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Baesler: Office Switch Will Help Early Childhood Education

BISMARCK, N.D., Dec. 12, 2016 – The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) and the North Dakota Department of Human Services on Monday announced the transfer of the North Dakota Head Start State Collaboration Office from Human Services to NDDPI. The change will help strengthen and clarify how early childhood education services are provided in North Dakota.

State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler and Maggie Anderson, the interim executive director of the human services agency, began discussions about moving the office to NDDPI shortly after the incumbent administrator, Mark Schaefer, resigned in September.

Baesler said the change will strengthen NDDPI's emphasis on early childhood education, and assist cooperative efforts among various early childhood education agencies and programs. Those include NDDPI and the state departments of health and commerce, as well as Head Start, Early Head Start, prekindergarten and early childhood special education.

“Our goal is to help low-income families prepare their children to begin school, and to increase their children's chances for success once they start,” Baesler said. “This change will help to comprehensively support the healthy development of our North Dakota young people in the first years of their lives. At NDDPI, we already strive to address many of the same things that Head Start and other early learning programs promote within our state.”

Last year, Baesler was successful in obtaining \$3 million in state support from the North Dakota Legislature for local early childhood education programs for 4-year-olds. Those grant funds are benefiting 978 North Dakota children during the 2016-17 school year.

Head Start and Early Head Start benefit preschool children in low-income families. Early Head Start aids pregnant women, infants, and toddlers to age 3. Head Start serves mostly 3- and 4-year-olds. [Head Start](#) was created in 1965; Congress approved the [Early Head Start](#) program in 1994.

Anderson said the Department of Human Services and the NDDPI “have a longstanding relationship and work in partnership on several early learning initiatives.”

“This office transfer is just another example of how collaboration can enhance services, resources, and programs for low-income children and families,” Anderson said.

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Gov. Jack Dalrymple has agreed to the change. Allison Driessen, president of the [North Dakota Head Start Association](#), said Head Start advocates across the state strongly support moving the Head Start State Collaboration Office.

“What the office brings is a strong foundation in parent engagement, health and well-being. We serve the entire family,” Driessen said. “Head Start shares NDDPI’s vision of educational success for life. Head Start gives low-income children the school readiness skills needed to be great learners. It is critical that somebody is representing low-income families as policies are being made.”

The Head Start State Collaboration Office promotes collaboration within North Dakota’s Head Start programs and maintains a statewide information resource on Head Start programs. The administrator represents the state and Head Start on several boards and councils with interests in early childhood education, including the [Early Childhood State Advisory Council](#) and the [North Dakota Head Start Association](#).

The new administrator has not yet been hired. The job opening will be posted soon. The position will be within the NDDPI’s [division of student support and innovation](#), under the direction of early childhood administrator Tara Fuhrer.

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