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House Committee on Education and the Workforce

“Strengthening Head Start for Current and Future Generations”

Good morning Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to provide testimony this morning on the very important topic of this hearing.

2015 marks the 50th anniversary of Head Start creating opportunities for at-risk children and families. 10% of all Americans have now attended Head Start, including Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation and The Honorable Sylvia Burwell, Secretary of HHS. This topic could not be more important as we look toward to shaping the future.

I am a Head Start Director here to share my thoughts and observations based upon my extensive experience. I am a local program director, a psychologist by training, a state and national leader, a consultant and an author.

I first showed up for work in my Head Start program on September 1, 1968. I arrived with a sense of curiosity and awe about Head Start and the possibilities that it presented for the future. Today, 46 year later, I still arrive at work feeling that same sense of possibility. We must work together to preserve and deepen this unique national capability.

Head Start was created in 1964 and launched in 1965 as an intervention program. Those invited to the table to shape the program were physicians and psychologists. There was not an educator among them. Head Start has always been an intervention program that would include but not be limited to cognitive learning gains.

To accomplish this:

- We deal with the whole child...nutrition; medical and dental health; mental health; interpersonal skills development and the several domains of cognitive development. Young children cannot

learn if their teeth hurt, if they are hungry, or if they are regularly absent because of unstable housing or family challenges.

- Only the most needy are served by Head Start. We enroll the children others too often reject, suspend or expel.
- We enroll the family, not just their child, identifying the needs and goals of the family and working regularly with them throughout the year in order to help them succeed in achieving their goals.
- In my agency, we partner with the Medical College of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Children's Hospital who provide weekly mental health consultation services. Poverty has a major impact upon mental health in both the enrolled child and their parent.
- Head Start programs partner with the public schools. In my agency, we have 107 four year olds with a half day of Head Start plus a school funded half day of 4 year old kindergarten. We also provide leadership locally in this effort, including teacher training.
- We individualize instruction *in concert with parent input...* assuring that the parent is a key part of this process. Parents are their child's primary teacher and we have high expectations of parents. We support their development. This family-centric approach is not evidenced by other public entities serving young children at risk.

In 1991, in an effort to share innovative best practices I wrote a thought piece titled "What Really Makes Head Start Work?" In it I identified a secret to Head Start's success based upon my experience and extensive observation. We create what we call "Compassionate Partnerships" between a Head Start staff member and a parent or guardian on behalf of their child. These relationships are based upon respect, trust and a focus upon the child. Hundreds of thousands of individualized compassionate partnerships are created each year.

As I complete my thoughts on "Strengthening Head Start for Current and Future Generations", several thoughts come to mind...

You can mandate compliance. You cannot mandate excellence. We must achieve excellence. We know how to do this!

We should not seek to make Head Start more like the public schools, but to make the public schools more like Head Start. Involve parents. Create Compassionate Partnerships between teachers and parents.

Don't send Head Start eligible 4 year old children into public school kindergarten instead of Head Start when they need a full range of intervention services unavailable in an LEA. Our local schools love having us work with the children most in need in their district. We love it too!

Innovation is in our DNA...standardization kills creativity. Head Start programs annually study their marketplace through a community needs assessment and adjust services accordingly. Don't allow "one size fits all" program designs.

We want to continue to deliver upon the promise that every child can succeed! I look forward to working with the Committee on this.