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The Updated Role of Policy Council

Head Start Act Update

On December 12, 2007, President Bush signed into law the “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act”, thus reauthorizing the Head Start Program. The *Reauthorization or New Head Start Act*, as it is more commonly known, addressed several key issues, which resulted in new requirements for Head Start Agencies. Perhaps one of the most significant revisions involves changes to the Head Start governance structure. More specifically, the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Board and Policy Council have now changed. Head Start agencies must now familiarize themselves with these revisions, and strive to bring their agency into compliance as soon as possible.

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The Composition of the Policy Council

Under the new Head Start Act, parents of children currently enrolled in the Head Start program will continue to make up at least a majority (51%) of the Policy Council with the remaining members serving as community representatives. Parents of children formerly enrolled in the Head Start program may still serve as community representatives.

The Policy Council composition virtually stays the same as under the Head Start Program Performance Standards, except for one major difference regarding community representatives. Community Representatives must now be *elected by parents of children currently enrolled instead of selected by a locally determined process*. The new Act does not specify what expertise community members must have, nor does it provide information about term limits. Thus it is assumed that the regulatory requirements regarding Policy Council community members’ expertise and term limits still apply to Head Start agencies.

Conflict of Interest

Members of the Policy Council are prohibited from having a conflict of interest with the Head Start agency. They are prohibited from receiving compensation for serving on the Policy Council or from providing services to the Head Start agency. Thus, agencies cannot have Policy Council members working in the agency in a paid capacity (of any sort).

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## **Policy Council Responsibilities**

Under the new Head Start Act, the Policy Council continues to be responsible for the direction of the Head Start Program, however the role of the Policy Council has changed.

Under the new Act, the Policy Council must now approve and submit to the Governing Board decisions about each of the following activities:

- Activities to support the active involvement of parents in supporting program operations, including policies to ensure that the Head Start agency is responsive to community and parent needs.
- Program recruitment, selection and enrollment priorities
- Applications for Head Start funding and amendments to such applications, prior to submission of applications
- Budget planning for program expenditures, including policies for reimbursement and participation in Policy Council activities
- Bylaws for operation of the Policy Council
- Program personnel policies and decisions regarding the employment of program staff consistent with the Governing Body's responsibilities in this area, including standards of conduct for program staff, contractors, and volunteers and criteria for the employment and dismissal of program staff, contractors, and volunteers and criteria for the employment and dismissal of program staff, and
- Developing procedures for how members of the Policy Council will be elected.