Director of Early Childhood and Family Services Report
June 2026

Federal Updates:

- The Grant/Cooperative Agreement for Grant# 03CH012600-03-00 has been awarded and released.
  Organization: NEW RIVER COMMUNITY ACTION, INC. Grant#: 03CH012600-03-00

- **Action Alert: Submit Comments on the Proposed Head Start Rule**

On May 12, 2026, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register titled Restoring Flexibility to Support Head Start Program Access. The proposed rule would rescind significant portions of the 2024 final rule, Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming, which established, for the first time, federal standards requiring Head Start programs to pay competitive wages and provide meaningful benefits to their staff. ACF is accepting public comments on the proposed rule through June 11, 2026. This is a critical opportunity for Head Start programs, staff, families, and advocates to make their voices heard. The federal rulemaking process requires ACF to review and consider all comments received before finalizing any rule — which means your comment matters.

What Does The Proposed Rule Do?

The NPRM proposes to eliminate two sets of requirements added to the Head Start Program Performance Standards by the 2024 final rule:

Wage standards (§ 1302.90(e)) — currently scheduled to take effect August 1, 2031. The 2024 rule required that, by that date, programs must: develop or update a pay scale for all staff; provide education staff with wages comparable to public preschool teachers in their local area; provide all staff with a salary sufficient to cover basic costs of living; and promote wage comparability across Head Start Preschool and Early Head Start settings. The proposed rule would eliminate all of these requirements.

Benefits standards (§ 1302.90(f)) — currently scheduled to take effect August 1, 2028. The 2024 rule required that, by that date, programs must: provide full-time staff with health care coverage, paid leave, and access to behavioral health services; facilitate access to health care coverage for part-time staff; and facilitate access to child care subsidies and student loan forgiveness for eligible staff, with a required reassessment of benefits packages every five years. The proposed rule would eliminate all of these requirements as well.

ACF frames these eliminations as restoring "local flexibility" and estimates the proposed changes would result in "over $2 billion in future cost savings for Head Start programs." NHSA strongly disputes the framing of reduced worker compensation as a "cost savings" — these are not administrative costs, they are the wages and benefits of the teachers, family service workers, and support staff on whom every Head Start program depends.

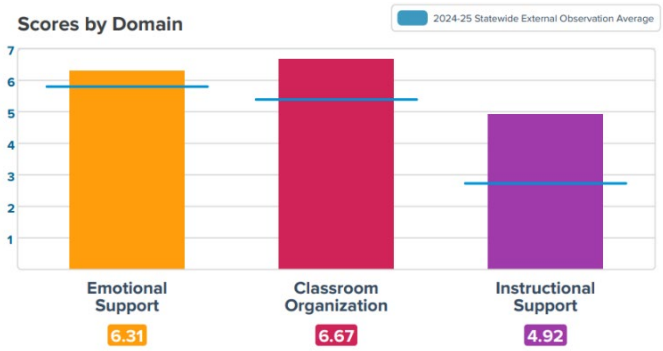
- **Fiscal Year 2026 (FY 2026) Head Start Funding Increase**-

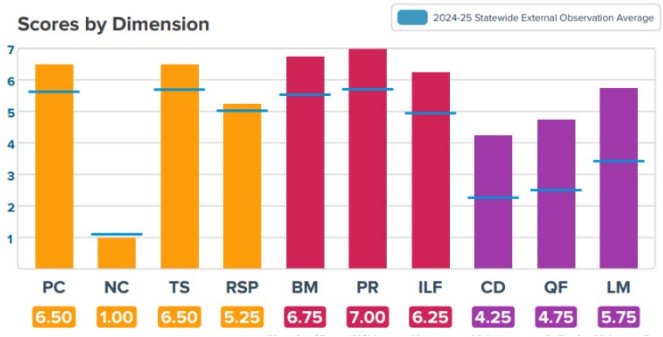
President Trump signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75), into law on February 3, 2026. The funding level for programs under the Head Start Act (the Act) is $12.375 billion, an increase of $85 million over FY 2025. This funding level provides all Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership grant recipients a 0.635% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

Head Start grant recipients who received funding in FY 2025 are eligible for COLA. Head Start Collaboration Offices are not eligible for COLA funding due to the statutory cap on their funding in the Head Start Act. Each eligible recipient will receive a COLA increase of 0.635% of the FY 2025 base funding level. Base funding excludes training and technical assistance funds and any one-time funding received during FY 2025. Recipients subject to competition for continued funding through the Designation Renewal System (DRS) are entitled to COLA funds through the end of their current award.

State Updates:

- Virginia Quality Rating internal and external Spring CLASS observations completed. I just wanted take a minute to celebrate one of our classrooms in Pulaski, (Holly Duncan) received an additional external CLASS observation this year. Teachstone completed a third external observation because Holly's scores are higher than the state averages. In case you are curious here are her observational scores.





NRCA Program Updates:

Enrollment- We ended the program year at 228. In my July report I will include a detailed report of enrollment at each site and if there is a waitlist. If you know of a child that would benefit from Head Start, applications for Head Start can be found online at the New River Community Action, Inc. webpage or any local public-school website.

Self -Assessment-Our Annual Program Self-Assessment is underway. We will update our 5-year goal progress and review program data to identify the next steps for those goals as well as the effectiveness of our program services to children and families this school year.

Service Area Updates:

- Attachments included this month:
  - Enrollment and Finance Dashboard reports.
- **Recruitment** for 2026-2027 continues. We are completing acceptance meetings and contacting families.
- Transition to kindergarten and End of year Celebrations have concluded.
- Summer Session at the Early Learning Center has begun.
- **Personnel-** Currently we have 4 LT, 2 AT and 3 CSA, 1 Specialist positions open. We do expect those numbers to change after meetings with staff.
- **Facilities** – New flooring has been installed at Fairlawn. Additionally, they have a new sandbox, a small log cabin and school bus being installed on their playground. Pearisburg fencing and playground project has been completed.
- We met our **in-kind contribution match** for the year.
- Alison Harris, Teaching Practices and Coaching Specialist, and I, will be attending the VaHSA Directors conference.

Respectfully Submitted,

Roni Fitch, Director of Early Childhood and Family Services