

*Prepared April 2020*

## **HEAD START FUNDING FAQ FOR FAMILIES**

### **What were the factors that led to this loss of Head Start funding for DCPS?**

Due to the shifting demographics of our schools that resulted in fewer Head Start-eligible students — as well as implementing systemic changes to enhance student supervision and safety — DCPS anticipated a reduction in Head Start funding for Fiscal Year 2021 and has been planning as such. Following an evaluation of our re-application process for Head Start funds, we have come to the decision to voluntarily relinquish our Head Start grant.

This decision will not reduce the number of Pre-K seats at DCPS schools next school year; it allows us to better strive for exemplary programming in all of our Pre-K classrooms. Access to high-quality, affordable childcare is a critical need for families across the district, and DCPS is proud to provide free, universal Pre-K in a school environment to ensure all of our young learners are ready for kindergarten.

Head Start grants typically last for a five-year grant period, and DCPS is at the end of the current five-year grant cycle. Ahead of the conclusion of this grant cycle, DCPS' Early Childhood Education Division (ECED) completed a comprehensive community needs assessment and review of services and schools to ensure that comprehensive services will be available at schools with the highest need. DCPS will have the opportunity to apply for Head Start funding in future years.

### **Will the loss of Head Start funding result in staff reductions?**

Yes. DCPS anticipates that positions supported by Head Start funds will be eliminated at the end of the current school year in June. This will include administrative staff and some paraprofessionals in the classroom. In total, 49 paraprofessional positions will be eliminated, and 34 ECED positions will be eliminated. Upon completion of all competitions, affected staff will be informed of their status and given the opportunity to apply for vacancies in alternate roles. The number of Pre-K classrooms at DCPS or teachers employed will not change.

### **Did student safety issues account for relinquishing Head Start funding?**

Head Start is a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the agency gave DCPS only a short period of time to implement student safety considerations in order to receive grant funding for FY21. DCPS has an unusually large Head Start model compared to other grantees since we do not differentiate between Head Start and non-Head Start Pre-K classrooms. Student supervision and safety is a priority for DCPS, but in order to compete for Head Start funding in future years, we need additional time to make the systemic changes recommended for grantees. With robust local investments, DCPS will not reduce the number of PreK seats next school year and will continue to provide high quality instructional programming to prepare our young learners for kindergarten.

**Can you elaborate on the safety and supervision incidents in Head Start Classrooms?**

In some instances, a student was left unsupervised for a period of time. We recognized a need to reinforce supervision practices with our youngest learners and have undertaken several changes in practice in order to ensure that all PK students are appropriately supervised at all times. These changes include training and professional development for teachers, ongoing monitoring, and the provision of additional educational aides in order to ensure that all PK classrooms are staffed with two adults at all times.

**For students who are enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten 3, will this impact their enrollment for next year?**

No. The enrollment processes are the same for School Year 2020-2021. This decision will not reduce the number of Pre-K seats at DCPS schools next school year. It allows us to better strive for exemplary programming in all of our Pre-K classrooms.

**For prospective students and parents, will anything shift for enrollment for next year?**

No. The enrollment processes are the same for School Year 2020-2021. DCPS is proud to offer universal Pre-K to any family living in the District of Columbia.

**How will this impact our school's budget?**

In a school's budget process, early childhood education is denoted with a teacher and paraprofessional per classroom. This allocation is not shifting for the next school year. As a part of our work to increase equity and consistency, DCPS' central office team is currently working to develop a budget that ensures appropriate resources to all schools in order to support high-quality Pre-K across the district.

While changes in the Head Start status of your school will not directly impact your school budget, you may see a decrease in centrally-supported services (ECED instructional coaching, family services, classroom materials, etc.) if your school shifts from Head Start to non-Head Start status.

**How is DCPS maintaining wraparound services for Pre-K families when Head Start funding is being eliminated?**

All DCPS Pre-K families will continue to have access to the mental health supports and social work services offered through the school community. Additionally, ECED will work to ensure that families furthest from opportunity, and those with the greatest needs, continue to receive support services as needed. ECED seeks to connect these families to community-based providers, as appropriate, and will work closely with the DCPS School Supports Division to ensure that existing school-based mental health and social service providers are prepared to support Pre-K children and families.