



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

AUG - 1 2016

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski:

Thank you for your letter concerning the Head Start Designation Renewal System (DRS). You asked that we suspend the requirement that Head Start grantees scoring in the lowest 10 percent of any of the three Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) domains be required to compete for continued funding.

Because the regulations that codify the DRS, including the 10 percent requirement, were created through the Notice and Comment Rulemaking process, we do not have the discretion to suspend any part of the DRS without initiating a new Notice and Comment Rulemaking process.

The implementation of DRS for all cohorts of grantees is nearing its completion. Throughout the five-year implementation phase, we have learned a lot about the process. We have made incremental changes, where possible, to improve the implementation and minimize the risk of disruption of services to children and to programs. We recognize that there are elements of DRS that need to be reevaluated. We also are seeing evidence that suggests that DRS, and CLASS in particular, has resulted in improved quality in Head Start classrooms and programs nationally.

We funded an independent evaluation of the DRS implementation that should be issued later this year. In addition, ACF is considering approaches to soliciting input on all of the DRS conditions and their implementation, including CLASS, to inform any future regulatory changes. Once we have analyzed the input and reviewed the findings from the evaluation, we will be in a position to determine next steps.

Thank you for your continued support of the Head Start program. If you or your staff have any questions, please feel free to contact Jim Esquea, Assistant Secretary for Legislation, at (202) 690-7627. I will also provide this response to the co-signers of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "SMB", is written over the typed name.

Sylvia M. Burwell