

Congressional Hispanic Caucus

United States Congress

Washington, DC 20515

CHAIRWOMAN

NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

12TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

June 17, 2009

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and Related
Agencies
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and Related
Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiahrt;

We are writing to express our deepest concern regarding the President's recommendation to eliminate Even Start from the fiscal year 2010 federal budget proposal and to urge the Subcommittee to continue funding to this vital program. We, as members of Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), stand committed to ensuring that funding for Even Start is preserved and that the services provided through the program are strengthened to help thousands of vulnerable families build better future for themselves and their families.

Even Start is a unique federal education program that directly addresses many of the educational challenges faced by Latino low-income families. It is the only federal education program that teaches literacy skills to children and parents alike. Families participating in the Even Start program receive both adult education services and early childhood services – a combination of services has been proven to result in positive developmental outcomes for young children.

Thousands of families have been able to reach their educational goals, increase their job skills, and improve the school readiness of their young children through participating in the Even Start programs. During this economic downturn, when Hispanic families are most in need, it is essential that we continue our commitment to such an essential program.

Evidence has shown that Even Start is a highly successful program. In fact, state and national studies have proven that families participating in Even Start score better on literacy and reading tests than those who do not. One study, the Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes in Even Start (CLIO), found that combined classroom-based techniques with strong parenting education curricula work to improve parents' responsiveness to children and interactive reading skills, two of the most critical skills for supporting children's literacy and later school outcomes. The CLIO study found a significant improvement in parent behaviors that are statistically related to child literacy and social development.

The success of Even Start is further demonstrated by the high demand for the program, particularly in immigrant communities. Given that 34 million adults, or 14% of the U.S. adult population, struggle with reading or writing English, it's not surprising to see that demand for Even Start programs is on the rise throughout the country.

Despite the growing need for the program and evidence showing its effectiveness, the new administration has recommended the elimination the program from the FY10 federal budget proposal. Statements from the Office of Management and Budget indicate that the decision to eliminate this program was based study conducted over five years ago. The 2003 Third National Even Start Evaluation, conducted by Abt Associates on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education and administered during the Bush administration, resulted in findings that were inaccurate and unreliable. One of the major flaws in the study was that it had a very small sample size that oversampled urban areas and English language learners (ELLs). Further, although 75% of study participants were ELLs, the researchers used mostly English-language literacy assessments, leaving little room to show progress. Thus, the study is not an accurate portrayal of the Even Start program.

As members of the CHC, we stand committed to ensure that Even Start programs do not have to close their doors on nearly 22,000 families currently served – over half of whom are ELLs. In light of the flaws of the study that criticizes the efficacy of Even Start, the exceptional need for a program in these difficult economic times that will serve the literacy needs of families with young children, we must continue to fund and improve Even Start program and use state-of-the-art approaches to help parents learn to read with their kids to ensure their success in school and in life.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez
Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
CHC Education and Job Training
Task Force