

Head Start

Notice for Proposed Rule Making (NPRM)

Overview

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NPRM: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking- The first draft of a proposed revision, addition or removal of a federal regulation. Also Called “The Rule” or the “Proposed Rule”

NPRM Basic Facts...

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- HHS Released the NPRM titled
 - “Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs”
 - The NPRM has a 60-day comment period with comments due by:
October 6, 2026.
 - The proposed standards total approximately 13 pages while the current standards are 130 pages.
 - Proposed to be fully effective by 2031

Head Start Language Guide

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- The Act: The Head Start Act- Federal law that governs Head Start
 - The Standards: Head Start Performance Standards (HSPPS)-The federal regulations that guide Head Start
 - NPRM: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking- The first draft of a proposed revision, addition or removal of a federal regulation. Also Called “The Rule” or the “Proposed Rule”
 - HHS: Health and Human Services- The federal department that oversees Head Start. It includes the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
 - Words that are used interchangeably:
 - Rule/Regulation
 - Law/Statute

Law vs. Regulation

The Head Start Act

- Passed by Congress and signed into law in 1965
- Reauthorized in 2007
- Establishes Head Start's Purpose, funding eligibility, governances, and oversight
- Sets requirements while authorizing HHS to issue federal regulations that guides daily program operations
- Laws (passed by congress and signed by the President) always supersede federal regulation

The head Start Performance Standards (HSPPS)

- Federal regulations, with the power of law, set by HHS
- Translates broad legislation language to specific actionable, and evidence-based expectations for Head Start grant recipients
- Does not require congressional approval to remove, change or add regulations but must follow specific administrative process to do so
- Most recently, the standards were changed in 2016 and 2024

Example: Law vs. Regulation

- **Head Start Act**

“...Children from low-income families shall be eligible for participation in programs assisted under this subchapter if their families incomes are at or below the poverty line...”

- *Legislation*
- *Big Picture*
- *Only Congress can amend*

- **HSPPS**

“To verify eligibility based on income, program staff must use tax forms, pay stubs, or other proof of income to determine the family's income for the relevant time-period.”

- *Regulation*
- *Day-to-day operations*
- *Used NPRM process to make changes/updates*

ACF's Intent and Impact of the Proposed Rule...

ACF's Stated Intention:

- To reduce federal bureaucratic burden on programs, defer to state policies/regulations whenever possible
 - Return substantial local control to Head Start agencies delivering the services and to parents as the primary caregivers and decision makers for their children
 - To reduce unnecessary duplication of Head Start regulations with federal statutes and other regulations
 - To emphasize the critical role of health, nutrition, and physical exercise for young children
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Implications of the Rule from Content Area Experts...

What gets lost in the process:

- Greater risk to children → reduced individualized attention. Higher ratios, fewer prescribed disability-service practices, reduced home-visiting intensity and fewer service requirements all potentially move Head Start away from the individualized model that distinguishes it from basic child care.
 - Greater risk to the workforce → reduced quality and relationships. The NPRM frequently treats staffing as a source of regulatory cost. But teachers, home visitors, Family Service Workers, disability specialists and administrative staff aren't merely regulatory expenses—they are the people through whom Head Start delivers its comprehensive model. Head Start quality depends heavily on a stable, qualified workforce. ACF itself acknowledges that competitive wages and benefits are important to recruitment and retention, while arguing that programs need greater flexibility to balance workforce investments with maintaining enrollment slots.
 - Greater risk to our future and variation → reduced national promise. Head Start has historically paired local flexibility with a national set of expectations for quality. Moving more decisions to state and local requirements could result in greater variation in what Head Start looks like from one community or state to another. The central question becomes: How much flexibility can we introduce before a national standard stops being truly national? Head Start has historically promised something more than compliance with whatever minimum child-care regulation happens to exist in a particular state.
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A Few Impacted Areas

Key Changes:

- 5% Administrative Costs
- Staff-to-Child Ratios
- Family Service Workers Caseloads
- Designation Renewal System
- Staff qualifications
- Rural communities

Key Removals:

- Services and protections for children with disabilities
- Requirements for health care coordination
- Suspension and expulsions
- Self-Attestation
- Housing Cost Eligibility
- Duration requirements
- Monitoring Section

Key Additions:

- English Only Instruction/ services for dual language learners
- Expanded Waiver authorization
- Physical Activity
- Nutrition
- Healthy Marriage

The NPRM Process

The Agency drafts a proposed rule



The Office of Management and Budget reviews the rule and goes back and forth with the Agency until a consensus is reached



The NPRM is published and the public comment period (60 days) begins

****We are Here**

The agency must review all comments



The final rule is published (normally this takes a few months)

Addresses comments and may contain revisions based on comments



The final Rule is Effective usually 30 days after it is published

Public Comment + Importance

Public Comment

- Public comment is the formal opportunity for individuals, families, programs, and organizations to provide feedback on a proposed federal rule before it becomes final.

Importance

- Public comment gives those directly impacted by a proposed rule an opportunity to identify concerns, share real-world experience and evidence, and explain potential impacts or unintended consequences that the federal agency must consider as part of the rulemaking process.

Who can make Public Comment + How

Who?

- Everyone Can Make Public Comment; You do not have to be a policy expert, attorney, or Head Start professional to comment.
- Parents, families, staff, community members, organizations, and anyone interested in Head Start can make their voice heard.

How to make Public Comment

Ready to make your voice heard? Submitting your comment only takes a few minutes.

- Visit the Head Start proposed rule on Regulations.gov.
- Click the “Comment” button on the top, left of the page.
- Add your comment.
- Copy and paste your personalized comment into the comment box. You may also have the option to upload your comment as a file.
- Complete the required information.
- Follow the prompts to identify yourself and provide any required information.
- Review and submit.
- Take one last look at your comment, then click “Submit Comment.”
- Save your confirmation.
- After submitting, you’ll receive a Comment Tracking Number. Save it for your records.

A quick privacy note: Comments submitted through Regulations.gov become part of the public record. Avoid including personal or confidential information that you would not want made publicly available.

Sample Public Comment

Re: Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs (RIN: 0970-AD30)

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

I am writing to urge the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to protect the Head Start Program Performance Standards and withdraw the proposed rule.

[ADD 2–4 SENTENCES ABOUT WHY YOU CARE.] / Not sure what to say? Consider:

- Are you or someone you know a Head Start parent, educator or alum? Tell your story about how Head Start has impacted you, your family or community.
- Why is access to high-quality early learning important to you? Describe a specific experience.
- What do you want decision-makers to know about the children and families Head Start serves?

For more than 60 years, Head Start has helped children and families access high-quality early learning alongside health services, developmental supports and meaningful family engagement. The Head Start Program Performance Standards help make that comprehensive approach possible. The proposed rule would fundamentally change those standards and make it harder for Head Start programs to deliver the high-quality services children and families deserve.

Specifically, the proposal would:

- Eliminate research-based standards that support educational quality, child safety and healthy development.
- Remove evidence-based teacher-child ratio requirements that support individualized learning and safe learning environments.
- Reduce protections and services for infants, children with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Limit opportunities for parents to shape their local Head Start programs.
- Make it more difficult for communities, especially rural communities, to sustain high-quality Head Start services.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge HHS to withdraw this proposed rule.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

The Standards May Change.

Your Voice Still Matters.

Head Start has always been more than a program; it is a **promise** to **children and families**.

The NPRM is a proposal. It is not yet the final rule.

This is your **opportunity** to share what works, **identify** what could **be lost**, and **help** decision-makers **understand** how these proposed changes could **affect children, families, staff, and communities**.

You don't have to comment on **everything**.

Comment on what **you know**.

Speak from your **experience**.

Tell your story.

**Public comment
closes October 6,
2026.**

Head Start has spent more than 60 years evolving, learning, and building a comprehensive model around children and families.

Whatever your perspective on this proposed rule, this is the moment to be part of what comes next. Read it. Think about it. Talk about it.

And most importantly—make your voice part of the public record.



Thank You

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