

**U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)
Region 10 Tribal Consultation**



OFFICE OF HEAD START

SUMMARY REPORT

from

July 10-11, 2019

Northern Quest Resort and Casino
Airway Heights, Washington

Natural disasters, tough budget cuts, and the lack of water and infrastructure were among the challenges discussed during the Region 10 Tribal Consultation in Spokane, Washington, July 10-11, 2019. Tribes throughout Indian Country face numerous concerns as leaders attempt to provide services to Native communities. Tribal leaders reminded HHS staff that the federal trust responsibility is the foundation for the provision of federally funded health care for all members of the 573 federally recognized Tribes, bands and Alaska Native villages in the United States.

The provision of federal health care services to American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) is a direct result of treaties between the United States and Tribes and reaffirmed by executive order, congressional actions and two centuries of Supreme Court case law. Further, the government-to-government discussions that occur during consultation remain an important, deeply valued policy.

Region 10 Director John Graham provided welcoming remarks before turning the consultation over to Tribal co-facilitators Ron Allen, Tribal Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, and Victor Joseph, Chief/Chairman of the Tanana Chiefs Conference. The co-facilitators next invited introductions around the table.

Administration for Children and Families Consultation

Head Start Annual Consultation

Fran Majestic, Director of Program Operations, Office of Head Start (OHS)

Todd Lertjuntharangoon, Regional Program Manager, OHS

Among the discussion points, Ms. Majestic addressed these highlights:

- The Head Start Act was issued in 2007. OHS staff do not see a reauthorization in the near future.
- OHS focuses on early learning/school readiness as well as health, nutrition and family well-being and support.
- AI/AN Head Start programs receive about \$300 million per year. That number has grown through every administration. Congress appropriated \$24 million for FY19 to increase hours and days of operations. AI/AN Head Starts also saw a \$4.5 million cost-of-living increase. The agency also awarded \$4 million to 5 Tribal entities for Early Head Start expansion and child care partnerships. A noncompetitive funding opportunity will be available for grantees impacted by certain types of natural disasters.

Questions and Answers

C: (Mr. Aukongak) I believe the Head Start program is working. The kids are learning, and at the end of the day you have two employees who are local, and two employees are paying for a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) home. I know this because I have two in my community, and they are Tribal members. I am very happy for them. They teach the kids very

well, and if we get a bus it would be even greater. When it snows, when it is 30 below, the kids still go to school.

C: (Ms. Majestic) I encourage your Head Start program to submit a grant application. Your stories are wonderful, and if you would like personal recognition, if you send us an e-mail, sometimes Dr. Bergeron reaches out with a personal note.

C: (Ms. Evans) The Spokane Tribe ceded more than 3 million acres and was established and currently has a 159,000-acre reservation but when my ancestors gave up that land they understood the government had the trust responsibility to take care of our health, education and welfare. We take that seriously and do not feel that trust responsibility is being met at all times. For my Tribe, consultation is that you listen with your heart.

When we talk about Head Start, we talk about our children. If we can reach out to families and provide one-stop resources for pregnant mothers, newborn babies, all the way up through Early Learning Centers to Head Start -- just the transitioning from those periods is important. The programs must break down silos and transition these young people from one to the other. The programs must work consistently and remember that they serve these families. Many families have trauma, and we must address the needs.

Head Start and all the federal programs must acknowledge the importance of bringing cultural learning into all the facilities through language teachers or immersion schools. Our Tribe has an immersion school. It is small and has completed only its second year. By the end of the school year, our 3-year-olds are speaking the language and displaying so much confidence.

We must address pay inequities. We may have public school teachers who earn a lot higher wages than the teachers in Early Learning Centers or Head Start. We have wonderful teachers in these facilities but when we underpay them, they will get better jobs at other places. That does not help the children. We should pay the people who dedicate their lives to children.

Some Tribes are able to build facilities. In our case, we are not, so we are always band-aiding, patching roofs, adding modulars. We want to see facility funds come down through the federal government so we can build beautiful facilities.

C: (Ms. Majestic) One of the beauties of Head Start is that it has always been federal to local. We try to make sure that it is extremely community- and family-based, and that means language and culture.

C: (Ms. Sam) We have consistently had 150 students. We do not have Early Head Start but would love to have it. We have had Head Start for 48 years. We hope to rebuild a new site and incorporate an addition for new students, and my hopes would be Early Head Start. We hope there would be funds that would supplement or help with this building.

C: (Ms. Majestic) The opportunities that we have had for expansion have been very limited. We make sure there is a set-aside for AI/ANs but in the last round we were able to fund only 5 and we typically get 3 to 4 times the number of applications. We do set priorities based on needs

because we want to serve children in healthy, safe environments. We want to see a program plan that builds you into the future and addresses needs. We try to be reasonable and creative to ensure our kids get services.

C: (Mr. Tyler) The CLASS assessment must be more culturally sensitive. The scores dictate funding. Regarding pay, we supplement Head Start by almost \$240,000. Those are Tribal dollars. We had no choice but to give pay increases. We were losing teachers. We send them off to get educated and lose them because of pay.

Mental health is one of the most important issues. We bring in a counselor once a week through a grant, but it should be through a line item through HHS. We have started to see a change during the last 10 years that puts a strain on law enforcement, social services and our health system.

We are located right on the tip of the coast, and my biggest concern is earthquakes. We are in the process of moving our Head Start facilities up on the hill. I thank Head Start for the relationship we have established in our efforts to secure funding.

C: (Ms. Majestic) That is an example of good program planning. And as we have gotten any money, we have tried to focus on making sure that we pay our teachers. Regarding CLASS, right now in the law that is what we have but that does not mean we cannot think about this differently. If you have an idea of how we can do a better job, we are open and we want to hear about it.

C: (Mr. Joseph) Our Tribe sometimes puts in almost more than \$1 million to offset the budget for Head Start needs. We pay for added classes because if Head Start served all of our children, it would pay that extra amount. Head Start remains important so we cover a big portion of the funding.

Some of the policies, we should only be responsible for half of what those policies say, and the rest of the money we spend should allow us to decide how we want our Head Start. I have always wanted Head Start to look at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to allow for more services to be provided in Head Start for children and parents. The parents of these children often are children themselves. The parents need counseling and services. Our Tribes need to bill for services. Some of those children are disabled or might need speech therapy.

C: (Ms. Majestic) Those are the things we want to look at, and Head Start cannot do it all. Our collaboration director for AI/AN has looked at issues for children and tried to advocate strongly with state structures and others to make sure there are more available services. I am not as familiar with CMS but that is a valid concern, and I will bring that back.

C: (Ms. Sanders) The Tribes are investing in the future by investing resources, which is a treaty violation. We expect to have more support for more of our children. Tribes are putting in millions of dollars to deal with opioids. And I believe prevention through Head Start is the key --

to get in front of the families and keep them whole. But we need more resources from the federal agencies.

Nutrition and traditional foods also are important in our communities. We continue to work on food sovereignty but there are some glitches in the system due to the regulations.

When we built our new facility, we did not know about the impact of opioids on our children -- the learning disabilities. So now we are reinvesting into facilities, transportation, home care and Early Head Start.

C: (Ms. Majestic) I will ask that our health lead and mental health lead reach out. We appreciate your insight.

C: (Mr. Tyler) I do not know when the act ends but I think it is important for us to know as Tribal leaders. Maybe eight or nine years ago there was a threat that Head Start was going to end. I do not know what will happen if this is not reauthorized. I do not know what we can do as Tribal leaders to push the issue. I know someone mentioned lobbying and letters to both sides of the aisle in Congress. We must push them to act on the reauthorization.

C: (Ms. Majestic) The act is to be renewed every five years. We get appropriations every year, and even in some of the leanest years. It has been a bipartisan issue for years. I do not think our appropriations have been at risk. Across the aisle people see the importance of these investments direct from the federal government to communities.

C: (Mr. Batt) A lot of funds cannot go above the Head Start match, and yes, some Head Starts are closing due to lack of funding or the overwhelming bureaucracy of being in compliance. This is a real concern. The requirement to make sure our teachers have degrees has always been an issue. Tribes want their own people teaching their own youth from early childhood. But for Tribes to be in compliance, we have to give up Indian staff to non-Natives who come in because they have the certifications and they will take that low-grade pay.

That is why you hear Tribes say it is great to have compliance waivers, but Tribes should have a continuous waiver of not being in compliance with those certifications. We have Tribal members go to the highest levels to get a bachelor's degree but in the end once they receive it, they are not going to stay. It is an unfunded mandate.

Please allow programs to renegotiate costs per child to allow the proper compensation and retention of qualified staff. OHS should consider waiving teacher qualifications specifically for Tribes that can employ as determined by the Tribes' standards and are certified as language speakers. When we do not have the funding, in order to be in compliance, we are losing our own Indian people teaching our youth.

The national centers create materials that do not take into consideration the different requirements for Native Head Start programs. The materials are revised as afterthoughts. We propose that the national centers employ staff who have knowledge and experience to develop appropriate materials for Native Head Start programs. Reviewers, regional officers and the

national centers must have culturally based sensitivity and understand one Tribe is different from another.

C: (Ms. Majestic) Within a program, you have some flexibility with degrees. We are looking for associate's degrees but everything you said is valid. All across the country we see aging facilities and infrastructure, so we continue to put emphasis on that. With that will come helpful technical assistance. We have not had the capacity before, so we intend to grow into that.

Q: (Ms. Desautel) A state law was just passed that removes the personal option to exempt children from the MMR vaccine in schools. It also requires employees and volunteers in child centers to be vaccinated. It is a large issue about personal exemptions. The Kalispel Tribe was given less than a month to discuss this issue within Tribal leadership and how this would affect us. What impacts should we think about as this new law comes into effect?

A: (Ms. Majestic) States make changes all the time, and we try to remain aware. We can ask our health lead to research this in conjunction with our policy person.

C: (Mr. Kutz) If children need mental health services to succeed, many times their parents and caregivers need those services. In those states that have not done Medicaid expansion or where they are block-granting, this is going to cause severe disruption. You are already talking about not having enough money in the system to educate these kids. And there is no additional money to pay for mental health services. You need to work with HHS to support Tribes that are in bad circumstances, and I do not know what kind of rules they can pass, to see if there is another way to provide additional money because some states are doing crazy things that are destabilizing Tribal health care.

You cannot look at Head Start in isolation. You need to have conversations with HHS about taking care of the broader problem.