



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

AUG 2 1995

Mr. John E. Coons  
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University of California  
School of Law (Boalt Hall)  
Berkeley, California 94720-2499

Dear Mr. Coons:

This is in response to your letter conveying your concerns about parent involvement in Head Start.

We completely agree with you about the importance of parent participation in Head Start. Parent involvement has contributed to the program's success in ways that remain unique to Head Start. The Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion recently reiterated that Head Start should continue its strong commitment to parents.

We know this view is shared by Dr. Peter Haiman whose work in the early years of the program did much to make the active involvement of parents a cornerstone upon which the success of Head Start is built. Recently, staff from the Head Start Bureau had a telephone conversation with Dr. Haiman to discuss his concerns. During this conversation we explained that we are currently in the midst of a major effort to review and strengthen Head Start regulations which define the goals and requirements related to parent involvement, as well as other areas of the program. We believe that Dr. Haiman was reassured with the direction we are taking. We look forward to receiving his specific comments when the proposed revised regulations are published.

While we know that terrific things are happening with parent involvement in many Head Start programs, we are also aware of problems with successfully implementing parent involvement in some of our programs. We are supporting local programs in reviewing their current level of parent involvement in all aspects of the program and making a renewed effort to include parents as decision-makers, volunteers, and primary educators of their children. During comprehensive program monitoring visits, a special effort is made by Federal staff to interview parents to determine how effectively the program is involving parents.

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Special efforts are also being made to reach working parents and parents with special needs. The recently reauthorized Head Start Act included a provision that requires every Head Start agency to provide parents of children participating in the program with child development and literacy skill training in order to help their children reach their full potential. In another aspect of our work, the Administration on Children, Youth and Families has developed a research announcement that will result in a descriptive study of families in Head Start.

We are committed to a quality Head Start program that is child-focused and family-centered in every aspect. Because we rely on the support and advice of interested individuals, I have asked that a member of the Head Start Bureau's staff call you to discuss any suggestions you might have regarding parent involvement in the Head Start Program.

Thank you for your interest in the Head Start program.

Sincerely,



Donna E. Shalala