



MISSION

The Arkansas Head Start Association's (AHSa) mission is to promote structured leadership and collaboration on the state and local levels by delivering equitable, innovative and quality services and training, technical assistance, and on-going support to the Head Start community in Arkansas.

VISION

The vision of the Arkansas Head Start Association is to demonstrate quality leadership by exhibiting compliance in providing high-quality educational services to children birth to five and their families, while maintaining a strong commitment to building competent and dependable staff.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 7, 2026

ARKANSAS HEAD START ASSOCIATION RESPONDS TO PROPOSED FEDERAL CHANGES TO HEAD START

The Arkansas Head Start Association is carefully reviewing the newly proposed federal rule titled "Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs."

Head Start programs understand firsthand that excessive paperwork and duplicative regulations can take valuable time and resources away from serving children and families. We support thoughtful efforts that give local programs greater flexibility, reduce unnecessary administrative work, and allow staff to focus more of their time on providing high-quality services. However, reducing administrative burden must never mean reducing quality, accountability, safety, or opportunity for children and families.

The proposal from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would significantly restructure the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Among its many provisions, it would make parent committees optional, remove or consolidate numerous federal requirements involving education, health, mental health, family engagement, staff development, transitions, community partnerships, monitoring, and program administration.

While some existing requirements remain in the Head Start Act or other federal and state laws, removing them from the Performance Standards may create uncertainty, inconsistent expectations among states, and significant differences in the services children and families receive based on where they live. Flexibility can be valuable, but every child deserves the same strong foundation of health, safety, educational quality, family engagement, and accountability.



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AHSA are particularly concerned about changes that could weaken the meaningful role parents have historically held in Head Start. Parent leadership is not an administrative burden, it is one of the principles that makes Head Start successful. Families must continue to have a genuine voice in decisions affecting their children and local programs.

We must also carefully examine the proposed 5 percent administrative cost limit. Head Start programs must maintain qualified leadership, fiscal accountability, technology, facilities, human resources, compliance systems, and other essential infrastructure. These responsibilities do not disappear simply because federal regulations are shortened. This limitation could be especially difficult for small and rural programs that already operate with limited staff and resources.

We welcome an honest discussion about modernizing Head Start and removing requirements that are truly duplicative or unnecessary. At the same time, changes of this magnitude must be guided by research, program experience, and the voices of parents, educators, directors, Tribal leaders, and community partners.

This is currently a proposed rule, not a final rule. The public-comment period gives Arkansas programs, families, and stakeholders an important opportunity to study the proposal and explain how these changes could affect services in their communities.

For more than 60 years, Head Start has helped children enter school healthier, better prepared, and ready to succeed while strengthening and empowering their families. In Arkansas, Head start and Early Head Start serves approximately 6200 children and families throughout our state. As this process moves forward, our guiding question must remain: Will each change improve outcomes and expand opportunities for children and families?

The Arkansas Head Start Association will continue reviewing the proposal, gathering input from programs throughout our state, and advocating for reforms that reduce unnecessary bureaucracy without compromising the comprehensive, high-quality services Arkansas children and families deserve.

Sara Wilhite
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