

# Dr. Bernadine Futrell

*Director of the Office of Head Start*



Dear Head Start family,

Over two years of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic in unprecedented times has taken an incredible toll on our Head Start children, families, staff, programs, and communities. This program year, you provided vital family- and child-centered comprehensive services. You've been on the front lines of addressing health equity by supporting access to vaccination for staff and families. You've navigated staffing challenges as well as the ebbs and flows of several COVID-19 variants as they plagued our communities. Head Start programs have been moving forward toward reconnecting children and families to comprehensive in-person services as local conditions permitted. In December 2020, just 38% of enrolled children were reported receiving in-person services. Despite ongoing challenges, by March 2022, 93% of enrolled children were reported as receiving full in-person services. Thank you, Head Start staff – for reaching, teaching, and caring for the children and families in your community as only you can!

As the Head Start community continues to move forward, we are focused on the OHS mission: to provide high-quality services in safe and healthy settings that prepare children for school and life. To that end, as we enter the next program year, we are focused on advancing equity, supporting programs' pandemic response and recovery, investing in the workforce, and reaching more children and families as our top priorities. At the Office of Head Start (OHS), we are committed to supporting programs through ongoing technical assistance, with policies like our recent inclusion of the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) in the definition of public assistance, and improved approaches to federal oversight. I'm proud of the entire Head Start community for your innovation, resilience, flexibility, and dedication to the Head Start mission.

In looking toward the next program year, Head Start programs will continue navigate the terrain of the COVID-19 pandemic, transitions that may look and feel different, and the long-term impacts on the children, families, and communities we serve with continued strength and resolve.

OHS is approaching this coming year as a season of ongoing recovery, response, and renewal. This approach comes with some considerations that will help us to move forward together into the next program year.

## 2022-2023 Program Considerations

**OHS will not use Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) results to make competitive determinations under the Designation Renewal System.**

Many center-based programs and staff are in a state of change. Children and families have experienced trauma, and children have had reduced time in group settings. As such, children should have more time for social and emotional development along with additional mental health supports. Programs continue to struggle with workforce shortages and onboarding new program staff. Some classrooms may continue to experience sporadic closures due to outbreaks of COVID-19. In recognizing these conditions, OHS will conduct CLASS® reviews during the 2022-23 program year but will not use the scores to make competitive determinations under the Designation Renewal System. The scores from CLASS® observations will be used to help OHS understand the current experiences of children in Head Start classrooms as a quality improvement opportunity and to offer training and technical assistance supports that build on existing program efforts to enhance teacher-child interactions.

**OHS will resume evaluating monthly enrollment reports to determine which programs enter into the Full Enrollment Initiative.**

Starting September 2022, OHS will resume pre-pandemic practices for tracking and monitoring enrollment. This includes evaluating monthly enrollment reports to determine which programs enter into the [Full Enrollment Initiative](#). The initial focus will be on grant recipients who are significantly underenrolled, specifically programs serving less than half of their funded enrollment. OHS will also engage other programs with higher rates of enrollment throughout the 2022-23 program year. [As a reminder](#), all programs will start fresh, including those who were participants in the Full Enrollment Initiative prior to the pandemic.

Full Enrollment Initiative processes are intended to support grant recipients in establishing deliberate and thoughtful strategies to reach full enrollment. Programs engaged in the Full Enrollment Initiative will be provided ample time, at least 12 months, to allow for data-informed strategic planning to address the issues driving underenrollment. This is an opportunity for programs to reflect, reimagine, reinvent, and redefine their programmatic design to support and sustain quality programming moving forward beyond the Full Enrollment Initiative. To engage in the process brings with it a host of support from the technical assistance system and regional offices, in addition to the general supports available to all grant recipients, such as the recent [Enrollment Forward](#) and [Prioritizing Staff Wellness](#) webinar series.

Children most in need of Head Start services can also be the hardest to recruit, enroll, and retain in the program. You may need to change your strategic program approach to reach future Head Start children and their families. Evaluating the current program and updating your community

assessment is an opportunity to step back, fully understand your community, and envision how you can provide responsive services in the changing environment.

Involving the governing body or Tribal Council in strategic planning is vital. OHS relies on the judgment of governing bodies and program administrators at the community level to determine what is necessary to fully resume comprehensive services at agreed-upon levels.

Now is the time for your creativity and flexibility. You may need to expand marketing or develop new partnerships. Consider using the [#GetAheadStart recruitment resources](#). We encourage grant recipient agencies to use funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplement Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act to address the needs of this upcoming program year. These funds can be used in many ways to respond to the impacts of the pandemic. They are also available to support enhanced community partnerships and related recruitment efforts, including purchasing services, materials, and technology for the purpose of recruitment. If you have questions about the allowability of certain expenditures, please contact your Regional Office.

We look forward to collaborating with you in these efforts to ensure each grant recipient is in the best position to meet the current moment and the Head Start mission, as we all strive together to do the Head Start heart work. Thank you for the work you do to support children, families, staff, and communities.

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.