



California Head Start Association Position on Preschool Learning Foundations

August 27, 2007

The California Head Start Association supports the Superintendent of Public Instruction as well as the Department of Education in their effort to establish evidence and research-based preschool learning foundations as they align with California Department of Education's K-8 content standards. We are pleased to see the understanding expressed in these foundations that learning across all developmental domains build young children's readiness toward school success. We appreciate the Department's outreach to Head Start programs as stakeholders in the larger early education community. The children enrolled in Head Start, Migrant and Tribal Head Start programs are California's children, attend California's schools and over time contribute to the economic vitality and to society.

It is of mutual interest for Head Start programs as well as the California Department of Education that we advance the science and practice of early education. Over the past 40 years, Head Start program performance standards, child outcomes framework, and commitments to advancing the provision of services have provided a structure for continuous program improvement. Advancing California's Preschool Learning System is imperative and California Head Start Association encourages the Department of Education to move forward without delay in the continued development of Preschool Learning Foundations. We acknowledge the importance of thoughtful discernment and review. We know based upon the evolution of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, although there may be dissent and disagreement, time is of the essence to improve the opportunities for children, families and program staff.

Concurrently to the release of Preschool Learning Foundations, the California Head Start Association urges the Department of Education to consider the following recommendations:

Implementation Strategies: It is critical the Department of Education clearly affirm the intended use of the Preschool Learning Foundations as well as address inappropriate uses. The Preschool Learning Foundation must not become a "check list" of experiences to be provided in a preschool environment but rather competencies – knowledge and skills – 3 and 4 year-olds typically attain when they participate in high quality programs that include purposeful teaching in a holistic approach. Communication materials designed to introduce the Preschool Learning Foundations shall direct program leaders to create an extended period of discussion and review leading to clear understanding by staff prior to full implementation. It is important the Department move

California Head Start Association
1107 9th Street, Suite 301, Sacramento, CA 95814
Caheadstart.org

quickly to inform practitioners of the relationship between Preschool Learning Foundation and Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised as well as K-8 Academic Content Standards. In addition, we encourage you to partner with First Five California to create a media campaign designed to inform parents and the general public to build interest in both the public as well as private marketplace.

Professional Development: Preschool Learning Foundations present an opportunity to boost instructional practices, classroom environments, parent engagement, teacher knowledge and application of child development theory as well as link our work systematically to K-16 public education. To accomplish this shift the California Head Start Association calls on the Department of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to commit their resources to establish funded in-service training days for Child Development Contracted programs. We request that the Department of Education, working in tandem with advocates (including preschool teachers) call on the legislature to establish a means for State Child Development programs to offer four days per contract year for the purpose of staff development. Hence, collateral materials provided at in-service trainings shall be designed to reflect the developmental needs of children, respect of family structure, and serve as a bridge to expand understanding of school success. Professional development supporting the understanding of Preschool Learning Foundations must be designed to draw from elements of the child's experience and interest, not limit a teacher's opportunity to construct learning. In addition to supporting the understanding of the Foundations, in-service days are cost effective and will benefit other program issues such as health & safety, transition planning and community partnerships for health or social service support.

Higher Education: We are pleased to observe the ongoing work in the Department of Education's funded projects related to higher education and workforce development. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Faculty Initiative Project is a critical link between the development of the workforce and needs of Child Development contractors such as Head Start. The Higher Education Summit on Child Development launched a number of efforts in communities and state-wide to expand access to degree granting education services. We call upon the Department of Education to commit additional resources to increase knowledge and understanding of the Preschool Learning Foundations among professors, instructors and administrative personnel at the Community College, State University and University of California levels. Closing the gap of knowledge and practice in preschool classrooms and early childhood settings will achieve efficiency when both the emerging workforce and those currently working in programs experience training in a synchronized fashion.

Head Start Collaboration Office: In California, Head Start serves approximately 25% of the preschool age children in subsidized education and care. In addition, the federal reauthorization of the Head Start Act clearly articulates coordination between Head Start educational services and state preschool services. This includes alignment between Head Start goals and expectations of those schools that later enroll Head Start children. California Head Start Association requests the State Head Start Collaboration Office immediately establish a work group. It would include State Department of Education lead staff, consultants and members of the Head Start community to construct specific communication materials related to Preschool Learning Foundations for Head Start's integration into their preschool curricula. Working closely with the California Head Start Association, the Department of Education can support the development of braided systems, services and motivate all of California's children and families to achieve school success in the early years and beyond.