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**INFORMATION MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start and Early Head Start grantees and delegate agencies and those Head Start agencies whose service population includes AIAN children

**SUBJECT:** Native Language Preservation, Revitalization, Restoration, and Maintenance in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

**INFORMATION:**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to clarify the Office of Head Start (OHS) support for teaching tribal languages to children in AIAN Head Start and Early Head Start.

**Background**

Across the United States, 45,175 children with AIAN heritage are served in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Region XI administers 148 tribal Head Start grantees and 57 tribal Early Head Start grantees that serve 47 percent, or 21,259, of the enrolled AIAN children. The remainder of children with AIAN heritage, 53 percent, are served across the regions.

Currently, almost two percent of enrolled **children’s** primary languages spoken at home are Native North American and Alaska Native languages (1.9 percent); one percent reported Spanish; and the majority reported English (95.7 percent). This shows a decrease from the eight percent enrolled children who reported AIAN languages as their dominant language in 2001 for Region XI.

The Native American Languages Act of 1990 (Pub.L. 101-477) found that the "lack of clear, comprehensive, and consistent federal policy on treatment of Native American **languages...has** often resulted in acts of suppression and extermination of Native American languages and cultures."

President **Obama’s** early learning agenda included Executive Order 13592, which contains the objective of "increasing the number and percentage of AIAN children who enter kindergarten ready for success through improved access to high quality early learning programs and services, including Native language immersion programs, that encourage the learning and development of AIAN children from birth through age 5."

In 2012, OHS released a Tribal Language Report that provided information on the success, progress, and challenges experienced by tribal programs as they work to preserve, revitalize, and maintain their tribal languages. The report highlighted a misperception among some tribal programs that the full integration of tribal language and culture in Head Start and Early Head Start programs was inconsistent with Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Currently, AIAN programs are involved in a number of language and cultural preservation, revitalization, and maintenance efforts. These efforts include teaching language using a variety of models and supporting cultural ways and traditions through aligning them with school readiness efforts.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards that support language preservation and culture and the resources that OHS has made available for this purpose are described below. OHS strongly supports the full integration of AIAN languages and culture in their Head Start and Early Head Start programs, including the use of language immersion, dual language, and other proven approaches. Pursuant to Pub.L. 101-477, it is the policy of the United States to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages" and to "encourage and support the use of Native American languages as a medium of instruction..."

The Head Start Act requires that children make progress toward the acquisition of English and that instruction be culturally and linguistically appropriate (Sec. 641A(a)(1)(B)(x)). Some grantees have expressed concern that the requirement that children make progress toward English acquisition means that supporting acquisition or progress in other languages is prohibited. This is not the case. There is substantial and increasing evidence that young children can benefit from the opportunity to acquire more than one language, and that support of home or heritage languages results in improved English language skills.

The [\*\*Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006 \(Pub.L. 109-394\)\*\*](#), which amended the Native American Programs Act of 1974, provides for the revitalization of Native American languages through Native language immersion and restoration programs that are administered by the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), which is also a part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

ANA and OHS believe language revitalization and continuation are fundamental to preserving and strengthening a **community's** culture. Use of Native language builds identity and encourages communities to move toward social unity and self-sufficiency.

### **Head Start Act and Program Performance Standards**

The Head Start Program Performance Standards provide for the integration of tribal language and culture in Head Start classrooms, in the curricula, with ongoing observation-based assessment, and across program systems and services. The current Head Start Program Performance Standards require programs to support all **children's** home languages and cultural and linguistic heritages. Specifically, 45 CFR 1304.21(a)(1)(i) states:

- (1) In order to help children gain the skills and confidence necessary to be prepared to succeed in their present environment and with later responsibilities in school and life, grantee and delegate agencies' approach to child development and education must:
  - (i) Be developmentally and linguistically appropriate, recognizing that children have individual rates of development as well as individual interests, temperaments, languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles;

Further, 45 CFR 1304.21(a)(1)(iii) states that the child development and education approach for all children must:

- (iii) Provide an environment of acceptance that supports and respects gender, culture, language, ethnicity and family composition;

Under certain conditions, the Head Start Program Performance Standards also require staff to speak the home language. 45 CFR 1304.52(g)(2) states:

- (2) When a majority of children speak the same language, at least one classroom staff member or home visitor interacting regularly with the children must speak their language.

Moreover, even in those cases where staff are not required or able to speak a Native language but desire to implement Native language teaching, a third adult who speaks the Native language can become an integral part of the learning environment and instructional process. The Native language speaker does not have to meet the credentialing requirements of a Head Start teacher or assistant teacher.

In addition, 45 CFR 1304.53(b)(1)(i) and (ii) address culturally appropriate toys, materials, and furniture in Head Start programs:

(1) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide and arrange sufficient equipment, toys, materials, and furniture to meet the needs and facilitate the participation of children and adults. Equipment, toys, materials, and furniture owned or operated by the grantee or delegate agency must be:

- (i) Supportive of the specific educational objectives of the local program;
- (ii) Supportive of the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the children;

Finally, the requirement that a **program's** approach to child development and education be culturally and linguistically appropriate also applies to child assessment.

The [Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework](#) notes that with regard to assessment, "**programs** are to ensure that children have opportunities to interact and demonstrate their abilities, skills, and knowledge in any language, including their home language" (page 4).

Taken together, these Head Start Program Performance Standards support the full integration of tribal language and culture into every aspect of the Head Start and Early Head Start program model.

## **Resources**

OHS is dedicated to providing Head Start programs with resources to meet the diverse needs of their communities. There are a number of resources dedicated specifically to supporting tribal language and culture in Head Start classrooms.

Resources related to tribal language are catalogued in the [Head Start Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness Resource Catalogue Volume Two: Native and Heritage Language Preservation, Revitalization, and Maintenance \(Second Edition\)](#). It is designed to provide programs with evidence-based materials, research, promising practices, and other information to help develop culturally and linguistically responsive systems and services. The catalogue includes books, articles, videos, and other useful resources, most of which are available free of charge.

In addition, OHS has released [Making it Work!](#) It is a tool and training manual for AIAN programs to connect traditional cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways to the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. It can be used to create and individualize cultural lessons to promote school readiness; to engage families and communities in planning, implementing, and expanding on lessons; and to support any curricula. The tool recognizes that traditional lifeways, language, and cultural heritage are important components of young **children's** school readiness. Making It Work! supports AIAN early childhood staff to meet school readiness goals as they teach their traditional cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways.

Grantees should review this IM and resources and direct any questions or recommendations regarding this IM to their OHS Regional Office.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of Head Start children and families.

/ Ann Linehan /

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