



Exclusive Op-Ed to LA Illuminator
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Talks of Eliminating Head Start Ignore Program's Far-reaching Impact

Head Start has helped millions of children and families across America build better futures. But until very recently, this cornerstone of early childhood education was at risk of being dismantled. While finalizing his proposed FY 26 budget, President Trump seriously considered the total elimination of Head Start funding—a move that would be detrimental to more than 20,000 Louisiana children and their families.

Fortunately, the President reversed course and the budget recommendations he presented did not include cutting Head Start. Much more work, however, remains at the Congressional level to preserve and protect this proven program that serves those most in need.

At Clover (formerly Kingsley House), we serve over 1,500 children from birth to age five through high-quality early care and education in Orleans and Jefferson parishes. We are also part of the Educare Learning Network, a national partnership of 25 high-quality early childhood schools committed to research-based practices and early learning excellence, with Head Start's evidence-based practices at the foundation.

But this isn't just about our organization—it's about an established framework that ensures all children have a fair start in life. Programs like ours and hundreds like it across the country, rely on federal Head Start and Early Head Start funding to perform this essential work.

Decades of research has shown that Head Start participation produces immediate and long-term positive outcomes for children, families, and communities. Providing education opportunities in safe, nurturing environments, accompanied by healthy meals, and comprehensive family-focused services, Head Start provides structure and an environment where young children, primarily from lower-income households, are provided the tools to succeed in school and beyond.

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Here's what's at stake:

More than one million parents depend on Head Start so they can go to work and support their families. Without it, many will be forced to choose between their job and their child's care—a choice no parent should have to make.

The loss of early education opportunities will have a severe ripple effect on local economies, employers, and employees across Louisiana. Lack of access to affordable childcare, most particularly for women in the workforce, leads to higher levels of absenteeism, reduced productivity and job loss.

In fact, the Louisiana Association of Business & Industry (LABI) sees early education as essential to ensuring a productive workforce, calling for expanded access to high quality, affordable early learning opportunities for all young children from birth to age 4, in centers that meet high standards of care. Head Start standards are the most rigorous in the nation.

Research shows that 80% of a child's brain development occurs in the first 1,000 days—from conception to their second birthday. Removing access to quality early childhood education during this period causes lasting developmental setbacks.

Eliminating Head Start for over 20,000 at-risk children in Louisiana will only widen the school readiness and opportunity gaps before they enter kindergarten. Economically speaking, children who require additional support ultimately cost school districts more in the long run, which provides a compelling rationale for investing in Head Start at the outset.

The data is clear: children who struggle to read in early grades are far more likely to fall behind, drop out, and face incarceration later in life.

As Congress now considers the President's proposed FY26 budget, the stakes could not be higher. Head Start has supported tens of millions of children and families over the past 60 years. We cannot afford to roll back that progress now.

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