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Bush Signs Head Start Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush on Wednesday signed into law a five-year renewal of Head Start, the federal preschool program for poor children.

The latest update to Head Start, which began in 1965, aims to open the program to more children and ensure that teachers are better-qualified. Congress overwhelmingly approved the legislation last month, and Bush signed it despite misgivings about aspects of the bill.

Bush praised the bill's push to increase competition among Head Start providers, raise learning standards and coordinate early childhood education.

The legislation raises the eligibility ceiling from 100 percent of the poverty level for a family of four, about \$20,650, to 130 percent, or \$26,845, while giving priority to the neediest children. It also sets a deadline of 2013 for half of all Head Start classroom teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

Bush took issue with the elimination of a testing regime for 4-year-olds, which the administration contends is a valuable tool for measuring progress.

"We should be working to provide more and better data to parents, teachers, and policymakers, not less," Bush said.

Bush signed the bill during a photo opportunity with lawmakers of both parties, a rare showing of bipartisanship as he battles Congress over spending.

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