

Selected Head Start-Related Provisions in *Draft Build Back Better* Legislation

The following summary is based on [draft bill language](#) as of October 28, 2021.

The emerging Build Back Better bill in Congress has structured a framework that reinforces the Head Start community's commitment to an equity-driven, universal early learning system.

The whole-child/whole-family and inclusive model of Head Start and Early Head Start are baked into the legislation and offered as a viable growth option for states in a mixed-delivery system.

1. Build Back Better envisions a mixed delivery preschool system where Head Start is a key provider and partner.

As states establish or expand their preschool programs, Build Back Better requires that they focus first on high-need communities, the very populations that Head Start has 56 years of experience serving. The bill also creates a structure of enhanced payments for preschool programs to facilitate providing comprehensive services, as defined in the Head Start Act, to include “the provision to low-income children and their families of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services,” based on family needs assessments. Through a requirement that Head Start slots be filled first, before additional expansion, states will also be asked to leverage existing capacity while building out. And, expanded funding for Head Start as an eligible preschool and child care option could usher in a new wave of more mixed-income and diverse Head Start classrooms.

Relevant preschool language:

- *ESTABLISHING AND EXPANDING UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS IN HIGH-NEED COMMUNITIES.—In awarding subgrants or contracts under this subsection, the State shall first prioritize establishing and expanding universal local preschool programs within and across high-need communities by awarding subgrants or contracts to eligible providers operating within and across, or with capacity to operate within and across, such high-need communities.*
- *(iv) partner with Head Start agencies to ensure the full utilization of Head Start programs within the State;*
- *(v) distribute new preschool slots equitably among child care (including family child care) providers, Head Start agencies, and schools within the State.*

- *The term “comprehensive services” means services that are provided to low-income children and their families, and that are health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary, within the meaning of section 636 of the Head Start Act 23.*
- *ENHANCED PAYMENTS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES.—In awarding subgrants or contracts under this subsection and in addition to meeting the requirements of paragraph (1)(B), the State shall award subgrants or contracts with enhanced payments to eligible providers that offer local preschool programs funded under this subsection to a high percentage of low-income children to support comprehensive services.*

2. Build Back Better aligns state systems - both preschool and child care - with the educational standards of Early Head Start and Head Start.

By establishing Head Start’s educational standards as a benchmark and North Star for quality in both preschool and in child care Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, it will bring much needed unity to what we expect children to gain from early learning whether with respect to cognition or social-emotional development. There are particularly strong opportunities through this alignment to expand access to Early Head Start. Currently, only 11% of income-eligible children can access Early Head Start and its wrap-around supports for infants and toddlers.

Relevant language for preschool:

- *(A) A certification that—(i) the State has in place developmentally appropriate, evidence-based preschool standards that, at a minimum, are as rigorous as the standards specified in subparagraph (B) of section 641A(a)(1) of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9836a(a)(1)) and include program standards for class sizes and ratios;*

Relevant language for child care:

- *Such tiered system shall— (i) include a set of standards, for determining the tier of quality of a child care provider, that— (I) uses standards for a highest tier that at a minimum are equivalent to Head Start program performance standards described in section 641A(a)(1)(B) of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9836a(a)(1)(B)) or other equivalent evidence-based standards approved by the Secretary*

Section 641(A)(a)(1)(B) of the Head Start Act

(B) scientifically based and developmentally appropriate education performance standards related to school readiness that are based on the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework to ensure that the children participating in the program, at a minimum, develop and demonstrate--

(i) language knowledge and skills, including oral language and listening comprehension;

(ii) literacy knowledge and skills, including phonological awareness, print awareness and skills, and alphabetic knowledge;

(iii) mathematics knowledge and skills;

(iv) science knowledge and skills;

(v) cognitive abilities related to academic achievement and child development;

(vi) approaches to learning related to child development and early learning;

(vii) social and emotional development related to early learning, school success, and social problem solving;

(viii) abilities in creative arts;

(ix) physical development; and

(x) in the case of limited English proficient children, progress toward acquisition of the English language while making meaningful progress in attaining the knowledge, skills, abilities, and development described in clauses (i) through (ix), including progress made through the use of culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional services;

3. Build Back Better provides for an urgent federal investment in the Early Head Start and Head Start workforce, including in American Indian Alaska Native and Migrant and Seasonal programs, in the amount of \$2.5 billion a year for six years – \$15 billion in all.

Like the larger early learning community, Head Start is facing a crisis and a reckoning over our underpaid, undervalued workforce. The National Head Start Association and our members will be working with the Office of Head Start to get this funding out the door as quickly as possible to raise compensation, stem turnover and enhance recruitment. This effort would build a precedent and momentum for the bold recruitment, compensation and pay parity provisions envisioned for the child care and pre-K workforce elsewhere in the legislation.

For more information please contact advocacy@nhsa.org.