REIA #26-27   School Health Services Head Start Program Nursing Services

Requesting Agency/Department(s)

Department of Health and Human Services

Dollar Amount

$252,274

Funding Source

General Fund/Undesignated Reserves

Finding

The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that *Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #26-27, School Health Services Head Start Program Nursing Services*, advances racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County, as the funds will largely support young children and families demonstrating the greatest expressed needs. The Head Start program[1] provides services to income-eligible families with young children aged birth to five at no cost. Eligibility is determined by family income, with those living slightly above, at, or below the federal poverty level being eligible to apply. Families who receive public assistance such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), and those with children in foster care or children who are homeless, also qualify for the Head Start program and its services, regardless of income.[2] Due to historical and systemic factors, children and families often identified as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) are often the largest beneficiaries of the Head Start program, in addition to those whose primary language is not English.

Background

Purpose

The purpose of SA #26-27 is to maintain funding for five contractual nurses to continue providing health services in alignment with Head Start Program Performance Standards and Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) requirements.

In FY25, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) School Health Services Head Start Program received $707,405 in federal Head Start grant funds, enabling the program to serve 648 students across 30 sites through the support of seven contractual nurses. In FY26, the program will receive $403,307, representing a 43% reduction in funding, which will enable the program to serve only 180 students. This budget shortfall is a result of federal government grant reductions. The actual number of students enrolled in the program for FY26 is 450, requiring additional funding of $252,274 to support five contractual nurses at a rate of $64.52/hour for 782 hours per year.

Additional Background Information (Optional)

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Prekindergarten/Head Start programs offer high-quality educational experiences for income-eligible children, preparing them with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for success in kindergarten and beyond. MCPS offers part-day and full-day programs at schools across the County. Entrance into a Prekindergarten and Head Start program is determined by age, income, and residency.[3] Children who will be three or four years old by September 1 are eligible to apply for the programs.

HHS's School Health Services provides health services to Head Start students through the employment of contractual nurses. These contractual nurses serve as additional support to the core team of merit Head Start health staff, ensuring that all enrolled children receive timely screenings, chronic condition management, medication administration, health education, and coordination of follow-up care. The continual employment of staff provided by this SA request is essential to maintain compliance with federal mandates, safeguard student health and safety, and ensure access to health services across all of the County's Head Start sites.

Relevant REIAs and Other Assessments

ORESJ has conducted REIAs since 2021. The following REIAs are relevant to supplemental appropriation #26-27.

- REIA #24-44 Department of Health and Human Services Increase Somatic Services at Montgomery County Public Schools
  https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/24-44.pdf
- REIA #23-68 – Amendment to the FY23 Operating Budget for Maryland School-Based Health Center Program
  https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/23-68.pdf

- REIA #22-24 High Quality Early Childhood Inclusion
  https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-24.pdf
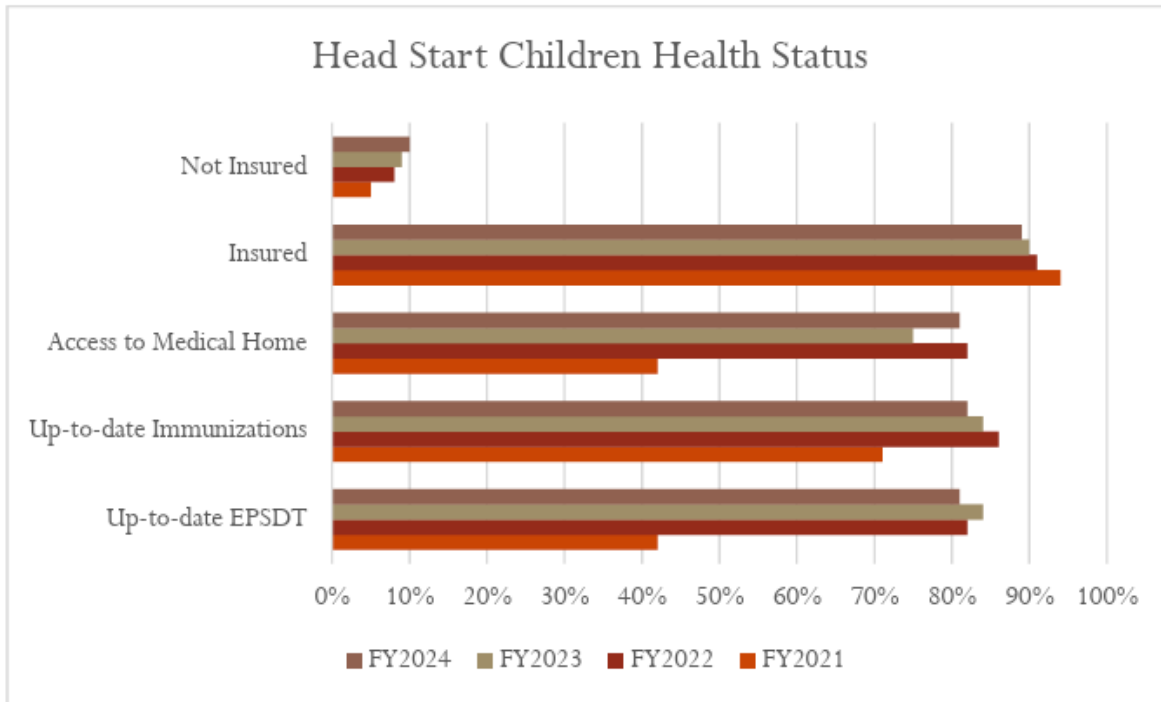
Analysis

Demographic Profile (Optional)

The racial makeup of children enrolled in Montgomery County Head Start programs has remained fairly consistent over the past five years, with BIPOC children representing the largest share of enrollees.[4]
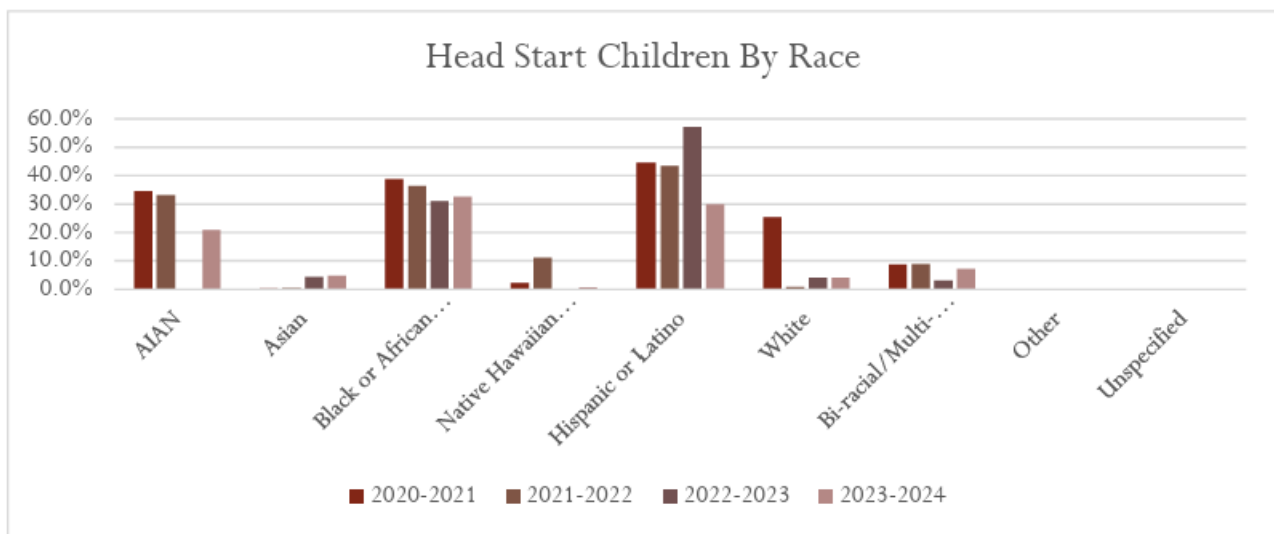
Head Start Children By Race

Data Source: Montgomery County Head Start Community Assessment 2025
https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/Montgomery%20County%20Head%20Start%20Community%20Assessment%20_2025FINAL.pdf

Because of Head Start's mission to support children and families through a comprehensive services model, including health services, most children enrolled in the program had medical insurance and an identified medical home from 2020 to 2024, performing better than their peers not enrolled in the program.[5]

Data Source: Montgomery County Head Start Community Assessment 2025
https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/Montgomery%20County%20Head%20Start%20Community%20Assessment%20_2025FINAL.pdf

ORESJ Research & Analysis

Despite nationwide[6] and local trends[7] of decreasing enrollment resulting from declining birth rates and immigration enforcement policies, current funding streams fail to meet the present demand for programs such as Head Start. As such, children and families who may be eligible for these services may not be able to access them, as resources are not presently available— potentially leading to the generation of waitlists. Additionally, uncertainty at the federal level[8] regarding continued funding for grants provided by the Head Start program could also jeopardize program enrollment. With inflation increasing the costs of services and care, and federal resources becoming increasingly scarce, Montgomery County may need to consider providing a more permanent funding stream that extends beyond this one-time supplemental request for the continuation of these services.

Caveats

This REIA has been compiled using the best available information at the time of writing, including department responses to the Racial Equity and Social Justice template and research conducted by ORESJ Policy Team Analysts. While the assessment examines specific racial equity and social justice impacts of the funding request, it cannot fully address all systemic inequities that affect the communities in question, nor do we seek to examine impacts outside the scope of the funding request. We recommend using this assessment as a starting point for discussions about the program's impact on advancing racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County.

References

[1] https://headstart.gov/programs/article/head-start-approach

[2] https://headstart.gov/how-apply

[3] https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/dtecps/earlychildhood/prek/

[4] https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/Montgomery%20County%20Head%20Start%20Community%20Assessment%20_2025FINAL.pdf

[5] Ibid.

[6] https://www.brookings.edu/articles/declining-public-school-enrollment/

[7] https://wjla.com/news/local/montgomery-county-schools-enrollment-declines-birth-rates-down-maryland-school-system-trend-continues-budget-manager-donald-connelly-executive-marc-elrich-births-data-numbers-enrolling

[8] https://nhsa.org/about-nhsa/newsroom/press-releases/extended-government-shutdown-impacts-head-start-programs/