

Civil Rights and Disability Organizations' Joint Statement in Opposition to Administration Efforts to Dismantle Head Start



On Aug. 6, 2026, the Trump administration proposed changes to Head Start that, if finalized, would dismantle the program from the inside out. The proposal strips away most of the quality standards that define which services families actually receive, including the requirements that ensure children are safe and supported, hold programs accountable to the families they serve and guarantee the comprehensive services children need to begin kindergarten ready to learn. We strongly urge the administration to withdraw the proposal.

Over the past year, the administration has delayed funding that numerous programs depend on just to keep their doors open, cut federal staff who support these programs and proposed eliminating Head Start entirely. Each of these moves has created uncertainty for the providers who run these programs and the families who count on them. We oppose this latest attack on Head Start, which will immeasurably harm the families the program was built to serve.

The Head Start program began in 1965 with a simple promise: the American Dream belongs to every child, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. Head Start sought to prepare children in our country's most impoverished communities with the opportunity to learn. The program prepares children for school not only by teaching them to read and write, but also by helping them receive medical and dental exams, nutritious meals and developmental screenings that catch delays early on so that any necessary intervention can make a positive impact. At the heart of the Head Start program are standards that ensure every child gets the support they need to thrive and that parents — their child's first and most important teachers — are integrated as full partners in governing the program.

Since the launch of Head Start over 60 years ago, the program has made good on its promises by applying cutting-edge child development research and implementing it in programs nationwide. Today, Head Start operates in 20,000 neighborhood locations across the country and is vital to the nation's effort to provide educational opportunities for all children regardless of their family's economic status, race, ethnicity or languages spoken at home. Millions of children have graduated from Head Start and decades of research demonstrates that children who attend Head Start are more likely to graduate high school, go on to college and become working adults who effectively contribute to the national economy. Among its alumni, Head Start counts teachers,

lawyers, professional athletes, members of Congress, a Supreme Court justice, and countless professionals and leaders who enrich our country.

This new proposal seeks to dismantle Head Start's reputable program offering a gold standard early education to families with the least resources and to children who need it most. The proposed changes would gut the program, removing the high-quality benchmarks that keep class sizes small, ensure teachers are trained and supported, value bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths, and offer other health services like medical and dental exams and intervention screenings to address a child's school readiness. These quality standards are the hallmark of the Head Start program, which ensures every child receives an early education and services that promote healthy development. Without these standards, Head Start would exist in name only, offering unequal services based solely on where a child lives. If finalized, changes to this program would mean that a child could be turned away from Head Start because of a disability or simply because they are struggling. The proposed changes would make it more difficult for families experiencing homelessness to enroll, and would remove prohibitions on corporal punishment, seclusion and expulsion. These changes would particularly harm Black and Latino children, and those with disabilities, who, respectively, make up 29%, 40% and 15% of Head Start participants. This proposed rule would fundamentally alter the Head Start program and break a decades-long promise that America has made good on to afford children born without opportunity the best our country has to offer in early childhood education.

We stand in solidarity and state unequivocally that every child deserves a head start grounded in the high-quality standards that effectively prepare them to succeed in school. We call upon the administration to rescind this proposal, and call on Congress to stand behind Head Start and reject these changes so that our nation can maintain its promise for future generations.

Signed,

Children's Defense Fund

EdTrust

Legal Defense Fund

NAACP

National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Urban League

The Arc

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