

Protect Head Start Performance Standards



We all share the goal of ensuring government programs operate efficiently and effectively. However, the recent Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) regarding changes to the Head Start Performance Standards raises important concerns for our local Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The promise of Head Start is written into the program's standards, which define Head Start as a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood experience that addresses all domains of child development. Removing those standards would fundamentally alter the program by limiting the services it provides to families and undermining the transformative change it creates for children and families across the country.

Bottom line: Modernization should strengthen local programs—not trade away the safeguards, access, and family voice that make them effective.

Our Foundational Promise

2007 Head Start Act

Congress enacted legislation designed to maintain the highest quality across Head Start programs. By using the definitive term “shall” more than 400 times, the law established a firm commitment to communities—not a flexible guideline. It promises safe classrooms, qualified educators, and robust health and nutrition services.

Anti-reduction clause

Administrative processes may be streamlined, but the core quality and scope of services delivered to children must not be reduced. Like a local building code, safety protections and performance measures remain non-negotiable despite economic pressures or procedural updates.

Operational Capacity Matters

While we support efforts to minimize wasteful spending, the proposal would reduce the maximum allowance for administrative and program management costs from 15% to 5%. That goes beyond eliminating inefficiencies and could underfund the infrastructure required to run a compliant, secure program. About half of Head Start grants serve 200 or fewer children, meaning many smaller programs have fewer participants over which to spread fixed administrative costs. Essential obligations include fiscal oversight, human resources, IT and cybersecurity, data systems, facilities management and organizational leadership.

HHS Estimated Savings would result from:

- Reduced numbers of staff, including teachers and home visitors
- Increased numbers of children in classrooms
- Fewer hours of service
- Less spending on coaching, home visiting, health, and mental health supports
- Moving money from administration to direct services

An Operational Reality Check

While the new proposal is introduced at the federal level as “administrative relief” aimed at reducing paperwork, a closer analysis suggests its impact may go beyond operational streamlining. Rather than simply simplifying office procedures, the proposed changes could alter foundational safety and quality standards that directly support safe, effective classrooms.

Where Families Could Feel the Difference

Proposal area	What could change	Why it matters locally
Class size and ratios	Current Head Start rules cap preschool classrooms at 17 children with at least two educators. The NPRM removes these nationwide group-size limits and defers all standards to state licensing.	Florida ranks among the states with the highest child-to-teacher ratios. State licensing regulates only by ratio — 1:15 for three-year-olds and 1:20 for four-year-olds — and sets no maximum group size. Without federal caps, Florida programs could legally place much larger numbers of children in a single classroom, significantly reducing individualized instruction and increasing supervision demands.
Operational hours and language support	The proposal reduces mandatory minimum learning hours and removes targeted support frameworks for dual-language learners.	Less time can disrupt working parents' stability; fewer language supports can isolate children learning English and hinder integration and academic success.
Enrollment for families experiencing homelessness	Programs can currently accept self-declared income for immediate enrollment. The proposal requires official tax documents and complete paperwork first.	Families without stable housing may face an unrealistic barrier to critical early intervention.
Suspension and expulsion protections	Current federal standards protect children navigating trauma or behavioral challenges. The proposal defers decisions to state law.	A fragmented safety net could make access depend on geography rather than developmental need.
Family governance	The proposal removes the requirement for third-party mediation in impasses and makes parent committees optional.	Unresolved disputes could jeopardize approvals for budgets, funding, and enrollment priorities while weakening grassroots parent engagement.

A Balanced Path Forward

The proposal frames local flexibility and high-quality standards as competing choices. They do not have to be. Effective, adaptable local management can coexist with the core safety, health, and educational benchmarks that protect children and support families.



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