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The Future of Head Start
New America’s Early Education Initiative

• We conduct research, develop policy recommendations, and disperse new ideas that aim to improve access, quality, and alignment in early education programs for all children from birth through 3rd grade.

• Our team is dedicated to helping policymakers develop an early education system that serves all American children.
Current Climate for Early Education

- Early education is more popular than ever before

- Majority of Americans support government investment in early education

- Support crosses party lines

- Business leaders, military leaders, public safety officials, and the greater education community have endorsed need for high-quality early education

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Progress to Date

• Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge

• President’s Preschool for All Proposal

• Strong Start Act

• Preschool Development Grants

• Child Care and Development Block Grant Reauthorization
What is the Early Education Landscape?

FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED IN STATE PRE-K

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Where does Head Start fit in?
Most Recent Changes to Head Start

• Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act in 2007

• Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

• Program re-competition through the designation renewal system (DRS)

• Teacher credential requirements

• Eligibility changes
CLASS System

• A research-based, observation-based assessment of how well teachers teach
• Measures emotional climate, classroom organization, and instructional supports.
• Research shows that CLASS scores are predictive of children’s learning outcomes
• Does not measure quality or impact of non-educational services that Head Start provides
• 92% of responding Head Start programs reported using the CLASS tool
Recompetition

- Grantees found to have low-quality programs have to compete with outside applicants through Designation Renewal System.
- Re-competition will only be successful if the quality of providers are accurately measured, poor performers are weeded out, and better centers replace them.
- Potential problems with re-competition (as identified by Sara Mead):
  - Few new providers
  - Transition challenges
  - Lack of transparency
- Too early to tell whether this policy will successfully increase the quality of Head Start programs.

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Think – Pair – Share

What is working now? Where do you see challenges and opportunities?
What have people been saying about next steps?
"Head Start has the potential to narrow the achievement gap...that potential will only be realized if we improve the performance of the weaker Head Start agencies -- and, if necessary, turn to other grantees to take their place."

-Williams Gormley, Georgetown University’s Center for Research on Children in the United States

“It shouldn’t be just for low-income. The literature shows that a middle-class kid in a preschool program leads to improved performance for poor kids without harming the performance of the middle-class kids...That’s the big one [problem facing head start]."

-Edward F. Zigler, then a 34-year-old associate professor of psychology at Yale University

“W. Steven Barnett, the executive director of [NIEER], sees the need for changes in a different area. Head Start must toss out a good portion of the regulations that have hamstrung innovation in the program, he says.... Without those regulations holding programs back, he argues, Head Start could focus more on outcomes for children, and not compliance issues.”

–Education Week
Strong Start for America’s Children Act of 2013

• House and Senate versions

• Resemble the Obama administration’s Preschool for All initiative

• As capacity for state pre-K grows, Head Start would stop serving 4-year-olds

• Focus on Early Head Start – Child Care partnerships
Congressman Paul Ryan

- Head Start funding would go directly to states in the form of block grants
- Only mentions Head Start for ages 3 to 5
- Re-competition would continue at the state level.
- Not a new idea—the Bush administration suggested this in 2003
Sara Mead’s Recommendations

- Increase transparency in Head Start monitoring and designation renewal processes
- Prioritize performance and innovation in the designation renewal process
- Encourage new providers
- Rethink matching requirements
- Establish clear metrics of program performance at grantee level
- Focus Head Start Performance Standards less on compliance and more on improving outcomes for children and families
- Carefully explore options for expanding state role in Head Start while protecting federal investments in the program

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New America Recommendations

• Experiment with Head Start grants to states
• Recognize Head Start’s role as a public pre-K provider
• Align QRIS to Head Start standards
• Include Head Start data in State Longitudinal Data Systems
• Streamline eligibility requirements across programs serving low-income families
SWOT Analysis Activity

- **Strengths** of the idea
- **Weaknesses** of the idea
- **Opportunities** the idea might bring
- **Threats** or challenges to implementing the idea or that the idea might bring
If you were in charge of reauthorization, what changes would you make to Head Start?
Reauthorization

- Not a priority for this Congress
- Most of the focus on early learning is looking at state pre-kindergarten
- Other priorities in education:
  - Senator Alexander: ESEA and HEA
  - Representative Kline: Perkins and IDEA
- HHS is putting together their ideas
- Education and Workforce committee asking for ideas

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