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SRCD Calls on HHS To Preserve Head Start's Program Quality and its Comprehensive Services to Children and Families

SRCD submitted comments on proposed changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, urging HHS to ground reforms in developmental science and preserve the quality and comprehensive services children and families receive. SRCD members with expertise in early childhood and Head Start, SRCD's policy staff, and SRCD's Executive Director, met with 11 congressional offices to share research linked to the proposal changes that indicate detrimental implications for child development, family engagement, and program access.



Washington, D.C. — [DATE] — The Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in response to its proposed rule, *Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs*. The proposal would substantially revise or eliminate more than 1,400 provisions that represent the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) including through increasing reliance on highly varied and generally more lax state standards.

SRCD's comments emphasize that Head Start was designed for a specific purpose: to promote the development and school readiness of children from low-income families, experiencing homelessness or in foster care systems, through comprehensive education, health, nutrition, family, and social services.

Quote from letter: "A slot is not an outcome, and the promise of "more slots" should not be treated as the singular measure of success. *What matters is what that slot provides: how many adults are available to respond to children, how much time children spend in the program, whether their teachers have the preparation and support they need, whether developmental concerns are identified and addressed, and whether comprehensive services remain accessible. Increasing nominal capacity does not, by itself, demonstrate that more children will receive a similarly effective Head Start experience. HHS's economic-focused logic risks treating reductions in services or professional capacity as program benefits simply because they lower costs, without fully accounting for what children and families may lose as a result."*

Drawing on decades of developmental science and input from SRCD members with expertise in Head Start and early childhood education, the comments examine proposed changes affecting child-staff ratios and group size, service duration, supports for dual language learners and children with disabilities, health and mental health services, curriculum and assessment, the Head Start workforce, and access to the program.

Read SRCD's Letter

SRCD urges HHS to withdraw and work with Congress to pursue a stronger evidence base for future reform built on consensus. Among its recommendations, SRCD calls for HHS to:

- Work with Congress to ensure that Head Start has the resources necessary to expand access without reducing the quality, intensity, or scope of services available to children and families;
- Comission an independent, nonpartisan National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) consensus study examining existing evidence on program quality, access, implementation, and child and family outcomes; and

- Support targeted research and structured conversations with programs, families, educators, and other stakeholders to distinguish genuinely unnecessary administrative requirements from standards with broad support that enable quality, accountability, or equitable access.

The comments were developed with the contributions of SRCD members who provided research, and reviewed drafts. We thank them for their time and support for this work.

SRCD Goes to Congress to Defend Head Start: SRCD also brought this evidence directly to policymakers on Capitol Hill. SRCD members with expertise in early childhood and Head Start, policy staff, and SRCD's Executive Director, met with 11 bipartisan congressional offices across key Senate and House authorizing and appropriations committees to discuss the proposed rule and share research on its potential implications for children and families. SRCD encouraged Congress to exercise its oversight role as HHS considers changes of this magnitude and emphasized that efforts to expand access or reduce administrative burden should preserve the quality, intensity, and comprehensive nature of Head Start services.

For questions, please reach out to SRCD's Policy Department at policy@srcd.org.