2026-2027
NABE EXECUTIVE BOARD

President / Western Region Representative
Margarita Machado-Casas, Ph.D.
Professor of the Dual Language and English Learner Education Department at San Diego State University
Co-Chair of the National Latino Education Research and Policy Project (NLERAP)
(619) 594-2841
margarita@nabe.org

Vice-President / Member-at-Large
Josefina Villamil Tinajero, Ed.D.
Professor of Bilingual/Dual Language Education
The University of Texas at El Paso
(915) 204-3499
josefina@nabe.org

Treasurer / Member-at-Large
Judith M. Saurí, M.Ed.
Principal (Retired) - Richard Edwards Dual Language Fine & Performing Arts IB School, Chicago
(773) 368-5929
judy@nabe.org

Secretary / Central Region Representative
Belinda Treviño Schouten, Ph.D.
Co-Chair of the National Bilingual Student Education Organization (BESO), Education Consultant
(210) 387-4372
belinda@nabe.org

Eastern Region Representative
Maria Coady, Ph.D.
Goodnight Distinguished Professor in Educational Equity
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC
(352) 359-9995
maria@nabe.org

Eastern Region Representative
Montserrat Garibay
Consultant
(512) 627-2313
montserrat@nabe.org

Central Region Representative
Olivia Hernández, Ed.D.
TNTP Partner
Southwest Region
(956) 369-2762
olivia@nabe.org

Western Region Representative
Susana Ibarra Johnson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
New Mexico State University
(505) 977-3102
susana@nabe.org

Member-at-Large
Santiago V. Wood, Ed.D.
International Bilingual Education Professional Consultant;
President of Wood and Associates Inc.
(954) 729-4557
santiago@nabe.org

Executive Director
Nilda M. Aguirre, Ed.S.
(225) 773-2098
nmaguirre@nabe.org

National Association for Bilingual Education

August 21, 2026

RE: National Association for Bilingual Education Opposition to the Proposed English-Only Mandate for Head Start

Dear Secretary and Administration for Children and Families Leadership:

The National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) writes to express our strong and unequivocal opposition to the proposed changes to the Head Start regulations that would require programs to conduct all education for young children in English.

NABE firmly rejects an English-only mandate for Head Start.

The proposed § 1301.04(a) would require Head Start programs to conduct all education in English and to prioritize teaching English to children whose native language is not English and who do not speak English. The proposal further states that these changes would "minimize non-essential multilingual services" and redirect resources toward "English-language education and assimilation."

We strongly disagree.

English acquisition does not require English-only education.

NABE fully supports strong English language development for every child. But promoting English proficiency and mandating English-only education are not the same thing.

Research demonstrates that children can learn English while continuing to develop their home languages. Bilingualism does not confuse children or hinder their development. Effective bilingual and multilingual educational approaches recognize and build upon the language knowledge children already possess. They give children the opportunity to learn another language early in life, communicate in more than one language, and strengthen cognitive and academic development.

A child's home language is not a barrier to learning English. It is an asset.

For young children, language is deeply connected to learning, family, culture, identity, and development. Eliminating children's home languages from the educational environment does not strengthen Head Start. It risks weakening the connection among children, families, and schools.

Multilingual services are not "non-essential."

NABE categorically rejects the proposed characterization of multilingual services as "non-essential." They are essential to effectively serving multilingual children and their families.

Head Start serves children from diverse linguistic communities. Their languages represent the knowledge and culture they have acquired in their families and communities. A child's first language provides a foundation for learning English: children draw upon concepts developed in their first language to learn related and new concepts in English.

2026-2027
NABE EXECUTIVE BOARD

President / Western Region Representative
Margarita Machado-Casas, Ph.D.
Professor of the Dual Language and English Learner Education Department at San Diego State University
Co-Chair of the National Latino Education Research and Policy Project (NLERAP)
(619) 594-2841
margarita@nabe.org

Vice-President / Member-at-Large
Josefina Villamil Tinajero, Ed.D.
Professor of Bilingual/Dual Language Education
The University of Texas at El Paso
(915) 204-3499
josefina@nabe.org

Treasurer / Member-at-Large
Judith M. Saurí, M.Ed.
Principal (Retired) - Richard Edwards Dual Language Fine & Performing Arts IB School, Chicago
(773) 368-5929
judy@nabe.org

Secretary / Central Region Representative
Belinda Treviño Schouten, Ph.D.
Co-Chair of the National Bilingual Student Education Organization (BESO), Education Consultant
(210) 387-4372
belinda@nabe.org

Eastern Region Representative
Maria Coady, Ph.D.
Goodnight Distinguished Professor in Educational Equity
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC
(352) 359-9995
maria@nabe.org

Eastern Region Representative
Montserrat Garibay
Consultant
(512) 627-2313
montserrat@nabe.org

Central Region Representative
Olivia Hernández, Ed.D.
TNTP Partner
Southwest Region
(956) 369-2762
olivia@nabe.org

Western Region Representative
Susana Ibarra Johnson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
New Mexico State University
(505) 977-3102
susana@nabe.org

Member-at-Large
Santiago V. Wood, Ed.D.
International Bilingual Education Professional Consultant;
President of Wood and Associates Inc.
(954) 729-4557
santiago@nabe.org

Executive Director
Nilda M. Aguirre, Ed.S.
(225) 773-2098
nmaguirre@nabe.org

National Association for Bilingual Education

This formidable asset should not be disregarded or minimized in the name of assimilation.

We reject the premise that assimilation should be an educational objective for Head Start.

Head Start's goal should be to help children thrive to their fullest potential—not to make them less connected to the language and culture of their families.

The proposal contradicts the broader mission of Head Start, which centers on supporting early learning and development, health, and family well-being.

The Head Start Act requires programs to support children with limited English proficiency in making progress toward English acquisition while also making meaningful progress in broader developmental and educational domains. An English-only mandate moves in the opposite direction.

Head Start is designed to support the whole child, not simply to teach English. A child who is developing English may already possess substantial knowledge, vocabulary, reasoning skills, and conceptual understanding in another language.

Limited English proficiency does not mean limited ability.

Head Start policies should allow educators to build upon children's existing knowledge while intentionally developing English.

Families must remain active participants in the educational process.

Head Start recognizes families as essential partners in children's education. For multilingual families, language is central to that partnership.

Parents should be able to participate meaningfully in their children's education, and children should be able to maintain meaningful communication with their families in their home languages.

An English-only mandate risks creating unnecessary distance between home and school, contradicting Head Start's commitment to engaging families as children's first and most influential teachers. That is not consistent with strong family engagement or effective early childhood education.

English proficiency and multilingualism can—and should—coexist.

NABE rejects the false choice between English proficiency and bilingualism. We can expect children to develop strong English proficiency without requiring them to abandon their home languages.

We can promote English while supporting Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Haitian Creole, Korean, Portuguese, Somali, Mixtec, Zapotec, and the hundreds of other languages spoken by children and families across the United States. In an era of globalization, multilingualism is an important asset for our nation and can expand children's future educational and employment opportunities.

There is no educational justification for forcing children and families to choose between English proficiency and their home languages.

2026-2027
NABE EXECUTIVE BOARD

President / Western Region Representative
Margarita Machado-Casas, Ph.D.
Professor of the Dual Language and English Learner Education Department at San Diego State University
Co-Chair of the National Latino Education Research and Policy Project (NLERAP)
(619) 594-2841
margarita@nabe.org

Vice-President / Member-at-Large
Josefina Villamil Tinajero, Ed.D.
Professor of Bilingual/Dual Language Education
The University of Texas at El Paso
(915) 204-3499
josefina@nabe.org

Treasurer / Member-at-Large
Judith M. Saurí, M.Ed.
Principal (Retired) - Richard Edwards Dual Language Fine & Performing Arts IB School, Chicago
(773) 368-5929
judy@nabe.org

Secretary / Central Region Representative
Belinda Treviño Schouten, Ph.D.
Co-Chair of the National Bilingual Student Education Organization (BESO), Education Consultant
(210) 387-4372
belinda@nabe.org

Eastern Region Representative
Maria Coady, Ph.D.
Goodnight Distinguished Professor in Educational Equity
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC
(352) 359-9995
maria@nabe.org

Eastern Region Representative
Montserrat Garibay
Consultant
(512) 627-2313
montserrat@nabe.org

Central Region Representative
Olivia Hernández, Ed.D.
TNTP Partner
Southwest Region
(956) 369-2762
olivia@nabe.org

Western Region Representative
Susana Ibarra Johnson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
New Mexico State University
(505) 977-3102
susana@nabe.org

Member-at-Large
Santiago V. Wood, Ed.D.
International Bilingual Education Professional Consultant;
President of Wood and Associates Inc.
(954) 729-4557
santiago@nabe.org

Executive Director
Nilda M. Aguirre, Ed.S.
(225) 773-2098
nmaguirre@nabe.org

National Association for Bilingual Education

NABE calls for the rejection of the English-only mandate.

The National Association for Bilingual Education calls upon the Administration for Children and Families to withdraw the proposed English-only requirement for Head Start.

Federal policy should instead:

- Promote strong English language development;
- Support children's continued development of their home languages;
- Invest in well-trained bilingual and multilingual educators;
- Support linguistically and culturally responsive early childhood education;
- Strengthen meaningful family engagement; and
- Recognize multilingualism as an asset—not a burden.

NABE will not support policies that equate English acquisition with assimilation. We will not support policies that characterize multilingual services as "non-essential." And we will not support policies that require young children to sacrifice their home language in order to succeed in school.

English proficiency matters. But English-only education is not the answer.

Bilingualism is an asset. Multilingualism is an asset. Our children are an asset. Head Start should build upon those strengths—not eliminate them.

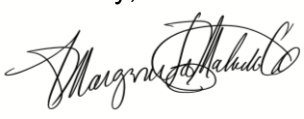
NABE is calling on and encouraging all members and affiliates to submit their own public comments opposing the proposed English-only mandate. The public comment period closes October 6, 2026. Every comment matters, and we urge our entire network to make its voice heard before the deadline.

How to submit a public comment

Comments must identify the Administration for Children and Families and include docket number ACF-2026-0595 and/or RIN 0970-AD30. Comments may be submitted through the Federal eRulemaking Portal at www.regulations.gov or by email to Deregulation@acf.hhs.gov. When submitting by email, include the docket number and/or RIN in the subject line. Comments become part of the public record and may be posted publicly without change.

The National Association for Bilingual Education stands firmly and unequivocally against an English-only mandate for Head Start.

Sincerely,



Dr. Margarita Machado
President
National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
On behalf of the National Association for Bilingual Education