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Head Start's effectiveness

One of the most impactful moments I have witnessed in 32 years of working in education, five of them with Head Start, happened recently at a family event. Our home visiting program regularly gathers to share a meal, engage in a developmental activity and create a community for families.

Two girls were completing a puzzle together. The younger of the two said, “Kids make fun of my hijab at school. Do they ever do that to you?” The supportive conversation that followed happened because there was space for it to happen. For a young girl growing up isolated from other Muslim children and attending a school where a hijab is something to tease someone about, it is everything.

In our home visiting program, almost 90% of the parents are newcomers to the United States, who speak over 10 different languages. To accommodate this, we have interpreters and devices that make communication, culture, connection and community possible.

The federal Administration for Children and Families, in [its proposal](#) for reducing “the federal burden” on Head Start programs, wants to remove all federal regulations “regarding home-based program design, instructional activities for home visits, curriculum, staff support, adapting curriculum, and group socialization structure.” But as standards are lowered, funds will be, too, resulting in families having fewer opportunities to connect. That would diminish the effectiveness of the program.

The administration’s [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) also states that instruction must be delivered in English, and if a child does not speak English, then there must be a priority to teach the language. Educators agree that instruction works best when children first learn concepts in their home language while gradually building skills in English. Not honoring a family’s home language would mean the welcome and validation that families feel in the program would be erased. The funding for the interpreters and translators would be eliminated.

This is just two of the hundreds of standards that the proposed rulemaking has put on the chopping block. The current standards have been developed by experts in the field of education and have proved effective through the program’s success rate.

If the standards are deleted, so will opportunities for two young girls to connect over a puzzle and find value in who they are.

— *Cara Craig, education specialist, Childcare Network of Evanston*