

as valid measures of assessments for Head Start students. Until child development and early education experts can agree about the appropriateness of the NRS, we should not be spending millions of dollars on its implementation and subjecting 500,000 children to it every year.

In addition to promoting development of the mind, I also believe that we must promote good physical development for all children. I am pleased that an amendment I offered in committee to promote physical development, including outdoor activity to support children's motor development and overall health and nutrition, was accepted.

The requirement for physical activity and nutrition for pre-schoolers is increasingly important as childhood obesity rates have doubled for young children in the past 20 years. Studies show that healthy eating habits help to prevent childhood obesity and other nutrition-related diseases. Given the epidemic rate of child obesity, dramatic changes need to take place in school nutrition environment.

The Society for Nutrition Education, SNE, reports that child nutrition programs present opportunities for positive role modeling of healthy and nutritious meals, from the formative years of early childhood through the teen years. Additionally, implementation of educational programs that guide and motivate parents and children to improve the nutritional quality of their dietary choices and to increase their physical activity levels is extremely important. Physical activity, particularly for youth, help to improve school performance, establish positive health habits, and possibly prevent the onset of adult diseases.

Mr. Chairman, again, I am pleased to have worked on this bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Head Start Act. The consensus we have reached on H.R. 2123 reflects positively on how well Head Start is working. Numerous studies indicate that every dollar spent on Head Start saves taxpayers \$4 to \$7 in the future due to savings in education and welfare expenses. Therefore, it is my belief that the bill before us today will continue to provide the best Head Start program for all of our children.

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PLATTS).

Mr. PLATTS. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of the School Readiness Act of 2005. I would like to pay particular attention and highlight a provision of the bill granting greater flexibility to Head Start programs wanting to provide Early Head Start to children ages birth to 3.

A priority goal of the Head Start program is to reach out and assist as many of our Nation's at-risk children as possible in the most effective and responsible manner possible. In continuing with this tradition, I was proud to join with my distinguished colleagues, the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. BIGGERT) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN), in offering a bipartisan amendment during committee consideration of this measure meant to reach out and serve at-risk children at an age when brain development is occurring rapidly and is perhaps in its most critical phase.

The Biggert-Van Hollen-Platts amendment, which was adopted unani-

mously in committee, gives grantees providing services under Head Start ages 3 to 5, and Early Head Start, birth to age 3, the flexibility to use existing unfilled Head Start slots for infants and toddlers who are eligible for Early Head Start.

In the earliest years, infants and toddlers are developing a foundation not only with respect to language and cognition, but also with respect to emotion, mental health, and social behavior upon which all subsequent learning is built. As many as 75 percent of children enter the Head Start program with vocabulary skills below the average range, and 82 percent of these children start out with early writing skills below the average range.

These numbers tell us that we need to start reaching out to at-risk children at an even younger age, before they have already fallen behind their peers. Yet early Head Start currently serves less than 5 percent of eligible infants and toddlers.

A major study of the Early Head Start program by Mathematica Policy Research and Columbia University found that 3-year-old Head Start children performed significantly better on a range of measures of cognitive, language, and social and emotional development than a control group. In addition, the parents of these children scored significantly higher than control group parents on many aspects of parenting and the home environment.

Early education programs are clearly important to the future of our Nation and our Nation's children. They have the ability to influence the course of young children's lives in a positive way. I hope my colleagues in this Chamber will join me in supporting final passage of H.R. 2123.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH), a member of the Subcommittee on Education Reform.

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Chairman, injecting religious discrimination into Head Start is a nonstarter. It is a roll-back of established civil rights laws. It is wrong. And I believe it sets the stage for unconstitutional activity. I ask my colleagues to withdraw that amendment and let this bill, which we do agree on, to go forward to serve the children of our Nation who are waiting for opportunities to ensure that no child in America is trapped within poverty's grasp, to enable every child in America to live up to his or her highest potential.

Faith-based organizations, as we all know, are free to use their own money to make employment decisions using religious criteria for programs. There is no discrimination against faith-based organizations that run federally funded social services. If they want to hire people of only a certain faith, they can do that with their own money. But when it comes to the use of taxpayers' dollars, no citizen in this country with the protection of the first amendment should have to pass a religious test to qualify.

Our Founders understood the importance of separation of church and State. I also believe they did not intend to have America exclude the celebration of spiritual values. It is important that we remember the Founders' directives to bring spiritual values of truth, honesty, love of country, but to never break down that wall which separates church and State. Preserve our Constitution.

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, when our forefathers in the 1960s wrote the 1964 Civil Rights Act landmark legislation, they provided a specific exemption in hiring for religious organizations, understanding that religious organizations would probably want to hire someone of their own faith. Now, if you disagree with that, go to the Committee on the Judiciary and rewrite the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Nowhere in this exemption does it say that, well, you have the exemption if you use your own money, but if you participate in Federal programs, you lose the exemption. It does not say that anywhere in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

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The fact is, that I understand there are deeply held beliefs here, but I do not think a religious organization should have to give up their rights under the 1964 Civil Rights Act just to participate in providing services to poor children who desperately need them.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Chairman, in response to the chairman, we are talking about taxpayers' money to support religious discrimination. That is what we cannot forget.

Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN), a member of the committee.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, I strongly supported this bill as it came out of the committee. I was proud of the product the committee passed out. I was pleased to join with many of my colleagues on the other side in offering amendments that were supported on a bipartisan basis that I think strengthen the Head Start program.

I am very sorry that that bipartisan consensus may be shattered, and it will be shattered if we later adopt the Boustany amendment because, make no mistake about it, the Boustany amendment is, in fact, an attack on religious liberty in this country. It takes us down a very dangerous road of taxpayer-financed religious bigotry.

It is important to understand what the Boustany amendment does and does not do. This is not a debate about whether or not faith-based institutions play a valuable role. Of course they do. We have seen it in response to Hurricane Katrina. We have seen it elsewhere. Nor is it about whether faith-based Head Start programs should receive Federal funds. They are receiving those today.