Head Start Collaboration and Coordination

**Issue Background**

Head Start program administrators understand the importance of coordination among their programs, child care programs, and other pre-k and state education programs. Indeed, collaboration with other community agencies is central to Head Start's mission and service delivery design because it is fundamental to delivering high quality Head Start services.

Coordination and collaboration is occurring in many states and at the local level all over this country. In fact, many Head Start programs provide full day services by leveraging child care funds to extend their services. Some 42 percent of families who reported needing full day, full-year early care and education received this extended care either directly through the Head Start program or through collaborations between Head Start and child care providers. Similarly, pre-kindergarten services often co-locate with Head Start programs to provide extended education and comprehensive health and nutrition services to a larger group of children.

The Head Start Bureau, in its recent 228-page report, *Head Start-State Collaboration Offices*, extensively documented how Head Start programs are collaborating with states, localities, and private organizations across the country. In this report, the Head Start Bureau catalogued the extent of this collaboration by providing summaries for every state in the country.

In Ohio, Head Start programs and the Ohio Head Start – State Collaboration Office have worked with Ohio’s pre-kindergarten program, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the State Early Intervention Coordinating Council, the Interagency Early Childhood Team for Ohio’s Help Me Grow program, the Ohio Family Literacy Initiative Task Force, the Ohio Reads alliance, the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Higher Education Consortium, and the Ohio Family and Children First organization.

Meanwhile, in Mississippi, a state without a state-funded pre-kindergarten program, Head Start programs have worked with the Mississippi Head Start – State Collaboration Office to coordinate activities with Mississippi’s Department of Education, the Mississippi Department of Health, the Mississippi Education Television Network, the Early Childhood Institution at Mississippi State University, Mississippi’s historically black universities, and school districts throughout Mississippi.

How are Head Start programs able to collaborate with state, local, and private organizations? The Head Start Performance Standards already encourage this collaboration by specifying that Head Start programs must:

- “Take an active role in community planning to encourage strong communication, cooperation, and the sharing of information among agencies and their community partners and to improve the delivery of community services to children and families.”

**Recommendations**

As the organization that pushed for 50 state collaboration grants, NHSA fully understands the need for Head Start to coordinate with other federal and state early care programs. NHSA supports provisions that will encourage collaboration and strategic state-level planning among Head Start, education, and child care programs to deliver services that help children succeed in school while meeting the needs of parents. We believe this can be accomplished in two ways:

**Expand the role of the State Collaboration Offices.** Right now these offices are the vital link between state pre-k, child care, private providers, and Head Start. We believe that these offices could easily be expanded so that they have more authority to bring all key stakeholders to the table to discuss building a comprehensive early education system. For instance, one improvement would be to enable the state collaboration coordinator to develop local community needs assessments and recruitment plans with the early childhood community to ensure that every child who needs services will get them. We continue to believe that State Head Start Associations need to be involved in the selection and the ongoing direction of the state collaboration coordinator.

**State Early Care Advisory Councils.** Many states already have set up state early care advisory councils to bring all the key stakeholders together to discuss developing a comprehensive early education system. The new formalized advisory councils would be made up of members from the Head Start community, parents, public schools, business and faith leaders, and other key stakeholders. The Advisory Council would be tasked with developing the early education plan for the state and would submit their report to the state collaboration coordinator for approval. NHSA supports this type of integrated planning and development so that the delivery of services is of the highest quality possible.