



## Head Start and Teacher Qualifications Brief

### Position

PHSA fully supports all thoughtful and effective efforts to improve classroom quality and teacher qualifications.

### History

- The federal Head Start program has served as a model of quality in the early care and education community for over 40 years.
- The 1998 Reauthorization mandated that 50% of teachers obtain A.A. degrees in ECE or a related field by 2003.
- Congress provided programs with increased funding for the costs of tuition, books, substitutes and salary increases so that programs were able to meet the newly mandated, increased degree requirements.
- 2003 data indicated that 27 % of Head Start teachers held an A.A, 27% held a B.A., and 4% held a graduate degree in ECE or a related field.
- Current Head Start reauthorization is likely to require that 50% of Head Start teachers possess a 4-year degree in ECE or a related field.
- The current reauthorization proposals do not include increased funds needed to achieve these mandates.

### Research

- Current research questions the assumed link between improved quality in classrooms whose teachers possess a 4 versus a 2-year degree. It now appears that teachers with 2-year degrees in ECE, accompanied by high quality professional development programs, may provide as high a quality classroom experience as teachers with a 4-year degree.

### Feasibility

- Because of the lack of funding for these mandates, there are numerous barriers to further increasing Head Start teacher qualifications. Staff will experience issues related to financing tuition and accessing 4-year degree programs, grantees will struggle to offer competitive salaries to attract and retain qualified teachers, and the higher education system will struggle to offer quality teacher preparation programs and meet the demand for increased access to ECE curriculum and faculty.

### Recommendations

- Establish an A.A. degree in ECE or related fields as a minimum qualification for all Head Start teachers.
- Encourage teachers to continue professional development beyond the A.A.
- Dedicate funding for scholarships (such as TEACH), release time, mentoring & substitutes.
- Develop alternate pathways to obtain a 4-year ECE degree.
- Develop loan forgiveness programs for Head Start teachers.
- Commit additional funds to provide competitive teacher salaries to ensure retention.