



NEWS RELEASE

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PERMALINK

Head Start Welcomes Administration’s Review of Designation Renewal System

NHSA Has Led Community in Advocating for Reforms of DRS

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Head Start Association today applauded an announcement from the Administration that it will reevaluate a regulation that NHSA has long argued is ineffective, arbitrary, and unnecessarily burdensome on Head Start programs. Earlier today, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released an official request for comments on a proposal that would change the Designation Renewal System’s (DRS) use of the CLASS tool, including the removal of the arbitrary lowest 10 percent provision and the adjustment of the minimum thresholds across all three domains. This announcement was publicly made by Steven Wagner, the Acting Assistant Secretary at HHS’ Administration of Children and Families, during remarks at NHSA’s 2017 Parent and Family Engagement Conference this morning.

“The Head Start community commends the leadership of the US Department of Health and Human Services for proposing a long overdue change to a policy, the Designation Renewal System, that has caused unnecessary and counterproductive anxiety for programs,” NHSA Executive Director Yasmina Vinci said. “The Head Start community is committed to providing our nation’s most vulnerable children and families with an opportunity to succeed in school and in life. This commitment includes an embrace of accountability, such as that included in the DRS. However, while CLASS is an effective and valuable tool for professional development, it has not been effectively applied in the DRS as a measure of quality.”

Vinci continued, “We look forward to discussing the potential changes with the entire Head Start community and other stakeholders, who share the Administration’s goal of ensuring Head Start is meeting its full potential. Our children, families, and communities -- and the American taxpayer -- deserve no less.”

Established in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, the DRS was intended to identify grantees offering lower quality services based on a series of triggers, place their grants up for open competition, and award the grants to the applicant most qualified to provide high-quality programming. An HHS report released last year stated, “No analyses indicated that grantees designated due to low CLASS scores differed from grantees that were not designated

on any study measure of quality.”

NHSA has advocated for years for reform of the DRS in meetings with federal lawmakers and administration officials. In a [2015 letter](#) to HHS leadership that was signed by dozens of state and regional Head Start associations, NHSA laid out specific and concrete recommendations for changes that would address the major flaws within the DRS. These suggestions were the result of a symposium convened by NHSA that included conversations with grantees, former federal officials, former Congressional staff, researchers, and others about how to strengthen DRS for the future.

***The National Head Start Association** is a not-for-profit organization committed to the belief that every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, has the ability to succeed in school and in life. The opportunities offered by Head Start lead to healthier, empowered children and families, and stronger, more vibrant communities. NHSA is the voice for more than 1 million children, 200,000 staff and 1,600 Head Start grantees in the United States. Visit www.nhsa.org and follow @NatlHeadStart for more information.*

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