

To: Administration for Children and Families

From: Center for Applied Linguistics

Re: Proposed Rulemaking ACF-2026-0595 Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs

Date: September 25, 2025

Head Start programs provide high-quality early education and child development services to promote children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth for later success in school. Almost one-third of children enrolled in Head Start programs are dual language learners – that is, children who are learning their second language while still acquiring their first. Head Start programs represent a substantial public investment in the future of these children. It benefits us all to ensure that public funds are invested to most effectively meet the promise of Head Start in providing for a strong early education and development program for these children.

The proposed new regulations for Head Start Programs, as published in the August 7, 2026 Federal Register notice *Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs*, will require programs to conduct all education to children in English. While we strongly support pathways to English acquisition for all children in Head Start programs, the research findings on language acquisition are clear – language acquisition and academic achievement are hindered when children are cut off from their respective home languages. Mandating the required language of the program and removing linguistic support for children who are acquiring two or more languages hinders language acquisition and does not support the educational aims of the Head Start program. Implementing this regulatory change would be a step backward for the impact and outcomes for Head Start.

Research clearly shows that multilingual approaches to education result in better academic outcomes, support and nurture children, and strengthen home and family connections. Intentional incorporation of children's home languages and cultural resources in instruction is a critical evidence-based practice in early learning. Head Start programs should align with the research base and ensure that home language is incorporated into learning and development, including English language development.

We therefore strongly oppose the change proposed at § 1301.04(a), and urge the administration to continue the critical work of supporting dual language learners in Head Start programs in ways that is consistent with the overwhelming body of research on language acquisition.

"Promoting access, equity, and mutual understanding for linguistically and culturally diverse people around the world."