

Head Start Modernization

Puget Sound Educational Service District • 2026-27

What We Do

PSESD delivers instructional and administrative support to early learning, pre-K through post-secondary schools, and direct service to students and families across the Puget Sound region, including **more than 5,000 early learners through Early Head Start, Head Start, and ECEAP.**

Our Federal Funding

More than \$29 million in federal funding supports early learning, special education, child nutrition, and student and family programs across our region, primarily through Head Start and Early Head Start.

Protect and Strengthen Head Start and Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start provide early education along with health, nutrition and family support that strengthen children and families. PSESD serves over 5,000 early learners across Head Start, Early Head Start, and ECEAP, though eligible families in our region far outnumber available spots. Federal investment should protect and strengthen these programs, expand access for families who earn too much to qualify but too little to afford quality care, and address the workforce shortage caused by low pay.

Sustained federal investment in the early learning workforce, inclusive services for children with disabilities, and coordinated birth-to-five systems is critical to ensuring more children enter kindergarten healthy, supported and ready to succeed.

Four Head Start NPRM Impacts

1. Washington ratios could change dramatically.

The NPRM would replace Head Start-specific ratios and group sizes with state licensing standards. In Washington, a toddler classroom that currently serves 8 children with 2 teachers could potentially serve 14 children for ages 12-29 months or 20 children for ages 30-36 months.

For older toddlers, that could mean 12 more children in the same classroom.

2. Shared governance would be weaker.

Policy Councils remain required by the Head Start Act, but the proposal removes the current mandatory impasse process when the parent-led Policy Council and Governing Body disagree. The proposal does not replace that neutral resolution pathway.

Policy Council can remain in statute while parent authority is weakened in practice.

3. Comprehensive services lose protections.

The proposal removes many current timelines and follow-up requirements for developmental, health, dental, and mental-health services. It also removes several detailed protections for children with disabilities and relies more heavily on general federal and state law.

Early identification and follow-up are part of school readiness, not separate from it.

4. A 5% administrative cap is not efficiency.

The proposal lowers the administrative cap from 15% to 5%. Only about 3.7% of Head Start grants currently operate at or below 5%. Fiscal management, HR, background checks, IT, facilities, data, monitoring, and compliance still have to happen.

Cut duplicative paperwork, not the systems that keep programs safe and accountable.



Performance Standards NPRM Feedback

Modernize Head Start by removing unnecessary bureaucracy and investing in what works—not by reducing classroom quality, comprehensive services, family access, or parent governance.

Preserve meaningful federal quality standards.

Urge the Department of Health and Human Services and Administration for Children and Families to substantially revise the NPRM and retain protections for teacher-child ratios and group size, comprehensive services, health and safety, disability services, home visiting, and family engagement. Flexibility should expand ways to meet children's needs, not lower what children receive.

Protect true shared governance.

Retain Policy Council authority and require a neutral, enforceable impasse process when the Policy Council and Governing Body cannot agree. Parents should remain governance partners with meaningful decision-making authority.

Reject a one-size-fits-all 5% administrative cap.

Reduce redundant reporting and unnecessary federal processes instead. Administrative functions that protect children, staff, data, facilities, fiscal integrity, and federal funds do not disappear when the allowable percentage is lowered.

Expand Head Start through investment, not reductions in existing services.

Protect and sustain Head Start and Early Head Start funding. Congress should closely examine assumptions that additional enrollment can be generated through larger classes, fewer staff, shorter service hours, reduced coaching and home visiting, or fewer health and mental-health supports.

Protect access for families facing the greatest barriers.

Preserve reasonable verification flexibility for families who lack immediate documentation, especially families experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Paperwork should not delay or deny access for children who are otherwise eligible.

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