

# Dr. Bernadine Futrell

Director of the Office of Head Start



Dear Head Start family,

Thank you for the actions that you take every day to partner with children and families and move the Head Start program forward. Head Start work is “heart work.” The Head Start idea is that all children, families, and communities – including those who have been adversely affected by persistent poverty, racism, and bias – should have the opportunity to thrive and reach their fullest potential of impact on this world.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) is continually looking for ways to support you in this heart work. In 2022, we are focusing on four priority areas to support programs in meeting the Head Start mission of ensuring eligible children and families receive high-quality services in safe and healthy settings that prepare children for school and life. These priorities are outlined below.

## Advancing Equity

*Promote belonging by identifying and addressing barriers and promoting new pathways for family stability.*

Fundamentally, the most expansive concepts of [equity](#) are embedded in the Head Start program. Equity is at the core of Head Start practices, principles, and philosophy. We know that by providing services that support the development of the whole child – cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally – and by implementing systems that promote flourishing of all people, Head Start programs continue to lead the way on advancing equity.

## Supporting Programs’ Pandemic Response and Recovery

*Work to safely restore in-person programming in healthy environments.*

The equity gaps in our communities have been both revealed and exacerbated by the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Head Start programs continue to be the frontline, supporting communities impacted by this crisis in myriad ways. As of February 2022, Head Start programs have spent more than \$850 million in COVID-19 supplemental funds to support their children and families with critical services. Even as the pandemic continues to impact many aspects of life, Head Start programs are working toward providing fully in-person services. As an example, in December 2020, only 38% of reported enrolled children received in-person services. This February, in the thick of the Omicron wave, programs reported 91%

of enrolled children received full in-person services. This is a classic illustration of Head Start programs and staff showing up with their whole heart for the children and families who need them.

## **Investing in the Workforce**

*Sustain a highly effective and representative workforce to support all children and families.*

The success of any Head Start program depends upon its staff having the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform the responsibilities of their position effectively and efficiently. The [Head Start workforce](#) need livable wages and pay parity in accordance with their skills, knowledge, and educational requirements that reflect the importance of the profession to effectively deliver support to young children and their families. Program leadership must also implement supportive policies and procedures that support staff wellness, effectiveness, and professional development.

## **Reaching More Children and Families**

*Focus Head Start services in places with greatest need.*

The children who most need Head Start services may be those who are hardest to enroll and retain. Rapid shifts in demographics have been exacerbated and highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and may result in under-enrollment for some Head Start programs. Bringing our full hearts to reaching the children and families who need Head Start services the most means understanding community needs and considering strategic shifts and systemic approaches to [eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance](#).

To support these four priorities, OHS is working on policy issues, technical assistance resources, and procedure changes. You can learn more about these priorities on the [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#) website. It is our commitment to bring our heart work to support you, as you bring your heart work to supporting children and families.

In unity, truth, and love,  
/ Dr. Bernadine Futrell /

Dr. Bernadine Futrell  
Director  
Office of Head Start

Office of Head Start (OHS) | 330 C Street, SW | 4th Floor Mary E. Switzer Building | Washington, DC 20201  
| <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov> | 1-866-763-6481 | [Contact Us](#)

You are receiving this email because you are signed up for Office of Head Start communications. You may [modify your ECLKC email subscriptions](#). Recipients subscribed through the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES) must be removed from HSES by their program or office. Please do not reply to this email. [Contact](#) customer service for additional support.