



Protect Head Start

Changes are being proposed to Head Start.
They are not final – and your voice matters.

A Guide to the Proposed Changes and How to Submit a Public Comment

For more than 60 years, Head Start has helped children and families thrive. Now, critical parts of the program could change.

- Head Start provides more than child care. It provides high-quality early learning experiences delivered by skilled educators and health and developmental services from the community for children and families who face the greatest barriers to opportunity.
- The federal government is proposing changes that could affect class sizes, staffing, health and mental health services, workforce qualifications, transportation, and other critical supports.
- As we continue to hear about rising costs and challenges to access child care, these proposed changes are not making things better for families or children.
- These changes are not final. The public has until October 6 to weigh in.

Why does protecting Head Start matter to our families and our community?

When Preston struggled with self-regulation, his teachers and family came together to find him the support he needed. Through collaboration, they provided him with the tools to process his feelings and navigate daily challenges.

Today, Preston is thriving and is a powerful example of the difference Head Start makes. Read more about his story at

tryingtogether.org/advocacy/day-in-the-life/.



What is happening with Head Start?

- The federal government has proposed significant changes to the standards that govern Head Start and Early Head Start.
- *They are not final.* There is a public comment period before changes can be finalized.
- This public comment period is an opportunity for families, educators, providers, and community members to tell the federal government how the proposed changes could affect children, families, and the early education system.

Why do the Head Start Performance Standards matter?

- The Head Start Performance Standards aren't just rules. They protect what makes Head Start, Head Start – ensuring that children receive high-quality early learning alongside health, developmental, nutrition, mental health, and family supports.
- They establish expectations for what families and children experience every day – including how many children are in a classroom, who teaches them, how health and developmental needs are identified, how families have a voice, and how children are kept safe.

What does the proposed rule actually mean for the families, children, and educators?

- **MORE CHILDREN WITH FEWER EDUCATORS:** Federal class size and staffing standards would be replaced with state licensing requirements, potentially allowing larger groups and higher child-to-staff ratios.
- **WEAKER WORKFORCE STANDARDS:** Some federal qualification and professional development requirements beyond those required by law would be eliminated, resulting in less qualified staff and further devaluing the work of early childhood.
- **FEWER FEDERAL PROTECTIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:** Some detailed Head Start requirements to support children with disabilities would be eliminated, along with the longstanding ban on suspension and expulsion practices.
- **NEW BARRIERS FOR SOME FAMILIES:** Eliminating self-attestation could make it harder for families without traditional documentation to establish eligibility.
- **FEWER CONSISTENT COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH REQUIREMENTS:** Detailed federal requirements for health, mental health, dental, developmental screening, and follow-up services would be scaled back and result in less frequent and consistent comprehensive services.
- **LESS CONSISTENCY FROM COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY:** More decisions would be left to state requirements or local discretion rather than consistent Head Start standards nationwide that ensure safety and quality.

The bottom line: The issue isn't whether Head Start should serve more children. It should. The question is whether expansion should come at the expense of quality, safety, and comprehensive services.

Why is this proposal so concerning?

- These proposed changes aren't happening in isolation.
- Head Start is facing multiple federal policy and funding challenges at the same time.
- This proposal would change longstanding program standards through the federal regulatory process – without requiring Congress to pass a new law or increase funding.
- At the same time, Head Start (and other early care and education programs) have faced uncertainty about federal funding and the future of the program.
- These actions make this a critical moment to speak up for Head Start.

Why do public comments matter so much?

- Comments aren't just a formality. It becomes part of the decision-making process.
- Before HHS can issue a final rule, it must consider substantive public comments and respond to significant issues raised during the comment period.
- Public comment period is open until October 6th.

Why YOUR public comment matters

- You don't need to be a policy expert. You need to tell your story.
- Families can explain what Head Start has meant for their children.
- Educators can describe what larger groups or fewer supports would mean in their classrooms.
- Programs can explain how the proposed changes would affect their ability to serve children and families.
- Community members can speak to why Head Start matters where they live.

Ready to #ProtectHeadStart?

1. **Submit a public comment by October 6.** Tell HHS how the proposed changes could affect children, families, educators, and communities.
2. **Contact your members of Congress by email and phone.** Ask them to protect Head Start and oppose changes that weaken quality, safety, and comprehensive services. Complete a quick action that sends automated emails to state and federal policymakers by visiting tryingtogether.org/current-issue.
3. **Help others take action.** Share these tools with families, educators, colleagues, and community partners.

How to submit your public comment

- Go to [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov)
- Type Head Start in the search box.
- Click “ACF_Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs_RIN-0970-AD30”
- Click the blue “comment” button.

You can submit a comment as an individual, on behalf of an organization, or anonymously.

- **Individual:** Anyone can submit a comment. You do not need to identify your employer or Head Start program by name.
- **Organization:** Only submit on behalf of an organization if you are authorized to represent it.
- **Anonymous:** You may submit anonymously if you are more comfortable doing so.

What makes a strong public comment?

Your comment doesn't need to be long. It should be specific, personal, and connected to the proposed changes.

- **Introduce yourself.** Are you a parent, educator, Head Start provider, early childhood professional, or community member?
- **Focus on what matters most to you.** Choose one or two proposed changes and explain what they could mean for children, families, educators, or your community.
- **Share what you know.** A personal experience, example, or relevant data point can help HHS understand the real-world impact.
- **State what you want HHS to do.** Ask HHS not to finalize changes that weaken Head Start’s quality, safety, workforce, or comprehensive services. Encourage them to withdraw the proposed rule.

Build Your Comment

WHO I AM

“I am a _____ in _____.”

WHY HEAD START MATTERS TO ME

“In my experience...”

WHAT CONCERNS ME

“I am concerned about the proposed changes to ____ because ...”

WHAT COULD HAPPEN

“For children/families/educators, this could mean...”

WHAT I WANT HHS TO DO

“I urge HHS to preserve ____ and not finalize changes that would ____”

Sample Closing Sentence

“I am asking HHS to withdraw the proposed changes to the Head Start Performance Standards and maintain the rules that make Head Start the quality early learning experience that it has been for the past 60 years.”

More Information and Resources

- For a high-level overview: [Trying Together response](#)
- For a collection of resources at the state level: [Pennsylvania Head Start Association](#)
- For a collection of resources at the federal level: [Start Early - Together for Head Start](#)
- Easy to read key takeaways: [Start Early summary](#)
- Searchable tool based on topic: [First Five Years Fund guide](#)

Additional questions? Contact Emily Neff, Director of Public Policy at emily@tryingtogether.org