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The Director’s Exchange Network

An Ongoing Community of Practice for Head Start Leadership

In the weeks and months ahead, Directors Exchange will take a deep dive into the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on the Head Start Program Performance Standards, helping executive directors and senior leaders understand what’s changing, what’s at stake, and how to prepare. Beyond the NPRM, Directors Exchange provides timely discussions on federal legislation, regulations, and emerging priorities while creating space to collaborate with peers, share solutions, and strengthen your leadership alongside fellow Head Start leaders.



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SUMMER 2026
EDITION

News and Resources for Head Start in the WEST

Elevating the Head Start Community

Head Start WEST exists to elevate the people, programs, and partnerships that make Head Start indispensable to children, families, and communities across the western United States. We connect leaders, strengthen organizations, accelerate innovation, and amplify the collective voice of the Head Start community so every child and family has the opportunity to thrive.

Since 2016, our work has evolved from serving a regional membership association into becoming a trusted partner for the broader Head Start community across the West. As our community continues to navigate workforce challenges, operational complexity, leadership transitions, and an evolving public policy landscape, our commitment remains clear: **to create opportunities that strengthen the people and organizations that make Head Start possible.**

What does "Elevating the Head Start Community" mean?

It means creating opportunities for people to **Learn, Belong, and Elevate**. These three commitments guide our work and shape our priorities for the coming year.

Learning

Building knowledge. Strengthening leadership. Inspiring excellence.

We create opportunities for professional growth that help individuals and organizations respond to today’s challenges while preparing for tomorrow’s opportunities.

Belonging

Creating connections that strengthen our community.

We create opportunities for Head Start professionals to connect, collaborate, solve problems together, and build lasting relationships across the western states.

Elevating

Celebrating excellence. Amplifying impact. Shaping the future.

We create opportunities to recognize excellence, develop emerging leaders, strengthen partnerships, and tell the story of Head Start’s lasting impact.

What’s Inside This Issue?

- Interview with 2026 Family Engagement Conference Keynote, Justin Tutt “The Man In The Black Chucks”
- Upcoming Opportunities from Head Start WEST
- Celebrating the 2026 Legacy Scholarship Recipients
- Fall Activity Resource: Your Story Has the Power to Make a Difference

Meet our Family Engagement Keynote – Justin Tutt “The Man in The Black Chucks”



Competing against more than 30,000 speakers from around the world, Justin Tutt earned a place among the Top 28 in the Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking. Today, as *The Man in the Black Chucks*, he has inspired more than one million students, educators, and families nationwide through engaging keynote experiences that blend humor, powerful storytelling, and practical strategies. Justin is known for creating interactive presentations that leave audiences energized, connected, and ready to take action. His mission is simple: to help people recognize their value, strengthen relationships, and step on purpose every single day. We got to know Justin a bit better and learn more about what he will be bringing to this year’s Family Engagement Conference.

Q: What will you be presenting at the conference, and what do you hope people walk away with?

I’ll be presenting *Step On Purpose*, a keynote experience that reminds us that the smallest moments often create the biggest impact. Every conversation, every smile, every encouraging word, and every relationship has the potential to change the direction of someone’s life. My hope is that every educator, family member, and leader leaves feeling re-energized, reminded of their “why,” and equipped with simple, practical ways to build stronger relationships with children, families, and each other. I want people to walk out thinking, “I can’t control everything, but I can control how I show up tomorrow.” When we choose to step on purpose, we create environments where children, families, and staff can truly thrive.

Q: Our theme this year is “Holding the Family Story.” What does that mean to you, and how does it show up in your own journey?

To me, holding the family story means recognizing that every family is carrying something we can’t always see. Behind every behavior is a story. Behind every struggle is a person who simply wants to be understood. My own journey has taught me that the people who changed my life weren’t necessarily the ones with all the answers—they were the ones who took the time to listen, believe in me, and remind me of my potential. That’s what I strive to do every time I step on stage. When we take the time to understand someone’s story before judging it, we create trust, build stronger relationships, and open the door for real growth and lasting change.

Q: What’s one thing you hope changes for the families and educators in our community after hearing you speak?

I hope people leave believing that they matter more than they realize. Our work isn’t measured only by lesson plans, paperwork, or the number of goals we accomplish. It’s measured by the lives we influence every single day. One conversation can build confidence. One encouraging word can restore hope. One caring relationship can change a child’s future. If every person leaves committed to being just 1% more intentional in how they encourage a child, support a family, or uplift a coworker, the ripple effect will extend far beyond this conference. Stronger relationships lead to stronger families, stronger teams, and ultimately better outcomes for the children we serve.



Learn More About Justin

Event Spotlight

Family Engagement Conference

October 12-16, 2026 | Hilton Waikoloa Village

Strengthening families has never been more important—or more complex. As Head Start programs respond to evolving expectations and the changing needs of children and families, professionals across every role are seeking practical strategies, meaningful collaboration, and renewed inspiration to support their communities.

We invite you to join fellow Head Start leaders, educators, family service professionals, health staff, governing leaders, and community partners in Kona, Hawaii, this October for an engaging professional development experience. Centered on this year’s theme, *Holding the Family Story*, the conference will bring together passionate professionals to explore innovative practices, share ideas, and build lasting connections that strengthen outcomes for children and families.



2026 Upcoming Learning Opportunities

Community of Learners
Starting September 15th, 2026

Turn your Community Assessment from a compliance requirement into your program’s most powerful strategy for planning, funding, and long-term success.



The Director’s Exchange Network
Ongoing

A leadership network where Head Start directors collaborate, solve challenges, and gain practical strategies to lead stronger, more resilient organizations.



Celebrating the 2026 Legacy Scholarship Recipients

Every year, the Head Start WEST Legacy Scholarship recognizes the passion, dedication, and leadership of Head Start professionals who are making a lasting impact in their programs and communities. We are proud to congratulate this year’s 10 Legacy Scholarship recipients, whose commitment to children, families, and the Head Start mission embodies the very spirit of this award.

Our scholarship recipients will be honored during a special Scholarship Award Ceremony at the 2026 Family Engagement Conference this October. We hope you’ll join us in celebrating these outstanding leaders and the difference they’re making every day.



Angella Zohrabayan
Pacific Clinics
California

Daniela Krstic
Head Start of Lane County
Oregon

Gabriela Avila
Child Development Resources of Ventura County
California

Guadalupe Cardenas
Foundation ECE
California

Haley Keefe
Shasta Head Start
California



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Juana Martinez
Pacific Asia Consortium of Employment
California

Lorena Cervantes
Centro de la Familia
Utah

Margaret Bradford
Booker T Washington
Arizona

Yomaira Villegas
Head Start of Northeastern Nevada
Nevada

Josh Grass
Shasta Head Start
California

Fall Activity Resource: Your Story Has The Power to Make a Difference

At this year’s First 1,000 Days Conference, we introduced the 6O-Second Story Framework—a simple yet powerful tool to help you identify, refine, and confidently share your personal Head Start story.

Stories have the power to change hearts, shape perspectives, and inspire action. By taking a few minutes to practice your story, you’ll be better prepared to advocate for Head Start in your workplace, your community, and beyond.

Scan the QR code to explore the framework and start crafting your story. The next time someone asks, “Why does Head Start matter?” you’ll have an answer that leaves a lasting impression.

