

Dear Head Start leaders,

In the spirit of the season, I want to share my sincere thanks with all of you. Over the last few years, you have provided critically needed education, resources, services access, and support to countless children and families in the most challenging conditions we have ever faced. Head Start staff and families have endured grief, loss, and hardship that defy description. At the same time, they have continued to display kindness, persistence, and ingenuity.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) is taking this moment to both give thanks for your work and to re-assert the primary Head Start mission. It's up to us to find and enroll children and families with the greatest needs and to provide the best early childhood programs and services the nation has to offer. Head Start program selection criteria is based on each community's needs to reach children who will most benefit from services. It is hard, and we understand that we are not able to serve all the children who need us, but we must make sure enrolled children and families experience the full range of support needed to get all the benefits Head Start programs offer.

In this moment, we need to focus on making sure the children and families selected for Head Start services receive high-quality services in safe and healthy settings. These services require offering the wages and benefits necessary to attract and retain qualified staff. In some cases, especially when classrooms are being closed due to staff shortages, Head Start programs may need to reduce the number of children served to create room in the budget for competitive wages and benefits.

Additionally, program and community leaders, including parents, need to assess whether their services are truly reaching those who need them the most. As you well know, family needs shifted considerably during the last few years. Programs should consider:

- Are the hours of operation aligned with family needs?
- Is the program reaching all parts of the service area with high-need populations?
- Would transportation services allow more children and families to enroll and attend regularly?
- Can the program form new community partnerships to extend the services provided?
- Do you need to employ full time floaters or mental health consultants?
- Should the program reduce class sizes or increase hours?

We urge you to take a realistic look at what it will take to provide ongoing high-quality comprehensive services and, as needed, adjust your wage scale, benefits, and program design. We know these are difficult decisions. Maintaining high-quality standards and programming for enrolled children is our highest priority. It is essential to make sure the children most in need of Head Start services receive the best possible early childhood experience. OHS stands with you as a full partner to support quality and consistency of Head Start programs and services.

Please contact your program specialist with any questions or if you would like to discuss plans for revised enrollment levels, program designs, salaries, and benefits. Explore related policy guidance from OHS to meet the needs of children, families, and staff:

- [ACF-IM-HS-22-09 Enrollment Reductions and Conversion of Head Start Slots to Early Head Start Slots](#)
- [ACF-IM-HS-22-06 Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce](#)
- [ACF-IM-HS-22-05 Office of Head Start Guidance for Use of Funds Appropriated in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#)
- [ACF-IM-HS-22-04 Competitive Bonuses for the Head Start Workforce](#)
- [ACF-IM-HS-22-03 Head Start Categorical Eligibility for Families Eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)
- [ACF-IM-HS-21-05 Supporting the Wellness of All Staff in the Head Start Workforce](#)

Thank you for all that you do for children and families. I am thankful and hopeful for this continued partnership,

/ Tala Q. Hooban /

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