

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Head Start WEST Opposes Federal Proposal That Would Dismantle Head Start Program Standards

Proposal would weaken protections for children, families, and local Head Start programs

Following today's release of a federal proposal to eliminate most of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, Head Start WEST is strongly opposing a rule that would dismantle many of the protections that have made Head Start one of the nation's most effective investments in young children and families.

For more than 60 years, Head Start has combined early learning with health, developmental, nutrition, and family support services that prepare children for school and strengthen families. Head Start WEST is deeply concerned that the proposal issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would eliminate many of the standards that make this comprehensive approach effective.

Among other changes, the proposal would:

- Eliminate Head Start-specific classroom ratios and group-size requirements, removing safeguards that help keep classrooms safe and ensure children receive the individualized attention they need to learn and thrive;
- Eliminate key requirements related to services for children with disabilities and multilingual learners, threatening access to the supports children need to participate fully and succeed;
- Eliminate parent governance and engagement requirements, reducing families' ability to help shape the programs their children rely on;
- Restrict the ability of Head Start programs to use federal funding for essential operating costs, potentially forcing local programs to reduce staff, limit services, or serve fewer children;
- Eliminate standards related to educational quality, child development, child safety, infant and maternal health, and family services, weakening protections for some of the nation's youngest and most vulnerable children; and
- Put access to Head Start at risk in rural and underserved communities, where the program is often one of the only available sources of high-quality early learning and comprehensive family support.

Head Start WEST is also concerned that the proposal removes many of the evidence-based standards that support continued federal investment in Head Start. We look forward to working with members of Congress, state and local leaders, families, and community partners to advocate for strong quality standards and sustained investment in the program.

"Every day, we see how Head Start changes lives. Children and families gain the skills, resources, and support they need to succeed. This proposal would strip away many of the standards that make those

outcomes possible. We urge HHS to withdraw this proposal and preserve the protections that have made Head Start work for children and families for more than 60 years.”

— **Edward Condon, Executive Director, Head Start WEST**

Across the western region, Head Start serves approximately 123,643 children, families, and pregnant women through more than 450 local programs. For many families—especially those in rural and underserved communities—Head Start is one of the few places where children can access high-quality early learning alongside health, developmental, and family support services.

Decades of research demonstrate that Head Start improves school readiness, strengthens families, and produces lasting benefits for children and communities.

The proposal is now open for public comment. Current Head Start Program Performance Standards remain in effect, and local programs should continue operating under existing requirements while the federal rulemaking process moves forward.

Head Start WEST encourages parents, educators, program leaders, community members, and all Head Start supporters to review the proposal, speak out against the harmful changes, and participate in the federal public comment process.

Public comments provide an important opportunity to explain how the proposed changes would affect children, families, staff, and communities and to urge HHS to withdraw or substantially revise the proposal before issuing a final rule.

The public comment period is open through **October 6, 2026**. **A final rule is expected in December 2026**.

Head Start WEST invites supporters to join **Together for Head Start**, a nationwide coalition working to oppose the proposal and protect and strengthen Head Start. The coalition has developed resources, including a customizable public-comment template, to help individuals and organizations submit comments before the deadline.

About Head Start WEST

Head Start WEST is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening Head Start programs, supporting children and families, and representing the interests of the Head Start community. Through advocacy, education, training, technical assistance, and leadership development, Head Start WEST works to promote the continued viability, quality, and success of Head Start programs across the western region.

Head Start WEST supports programs in Arizona, California, Nevada, Hawaii, and the Pacific Region.

Head Start WEST is also a member of **Together for Head Start**, a coalition of national, state, and local organizations committed to opposing the proposed rule and protecting and strengthening Head Start.



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Coalition members work together to elevate the voices of families, educators, providers, and communities and to advance policies that help children thrive.

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