

across this Earth are seeing the good and generous heart of America.

As citizens of this good Nation, we can be proud of our heritage and confident in our future. The ideals of July 4th, 1776, still speak to all humanity, and the Revolution declared that day goes on. As we celebrate our independence in 2003, we still place our trust in divine providence. We still pledge our lives and honor to freedom's defense. And we will always believe that freedom is the hope and the future of every land.

May God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:01 a.m. on July 3 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on July 5. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 4 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

### Remarks at Highland Park Elementary School in Landover, Maryland *July 7, 2003*

Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Please, Windy, thank you very much. I'm proud of you. I'm proud of your dedication. It is a great country where Windy can come from a Head Start program and is now a leader in the movement to make sure Head Start fulfills the promise of the program.

First, I want to thank the good folks here at Highland Park Elementary School for letting me come by and see a program which works. I don't know if the people in the State of Maryland know this—I know the Governor does—that the teachers here and the program here uses a strategy, what they call a Center for Improving Readiness for Children, Learning, and Education, C.I.R.C.L.E., which is a model program. It's a program that incorporates profound and simple reading lessons necessary to lay the foundation for future readers. And it's a program that's working. There is a strong emphasis on learning. There is obviously the continued Head Start focus on good nutrition and health care. This program also works well because the parents are involved.

So, I've really come to say a couple of things. One, I want to thank the good folks

at this learning institution for your focus and dedication. I also want to say that this is possible, this program is possible, to be spread around the country. I mean, this is what we need to do. That's what we're here to talk about. We're really here to talk about how to make sure Head Start works.

I'll never forget the lady in Houston, Texas, who stood up at one time and she said, "Reading is the new civil right." Her point was, is that if you can't read, it is hard to access the greatness of America. And if reading is the new civil right, a good place to start with civil rights is at the Head Start programs all across the country.

And that's what we're here to talk about, how to make then work better. They're working okay. We want better than okay in America. We want excellence. Windy understands that, and I want to thank her for working with my Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson. I appreciate you coming, Tommy.

And I appreciate my friend Rod Paige. He's the Secretary of Education. If you noticed, the two Secretaries are here, Health

and Human Services and Education. The idea is to combine both focuses, both Departments into one when it comes to Head Start. The Head Start program will stay under Tommy's purview, but we want it to become an Education Department as well.

I mean, after all, you've got a million kids gathered together at one time during the day. If you've got a million kids that may be, as they call them in the education world, at-risk readers, let's get it right early then. That's what we're saying. And that's what this initiative is attempting to do.

I appreciate Bob Ehrlich, the Governor of this great State. He knows what he's doing when it comes to education. He's got a great wife, the first lady, Kendel, with us as well. Governor Ehrlich sets high standards. He challenges what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations. He understands if you lower the bar, assign certain kids to failure based upon demographics, that's precisely what you'll get in the State of Maryland. So he said, "We ought to raise the bar." He believes every child can learn. And so does the Lieutenant Governor, Michael Steele. They understand that high standards will yield high results. And the best place to start in achieving high standards is with the littlest of children.

I want to thank very much Congressman John Boehner for coming today. The Congressman is not from Maryland; he's from Ohio. But he's an important figure since he's the chairman of the House Education Committee which is marking up legislation which will help us spread excellence to the Head Start programs all across the country. Congressman, thanks for coming. I look forward to continuing to work with him.

He also is one of the authors of what we call the No Child Left Behind Act, which I'll talk about a little bit later. But the No Child Left Behind Act essentially says we expect every child to learn, and there is going to be high standards and strong accountability measures to every

State in the Union. In return for increased Title I funding and in return for an increase in the Federal budget of elementary and secondary schools act money, we expect results. You see, we're not going to just spend money and hope something positive happens. We're going to spend money and see results.

Well, if you believe in high standards and accountability, then it's really important to get the young kids up to the starting line at the same time. And that's why the Head Start reforms we're going to talk about are important, the reforms which John and his committee are carrying to the floor of the House relatively soon.

I want to thank Nancy Grasmick, who is the State superintendent of schools in Maryland. I'm honored that you're here. Thank you for coming, and thank you for taking on a tough job. I appreciate Andre Hornsby as the superintendent of schools, an even tougher job. Government closest to the people is sometimes government that's the hardest. And I want to thank Guylaine Richard, who is the program director for the Head Start. I appreciate, Guylaine, you opening up this chance for me to come and see a program which works.

I want to thank Lori Ellis, the principal. When we leave, she can take a deep breath and relax and say, "Thank goodness the entourage has departed." [Laughter] I appreciate the—Tonya Riggins, who is the Highland Park Head Start Center coordinator. I want to thank Lisa Dunmore and Alice Williams, the two fine teachers we had to meet. For the teachers who are here, thank you for doing what you're doing. You're a part of a noble profession, an incredibly important profession for the future of this country. You know what I know, that reading is the key to all learning. It's where you've got to start.

And the research—I see some of my friends from the National Research Council, National Institutions of Child Health who are here. Reid Lyon is an expert. He's

not a political person. He's a scientist. He understands how the brain works, and he's spent a lot of time analyzing what works and what doesn't work. He caught my attention when I was the Governor of Texas. I would ask him a question, "Are you sure we can teach kids, you know, the so-called impossible-to-teach?" He said, "Sure, I know it. I'm absolutely certain." And so he started doing research to convince the people about the real future. And he says that—he and his fellow researchers—that preschoolers can learn much more than we ever thought possible about words and sounds.

In other words, society limited how much a certain—how much a preschooler could learn. At least our imaginations weren't very open. It kind of felt like certain things were impossible to—certain knowledge was impossible to impart to our children, particularly the young.

And so I want to thank Reid and the good folks who are focusing on science, who have opened up a tremendous realm of possibility now to achieve that which we want, a literate America. He also says there—he and other researchers say, and this is just as important, kids love to learn. They love to learn to read. Even the youngest child can learn that we read words and letters from left to right or that letters are associated with sounds; even the youngest of toddlers can figure that out over time.

In one exercise, children clapped for each syllable in a word. They can trace letters on the page to begin to understand the movements we use to write. They can play word games and learn rhymes and songs that help them to develop their own vocabulary. That sounds like a simple curriculum, but it is research-based, all aimed at laying the foundation for children to become good readers. These are what we call the building blocks, and these building blocks need to be a part of Head Start programs all across America. That's the mission. That's the goal.

Research also shows that if children do not develop these skills before they reach kindergarten, they will struggle to achieve success in their lives. Now, we need to listen to that kind of research in America. If the scientists come together and say, "If we fail in our mission to give children the foundation necessary for reading, they will fall behind and may not be able to develop the skills necessary, so they have to struggle in life," we got a—this is an opportunity that we better not miss.

We cannot let our children down. Now look, Head Start is a great opportunity to provide the foundation for reading. And first, I just want everybody to understand, Head Start does a good job of giving children nutrition and medical care. That has been primarily the focus, and the program needs to be applauded for meeting that goal. And nobody in this room wants Head Start to change that focus. We just want an additional focus to Head Start, and the Head Start focus is teaching the basics for reading and math. That's the new focus, along with health and nutrition.

The Department of Health and Human Services did a report, and here is what it said: "Even though most children in Head Start make some educational progress, most of them still leave the program with skills and knowledge levels that are far below what we expect." Now, in my line of work, if you see a problem, you address it. And I see that as a problem. If we're not meeting expectations, if we're not challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations, let's start right now in America. We want Head Start to set higher ambitions for the million children it serves.

And so I laid out a plan. Every Head Start center must prepare children to succeed by teaching the basics of learning and literacy. That's the cornerstone of the plan. And every Head Start teacher must have the skills necessary to do so.

And so we started last year when we launched the Strategic Teacher Education Program, STEP, to train 3,300 Head Start

teachers and supervisors in the C.I.R.C.L.E. program, which is used right here at this school. In other words, it's a go-by. It is a curriculum. It's easy to understand. It's easy to teach. It's easy to implement. It is not a difficult chore for a teacher to take the basic learning from the C.I.R.C.L.E. program developed by the scientists and implement it at the Head Start program in which he or she teaches.

Tonya Riggins, the assistant Head Start supervisor at Highland Park, was one of the teachers in the program. Tonya and thousands of other trained teachers went back to train other teachers at the program. So it's going to—we started with 3,300. Those 3,300 went back to their local communities and talked to teachers with whom they teach how to teach a basic curriculum. It is a—and by the way, as new teachers are added, they too will be given the tools necessary to teach the program.

Now, in order to make sure that the C.I.R.C.L.E. program is—and other curriculums which work—are being used, is working, I believe there needs to be an evaluation program. And after all, if we're spending a lot of taxpayers' money, which we are, it makes sense to determine whether or not these programs are, in fact, laying the foundation for reading.

Now, I fully understand a 4-year-old child is not going to take a standardized test. That would be absurd. That we would—we would be defeating the purpose of accountability before we even began if we said, "Okay, we'll give standardized tests to 4-year-olds." But we can have children assessed by asking simple questions. You know, words go left to right. Are you able to identify certain sounds? Are they developed by—developing the key skills necessary?

And I think what needs to happen is—and I hope Congress agrees—that the simple evaluations at the beginning of the year and the end of the year will tell us whether or not progress is being made in developing a curriculum necessary to teach children

how to read. And if they are, we ought to be praising the programs, and if they're not, something else ought to happen. We cannot miss the opportunity much longer in America. Otherwise, children will be left behind.

And so Boehner is here because his committee and the Congress is considering legislation that would put a new emphasis on language skills and literacy skills in Head Start programs. In other words, we're going to codify into law that which we have started through the teacher training program.

The legislation will require Head Start providers to teach language, reading, and writing skills, as well as early math skills. In other words, it now becomes a part—when they pass the law that says the Head Start mission is further defined as an educational mission. And those programs that are used must be proven by scientific research. The legislation would hold Head Starts accountable for getting the job done.

Now look, as I mentioned before, the No Child Left Behind Act says every child can learn. We're going to have high standards. We're going to trust the local people to develop the curriculum, but in return for Federal money, we want you to measure to tell us whether or not children are learning to read and write. And that's a heavy lift for some communities, because there hasn't been a proper focus on the little children.

And therefore, we're asking people to develop an accountability system without everybody being at the same starting position. And that's why it's so important for preschool programs to be focused on literacy, so that when the accountability systems kick in in Maryland or Texas or anybody else, we can truthfully say that every child has been given the tools necessary to be at the starting line at the same time, so that we have true accountability, true measurement. And that's why the Head Start program is important.

Now, there's Governors around the State, the country that have said, "Look, give us

the flexibility to be able to dovetail the Head Start program into our preschool programs so that all students—so we have a better control over whether or not the students are given the skills necessary so that when you hold us to account, we can achieve that which we want to achieve, which is excellence in the classroom.”

I appreciate the desire for flexibility. I support the Governors’ desire for flexibility so long as, one, Federal monies going to the States are used only for Head Start. In other words, what we really don’t want to do is say we’re going to focus on Head Start; the Head Start money goes for, you know, a prison complex. I know that won’t happen with Governor Ehrlich, but there needs to be a guarantee that the Federal money spent on Head Start only go to Head Start.

Secondly, States and local governments must put money into the program, which would lock in the Head Start money for Head Start. So, in other words, the flexibility given to the State would not allow the States budget flexibility. It’s management flexibility to be able to take the Head Start program, dovetail into the preschool program, then the kindergarten program, and then into the elementary school program.

Governors ought to have that flexibility to—hope that Congress will provide that flexibility so that when the accountability systems kick in, fully kick in, that a Governor can truthfully say, “Well, I’ve had the tools necessary to make sure the Head Start program fits into an overall comprehensive plan for literacy and math for every child in the State of Maryland,” in Governor Ehrlich’s case.

This is a very important initiative I’m talking about. It is—it seems like to me a fantastic opportunity for the country to make sure that the desires of this country are met, and that is, every child become a good reader. If reading is the new civil right and human dignity and freedom is

what this country is all about, let’s make sure every child learns to read.

So I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come today. We know what works. We’ve got the pros and the experts that have laid out a curriculum that will help us achieve a goal. We’ve got a million kids anxious to learn, showing up on a daily basis at Head Start programs all across the country. We’ve got teachers who want to teach. We’re writing the checks for the local governments and the local Head Start programs. Let’s combine it all into a comprehensive strategy that will allow us all to say, “We have done our duty for future generations of children by laying the most important foundation of all, and that is the ability for each child to learn to read.” I know it can happen. There’s no doubt in my mind.

I want to thank those of you who are working on the frontlines of education. I appreciate your willingness to accept a new mission to be incorporated with the old mission. And I appreciate your willingness to work hard, to see to it that not one single child in America is left behind.

May God bless your work. And may God continue to bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. at the Head Start Center. In his remarks, he referred to Windy M. Hill, associate commissioner, Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services; Andre J. Hornsby, chief executive officer, Prince George’s County Public Schools; Guylaine Richard, program supervisor, and Tonya Riggin, acting assistant program supervisor, Head Start, Prince George’s County Public Schools; and G. Reid Lyon, branch chief, Child Development and Behavior, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.