Start Act in 2007, they called on programs to take steps to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the populations they serve. It's a major undertaking. A survey conducted in the 1990s found that more than 140 languages were spoken by Head Start children and their families, nationwide. Nearly 85 percent of Head Start program grantees serve children and families from more than one language group, according to a 2008 report prepared for the Office of Head Start. And a significant number of Head Start programs serve communities in which eight or more languages are spoken, that report found. At the same time, the Head Start reauthorization set requirements for teachers to obtain new college degrees and training. While the overall Head Start teacher force, nationally, appears to be relatively close to reaching the goals set out by Congress for securing bachelor's degree and other credentials, their peers in the migrant, seasonal, and AIAN Head Start community are farther behind.

Consider these statistics:

- By October 1, 2011, 100 percent of Head Start classrooms must have a teacher with at least an associate's degree in early childhood education (ECE) or a related field. The program is about 7,500

teachers short of meeting this requirement, nationally, according to federal 2008-2009 Program Information Report (PIR) data.¹ While 83 percent of the overall Head Start teaching population meets that goal, just 58.6 percent of AIAN and 51.2 percent of migrant and seasonal teachers do (though the data for judging the migrant/seasonal teaching population is limited).²

- By September 30, 2013, 50 percent of Head Start teachers in center-based programs nationwide must have at least a bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field. While 49 percent of teachers nationally meet that mark, the numbers are much less impressive among AIAN teachers, 22 percent. Among migrant and seasonal educators, it's 16 percent, though the same data limitations apply.
- By September 30, 2013, all teacher assistants at center-based programs must have at least a child development associate (CDA) credential, be enrolled in a CDA program to be completed within two years, or be enrolled in a program leading to an associate's or bachelor's degree. About 13,000 assistants do not yet meet this requirement. Migrant and seasonal assistants trail the national average in CDA attainment.

1 Estimates of teacher credentialing in this document are only for Head Start teachers working with preschool-age children, not Early Head Start teachers, who face different credentialing requirements under the law.

2 Federal PIR data on migrant/seasonal Head Start teacher credentialing is limited, in that it does not separate the credentials of migrant/seasonal Head Start preschool teachers, for whom the associate's/bachelor's degree requirements apply, from those of teachers working with infants/toddlers, who do not have to meet the associate's/bachelor's degree mandates.

Despite these hurdles, a number of institutions, particularly at the community college level, have taken innovative steps to help migrant, seasonal and AIAN teachers and teacher assistants. This document draws from those promising practices and provides recommendations for increasing the opportunity for migrant, seasonal and AIAN Head Start teachers to pursue college degrees and training.

We recommend that policymakers at the federal, state and postsecondary level take several steps to help these teachers acquire new credentials and skills in working with young children:

- **Needs Assessment.** Conduct a comprehensive, baseline needs assessment of Head Start staff. This assessment should include college-readiness testing and the collection of individual, rather than aggregate-level, teaching staff data to allow for longitudinal research and help policymakers clearly quantify needs and plan accordingly.
- **New College Curricula and Instructional Models.** Promote curricula and instructional strategies that blend English language acquisition for Spanish and Native language speakers with content learning and classroom training.

- **New Delivery Mechanisms.** Encourage collaboration among community colleges, Head Start providers and others to deliver coursework in different ways, such as through distance education. These programs should be designed to account for educators' diverse cultural backgrounds, uneven access to technology and varying degrees of technological skill.
- **Culturally Relevant Strategies to Support Teachers.** Design social marketing, mentoring, case management and cohort teaching approaches that take into account the unique obstacles that these educators face—with the goal of showing them that college degrees and training are within reach.
- **Increased Cooperation Among Higher Education Systems.** Bring national organizations representing colleges and teacher education programs together to develop new curricula and articulation agreements that meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse educators and their programs.
- **Targeted Financial Aid.** Review, and if necessary, revise federal and state grant, scholarship and financial aid policies to provide greater opportunities for teachers and teacher assistants in Head Start programs. These efforts should account for educators' non-traditional schedules and needs.

This paper is a call to action.

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The strategies discussed here not only have the potential to increase the professional credentials of migrant, seasonal and AIAN Head Start teachers, but also to provide these educators with new, crucial skills for working with disadvantaged young children. Creating a more skilled Head Start teaching population will have another important benefit: It will give children in some of the nation's neediest and most diverse communities a much stronger academic and developmental foundation to prepare them for the challenges they will face in the K-12 system, and during the rest of their lives.

Improving the Skills and Credentials of Migrant, Seasonal and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Teachers:

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For over four decades, the federal Head Start program has provided millions of young children from impoverished backgrounds with access to early childhood education and basic health services. Teachers in the Head Start program play a crucial role in this process, by laying the foundation for preschoolers' future academic and social development. Recognizing this, policymakers and early childhood advocates in recent years have made improving the academic caliber of Head Start, and the boosting the overall qualifications of the program's teaching staff, a priority. Yet many teachers and teacher assistants working in Head Start's migrant and seasonal and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities—among the nation's most economically disadvantaged populations—face significant geographic, cultural and linguistic obstacles in returning to school for additional coursework and professional training. These teachers are a crucial, yet underutilized resource within the Head Start community. This paper describes the hurdles that teachers in these communities face in credentialing; puts the challenges they face in context; and offers promising practices and recommendations that can strengthen this teacher corps and build the Head Start program's cultural and linguistic expertise.

THE LANDSCAPE TODAY

Head Start was launched in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of his administration's Great Society and War on Poverty initiatives, as an eight-week summer program to promote young children's social and cognitive development. Services for Native American and Alaska Native children also were included, and four years later, migrant Head Start services were created with the goal of broadening the program's reach to seasonal farm workers and others whose access to basic childcare services was limited.

Policymakers and advocacy organizations have long been interested in improving the academic caliber of early childhood education programs by raising the skills and professional training of teachers. While research on the connection between teacher credentials and young children's learning is mixed, some studies have suggested that there is a payoff to teachers having more education, including a bachelor's degree. A 2001 report by the National Research Council, for instance, concluded that preschool teachers benefit from college degrees with specialized training, and recommended that children in early childhood education be assigned a teacher who has a bachelor's of arts degree with specialization working with young children.

The Obama administration has called for strengthening the academic spine of the early childhood education system and its teacher corps. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently said that early childhood programs need to play a greater role in getting K-12 schools out of the “catch-up business.” Yet too many programs are currently not up to the task, he noted. Some are “excellent, some are mediocre,” the secretary said in a November 2009 speech before the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and some “waste the most formative years of a child’s life.” Improving the quality of early learning, Duncan added, will require recruiting effective educators into early childhood programs, and retaining them.

HEAD START SNAPSHOT

The national Head Start and Early Head Start programs, combined, serve a million children nationwide and have an annual budget of roughly \$7 billion. They employ 55,873 teachers and 51,742 teacher assistants.

The program includes:

- Head Start, serving 3-5 year- olds in 10 geographic regions around the country;
- Early Head Start, serving children from birth to age 3;
- American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start, serving children ages 3-5 and some serving Early Head Start children from birth to age 3, in 26 states; and
- Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, which serves children from birth to age 5 in 38 states.

Studies show that the Head Start program is associated with positive academic achievement and the emotional and social well-being of children, though benefits vary according to factors such as academic subject and children’s level of participation. Head Start children have lower mortality rates and tend to receive better health care compared with those who were not enrolled in the program, according to the National Head Start Association.



THE ACADEMY FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AED understands the challenges that Migrant and Seasonal and AIAN Head Start programs face in teacher training and credentialing—from having worked with those programs directly.

AED operates the national collaboration offices for both the Migrant and Seasonal and AIAN Head Start programs, which promote high-quality, culturally appropriate services for those communities. In addition, AED runs the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Technical Assistance Center, which provides on-the-ground training and support to those programs. In surveys conducted by AED, and in conversations, Migrant and Seasonal and AIAN Head Start program staff have described the myriad financial, geographic and cultural barriers their teachers face in pursuing college degrees and training.

In September of 2009, AED's National Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, in cooperation with AED's Community College Policy Center, hosted a meeting of stakeholders from the Head Start and community college worlds, to discuss barriers to teacher-training and how community colleges might help. Those discussions, and other research, have shaped many of the ideas and recommendations in this paper.



In 2007, federal lawmakers retooled teacher credential requirements during their reauthorization of the Head Start law. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, among other provisions, requires that:

- **By October 1, 2011**, 100 percent of Head Start classrooms must have a teacher with at least an associate's degree in early childhood education or a related field. The program is about 7,500 teachers short of meeting this requirement, nationally, according to federal 2008-2009 Program Information Report data.¹ While 83 percent of the overall Head Start teaching population meets that goal, just 58.6 percent of AIAN and 51.2 percent of migrant and seasonal teachers do (though the data for judging the migrant/seasonal teaching population is limited).²
- **By September 30, 2013**, 50 percent of Head Start teachers in center-based programs nationwide must have at least a bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field. While 49 percent of teachers nationally meet that mark, the numbers are much less impressive among AIAN teachers, 22 percent. Among migrant and seasonal educators, it's 16 percent, though the same data limitations apply.
- **By September 30, 2013**, all teacher assistants at center-based programs must have at least a child development associate credential, be enrolled in a program leading to a child development associate credential within two years, or be enrolled in a program leading to an associate's or bachelor's degree. About 13,000 assistants do not yet meet this requirement. Migrant and seasonal assistants trail the national average in CDA attainment.



At the same time, the federal Head Start law and performance standards call on programs to address another challenge: to support culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies for meeting the diverse needs of the populations they serve. Meeting this need has been a major concern among tribal leaders and AIAN Head Start officials. Native American and Alaska Native Head Start “is on the frontline in the preservation of Native language and culture,” one tribal leader testified before Office of Head Start officials in 2009, “which have proven to be key elements in Native student confidence and success in later years.” Another testified that Head Start helps ensure that students are “grounded in both their heritage language, as well as in the English language.”

A number of early childhood advocates, Head Start providers, and colleges have taken steps to blend culturally and linguistically appropriate methods into early childhood education. Some Head Start providers have arranged to have their staff take college classes focused on broadening their understanding of how to work with children and families from diverse

backgrounds. A number of colleges, meanwhile, have developed teacher-preparation courses aimed at building cultural competency among early childhood educators.

In addition, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has created a “Quality Benchmark for Cultural Competence Tool”—a guide for helping early childhood education programs reflect upon and weave culturally competent practices into their daily activities. NAEYC’s tool suggests several ways programs can adopt culturally competent practices, such as: incorporating the traditions and history of families into their policies and teaching practices; encouraging family involvement in activities that reflect local cultural and ethnic identities; and creating policies and practices that build on the languages and dialects of children and families. The tool is meant to not only guide policy, “but to spark dialogue and action in the realm of policymaking,” NAEYC explained, which will “ensure that early childhood programs not only respond to the needs of diverse children but impact them in a meaningful way.”

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An Overlooked Population

Migrant, seasonal and AIAN teachers bring their own distinct strengths to the Head Start program, one of which is a strong understanding of the children and families they serve. Many of these educators, in fact, grew up in the same areas where they now teach. They raised their children in these communities and received Head Start services in them. (Twenty-one percent of the migrant-seasonal Head Start and Early Head Start program staff members, for instance, are parents of current or former Head Start children.) Partly because of this bond, there is a long tradition of mothers and fathers with children in Head Start programs eventually pursuing jobs as teachers or teacher assistants in them. Once migrant, seasonal and AIAN parents join the staff of Head Start staff, they can use their language skill and cultural understanding to encourage parents to stay involved in the education of their children throughout school.

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program serves nearly 35,000 children in 38 states. The mothers and fathers who rely on the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program generally work long hours, at relatively low pay. They find jobs in many areas of agricultural fieldwork, including soil preparation, cultivation and the manual harvesting of crops such as strawberries, tomatoes, onions, apples and citrus fruits. The mean annual salary for farm workers is just \$19,280, according to 2008 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For many of these workers, Head Start provides them with an important alternative to having to bring their children with them to the fields or other potentially unsafe job sites. Head Start centers strive to meet migrant and seasonal workers' needs, typically staying open as long as 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week during the busiest seasons. Depending on the demands of industry and the geographic location, centers also may operate anywhere between 6 weeks and 11 months out of the year. In addition, some

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program serves nearly 35,000 children in 38 states.

migrant and seasonal programs coordinate services to families who move from state to state.

Many of the educators in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs begin their classroom careers with relatively little formal education. These teachers often forge strong connections with their local Head Start centers after having enrolled their children in them, and later apply to join the staff of the programs. Even if they lack significant formal education, these educators play a critical role in Head Start centers. They bring strong ties to the local community, an understanding of Spanish and other languages spoken by families, and a deep knowledge of migrant culture. In fact, parents qualified to be teachers or teacher assistants receive priority in the hiring process at Head Start centers, according to federal performance standards for the program.

The American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start program, meanwhile, serves nearly 23,000 children in 26 states around the country. Its teachers are working with children and families who face myriad socioeconomic and educational challenges, including poverty and severe health problems. Researchers, such as those with the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Research Center, are studying new language and cultural curricula and instructional methods that meet the distinct backgrounds and learning styles of AIAN children. Yet finding strategies that can be applied across broad student populations, particularly given the diversity of different tribes, can prove to be difficult.

TEACHER CREDENTIALING GAP: BY THE NUMBERS

The nation's AIAN and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs trail overall program averages in some measures of teacher credentialing. By October 1, 2011, 100 percent of the program's classrooms, nationwide, must have a teacher with at least an associate's degree in early childhood education (ECE) or a related field. By September 30, 2013, 50 percent of all Head Start teachers must have obtained at least a bachelor's degree in ECE or the equivalent. And by September 30, 2013, 100 percent of assistant teachers need to have a child development associate (CDA) credential, be enrolled in a CDA program to be completed within two years, or be enrolled in an associate's or bachelor's degree program.

BASELINE	MANDATED OUTCOMES	GAP
Current quantity of teaching staff meeting the Head Start Act of 2007 October 2011 credentialing mandate	Required quantity of teaching staff meeting the Head Start Act of 2007 credentialing mandate by October 2011	Difference between the baseline and the mandated outcomes to be achieved by October 2011
Teachers:	Teachers:	Teachers:
83.2% (37,003) of all HS	100% (44,500) of all HS	16.8% (7,497) of all HS
51.2% (1,957) of MSHS	100% (3,821) of MSHS	48.8% (1,864) of MSHS
58.6% (682) of AIANHS	100% (1,163) of AIANHS	41.4% (481) of AIANHS

BASELINE	MANDATED OUTCOMES	GAP
Current quantity of teaching staff meeting the Head Start Act of 2007 September 2013 credentialing mandate	Required quantity of teaching staff meeting the Head Start Act of 2007 credentialing mandate by September 2013	Difference between the baseline and the mandated outcomes to be achieved by September 2013
Teachers:	Teachers:	Teachers:
49.1% (21,851) of all HS	50% (22,250) of all HS	0.9% (399) of all HS
15.7% (598) of MSHS	50% (1,911) of MSHS	34.3% (1,313) of MSHS
22.4% (261) of AIANHS	50% (582) of AIANHS	27.6% (321) of AIANHS
Assistant Teachers:	Assistant Teachers:	Assistant Teachers:
71.5% (33,169) of all HS	100% (46,373) of all HS	28.5% (13,204) of all HS
65.8% (1,745) of MSHS	100% (2,650) of MSHS	34.2% (905) of MSHS
70.7% (875) of AIANHS	100% (1,238) of AIANHS	29.3% (363) of AIANHS

Source: Head Start Program Information Report, 2008-2009 year. Note: Estimates are only for Head Start staff, not Early Head Start staff, who face different requirements under the law. For the migrant/seasonal program, the PIR data is limited in that it does not separate preschool teaching staff, who have to meet these specific 2011 and 2013 mandates, from those who work with infants/toddlers, who do not.

HS = National Head Start; MSHS = Migrant and Seasonal Head Start; AIANHS = American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start

Cost, Language Barriers

American Indian and Alaska Native teachers face some of the same obstacles in improving their credentials that their peers in the migrant and seasonal community do. In a recent survey, conducted as part of the 2009 National American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Collaboration Needs Assessment, directors of those Head Start programs cited a number of challenges, including the long distances that teachers have to travel for classes and professional development and the difficulty of finding reliable substitutes for educators while they attend training. Attempts to establish online courses in AIAN Head Start programs are hampered by poor Internet service and teachers' lack of familiarity with the technology, the Head Start directors noted. In addition, migrant, seasonal and AIAN Head Start teachers and staff are slowed on the path to obtaining credentials and degrees by requirements that they take remedial coursework.

One of the most obvious hurdles for migrant, seasonal and AIAN teachers obtaining credentials and training is cost. The average salary of Head Start teachers nationwide is \$26,672; among AIAN teachers, it's \$24,708, according to 2007-2008 Program Information Report data. Because migrant and seasonal Head Start teachers typically work only part of the year, they often earn even less. For these teachers, even the relatively low tuition of a community college can seem out of reach.

Other teachers are hindered by language barriers. While Spanish skill is often essential to the day-to-day work of many migrant and seasonal Head Start teachers in helping non-English speaking children, many of these same educators lack the English proficiency necessary to complete the curricula of traditional associate's or bachelor's degree programs. Eighty-one percent of crop workers said that Spanish was their native language, and 44 percent reported that they could not speak English at all, according to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, published by the U.S. Department of Labor.

There are also geographic hurdles. Many migrant, seasonal and AIAN programs are located in remote areas, far from colleges offering early childhood training, and with only limited access to reliable Internet connections for online courses.

Another commonly cited issue in migrant and seasonal and AIAN Head Start programs is that as soon as their teachers secure bachelor's degrees, they often leave for better-paying work in K-12 education or other fields. In migrant and seasonal programs, where Head Start work may not be available year-round, retaining teachers with college credentials can be especially difficult. Of the migrant and seasonal Head Start teachers who left the program in 2007-2008, 40 percent said they were moving to a higher-paying job in the same field. These career moves, while laudable, can make it difficult for programs to retain teachers who meet the demands of the communities they serve.

National Implications

Despite these hurdles, the need to provide young children, particularly those with diverse cultural and linguistic needs, access to high-quality teaching has become increasingly urgent in recent years.

Consider these facts:

- Nationwide, the number of preschool through grade 12 students classified as limited-English proficient jumped by 57 percent, to 5.1 million, from 1995 to 2005, according to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition;
- Just 57 percent of 4th grade English-language learners (ELLs) scored at or above the "basic" level on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in math, compared with 84 percent of non-ELLs. In reading, the gap was even larger, with just 30 percent of 4th grade ELLs reaching the "basic" threshold, compared to 69 percent of non-ELLs, on the 2007 NAEP; and



- American Indian and Alaska Native students were less likely than their non-AIAN peers to reach the “basic” and “proficient” levels on the NAEP in both reading and math at the 4th and 8th grade level, according to a 2007 study.

Willing Partners on Campus

Given these high stakes, federal, state and postsecondary officials have an interest in supporting practices that can improve the academic preparation young children receive before they enter elementary school. Improving the skills and credentials of migrant, seasonal and AIAN Head Start teachers will require Congress and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to work with state and local partners, as well as higher education institutions, to establish new options for early childhood educators.

One set of institutions in particular—community colleges—is well-positioned to help. Community colleges have a proven history serving the kinds of students—working adults, dual-language learners, part-time enrollees, and first-generation college students—who make up a sizable chunk of the Head Start teaching population. In addition, many community colleges have established relationships with early-childhood service providers in the surrounding community, such as Head Start programs. These colleges know those programs’ staffing needs, particularly their demand for well-educated teachers who can work with bilingual youth and families. Community colleges also offer low tuition costs, flexible schedules, work-study programs and strong connections with job-placement

programs. President Obama has set a goal to have U.S. workers secure 5 million new community college degrees and certificates by 2020, as part of \$12 billion plan known as the American Graduation Initiative.

Two other sets of institutions, tribal colleges and Hispanic-serving institutions, have many of the same attributes—convenience, affordability and strong ties to early childhood programs—that can help current and prospective teachers improve their skills. Many tribal colleges and Hispanic-serving institutions have long regarded the training of teachers, including early childhood educators, as a core part of their mission. Head Start teachers and teacher assistants at these institutions would benefit from new early childhood curricular and instructional approaches, articulation agreements and other innovative strategies. President Obama, in a November speech before the White House Tribal Nations Conference, singled out tribal colleges for praise, calling them “economic lifelines” for their communities. The president noted that tribal college students show strong degrees of retention in school, and that nearly 80 percent of them pursue careers that help their tribal nations. The Head Start reauthorization of 2007 authorizes the federal government to award demonstration grants of at least five years to Hispanic-serving institutions and tribal colleges that partner with Head Start programs on efforts to boost the teaching credentials of current Head Start staff, as well as parents served by programs and others in the community. The grants also can be used by institutions to pay for college tuition, fees and books for those individuals, and to support the development of curricula targeting children from diverse backgrounds.

Several postsecondary institutions already have established innovative policies for putting migrant, seasonal and AIAN Head Start teachers, and other early childhood educators, on the path to obtaining necessary college training and credentials.

PROMISING PRACTICES

I-BEST: In the state of Washington, the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program is an instructional model that pairs two instructors in one college classroom: one of whom specializes in adult literacy, the other in workforce training. This allows enrollees, including Head Start teachers, to pick up basic literacy skills as they acquire job training. The goal of the model is to move students further, faster. The model seeks to provide a clear, focused path for early childhood teachers with limited English skill to move from remedial college coursework toward obtaining associate's or bachelor's degrees. The program, which operates among Washington's 34 community and technical colleges, grew out of a clear need: Washington has seen a steady influx of non-English speakers, creating a demand for adult-literacy and job-skill training. At the same time, research showed that only a small portion of the English as a Second Language and Adult Basic Education students arriving at the state's two-year campuses were moving beyond remedial classes to college-level work. I-BEST seeks to get them beyond that tipping point.

Since its creation in 2004, I-BEST has shown positive results. A recent evaluation found that students following that instructional model were more likely than their peers to continue into credit-bearing college work and make gains on basic skills tests. They were also more likely to complete workforce training than traditional ESL students and continue into the second-year of their college studies.

Bay Mills Community College: This tribal college, located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, has taken a number of steps to make it easier for Native American Head Start teachers to obtain new degrees and credentials – and to help those educators work with children in culturally appropriate ways. The college, which serves students from federally recognized tribes across Michigan and around the country, has offered several free online courses in Native studies in the past. This year, the college is expanding that effort to allow individuals seeking to obtain child development associate credentials to take their first three CDA classes – courses that would normally cost \$85 per credit hour – at no cost. The goal is to boost early childhood teachers' and aspiring teachers' comfort level with online technology, and convince them that they can succeed as college students. Bay Mills' early childhood education curriculum also requires students take courses on Native culture, which are not specific to any one tribe. In addition, the college recruits Native teachers who cover courses across the curriculum, on cultural issues, academic performance standards, and other topics, which school officials believe helps ensure a Native perspective on course content and delivery.

South Texas College: This two-year institution, which serves more than 27,000 students on five campuses, has sought to streamline the process through which early childhood educators can obtain an associate's degree. The college has partnered with a local workforce board, which provides financial support to students pursuing associate's degrees in various subjects, including early childhood education. There is a major demand for early learning educators, particularly those with Spanish language skills, in the region served by the college, which is located in McAllen, Texas, just a few miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. The area includes numerous migrant Head Start centers. The college's student body is 95 percent Hispanic, and 75

percent of its attendees are the first in their families to enroll in higher education. South Texas College officials also have applied to the state to create their own bachelor's degree in early childhood education, to go with two other bachelor's degrees they currently offer in technology-related fields.

Rio Salado College: Located in Tempe, Ariz., Rio Salado offers an array of traditional and online options designed to help early childhood teachers, many of whom work in migrant and seasonal Head Start programs, move seamlessly from a certificate of completion to an associate's degree, and then a bachelor's degree. The college offers customized distance education programs and professional development to early childhood teachers in the region, and across the country, with convenient schedules to meet the needs of working parents and current Head Start employees. Students are allowed to choose from numerous pathways and programs of study that suit their interests in early childhood education, all of which meet professional certification and degree requirements. They are expected to take part in extensive, in-person observations in early childhood classrooms. In addition, Rio Salado has established agreements with several approved local training programs that allow students who attend them to receive credit toward an associate's degree that may articulate to a university for completion of a bachelor's degree. It also has agreements with four-year institutions that allow students to apply credits toward a bachelor's degree in an early childhood education field.

Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI): This National Indian Community College, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, delivers early childhood education courses to teachers from remote communities through two-way video conferencing, as well as through online and traditional means. Eighty-four early childhood students from across New Mexico and Oklahoma were enrolled during the most recent semester. Many of the program's early childhood students are Head Start teachers and staff members. They typically gather in libraries, education centers and other facilities in their tribal communities to use the video conferencing technology, which allows them to have back-and-forth discussions with teachers on the SIPI campus through video screens. Teachers and aspiring teachers from the Alamo Navajo, Santo Domingo Pueblo, San Felipe Pueblo and Cherokee Nation communities, among other tribal areas, have participated using the technology.

Courses delivered through video conferencing are given in the late afternoon, in the evenings and on weekends to accommodate the needs of adult learners, many of whom are working and have children. The institute also attempts to meet these students' needs by working with directors of Head Start programs throughout the region, to ensure that Head Start staff members have time to take classes. In addition, SIPI officials have taken steps to encourage their students to move beyond an associate's degree to acquire bachelor's degrees. Since these students will most likely have to take bachelor's degree courses via distance education, SIPI trains the Head Start teachers and other students it serves on how to use computer technology, so they are prepared to enroll in online courses. Credits from SIPI's early childhood education courses can be transferred to a number of four-year colleges and universities in New Mexico.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving the credentials and skills of teachers in the nation’s most culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood programs will require the cooperation of policymakers and advocates at all levels. It will also require the active participation of the nation’s 1,117 community colleges—which serve 11.7 million students across all 50 states—and tribal and other institutions with ties to migrant, seasonal and AIAN communities. Elected officials and education leaders at all levels can support several policy initiatives that have the potential to create a better-qualified workforce within the entire Head Start community:

Needs Assessment. Policymakers should support a comprehensive, baseline needs assessment to gauge the skills of Head Start teachers and teacher assistants currently working in migrant, seasonal and AIAN programs to determine those educators’ levels of college-readiness and English-language competency. Data should be collected for individual teachers, rather than at the aggregate level, to allow for longitudinal research. Needs assessments should also seek to gauge the cultural competency of teachers to work in diverse communities, as defined by organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children. This information would inform Congress, the Office of Head Start and state and local policymakers about the status of the teaching population and provide specific recommendations on educational interventions for teachers and aspiring teachers who could not keep up. The 2007 Head Start reauthorization required governors to create state-level advisory councils to better coordinate early childhood education and care. These councils are supposed to develop recommendations for improving teachers’ professional development and assess the capabilities of two- and four-year institutions to support early childhood education, and may be able to provide useful information for needs assessments.

New College Curricula and Instructional Models. Policymakers should promote curricula and instructional strategies that blend English language acquisition for Spanish or Native language speakers with content and pedagogical training. Many community colleges have established records of providing English as a Second Language and basic-skills support to students from immigrant and other predominantly minority communities. They are also adept at designing programs that integrate language skills with relevant workforce competencies. (Washington state’s I-BEST model is one example.) Given this experience, community colleges should take the lead in creating new degree and credential programs to meet the needs of early childhood education programs serving diverse communities. Two-year colleges and tribal colleges have experience providing the support services such as tutoring, child care and flexible scheduling that are vital to Head Start teachers. Many of them also have forged partnerships with four-year programs that do not require place-bound teachers to transfer to other locations to complete more advanced coursework.

New Delivery Mechanisms. Policymakers, Head Start providers and community colleges need to work together to deliver coursework and professional development in different ways, particularly through distance and online education. (Rio Salado College’s

program is one example of this approach.) English-language and basic-skills training, for instance, can be delivered to Head Start teachers gathered in community education centers. Serving teachers in these shared facilities is an especially attractive option in communities where many parents and teachers lack high-speed Internet access in their homes. On-site staff can supplement this training by providing in-person support and professional development to the assembled teachers. Satellite centers and mobile classrooms can also meet migrant, seasonal and AIAN teachers' needs.

Culturally Relevant Strategies to Support Teachers.

In order to make migrant and seasonal, AIAN, and other Head Start teachers and assistants aware of credentialing opportunities, federal, state and community college officials will have to reach them, and support them, in different ways, including through social marketing, mentoring and case management. These efforts should aim to convince teachers and aspiring teachers that obtaining a college degree is not out of reach, and to encourage them to finish their studies. These efforts should also be culturally appropriate. For instance, they should consider and address the competing pressures that teachers and teacher assistants face in securing new credentials at the same time they are raising families. Giving teachers access to case management—which can mean having them work individually with trained advisors, who can help them secure financial aid, child care and other services—is another important option.

In addition, higher education institutions should create new arrangements that allow migrant and seasonal, AIAN and other Head Start teachers to work in cohorts, or teams of students who move through early childhood certificate or degree programs together. In some cases, this approach is also more culturally appropriate than working and studying individually. It can encourage teachers to persist in their college programs, by providing them with peer support and by reducing their isolation.

Increased Cooperation Among Higher Education Systems. National teacher education organizations, such as the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs and other organizations need to work more closely together to develop and promote culturally and linguistically sensitive early childhood curricula and methods. Higher education leaders also need to establish articulation agreements that speed the journey of teachers and assistants from child development associate's credentials to associate's and bachelor's degrees—while also providing those educators with skills that benefit young children academically and socially.

Targeted Financial Aid. Improving the credentials and training of Head Start teachers will require providing them with new, and different forms of grants, scholarships and financial assistance than are currently available. Currently, many teacher education grant programs do not cover the costs of basic-skills courses. Others require recipients to be enrolled full-time, or on accelerated paths to degrees, which are sometimes insurmountable barriers to nontraditional students. Washington state's Opportunity Grant program seeks to overcome some of these barriers by allowing part-time students from low-income backgrounds to receive aid for up to three years; recipients can use this money for remedial coursework and are encouraged to leverage it with other financial aid. Policymakers should also consider channeling more financial aid toward helping Head Start teachers cover the costs of support services, such as tutoring, counseling, child care and alternative delivery of coursework. These services bring up-front costs, but they also provide a significant return on investment, in the form of student retention in college, certificate completion and a more skilled teacher corps.





A PATH FORWARD

Head Start programs serving some of the nation's most diverse populations face myriad challenges in attempting to improve the professional credentials and training of their teachers. Yet these programs also have an opportunity. Boosting the number of early childhood educators with CDAs, associate's degrees and bachelor's degrees can accomplish much more than simply supplying Head Start teachers with new credentials. It can also provide those teachers with crucial training and exposure to innovative strategies for improving the academic preparedness and social well-being of disadvantaged children from a broad range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As a result, improved education, health, mental health, nutrition, disability and family partnership services will be delivered to migrant and predominantly minority communities by the teachers who are most familiar with the cultural and linguistic needs of those children and families.

The strategies discussed in this paper can also benefit a much broader swath of the early childhood population than those served by migrant, seasonal and AIAN Head Start programs. Traditional Head Start and state-run early childhood programs, which are interested in improving their academic caliber and teacher credentials, will have more options for helping teachers who bring distinct strengths to their programs—such as skill working with non-English speakers and an understanding of the cultural backgrounds of the children they serve—yet who are likely to struggle in traditional teacher-credentialing programs. If these strategies take hold, young children from the poorest backgrounds are likely to leave preschool with improved odds for success in the K-12 system, and beyond.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For additional information concerning American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start programs, please contact:

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