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**MEMORANDUM**

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**TO:** <<Head Start Program Director>>

**FROM:** Jerry West, Project Director

**DATE:** 2009  
FACES-204

**SUBJECT:** Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) 2009

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Recently, you were notified in an email from the Office of Head Start that your program has been selected to participate in an important upcoming study, the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey, or FACES 2009. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR), is conducting FACES 2009 under contract with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). ACF first launched the FACES study in 1997 as a mechanism for obtaining longitudinal information on the characteristics and experiences of, and outcomes for, children and families served by Head Start. FACES has collected data from four successive nationally representative cohorts in 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2006 and has disseminated the information to ACF, the Office of Head Start, Congress, and the early childhood research community through a series of reports. The study focuses on children's development, family involvement, and program quality to identify strategies for improving program effectiveness. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which oversees and approves federal information collections, is currently reviewing the design for the FACES 2009 cohort, and clearance of the study is pending.

MPR will *not* judge or report on the performance of individual programs, staff, or children. We are a policy research firm that has extensive experience in conducting Head Start and other early childhood research. The information that is provided by the staff, families, and children in your program will be combined with information from all other FACES 2009 participants and summarized in descriptive reports.

Your program was selected to participate in FACES 2009 through a random process. While participation is not mandatory, it is very important for all of the sampled programs to participate in the research in order to ensure the accuracy of the data. As described below, we will randomly select approximately three classrooms from each of two centers in your program for the study, and then will randomly select a sample of children who are new to Head Start to participate. We will work with staff from your program to invite the families of these children to participate in FACES 2009. All participating parents, children, and classrooms will be paid or given a gift for participating.

A FACES coordinator will be calling you within the next two weeks to discuss your program's participation in this research and to answer any questions you may have. This memo describes the activities we would like to complete during our visit to your program, and the process we will follow to work with you to schedule and prepare for the visit.

## **SITE DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES**

Contingent on OMB approval of the study, a team of Mathematica staff will visit the sampled centers and collect the data for this study starting this fall. In both the fall and spring of 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, staff will spend about one week at each program to administer an assessment to each selected child whose parents have agreed to let him/her participate. We will interview the child's parent or guardian at the program or by phone, whichever is most convenient for them. We will also interview the child's classroom teacher. In the fall, MPR staff

will interview you, the center directors and the program's education coordinator. In the spring of 2010 and 2011, staff will conduct observations in the study classrooms.

In the box below, we provide an overview of the site-visit activities and an estimate of how much time we will need to complete each one. We have also enclosed a FACES 2009 brochure and a FACES 2009 fact sheet with additional information about the study.

### **SITE-VISIT ACTIVITIES**

***Child Assessment Battery.*** During the visit, we will administer a 45-minute assessment to approximately 60 newly enrolled children in each program. The assessment is intended to measure important knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are typical of Head Start children. These assessments are administered individually to each child by a trained MPR staff member.

***Individual Staff Interviews.*** MPR staff will conduct individual 30-minute interviews with the center director and education coordinator, and a 45-minute interview with the teachers of the sampled classrooms and children (45 minutes). We will talk with these staff about their employment and educational background, program goals and philosophy, and curriculum and classroom activities.

***Teacher Child Reports.*** Teachers will complete short checklists about each sampled child's cognitive and social development. These can be completed using paper questionnaires or on the Web. Each child report requires about 10-15 minutes to complete.

***Parent Interview.*** We will also conduct a 45-minute interview with one parent of each study child. This interview will focus on parent and child activities, experiences with community agencies, health care, and parents' feelings and attitudes about themselves. These interviews will be conducted by phone or by appointment at the center.

***Classroom Observations (Spring 2010 and Spring 2011 Only).*** Site visitors will conduct observations in the study children's classrooms to measure classroom practices and instructional content. Each observation will take approximately 3 hours.

**All Information is Private.** All of the information collected during the site visit will remain private; we will not quote any staff member or person by name. The reports we prepare will describe the range of experiences of Head Start children and their families and a range of views and classroom practices across programs. Opinions and practices will not be attributed to specific individuals or programs.

## **NEXT STEPS IN PLANNING THE VISIT**

The FACES coordinator responsible for working with your program will contact you soon to answer any questions you have about the study and begin planning the visit to your program. During that conversation, we will discuss the process for selecting centers and children to participate in the study. We will also ask you to identify someone from your program to work with MPR's FACES coordinator to help organize the data collection. We call this person the On-Site Coordinator (OSC).

**Choosing an On-Site Coordinator.** The OSC will help us put together the information we need to select our samples of classrooms and children, schedule visits to Head Start centers, and obtain parental consent for children to participate in the study. The OSC will also assist in identifying the staff to interview at each center and scheduling the best times to conduct these interviews.

If the randomly selected centers are not in close proximity to one another, it may be necessary to identify two coordinators. We suggest that you identify a back-up person, regardless of the size of your program, to ensure that there are at least two staff to fulfill the role of the OSC. The OSC will receive an honorarium for helping us in fall 2009.

**Selecting Centers and Classrooms.** As a first step in selecting centers and classrooms, we will ask you during our call for the following information:

- The program option(s) you offer (full-day, part-day, center, and home-based)
- The names and zip codes of your centers and/or home visitors
- Your best estimate for the number of newly entering 3 to 5 year old children you will serve at each of the centers in your program in the fall of 2009.

If your program also offers a home-based option, we will select children from the home visitors' caseloads to be part of the study. Therefore, we will also need information about these caseloads.

The next step in the process involves the random selection of centers or home-based caseloads. Two centers per program will be selected based on the information you provided to us. Once a center or home visitor is randomly selected, we will, with your permission, inform them of their selection and describe their participation in the study.

After the centers have been selected and have agreed to participate, approximately three classrooms per center will be randomly selected. This process will be facilitated by a FACES enrollment specialist (FES) who will visit each center, a few weeks prior to the start of data collection. We will ask the OSC to provide the enrollment specialist with a list of its eligible classrooms and the number of eligible children in each. If a center has three or fewer classrooms, we will include all of them. Classrooms with no newly entering 3 or 4 year olds will not be eligible to participate in the study.

**Selecting Children.** A multistep process is used to select the children who will participate in the study, and this will also require the assistance of the OSC and center staff. After classrooms have been sampled, the FES will ask the OSC to provide a list of all newly enrolled 3 and 4 year olds in the selected classrooms. Children will be randomly selected for the study from these classroom rosters. Approximately 10 children from each class will be invited to participate.

**Obtaining Consent.** Once children have been sampled, MPR will work in partnership with the OSC to gain parental cooperation. While the FES is still on-site, they will distribute informational materials to selected families. The FES will be available to discuss the study with parents in person

**Scheduling the Visit.** We hope to conduct all of our assessments and interviews at your program within a one-week time frame. As a first step in scheduling, we would like to discuss your program's operating schedule and how our visit can fit within it. We will make every effort to conduct the visit at a convenient time for your program.

We are looking forward to visiting your program and learning about your experiences with Head Start. Your participation will be important for helping the Office of Head Start assess how well the system is fostering children's school readiness. If you have questions about the site visit before we call you, please contact [FACES COORDINATOR] at MPR [xxx-xxx-xxxx, EMAIL ADDRESS]. The FACES coordinator will work with you to schedule the site visits.