

**Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Office of Head Start Tribal Consultation
in conjunction with Region V Tribal Consultation**

May 2, 2018

Grand Casino Mille Lacs Hinckley
Hinckley, Minnesota

Summary Report

Seeking to provide more access to Native communities, the Office of Head Start (OHS) held a Tribal Consultation on May 2, 2018, in Hinckley, Minnesota, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Region V Tribal Consultation. By planning a joint meeting, OHS staff hoped to give Tribal leaders a chance to voice opinions and concerns in one convenient setting.

The meeting opened at 1:05 p.m. with brief remarks from Angie Godfrey, Regional Program Manager for OHS Region XI AIAN. Ms. Godfrey scheduled the Consultation to include plenty of time for listening to Tribes and answering questions. Deputy Director Ann Linehan, also provided critical updates. Ms. Linehan, who has served as the Acting Director of OHS, announced the arrival of the newly appointed OHS Director, Dr. Deborah Bergeron. Dr. Bergeron, who has a background in K-12 public education, brings humility, sincerity and energy to her new role at the OHS, said Ms. Linehan.

OHS Funding Updates

Ms. Linehan noted that Congress passed a \$610 million increase in Head Start funding. The funding included a cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) increase for Head Start staff. The money comes at a time when OHS is over halfway through its FY18 budget. For the COLA, Tribes that have a funding period from October to May 1 will have to apply for the COLA as a supplemental award. The funds will be retroactive to the budget period. For Tribes that will receive funds in June, July, August or September, the COLA will be rolled into their funding for FY18. Ms. Linehan encouraged all Tribes to apply for the COLA as that will automatically become part of the base for FY19.

Congress also appropriated \$260 million for Tribes to apply to increase program operations for longer hours or days throughout the year. OHS will distribute program instructions in a few weeks to inform Tribes how to apply. OHS has until March 2019 to allocate the funds. Ms. Linehan also announced the administration has rolled back a requirement that preschool programs had to meet 1,020 hours by next August. Tribes that have not received requests for additional hours do not have to apply for them. Effective September, however, all Early Head Start center-based programs must go to 1,380 hours. Tribes have flexibility in determining how

to use those hours. Early Head Start has increased hours because continuity of care is so important for infants and toddlers, said Ms. Linehan. Tribes with Early Head Start programs should apply for the funds to meet the new requirement.

OHS also received an increase of \$115 million for Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership and Early Head Start Expansion. \$15 million will go to existing Early Head Start programs, and those programs also will receive a COLA. \$100 million will be available for a competitive opportunity to apply for more slots. When OHS divides that money nationally into the 12 Regions, about 60 programs will receive funding, even though many Tribes will submit outstanding applications. The competition will occur during the fall, with decisions available in March 2019.

Tribal Consultation Discussion

Substance Abuse Epidemic:

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa testified that tribal members reside in a heavily rural area right at the tip of Wisconsin. Primary challenges include a limited talent pool, high turnover due to low pay and a meth/opioid epidemic that has led to child neglect and interventions. With reduced Head Start staff, these problems seem almost insurmountable. Red Cliff attempts to hire Tribal members but schools and colleges offering accreditation are some distance away. The future of the Tribe remains at stake as parents struggle with substance abuse and leave their children with any available caregiver. Child care centers attempt to pick up the slack, which puts great pressure on Head Start staff.

Red Cliff tribal leaders are trying to address the drug epidemic. Their work includes law enforcement, treatment and recovery, and school prevention programs. Tribes request more funds for these efforts as well. Ms. Linehan noted that the administration and Congress remain interested in looking at additional funding to address opioids. Ms. Linehan asked the Tribes to identify where additional funds could be most helpful. OHS staff also hope to plan a national conference session on opioids.

There is a high prevalence of grandparents taking care young grandchildren due to opioid addiction in families on the Mille Lacs Reservation. Grandparents are caring for their grandchildren, and they take on the child-care costs and the burden of trying to help family members. Head Start funding should increase to continue providing meals and a safe, positive environment. The Tribe also has a high level of homelessness in the community, which often includes homeless children. 37 percent of the people who live in Mille Lacs are homeless.

There are high numbers of uninsured children on the Mille Lacs reservation. These youth have diagnoses of PTSD but have not received needed mental health support because parents have not completed the medical assistance application process. Head Start programs should partner with Health Centers and Health and Human Services programs to assist families.

OHS Response:

Family advocates can help homeless parents enroll their children in Head Start, said Ms. Godfrey. Local partnerships also can assist the children with transportation or other needs that provide continuity. Ms. Godfrey offered to follow up on the issue. Ms. Linehan agreed that Head Start is an anchor in many communities but runs the risk of growing overwhelmed unless local staff members team up with other area agencies and support services.

Staff qualifications:

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, asked about cultural teacher qualifications and curricula in Head Start classrooms. Elders who are fully fluent speakers of Native language may not have a college education but do have a “degree” in language and cultural heritage. Children also appreciate interacting with elders. Tribes should have the ability to establish the qualifications needed to bring fluent language speakers into a classroom. Elders, for instance, could participate as aides.

The Mille Lacs Tribe also assists infants and youth through a daycare program. Like most Tribal programs, Head Start operates in the midst of great poverty, making the need for services even more important. However, Mille Lacs has noted high staff turnover. The Tribe prefers to employ and train its own members to offer early childhood education as a career. Even so, the demand on employees is incredibly stressful and the Tribe has high absenteeism, said Mr. St. Germaine, who reported a daily absentee rate of 10 percent. Volunteers offer to fill in the gaps in daycare services. Head Start graduates move on to the Tribal school under the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE).

Traditionally Elders served as the teachers of cultural beliefs and Tribal identity. All Tribes should have funding and support to include Elders in early education and even K-12.

OHS Response:

Tribal communities have worked hard to help federal Head Start/Early Head Start staff understand how to help language grow, said Ms. Godfrey. Immersion classrooms are now more popular, and a number of programs use a variety of languages. Head Start has qualifications but works closely with individual programs to align and support the language of each Tribe. Pueblos, for instance, have oral traditions and tend to prefer immersion programs.

Head Start teachers and teacher assistants must meet federal qualifications but bringing in a third person for language and culture is an allowable expense, added Ms. Linehan. Tribes can use Head Start dollars to pay for a person who may not meet teacher qualifications and is not part of the teaching team but can focus on language preservation and cultural restoration.

Head Start also will work with Tribal communities by supporting an elder in a classroom as a third person without requiring that elder to go back to school, said Ms. Godfrey. Head Start still needs qualified staff, and funds are available for staff members who want to take courses. Head Start seeks balance knowing that Native language creates a richer learning environment in the classroom. Further, Head Start officials also are reviewing findings on language and culture in the first American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). The growth of Native languages in Tribal classrooms is a remarkable achievement that Head Start will continue to support, said Ms. Godfrey.

Wages:

In discussing qualifications and number of staff in a classroom, Lee Turney said Tribes struggle to match the competitive wages found among peers as well as other community employers. Due to such issues as cost per child, for example, some Tribes cannot hire a third person in the classroom, added Mr. Turney, the early childhood development director for Leech Lake. That means the first two professionals in a classroom must have a western/European approach to education, and a third person can incorporate language and culture if funds are available. Tribal children, however, need a clear understanding of history, heritage and background at an early age.

Native American language and culture should not remain secondary to a western/European education standard, said Mr. Turney. Putting Native American language and culture on a level playing field with western ideals is a strategy that Tribes can address and implement with OHS staff rather than legislatively, Mr. Turney added. Further, Tribes should have more autonomy in setting teacher criteria and making decisions at the local level regarding who comes into a program to provide language and culture.

Tribes also seek ways to streamline services. Tribes that offer Head Start and Early Head Start end up managing two separate grants serving the same groups of people, said Mr. Turney. Birth to 5 grants worked through a lot of these issues initially. However, for Tribes that experience fluctuating community needs, it was recommended that Tribes get an opportunity during the 5-year grant cycle to go into a Birth to 5 grant process so those at the user/local level can better determine how that grant can serve Tribal communities more effectively.

OHS Response:

OHS staff members pushed the envelope as far as possible legally by getting permission to do a Birth to 5 funding opportunity announcement, said Ms. Linehan. Although OHS would like to see commingled Head Start and Early Head Start funds, the statute and the way Congress appropriates the funds separately mean the Office of Head Start has no choice but to track those funds attached to the age group. Ms. Godfrey provided additional details on how the Birth to 5

program operates in Alaska. The Region XII migrant programs do not delineate between infants, toddlers and preschoolers, Ms. Linehan added. Therefore, because the strategy is not unprecedented, perhaps OHS and Tribes could continue to push the idea forward.

OHS must look more closely at the issue of cost per child. Leech Lake has offered Head Start since 1965 and Early Head Start since 2010. However, no one seems to consider the costs of managing and administering a program today, costs associated with livable wages, classroom size and quality services. Although Leech Lake Tribal Leadership has supported the nonfederal share match with funds, not all Tribes can do that. A discussion of cost per child raises the issue of serving fewer children; even so, Tribes also must consider the effects of overburdened, burned-out teachers and frequent staff turnover.

Language and Culture:

The Oneida Nation faces similar concerns surrounding language and culture. A number of community members have begun “language nests” to address this issue with young children who are not yet in school. These community members meet with children once a week, speaking and playing with the youth only in Native language. Head Start funding is needed to implement that type of program within current Head Start services or to develop something brand new. One consideration: a full immersion Head Start program. Information was also requested on food programs for Head Start as part of an effort to implement healthier indigenous foods.

Would a Tribal chef fit within Head Start requirements, especially as the community seeks to establish its own qualifications. What Tribal Nations value as indigenous foods might look different than what the United States deems as healthy.

There is a grant from the Department of Agriculture that focuses on ‘farm to early care programs’. The grant highlights indigenous vegetables and plants. The Leech Lake Head Start also introduces children indigenous plants and vegetables in the classroom through the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed).

OHS Response:

Ms. Godfrey stated that tribes must work with a nutritionist and serve nutritious meals that meet daily requirements but families and local communities get to decide what food is served to children. Tribes also can determine the meals that are served through USDA contracts, which is how Head Start funds programs that have food costs. A tribal chef could work with the Head Start Program Health and Nutrition Manager to develop appropriate meals that include indigenous foods, and meet Head Start Standards.

Wrapping up the Consultation, Ms. Godfrey agreed to keep Tribes posted on a planned opioid awareness meeting for agencies throughout ACF. Because Head Start touches families across communities, local residents look to the program to reach people at the ground level. Head Start seeks to bring in experts to share the best thinking on opioid interventions to assist Head Start professionals without reinventing the wheel. This series of events will begin next year, said Ms. Linehan. Head Start also will recommend where Tribes could put additional moneys to get the most impact should more funding become available.

The meeting adjourned at 3:02 p.m.

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