

Historical Overview of Head Start’s Support for Children and Families Who Speak Languages Other Than English

Head Start has a long history of serving culturally and linguistically diverse populations. In the early years of the program, the population was primarily Spanish-speaking children and their families. Now over 140 languages are spoken by Head Start children and their families, and the number of cultures represented is even greater. Today, more than thirty percent of the children entering Head Start speak a home language other than English. The Office of Head Start (OHS) refers to these children as dual language learners – or sometimes English language learners (ELLs) – who are learning both English and their home language.

For twenty six percent of these dual language learners, the primary language at home is Spanish, but the remaining five percent are speakers of East Asian, Middle Eastern, indigenous Central and South American, and other languages. Those numbers have been growing in the last few years, reflecting the changing demographics of the country. In fact, during the Head Start 2006-2007 program year, only 14% of Head Start programs nationwide served exclusively English-speaking children.

Head Start’s commitment to serving diverse populations began with its founding principles in 1965 and continues to be reflected in the mandates that programs must follow. The first *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (1972) required that the educational programs build cultural identity and that staff speak children’s languages. The current *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (1996) have expanded to include over 20 Standards that include respecting the home language and cultural backgrounds of children and families. The Standards require programs to address the needs of dual language learners and their families across multiple services and systems. Furthermore, *The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* (2000) offers a guide for the ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children and includes Congressionally-mandated indicators for English language learners to demonstrate progress in listening to and understanding English as well as progress in speaking English. *The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act 2007* also requires that programs support a child’s progress towards the acquisition of English as well as progress across other domains of learning and development, including progress made through the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional services

Over the years, the Office of Head Start (OHS - formerly the Head Start Bureau) has undertaken many activities to promote culturally and linguistically responsive programs for children birth to five and their families. OHS has conducted national institutes focusing on Hispanic and emerging populations; promoted research, curriculum development, and needs assessment; prepared staff development materials such as the *Multicultural Principles*, *Head Start Bulletins*, and videos; and supported innovative projects. The historical overview highlights some of these national efforts.

2009 ***Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five. Addressing Culture and Home Languages in Head Start Program Systems & Services*** has been updated. The ten principles, first published in 1991, remain intact. The updates include a brief research review, examples of policies and/or practices from Head Start programs, and reflective questions and activities. This resource provides useful information and guidance to all Head Start, Early Head Start, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Migrant and Seasonal programs as they respond to changing demographics and as they improve their service delivery. Available online at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/> or Head Start programs may order copies at 1-866-763-6481 or puborder@headstartinfo.org

2009 ***Building Blocks for Hispanic Outreach and Services DVD and transcript*** will soon be available online at the OHS Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) Web site. This series highlights changing demographics; understanding the Hispanic community in the service area; and meeting the needs of Hispanic families and children. Examples from Head Start programs and interviews with staff, parents, and specialists are included. The series and a viewer's guide for staff development will be available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2008 **The Office of Head Start National Dual Language Institute** was held in Washington, D.C., October 28-31. The OHS Institute brought together over 1,370 program administrators and managers, teachers and parent leaders to gain knowledge, skills, and resources to address challenges and maximize opportunities for children who are dual language learners or whose native languages are being revitalized. Invited presenters were notable experts and researchers as well as practitioners from Head Start programs and others in the early childhood community. Issues related to language and literacy development and school readiness were highlighted, as well as assessment, staff development, governance policies, and the use of community resources.

2008 **The Dual Language Learners (DLL) and Their Families section** was created on the OHS Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) Web site. This landing page provides easy access to relevant information and resources. The OHS Report entitled *Dual Language Learning: What Does It Take?* and the *Program Preparedness Checklist* regarding program services to dual language learners are included. In the same year, OHS also released Information Memorandum ACF-IM-HS-08-02 announcing the increased availability of resources in Spanish on the ECLKC. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2008 ***Professional Development Head Start Bulletin #79*** was the first *Head Start Bulletin* to be translated into Spanish. Other professional development resources also have been translated. OHS plans to translate all future *Head Start Bulletins*. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2007 ***The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act*** was signed into law by President Bush on December 12, 2007. The Act specifies that Head Start agencies must “assist children with progress towards acquisition of English while making

meaningful progress in attaining the knowledge, skills and abilities and development across the domains of the *Child Outcomes Framework*, including progress made through the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional services.” Furthermore, the Act emphasizes improving outreach and increasing enrollment and quality of services to children and families, particularly in communities that have experienced a large increase in speakers of languages other than English (LOTE) and improving service delivery to children and families “in whose homes English is not the language customarily spoken.” With regard to the current *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (1996), the Act requires “that any revisions will not result in the elimination or any reduction in quality, scope, or types of ...services.”

2007 ***Five Steps to Community Assessment: A Workbook for Head Start and Early Head Start Programs Serving Hispanic and Other Emerging Populations*** provides guidance, worksheets, checklists and charts for each step and information about how to write a community assessment report. Examples from actual community assessments conducted by programs and URLs for e-resources on demographics, health and other topics are provided. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2007 ***Dual Language Learning: What Does It Take?*** is an extensive report that documents strengths and areas in need of support based on a national needs assessment of Head Start program staff, parents and TA providers in 2005-2006. The report provides recommendations to better serve culturally and linguistically diverse children and families that include ways to enhance best practices and approaches at both the local and national levels. In the report, OHS identifies dual language learners as children learning two or more languages at the same time, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to learn their first language. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2007 **The National Head Start Institute on Hispanic & Other Emerging Populations** in San Antonio focused on Head Start’s role in serving many diverse populations. The Institute’s goals included: expanding cultural and linguistic competency in Head Start to improve service delivery, recruitment, and community partnerships and enhancing knowledge of research-based, culturally appropriate strategies for achieving positive outcomes in language and literacy.

2007 **The Head Start Connection** is a link on the Web site of The Office of Refugee Resettlement in partnership with OHS. The link offers additional information on how Head Start programs can become an effective partner in refugee resettlement. Available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/whatsnew/headstartconnection.htm>

2006 **The Second National Head Start Hispanic Institute** built on the 2005 Institute. It provided an opportunity for the leadership and staff of Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs to explore specific issues related to providing effective services to Hispanic children and families.

2006 The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) 2006 is an ongoing longitudinal study that began in 1997 and is also an integral part of Head Start's system of Program Performance Measures, an outcome-oriented accountability system. FACES collects data on successive, nationally representative samples of Head Start programs, classrooms, teachers, parents, and children and examines program quality and child outcomes from the time the children enter Head Start through the end of kindergarten. Findings from the FACES 2006 cohort indicated that 27% of newly entering 3- and 4- year olds in Head Start lived in homes where English was not the primary language spoken to them; for 84% of these children, Spanish was the home language. Findings also indicated that dual language learners had diverse skills: in Fall 2006, 47% demonstrated sufficient English language skills to be assessed in English. By Spring 2007, children assessed in English and in Spanish demonstrated progress toward national norms in the area of letter-word knowledge, but those assessed in English showed the greatest progress. A new cohort of FACES was launched in Fall 2009 and will provide information about the knowledge and skills of dual language learners when they enter Head Start and their progress in English and their home language, when it is Spanish, during the Head Start year(s).

2006 – 2007 Culturally Responsive and Aware Dual Language Education (CRADLE) demonstration projects assisted 44 Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs in designing and implementing program-wide philosophies, policies, and practices to support children and families from diverse language and cultural backgrounds.

Available at <http://www.ehsnrc.org/Highlights/cradle.htm>

2005 – 2006 The Early Head Start Expert Work Group on Dual Language Acquisition was formed.

2005 The First National Head Start Hispanic Institute with over 2,200 people took place in Albuquerque. The goals of this Institute were to increase the recruitment and enrollment of Hispanic/Latino children and to enhance Head Start's services to these children and their families. Videos of sessions are available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2005 The Head Start Bulletin on English Language Learners #78 includes articles about research-based instructional strategies that support first and second language acquisition and descriptions of Head Start programs successfully serving diverse populations. Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

2005 – 2008 Head Start Innovation and Improvement Projects included funding of 1) the University of Cincinnati's Bilingual Bridge program, which offered an online early childhood AA degree taught primarily in Spanish as well as an array of support services, and 2) the Community Development Institute's HELLP (Head Start English Language Learners Project) which provided a comprehensive training program to 44 Head Start programs to assist them in working with English learners and their families.

2002 **English Language Learners Focus Group** brought together staff and parents from local programs that served diverse populations of children and families and subject experts in the field of second language acquisition. The purpose was to identify research-based strategies to improve Head Start and Early Head Start services for children and families from non-English language backgrounds and to solicit recommendations regarding effective approaches that support the development and learning of linguistically diverse children and that assess child progress over time.

2000 **The National Head Start Child Development Institute** for 3,200 education leaders included major presentations regarding language development, English language learners, and preserving native languages. A Training Package for Ensuring Quality and Accountability through Leadership based on 29 key Institute presentations was created and disseminated to the field. In planning for this national Institute, the two most pressing needs identified through extensive consultation were for specific strategies to support programming for English language learners and strategies for guiding children's behaviors. Available at www.hsnrc.org

2000 **The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework** was published to guide Head Start programs in their ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children and to analyze and use the data in program self-assessment and ongoing program improvement. Congressionally-mandated indicators for English language learners include progress in listening to and understanding English as well as progress in speaking English.

1998 **The Head Start Act** was amended in 1998. Sec. 648B(11)(e) requires that The Secretary provide training for personnel providing services to non-English language background children, including services to promote the acquisition of the English language.

1997-ongoing **The Head Start Higher Education Partnership Grants (HEGs)** were created to increase the numbers of Head Start and Early Head Start teaching staff with degrees in early childhood. The first Higher Education Partnership grants were awarded to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Over the years, these grant awards have expanded to include Tribally Controlled Land Grant Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and Hispanic/Latino Service Institutions (HSIs). The HEGs offer financial assistance to current Head Start teachers and develop Head Start-specific coursework that include approaches for promoting language and literacy development in young children.

1996 **The Head Start Program Performance Standards** include over 20 Standards that require programs to address the needs of dual language learners and their families across multiple services and systems: Child Health and Developmental Services; Education and Early Childhood Development; Child Nutrition; Family Partnerships; Management Systems and Procedures; Human Resources Management; and Facilities, Materials, and Equipment. For example, programs are required to provide an environment of acceptance that supports and respects gender, culture,

language, ethnicity, and family composition; serve foods that reflect cultural and ethnic preferences; communicate with families in their preferred or primary language or through an interpreter, to the extent feasible; and hire staff, whenever possible who speak the home languages of infants and toddlers, and when a majority of children speak the same language, hire at least one classroom staff member or home visitor who speaks their language; and promote family participation in literacy-related activities in both English and the home language.

1996 *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs* were incorporated into the revision of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*, which were published as a Final Rule, November 5, 1996.

1993 – 1996 *A Descriptive Study of Head Start's Bilingual and Multicultural Program Services* determined that more than 140 languages were spoken by children enrolled in Head Start programs. After English, the most common languages spoken by Head Start children were Spanish, Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

1991 – 1996 *Padres Hispanos en Acción* was a joint effort of the Kraft General Foods Foundation, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and distribute multi-media nutrition materials with accompanying training to programs and families located in the twenty states with the largest number of Hispanic Head Start enrollees.

1991 *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs* was developed by a task force of representatives from the grantee network who provided training on the four multicultural curricula as part of the "Strategy for Spanish—Speaking Children" in the 1970s. The ten multicultural principles, extending beyond the walls of a Head Start classroom, apply to all program services and form the foundation for Head Start families and staff to understand and respect cultural differences. This resource was updated in 2009.

1990 – 1994 **Multicultural Infusion Network** was a network of six Head Start agencies that demonstrated the infusion of the ten multicultural principles across all the program services, including health, social services, parent involvement, education, management, children with disabilities, and staff training. This network was comprised of a diverse group located in Fresno, California; Mahube, Minnesota; Seattle, Washington; Fairfax, Virginia; Southern Ute, Colorado; and Spokane, Washington. Among the family languages represented were Hmong, Chinese, Spanish, Navajo, and Arabic. These effective practices have been showcased at a number of events and in publications for the Head Start community.

1988 *A Look at Head Start's Cultural Diversity* issue of the *Head Start Bulletin* was written to celebrate the diversity of Head Start, promote sound practices, and showcase successful approaches.

1982 **Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Bilingual Specialization** was established for candidates with a working knowledge of two languages, including the ability to speak, read, and write well enough to understand others and to be understood by others.

1980 ***Evaluation of the Head Start Bilingual and Bicultural Curriculum Models*** was the final report of a study conducted over a three and a half year period at eight Head Start centers in communities with relatively large Hispanic populations. The report focused on the impact of the four bilingual and bicultural preschool curriculum models (implemented during 1976-1979). Data from the evaluation were analyzed to answer central questions about impact, implementation, and feasibility of transfer.

1978 ***Bibliography of Bilingual and Bicultural Preschool Material for Spanish-Speaking Children*** was disseminated to staff in early childhood programs to help them identify suitable curriculum and other instructional materials.

1976 – 1979 **Bilingual and Bicultural Curriculum Models** were disseminated and used for training to support children's cognitive and social growth and individualization of instruction based upon a child's linguistic dominance. The four models were:

- *ALERTA—A Learning Environment Responsive To All*. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- *AMANECER—A Multicultural Action Network for Early Childhood Education*. Resources Intercultural Research Associates, San Antonio.
- *NUEVAS FRONTERAS de APRENDIZAJE—New Frontiers in Learning*. University of California, Santa Cruz
- *UN MARCO ABIERTO—An Open Framework*. High Scope Foundation, Ypsilanti

1976 **Head Start Strategy for Spanish-Speaking Children Workshop** included a Bilingual and Bicultural Early Childhood Development Research Workshop with four priority areas: curriculum development, staff training, resource networks, and research.

1972 ***The Head Start Program Performance Standards*** required that classroom environments help each child build cultural identity; an educational program be individualized to meet the needs of children from various populations; and staff reflect the racial and ethnic population of the children, including staff that speak the primary language of the children and are knowledgeable about their culture. These first Standards also required that parents be involved in the planning and implementation of services and considered for employment opportunities.