

February 18, 2016

Dear Dr. Enriquez:

We are writing to express our concerns about the Office of Head Start's proposed rules as they relate to parent and family engagement. We believe that what makes Head Start so successful is its two generational approach—working with both the child and their parents. We know that getting our most at risk children ready for school takes more than a strong and dynamic classroom experience, it also requires working closely with parents. Simply put—when a family does better, so does the child.

Head Start was built on the principle that a parent is a child's first and most important teacher. Head Start works with parents to support their child's learning at home and encourages them to actively be involved in their child's education. Programs also support families by connecting them to critical services such as employment support, educational opportunities, health and mental health providers, housing, and emergency food services. And they provide opportunities for parents to gain valuable leadership skills while ensuring that their voices are heard in their child's education.

Unfortunately, the proposed rules would dilute and diminish the work Head Start does with families in two specific ways by:

1. **Diminishing the Voices of Parents.** The new rules propose to take away the voices of parents on the Policy Council—the parent led governing body in Head Start—by establishing an impasse policy that ensures that the votes of parents on key issues won't count and can be overruled. The proposed rules also take away the parent committees, which is the first rung on the leadership ladder for parents. These changes will decrease opportunities for parents to have a say in their child's education. We believe Head Start should seek ways to increase the ways in which the program can empower parents, not weaken the existing standards in place that make sure parents' voices are heard.
2. **Decreasing Services Available to Parents.** As you know, Head Start programs works closely with parents through Family Partnership

Agreements. The agreement lays out the steps a parent will take to help their child succeed and be ready for kindergarten. This process allows parents set clear goals such as going back to school, participating in vocational training, and find a paying job. The Family Partnership Agreement and the inventory process allows programs to target services ranging from substance abuse counseling, educational assistance, job coaching as well as other barriers that are impeding self-sufficiency. Sadly, the proposed rules would eliminate this key aspect of Head Start's work with parents. We believe this will significantly weaken one of the most important elements of this two generational program. We ask you to reconsider.

We understand that the comment period has closed, but are hopeful you will hear our concerns as you make modifications and changes before issuing the final rule. Thanks again for all your work on behalf of low income children and families!

National Organizations

Momsrising

Washington State Organizations

Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP

Washington State PTA

Children's Alliance

Thrive Washington

League of Education Voters

Child Care Aware of Washington

SEIU 925

American Federation of Teachers Washington (AFT)

United Ways of the Pacific Northwest

United Ways of King County

One America

Partners for Our Children

Washington State Child Care Association

Wellspring Family Services

Washington State Community Action Partnership

Washington State Budget and Policy Center

Statewide Poverty Action Network

The Prosperity Agenda

United Ways of the Pacific Northwest

Washington State Family Engagement Trust

Bipartisan State Early Learning Leaders

Rep. Ruth Kagi (D-Shoreline)

Rep. Maureen Walsh (R-Walla Walla)

Senator Andy Billig (D-Spokane)