

## Full Enrollment Initiative

Glenna Davis: Happy birthday, Head Start. And welcome everyone to the Full Enrollment Initiative webcast. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to Heather Wanderski. Heather, the floor is yours.

Heather Wanderski: Thank you so much, Glenna. Hello, Head Start and welcome. Actually, I don't know if you guys can see my face. You all are throwing me off. I have never come on a webinar like this and have seen so many reactions and celebrations, and hearts, and thumbs, and waves. You guys have just completely... like I'm about to cry. I'm so excited you guys. I don't even know that I can concentrate. You guys have just floored me. Love the love. I do have to concentrate now and focus on what it is that I need to say here. I just want to thank you guys so much for joining us for today's webinar. We're really, really excited that you have chosen to spend time with us on this very special day in Head Start's history.

We know there are many of you who have questions about the Full Enrollment Initiative and what it means, and what to expect for your program. We wanted to provide an opportunity to hopefully, answer some of your questions and address the concerns that you may be having. The purpose of today's webinar is really meant to shed light on what happens during the Full Enrollment Initiative process. Just wanted to introduce or take a look at who we have joining us for today.

First, I'll introduce myself. My name is Heather Wanderski. I am the division director for program operations within Head Start. Some of you may know me since I've been around for a number of years in various roles. But the operations division really supports our regional operations and our Regional Offices in all things with operational issues. Also joining me today is someone who hopefully needs no introduction, and that is Khari Garvin, the director for the Office of Head Start. Khari has been a great advocate for Head Start. And we are really excited to hear from him today on his priorities and about reaching full enrollment.

Also joining us today is Priscilla Hodge, she is a program specialist in the Office of Head Start. She is also part of the operations team. Priscilla brings a wealth of knowledge and understanding around the regulations, policies, and processes of the Full Enrollment Initiative. We're really excited to have her here with us too.

Let's take a look at that agenda. In just a minute, I'm going to start things off by turning it over to Khari. And as I said, you know, this is truly a special day for Head Start. I'm really excited for him to remind us of and share in that birthday celebration, as well as giving him an opportunity to keep us grounded by addressing Head Start's purpose and priorities. Then I'm going to probably spend time talking about the statutory and the policy requirements for the Full Enrollment Initiative. I'm also going to spend some time addressing the purpose of the initiative and the intent of what we really want to achieve with the process.

And then Priscilla is going to round us out by talking more specifically about how we've operationalized the restart of the Full Enrollment Initiative, which will hopefully provide further clarity on what we're doing and the process in general. She's also going to share some

resources that are available to support you and talk about what you might expect if you are underenrolled.

Finally, we're going to address some of your questions. While we will not be offering live Q&A, we do have panel monitors who will be monitoring the Q&A, and they're going to try to answer your questions. As mentioned at the top by Glenna, as part of housekeeping we're going to be asking you to direct your questions to the Q&A, not to the chat. While we don't anticipate being able to necessarily get to all your questions, if there are common questions that arise we can use some of our time at the end to recap important information. And we can also use your information and your questions to provide us guidance with further training and technical assistance.

At this point, I'm going to turn things over to our fearless leader, Khari. Khari, welcome and thank you for joining us today.

Khari Garvin: Well, Heather, thank you for that. And great, great, great, great sort of intro. Thanks for getting us kicked off. Thanks for convening this to all of you colleagues from all across the country. I think, there's almost 1,700 people and counting in the room. Just welcome, good afternoon, good morning to others depending on where you are. But thanks for carving out time to be with us today. Happy birthday, Head Start. 58 years of really exceptional work, deep impact across the country. And this is a big deal for us. And this is an important moment and today is the day. Very excited about that and I know that many of you share the enthusiasm that we all do for the legacy of this program as we continue on.

I do want to talk a little bit as we move to the next slide. I just want to just talk a little bit about our past and from whence we've come. Many of you know this probably by heart, but for any who might just be new to the Head Start family, this all began 58 years ago, May 18, 1965. This program that we know and love as Head Start is really part of the War on Poverty Initiative that was part of the package that Lyndon B. Johnson – President Lyndon B. Johnson created. It started out as an eight-week demonstration project. And now here we are much more than that. Many programs that operate of course throughout the year. But eight-week demonstration project with the intent to break the cycle of poverty.

Just as a reminder, the Head Start program is part of our nation's prescription to end poverty. And I think that's a significant part of our past. Our mission is all about breaking a cycle poverty also early childhood education and the two-generation focus working both with children birth to age 5 and their families to create success and help children succeed in kindergarten transition and then school success beyond.

When we think about Head Start, we should be thinking about all of those things, including school readiness also and then social, emotional development, cognitive development all of the comprehensive services that work together to define who we are. We're celebrating this moment, and I hope that we'll continue to reflect on that this year. This is a significant history and a significant historical program for the nation. And I just wanted to acknowledge that but also say that I am very much looking forward to casting a new life form that frames a new vision for our Head Start system that is equipped and poised and ready to meet the evolving needs of children, families, and communities of the 21st century.

With that in mind, and as we look ahead to meeting those challenges, I just want to frame out for you the five priorities that I've named for the Office for this year. And you'll hear a lot more about this. I'm going to kind of run through these now, but certainly I want these to be top of mind as we continue to endeavor to do the best work we can and to achieve the deepest impact that we can through what remains of this year and beyond.

These five priorities that I will quickly touch on, I want to emphasize here that you see on this graphic to the left. That image to the left is intended to be a lens. I want us to understand clearly that the five part – these five priorities, the lens through which we look to define and shape these priorities, is equity, inclusion, and belonging. Those terms can get kind of co-opted sometimes and sometimes defined in ways or in different ways. But I want to be clear that for us and Head Start, equity, inclusion, and belonging that means for us being very careful about many things including equal access, equitable outcomes for children and families.

Being careful to embed language and culture into the work that we do. Really taking into account the real lived experiences of families who we serve. And really making all that part of the fabric of our work. When we think about equity, inclusion, and belonging and all those things I just described, that's the lens that we look through as we get to these five priorities. First of all, I don't think any of these will be a shock to anyone, but they really are important.

Number one, child health and safety. And by that, that has everything to do with reducing and really eliminating the hazards and the harms that children will experience or can experience when they are in our care. We want to laser focus on that. I know that that's something that's kind of bubbling up for us. I know that we've been seeing spikes in that for all sorts of reasons, but we really want to double down on our commitment and reaffirm our commitment to safeguarding children and families particularly when they're in our care. That's the first one.

The second one is reaching. Making sure that Head Start resources and Early Head Start resources are reaching the children, families, and communities of greatest need. And that's very, very, important, you know. We want to make sure that we are, for this precious resource that we have, that we are making every opportunity available to make sure that those resources are reaching children, families, and communities of greatest need, with an emphasis on children and families experiencing homelessness. Not to the exclusion of other families, but just recognizing that those family, children in foster care and others have a particular need that we want to make sure that Head Start can address. We want to make sure that we are doing our level best to make sure that our resources are reaching those entities.

The third is investing in many of you, the workforce. We understand the challenges that programs are facing. We understand the challenges as they relate to being able to compete in the marketplace. And being able to pay Head Start staff, not just teachers, but all staff and to compensate all Head Start staff in a way that is competitive in particular with local school districts that operate in our service areas. Again, that would include teachers, teacher assistants, family service workers, cooks, custodians, bus drivers, health coordinators, and on, and on, and on it goes. We want to make sure that we have a workforce that is respected and also properly compensated in a way that really honors the training, and expertise, and the hard work that we do. That is a third priority for our office.

The fourth one that I'll mention here in this moment is that we want to make sure that we are paying attention to and that we are building the highest quality environments. And by that, I want you to take a broad view of that. You'll see on the slide there in parentheses, there's some other terms that follow there. By environments, I want you to think in the broadest sense, not just the classroom environment. Including the classroom environment but going beyond that and thinking about environments as really the infrastructure of our programs that help our programs to be successful. We want to make sure that we have the best and highest quality fiscal environments, facilities environments, learning environments, human resources environments, and so on and so forth. Again, those infrastructure pieces that really equip Head Start programs to operate at the highest efficiency and with the deepest quality. That is the fourth priority.

And then last and certainly, not least. Last and certainly, not least, we want to augment Head Start's capacity. We want to change and build Head Start's capacity to partner with state systems as well as national partners. And the centerpiece of this priority is our Head Start Collaboration Offices, both our state and national collaboration offices. And really what the goal here is to leverage the resources that we have in our Head Start Collaboration Offices so that we can build stronger partnerships with child care in our states. We can build better partnerships with McKinney-Vento liaisons. We can build better partnerships even with our school districts so that through those partnerships particularly with child welfare agencies and particularly with school districts so that we can establish more seamless transitions between Head Start exit and kindergarten entry.

We also would like to see better alignment between Head Start and kindergarten through third grade continuum, with an emphasis on aligning elements of curriculum and assessment and instruction. We'd also like to see better alignment with Head Start at school so that children with special needs can get all the services that they need in a timely way. That's why we have this fifth priority. Again, equity, inclusion, and belonging, it's the lens that we look through. It's the thread that strings it all together. It's the underlay; it undergirds all of this as we endeavor to deliver on these five priorities.

I'll conclude with this. I know, I know that you are tired. I know that. I know that you have been working hard. I know the kinds of impacts that the pandemic has had not just on the families that we serve, but even on staff. And by staff, I mean staff who work in programs, staff who work in our Regional Offices. Everyone has been impacted some way by the pandemic. As we continue to make our comeback, and we are making a comeback, but I just want to acknowledge that I know that you're tired. I know that the challenges are real.

But I want to assure you of our commitment, the Office of Head Start's commitment to partner with you and to extend as many flexibilities as we can that the law will allow through both the Full Enrollment Initiative and other compliance components that we have to come under, as it relates to delivering and complying with Head Start services. Please know that I get it, and that we get it here. And you'll hear even today about all the different ways that we intend to partner and to take this journey together. Thank you so much for your attention. And with that, I give it back to you, Heather.

Heather: Thank you, Khari. And that was so wonderful. You can see just lots, and lots, and lots of reactions for you as well. And, I think, you got the biggest ... If we were going to measure like on a measuring, I think, the workforce priority got the most reactions. Although, I'm seeing here now, I think, just in general Khari, there's a lot of reaction just for you. Thank you so much for your leadership and your support. I think right now we want to talk a little bit more specifically about the Full Enrollment Initiative including requirements and purpose.

There are, as Khari mentioned, there are statutory requirements around the Full Enrollment Initiative particularly. But there are two source documents that we have that provide direction around the process. The first official document that provides us with direction is the Head Start Act. The Act outlines the requirements for reporting enrollment on a monthly basis. And the creation of a plan to reduce and eliminate underenrollment for programs who report four or more consecutive months of underenrollment. It also provides authority to the Office of Head Start for designating a program as chronically underenrolled with the ability to take further action which includes recapture and redistribution of funds as necessary.

The second document that assists with guiding the process is our program instruction titled Full Enrollment Initiative. And that was issued back in 2018. The program instruction essentially operationalized the provisions in the Head Start Act by identifying procedures and timelines for the overall process. The other thing that the program instruction does is it contains an appeal process for recipients who decide to appeal a decision to recapture, withhold, or reduce funding. And I'm going to talk further about the process, and we'll continue to refer back to both of these two documents, both the Head Start Act as well as the PI.

The Head Start Act outlines expectations for each Head Start agency to enroll 100% of its funded enrollment and maintain an active waiting list at all times with ongoing outreach to the community and ongoing activities to identify underserved populations. I think, as Khari mentioned, I think that very much aligns with the priorities that he shared about making sure that we are reaching eligible children and families of greatest need. It also outlines the requirements for recipients to report enrollment on a monthly basis. The Office of Head Start does review enrollment reports each month. And we do talk with programs about any issues or challenges that they may be facing if they're not meeting full enrollment with those reports.

For programs operating with an actual enrollment that is less than funded enrollment based on four months of data, the Head Start Act says that we should be collaborating together on a plan for reducing or eliminating underenrollment and providing technical assistance to implement that plan. Recipients who report for consecutive months of underenrollment will receive what's referred to as an Initial Underenrollment Letter from the Regional Office. The 12-month period for developing and implementing that plan and receiving technical assistance starts 10 calendar days after receipt of that Initial Underenrollment Letter.

When collaborating together on a plan for reducing or eliminating underenrollment, the Act talks about taking into consideration certain provisions. Those provisions include the quality and extent of the outreach recruitment and community-wide strategic planning and needs assessment. It talks about taking into consideration any changing demographics, mobility of populations, and identification of new underserved low-income populations; facility related issues; the ability to provide a full working day programs where they're needed; the availability

of other early childhood education options in the community; and any agency procedures that may be impacting enrollment. The considerations from the Act are certainly not exclusive. And plans really should be created to address program specific challenges or barriers that are preventing full enrollment.

The last two actions as part of the Full Enrollment Initiative actually occur at the end of the 12-month period. That includes a review of the most recent applicable enrollment report that is provided to us at the end of that 12-month period. Based on that report, what we are looking for specifically is whether a program is able to achieve and maintain at least 97% enrollment or if they're falling short. If at the end of the 12-month period your program is meeting at least 97% enrollment, the Office of Head Start will continue to evaluate your enrollment reports to ensure you're able to maintain at least 97% enrollment for six consecutive months.

Once you have achieved and maintained at least 97% enrollment for six consecutive months, then what we do is at the end of that period, we send you a letter of completion. That letter of completion serves as your official notice of successful completion of the underenrollment plan and the process. If your program at the end of the 12-month period is less than 97% enrolled, then the Office of Head Start has the ability to designate your agency as chronically underenrolled and take further actions. These actions could include recapturing, withholding, or reducing annual funding and funded enrollment. Any reduction in funding will adjust the funded enrollment to be consistent with your historical actual enrollment levels.

And then the last thing that addresses what happens at the end of the 12-month plan is the program instruction. And that outlines what I mentioned before is the appeal process if a recipient does wish to appeal the decision to recapture, withhold, or reduce funding. An appeal needs to be submitted in writing. And a recipient may request a hearing with the written appeal, but a hearing is not required. If you request a hearing as part of the appeal, a hearing will be scheduled no later than 60 days following receipt of the written appeal and the request for a hearing. The hearing would be held either by telephone or through electronic conferencing. Within 30 days following the date of the hearing, the Office of Head Start would then communicate its final decision to the agency in writing.

What I really want to say next, it really gets back to the purpose of the initiative and what Congress had intended with the provisions in the act. First, programs should be meeting their funded enrollment. And really what that reflects is that empty slots are really lost opportunities to help children and families who are living in poverty. It also sends mixed messages to Congress that we're not making full use of available funding. And it undermines the message that we need additional resources and supports to be able to support our quality programming for our children and families.

Really, at the heart of what the Act is trying to do is one of two things. The first is if you have eligible children that are no longer in the service area that we are funding, it gives the Office of Head Start the ability to recapture the associated slots and funding and redistribute them to communities within the state where there is greater need. Or if you have a significant need for services in your community, and you're not able to meet those needs, the initiative gives us the opportunity to partner together to identify where there are barriers and for us to collaborate with you on a plan to address those challenges.

During the process, we provide technical assistance and support you with helping to make some of those critical decisions if necessary. Really to best design a program that meets community needs so that there are not lost opportunities experienced in areas where there is that significant need. Ultimately, it is all of our responsibility to ensure that we are practicing effective stewardship of federal funds by reaching children and families of greatest need. And at this point, I do want to now turn it over to Priscilla to talk more specifically about how we've operationalized the restart of the Full Enrollment Initiative, and what you might expect if you are experiencing underenrollment. Priscilla, I am going to pass the torch.

Priscilla Hodge: Thank you, Heather. And happy birthday, Head Start. And hello Head Start family. During this portion of the webinar, I'll speak to how the Office of Head Start operationalized resuming the Full Enrollment Initiative. As many of you know, the Full Enrollment Initiative had been underway for several years before its pause in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And this graphic here depicts our journey from the pause until now. First, if you look at the top far left, you'll see during the 2019-2020 program year, we paused the Full Enrollment Initiative due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following year, the 2020-2021 program year, OHS provided programs full flexibility on how to provide services. Some programs operated in person, others operated virtually, and others were hybrid. And understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted each community differently, we really wanted programs to feel empowered to make the decisions that best met the needs of their communities, while also protecting the children, families, and staff of the Head Start programs.

Last year during the 2021-2022 program year, we began to see some improvements on the pandemic front, and programs began working toward full in-person services. It was during this time, May of 2022, that we communicated to the field that we would un-pause the Full Enrollment Initiative beginning in September of 2022. And now as we're winding down the 2022-2023 program year, we are continuing to work towards full enrollment. We recognize that programs are still facing challenges that existed prior to the pandemic and many challenges that were exacerbated by the pandemic. And as Khari and Heather mentioned, we believe the Full Enrollment Initiative is an opportunity for us to partner and work together, not only to identify challenges but also to come up with solutions that work. And ultimately, support programs in reaching children and families of greatest need and providing them with high quality programming.

Now I'd like to speak to our approach for resuming the Full Enrollment Initiative. In September 2022, we resumed the Full Enrollment Initiative using a staggered approach. And what that means, that is instead of entering all recipients with four or more consecutive months of underenrollment into the FEI at the same time, we first entered recipients reporting significant underenrollment. And by that, I mean less than 50% of their funded enrollment. And over time, we entered additional recipients reporting underenrollment into the Full Enrollment Initiative.

Now this staggered approach will continue until all recipients reporting four or more consecutive months of underenrollment have entered into the Full Enrollment Initiative by January of 2024, with the exception of migrant and seasonal Head Start programs. Enrollment determinations for migrant and seasonal programs will be based on enrollment reports from

September 2023 through August 2024. And this staggered approach really provides us a unique opportunity to really focus on recipients facing the most challenges and or barriers to full enrollment. Our goal at the beginning and continues to be to provide those who need support with technical assistance as quickly as possible.

And lastly, I just wanted to mention that as we resume the FEI, OHS did reset all recipients' enrollment status. And this includes those who have participated in the Full Enrollment Initiative prior to the pandemic. Recipients who were previously designated as chronically underenrolled, they no longer carry that designation, and their enrollment statuses were reset as well. And then again, the reported enrollment for the month of September was the first month of enrollment that OHS evaluated as part of the Full Enrollment Initiative.

Now I'd like to walk through what to expect as part of the Full Enrollment Initiative process. First, recipients that enter into the Full Enrollment Initiative will receive an Initial Underenrollment Letter in HSES correspondence. The letter will indicate the grant and the programs operated under that grant that have entered into the Full Enrollment Initiative. In addition, the letter will outline FEI requirements, reporting requirements, and next steps.

And one of the next steps will be the initial underenrollment meeting, which is when the Regional Office will meet with the recipient to review the letter to discuss the FEI and expectations as part of the process. OHS does request that the board chair and/or governor and body official attend the meeting as this will be an opportunity to ask about the process, or to even just share some of your challenges or barriers to achieving and maintaining full enrollment. And we really want to be sure that everyone has all the same information so that everyone is on the same page.

During the initial underenrollment meeting, the Regional Office will discuss the required underenrollment plan. And essentially, this is a working plan to reduce underenrollment. And it must be submitted to the Regional Office within 30 days of the initial underenrollment meeting. And I do want to note that the Regional Office does not formally approve the plans, but will use the plans to support and facilitate conversations throughout the 12-month period. Another expectation of the FEI process is that recipients who have entered must report monthly enrollment by center and program option using the center level reporting spreadsheet in HSES. This level of detail proves useful to OHS as we partner with programs to identify solutions to enrollment challenges.

And this is actually a great segue to what you will see on the right half of the slide, which speaks to what you can expect from OHS as part of the Full Enrollment Initiative. First, you can expect partnership and support. We recognize the challenges that many of our Head Start programs are facing, some of which existed prior to the pandemic. And we also acknowledge the impacts of the pandemic on overall program operations from staffing, to wellness, to just the rising costs, just to name a few. Programs should also expect our support for programs making the necessary adjustments to program designs to meet the community need, which may include difficult decisions.

But we want you to know that we are in this together. And that we'll work with you to find the best solution that allows you to make a difference in the lives of the eligible children and



families in your communities. In addition to our support and partnership, you can also expect to receive ongoing training and technical assistance throughout the 12-month period from both your Regional Office and your TTA network. This includes collaboration to identify challenges in achieving and maintaining full enrollment, partnering on plan and strategy to reach full enrollment, and technical assistance to support your implementation of your underenrollment plan. And again, I want to reiterate that during the process we will partner with programs and provide the technical assistance and supports necessary so they're able to deliver high quality programs to children and families of greatest need.

And now, I'd like to share with you some updates on our national enrollment. Before I go into this, I do want to note that our migrant and seasonal Head Start programs is not reflected in the data that you'll see on the next few slides because their enrollment is reported differently due to the unique characteristics of the population served by migrant and seasonal Head Start programs. Many of them have program start and end dates that stagger or overlap throughout the year to meet the needs of families working in agriculture. Their enrollment is reviewed and assessed on a program by program basis specifically designed for migrant and seasonal Head Start programs.

This bar graph here illustrates our Head Start and Early Head Start enrollment for the month of March. And as you'll see here, Head Start and Early Head Start are enrolling about 80% of funded enrollment nationally, which is a slight increase from last month. And while the goal is full enrollment or 100% enrollment, this is both exciting and promising. When we resumed the Full Enrollment Initiative in September, our Head Start enrollment was 75% and our Early Head Start enrollment was 76%. Over the course of about eight months, we have increased our enrollment by 5%, which may seem small, but it represents roughly 40,000 children who are now enrolled in Head Start programs. While we still have a way to go, we are making significant strides when it comes to our enrollment. And we really want to thank everyone and acknowledge your hard work and acknowledge the work that we're all doing to make great progress.

This next slide illustrates the national enrollment numbers by region for the month of March. And as you can see, we have four regions – Regions four, six, seven, and eight – who are actually enrolling above our national average of 80%. And then there are three regions – three, five, and 11 – who are just shy of our national average. And again, the national average is 80%. And again, the goal of the Full Enrollment Initiative is to really get our national enrollment back to 100%. And we can see here that we're really moving in the right direction. And together with continued partnership and collaboration, we'll get there.

And the last slide here illustrates the number of grants that fall into different enrollment categories based on programs with the lowest enrollment. And I want to explain what I mean by that. For example, if a recipient is operating a grant with a Head Start and an Early Head Start program, and the Head Start is enrolling 100% and the Early Head Start is enrolling below 50%, for the purposes of this illustration, the recipient is counted in the below 50% category. As you see, about 27% of our grants are enrolling 97% or more funded enrollment. And a little more than 50% of our grants are enrolling above our national average of 80%. And about 8% of our grants operate at least one program that is significantly underenrolled, meaning below

50%. And again, I think, this shows that while there's still work to do, we are making progress and moving in the right direction.

And lastly, I want to share with you some resources that are available on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center or ECLKC. First, we have the Head Start Policy and Regulation section. And it provides links to our Head Start policy and regulations that pertain to the Full Enrollment Initiative, such as the Head Start Act and the program instruction for the Full Enrollment Initiative that was issued in 2018. We also include the information memorandum for enrollment reduction and conversion of Head Start slots to Early Head Start slots, as well to the supplemental document that outlines critical questions and data to consider as part of the planning and development of both enrollment reduction and conversion request.

You also see here a strategic planning section. And this references a few resources that may be of use as part of your strategic planning. First, the Foundations for Excellence. This really highlights how sound planning practices support effective Head Start programs. The guide covers a range of planning topics to support programs' successful completion of Head Start grant applications as well to ensure programming is responsive to community needs throughout the grant period. The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework – this can be used to provide program-wide strategic planning, program design and management, continuous learning, and improvement activities, as well as governing body and parent groups.

And then there are a number of resources around enrollment and ERSEA more broadly that you may find helpful. The ERSEA assessment tool will help you identify ways to improve your programs ERSEA services. And although we aren't where we were two to three years ago, the ERSEA strategies during a pandemic tip sheet can help guide ERSEA planning and service delivery during the continued times of transition. The ERSEA insights outline strategies and guiding questions to help programs manage their ERSEA efforts. It identifies ways to build responsive systems to effectively deliver each element of ERSEA eligibility, recruitment, retention, selection, enrollment, and attendance.

And lastly, we also have a great – quite a few useful tools and resources around workforce and recruitment. A few that are listed here include the information memorandum strategies to stabilize Head Start workforce, which highlights strategies to support the Head Start workforce that grant recipients can begin working towards immediately. The Promoting Staff Well-being page, this provides several resources that promote a culture of wellness for young children and adults who care for them. And lastly, the resource around creating a staff wellness action plan may be useful for programs who don't have one of those plans. But also can be useful for programs who already have one but want to focus on which goals to prioritize.

And again, I just want to mention that this is not an exhaustive list, but just a few resources that we wanted to share. There are many more, and we encourage you all to explore the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. And note that all pages are translated into Spanish. You just select the button at the top-right corner to see the Spanish translation. And at this point, I'd like to transition to Q&A. And in particular we wanted to take the time to address a few questions that have come up on several occasions, and questions that we feel are top of mind for programs. Let's jump right in.

Our first question, and I believe Heather is going to help us out here with the answer. The first question is, the Head Start Act was last reauthorized in 2007. Given this was over 15 years ago and pre-pandemic, has OHS considered the FEI requirements outlined in the Act are out of touch with the current state of early care and education?

Heather: Great question. And I'm waiting for all the reactions because if I had a dime for every time ... and I'm sure Khari's probably thinking the same thing, if he probably has also heard that question come up. I think, what we want to say here really is that long before the pandemic hit, the early care and education field in this country was in dire need of investment. There are large disparities in access to quality early care and education. The workforce is overstretched and underpaid. And we know that in some communities, parents have very few options to choose from. However, as I mentioned earlier, empty slots are lost opportunities to help children and families who are living in poverty.

There were programs who even prior to the pandemic were challenged with finding qualified staff. The issue is not exclusive to the pandemic. We certainly recognize it was exacerbated by it, but it's not exclusive to that. The Full Enrollment Initiative presents an opportunity for us to partner together to identify what those challenges are and help to achieve and maintain full enrollment, and support programs in making necessary adjustments to program design to meet that community need regardless of what those challenges are.

And if it is staffing and if ... you know, then do you need to evaluate and analyze what is the genesis of those staffing challenges and look to try to make some adjustments in your program. And that's, I think, the point of what we're trying to get with the Full Enrollment Initiative, is find out ways that we can partner together to figure out what those are, and if there are adjustments of things that can be made. We don't think that the provisions in the Act are out of touch but rather an opportunity for us to intentionally work together. And we want to be able to support and sustain quality programming while reaching the children of greatest needs.

I think, that's generally a tough question. We get it a lot, Priscilla but, I think, that that's how we would respond. And Khari, I'm not sure if you had anything you wanted to add on that. No. Okay.

Khari: No, all good.

Priscilla: Thank you, Heather. Going to our second question is, I understand that migrant and seasonal Head Start programs have not been evaluated for entry into the FEI yet. Will their evaluation include a staggered approach similar to the approach discussed today?

Heather: Another really good question particularly for those who are migrant and seasonal program. Under that program instruction that we talked about earlier, migrant and seasonal programs are going to be considered underenrolled for the year if at the end of the budget period their cumulative enrollment is less than 97% of funded enrollment. Based on the way in which enrollment is reported, we do not have the ability to implement a staggered approach to restarting the Full Enrollment Initiative. Enrollment determinations will continue to be made based on cumulative enrollment at the end of each budget period. Enrollment reports from September 2023 through August of '24 are going to be used for determining inclusion in the Full Enrollment Initiative.

The decision to evaluate cumulative enrollment reports starting in September of this year was really to provide our migrant and seasonal programs with a full 12 months to reach full enrollment following our announcement of the restart of the Full Enrollment Initiative, which we did in September 2022. We wanted to give a full 12 months after our un-pause to give them the opportunity to demonstrate full enrollment.

Priscilla: Thank you, Heather. That was very helpful, and thanks for clarifying that. Moving on to our next question. There's a section in the Initial Underenrollment Letter that outlines how much funding we may lose if we do not meet full enrollment. If we are unable to achieve full enrollment, does this mean our grant will be reduced by that amount of funding at the end of the 12-month period?

Heather: Yeah, I think, there's been a lot of reaction to some of the information that's in the Initial Underenrollment Letter. As you pointed out, it does contain information that would – if we were making a determination at that point in time – it contains what would be considered potentially at risk. But want to just make sure folks are very well aware that that's just an estimate. It's not what is going to be actually proposed. It's really provided just for your informational purposes only. It doesn't give or take into account what could really play out over the course of the 12-month period. And we have to give that an opportunity to play out. We really, as we mentioned before, want to partner and support you throughout that 12-month period really to get you back to full enrollment. That way, that does not play out the way that it is in the letter.

And some adjustments to your program design really may be necessary. And we're open to supporting you in making some of those changes as you need to. What I really also want to emphasize is that we really share a common goal in making sure that we are providing high quality services for all of the children that we're funded to serve. But if a reduction in funding of your funded enrollment is warranted, we're going to make sure that we are looking at those and that we are supporting you as based on the Head Start Act.

Priscilla: Thanks, Heather. And I'll ask you, this is the last question that we have is, "Our agency has three Head Start grants. Two of the grants are fully enrolled and all programs operated within each grant. However, the Early Head Start program operated under the third grant is underenrolled and recently entered into the Full Enrollment Initiative. Does this mean that all three of our grants are now part of the FEI? If so, are we required to develop a separate plan for each?"

Heather: Yeah, another good question, Priscilla and definitely get in the weeds on this one. But, I think, really the way that you have articulated the question based on this scenario, which, you know, I think, talks about the fact that all programs operated under the two grants are fully enrolled. Really only the Early Head Start program operated on the third grant meets the criteria for entry into the Full Enrollment Initiative. The other two grants don't automatically enter just because one of those grants has four or more consecutive months of underenrollment. You know, I think, it's really important to make a distinction that we're talking about specifically the grants.

Now in situations where a recipient does have multiple grants that enter into the Full Enrollment Initiative at the same time and they're part of the same Regional Office, your agency could look to develop one plan to address a strategy to achieve and maintain full enrollment for each of those programs across multiple grants. But that's only if all of the grants at least have multiple programs that are experiencing four or more consecutive months of underenrollment. Just to be clear, we're only bringing in programs and grants that are less than four consecutive months of under enrollment.

It's interesting. I've been watching the chat. I do see some themes. And one thing that I do want to make sure that we take the opportunity to address while we are here in this space is around change in scope requests. There are a number of programs who have made mention of the fact that they have a change in scope requests. Whether that be an enrollment reduction or a Head Start to Early Start conversion that you are waiting on responses for. And you're asking about how does that play out with my current status? Will I be pulled into the Full Enrollment Initiative? Because this really is imperative.

And I will say right now like with the opportunities that we have made available, and how we've continued to encourage our programs to make decisions and make change if their community is suggesting that you move in that direction, and you've got the leadership in your program to support that, that we are seeing a significant increase in the number of change in scope requests with the Office of Head Start. And obviously, right now this is typically the largest time of volume that we see these requests come in because it's an opportunity, as you get toward the end of the school year to make some design changes before you start a new school year.

I think, we are recognizing that it is an implication and workload issue. Certainly, we are looking to address that. Do encourage you to continue to submit requests as you need to. And certainly, also noting that that is clearly what helps support many of our programs with reaching full enrollment just based on what you may be proposing to do.

All that to say is, we recognize and understand and are doing what we can to help expedite the requests and the decisions that you need. Certainly, if you are experiencing challenges, I encourage you to talk with your regional leadership to make sure that they understand that if it's been a little bit of time that it's under request. And certainly, you have the ability to check in with your program specialist on the status of your request. We encourage you to do that and make sure you're keeping open channels of communication with the Regional Office so that we can make sure that we respond to those requests timely. We are all very much aware that that is a factor for our programs.

Just thank you, thank you, thank you. And I just wanted to make sure that I took the opportunity to say that and put that out there because I know a lot of you are anticipating decisions soon on those requests.

I think that essentially concludes our webcast today. I do want to thank you all for joining us. And I hope that you found the information to be helpful. Particularly, if you still have questions that you had before this event today that we have hopefully, had the opportunity to answer some of those questions. As we made mention, we have been watching the chat, and I do want

to thank our panel monitors for answering some of our questions today. And for answering the questions that we had during the time together.

As noted, we do have some very specific questions in the chat that if we have been able to identify who you are, we'll be planning to follow up with you on those specific questions. But also too, as we continue to see common themes, we will be able to use this to better inform our training and technical assistance in the future.

We appreciate your time. We hope that you will join with the Office of Head Start in continuing our birthday activities throughout the remainder of the day. Make sure to show us how your program has celebrated Head Start's birthday by posting pictures and videos of how you spent the day. Be sure to make sure that you use our hashtags; there is two of them. There is the hashtag HeadStartBirthday. There's also the hashtag HappyBdayHeadStart so that we can make sure that we can lift up and share your stories on our social media sites too.

Finally, I want to close by saying thank you for all your work on behalf of children and families. This program would not be a success without your commitment and your dedication. I know Khari mentioned how hard this can be and how tired folks are. I just want to acknowledge that and really just give a great big thank you to you all. We definitely look forward to continuing our meaningful, important work together. Just again, big thank you and big heart. This is my reaction to you all and all of your wonderful reactions. And thanks again for all your time today.