



President Bush's Proposal for Head Start

President Bush believes strongly that the single most important goal of the Head Start reauthorization should be to improve Head Start and other preschool programs to ensure that children are prepared to succeed in school. In light of what research tells us about the preschool years, and the importance of acquiring specific pre-language and social skills, the President believes Head Start must provide more emphasis on early learning and promote the best methods for preparing children for success in school. To coordinate all preschool programs to better meet the needs of children and families, the President proposes to allow interested states to integrate Head Start into their state plans for early care and education. This proposal is summarized below.

Proposal to enable States to include Head Start in early care and education planning

The President proposes to allow interested states to include Head Start in their preschool plans. This would enable states to do a better job of integrating and coordinating comprehensive early care and education services.

To receive Head Start dollars, states would have to meet certain accountability requirements. They would have to submit a state plan for approval by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education. The state plan must address several fundamental issues concerning preschool education, including how the state will: (1) work with the public school system to develop goals for all preschool programs in the state; (2) identify guidelines that preschool programs can use to achieve these goals; (3) devise an accountability system to determine whether children are achieving the goals; (4) provide professional development for preschool teachers and administrators; and (5) help parents provide support for children to succeed in kindergarten. In addition, states must describe how they will maintain the range of child development goals of Head Start, including the provision of social, parental, and health services.

The President's proposal has several key characteristics that are frequently misunderstood, or overlooked altogether, and I would like to set the record straight.

First, the President is not proposing to block-grant money to the states. In fact, Head Start will continue to be managed as a Federal-to-local program, except in those instances where states have developed plans for comprehensive and integrated preschool services that are approved by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education. States are not required to take advantage of this opportunity, nor will Head Start be turned over to the states with no strings attached.



Second, any state that takes advantage of this option will be expected to make a commitment to maintain the integrity of the comprehensive nature of Head Start services. For instance, states must serve as many Head Start eligible three- and four-year-olds as are currently being served through Head Start. They must also provide the comprehensive services currently found in Head Start, including social, family, and health services. And plans for ensuring the ongoing professional development of staff and administrators must be in place.

Third, states must maintain their current level of state spending on preschool programs. In other words, states will not be able to cut back on state preschool spending because they now have Head Start dollars.

Finally, states will have to explain how they intend to coordinate the use of funds across all state and Federal programs that have the purpose of promoting school readiness, as well as how they intend to administer the program. The President's purpose in making this option available to the states is to coordinate preschool programs to better meet the needs of children. States will receive Head Start dollars only when they have an approved plan in place that supports this goal.

For current information on this and other key issues affecting the Head Start community, visit the Head Start Bureau Web site at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb or www.headstartinfo.org