

Head Start agencies in Mass. expect cuts to programs due to federal shutdown

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By [Amanda Beland](#)



Colored crayons sit on a table at Roxbury Head Start. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

Hundreds of Massachusetts children could lose access to Head Start early childhood education programs if the government shutdown continues into November.

Six of the state's 28 Head Start agencies are scheduled to receive federal funding on Nov. 1. But if the shutdown lingers, the money won't be

disbursed. Advocates and state leaders said they're worried that children and their families will suffer.

“We need the federal government to reopen up so that our families can go to work, our children can receive education and our teachers can go to work as well,” said Amy Kershaw, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care.

Head Start provides early childhood education program, primarily for low-income families. It also offers activities to improve health and well-being.

In Massachusetts alone, about 3,000 Head Start workers provide service to more than 10,000 kids. The vast majority of the funding — about \$189 million — comes from Congressional appropriations. This year, the state kicked in \$20 million, it's largest contribution in the program's history.

Kershaw said the state “can't make up for the loss in federal funds.”

Without that appropriation, those six programs across the state could face a stark choice of options, from reducing hours and staff to closing entirely.

Community Teamwork, a nonprofit community action agency, has a Head Start program in the Greater Lowell area that won't receive funding after Nov. 1. They serve about 550 kids each day.

CEO Carl Howell called the situation “pretty catastrophic” and said his agency is looking at ways to move money around and keep the program afloat. But that could jeopardize other initiatives.

“We wouldn't have any funds to pay for the services we provide, and no reassurances that we would be reimbursed for providing those services,” Howell said. “The reality is if there isn't any funding, it's hard to operate a childcare center without those funds.”

Howell said parents rely on Head Start programs so they can go to work.

"Rural parents now have to decide whether or not they have to take leave because they don't have stable childcare," he said.

Nationwide, [more than 130 Head Start programs](#) are at risk for losing their federal funding. Support for the program has been shaky from the Trump Administration. In the spring, it [delayed release of billions of dollars in funding for the program](#). The administration also tried to ban undocumented immigrants from using the program, [a directive that has since been blocked in court](#).

Michelle Haimowitz, Executive Director of Massachusetts Head Start Association, urged the federal government to immediately support the program.

"Classrooms are joyful, nurturing places where teachers are sharing that knowledge with the children every day," Haimowitz said. "And programs are gonna do everything they can, but may be forced to make some really impossible decisions as the shutdown extends. And we are hopeful and urging our federal partners to find a solution that fully funds Head Start."



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