

Castle Helps Lead Passage of Head Start Reauthorization Bill to Improve Education for Low-Income Children -- May 2, 2007

Washington D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle, Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education today played a key role in the passage of the 'Improving Head Start Act of 2007' which he co-authored and co-sponsored with Rep. Kildee, Chairman of the Subcommittee responsible for K-12 education. The legislation, which reauthorizes the Head Start Early Childhood Education program, is based on an early version of the bill also authored by Castle which passed in the 109th Congress and works to strengthen the current law while focusing on ways to close the readiness gap between Head Start children and more advantaged peers as they enter kindergarten. Currently in Delaware, Head Start programs serve over 2,000 children, with over 800 additional three and four year olds receiving assistance through state government funding. Nationally, Head Start serves over 900,000 children every day and has over 1,600 grantees across the United States.

"The passage of this reauthorization today underlines the importance of early childhood education and services throughout the United States. I believe strongly that the reforms sought in today's legislation will go a long way to institute needed reforms to an already successful program. It has been proven that students who attend Head Start programs do start school more prepared than those with similar backgrounds that do not attend the program. However, Head Start students continue to enter kindergarten well below national norms in school readiness. By moving to close this school readiness gap, this bill will improve results for almost a million Head Start students across the nation.

"Today's legislation builds upon efforts made in the last Congress to evolve education performance standards to ensure Head Start students develop critical skills such as language knowledge; pre-mathematics and pre-science knowledge; cognitive abilities related to academic achievement and child development; and in the case of limited-English proficient children, progress toward acquisition of the English language, among other important initiatives. Additionally, this legislation enhances coordination and collaboration between states and local school districts in Head Start and includes reforms to ensure greater financial transparency and disclosure so that children are not being hurt by the mismanagement of critical funding," Castle said.

Head Start was created in 1965 to give economically disadvantaged children access to the same educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services that were enjoyed by their more affluent peers. The goal of the program was, as it remains today, to provide children a solid foundation that will prepare them for success in school and later in life. As the centerpiece of the Federal government's efforts to support quality early childhood education for our nation's most disadvantaged youth, Head Start has served over 24 million low-income children and their families.

Specifically, the 'Improving Head Start Act' includes provisions to:

- Strengthen Head Start's Academic Component by emphasizing the proven techniques of development in preparing disadvantaged children for school, improving teacher quality in Head Start, strengthening academic quality standards, and maintain the same local assessments of academic progress.
- Improve fiscal and program management by creating more competition in the Head Start system, seeking better

safeguards against financial abuse, and improving disclosure and transparency of Head Start agencies.

- Establish a greater role for states, local School Districts, and parents by creating a greater role for states and local School Districts in Head Start and strengthening the role of parents.
- Expand the reach and impact of Head Start programs by addressing the unique needs of children in migrant and seasonal and Indian Head Start programs, removing the barriers to ease enrollment of homeless children and preserving all current health and nutrition services for Head Start children.

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