



Office of the County Administrator

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To: Boulder County Board of Commissioners

From: Akane Ogren, Head Start Division Manager
Jana Petersen, County Administrator

Re: Child Care program continuation

Date: April 15, 2025

Summary

Boulder County received a federal notice in early March that our agency's grant application for Head Start funding for the 2025-2026 school year has been disqualified. Boulder County Commissioners gave direction at an administrative meeting on March 10 for staff to attempt to appeal the federal decision. We also received guidance to develop options for continuation of a child care program for next school year, even without federal grant funding. The purpose of this memo is to:

1. Present options for immediate Commissioner direction for the 2025-2026 school year
2. Offer preliminary considerations on longer-term options for the 2026-2027 school year and beyond

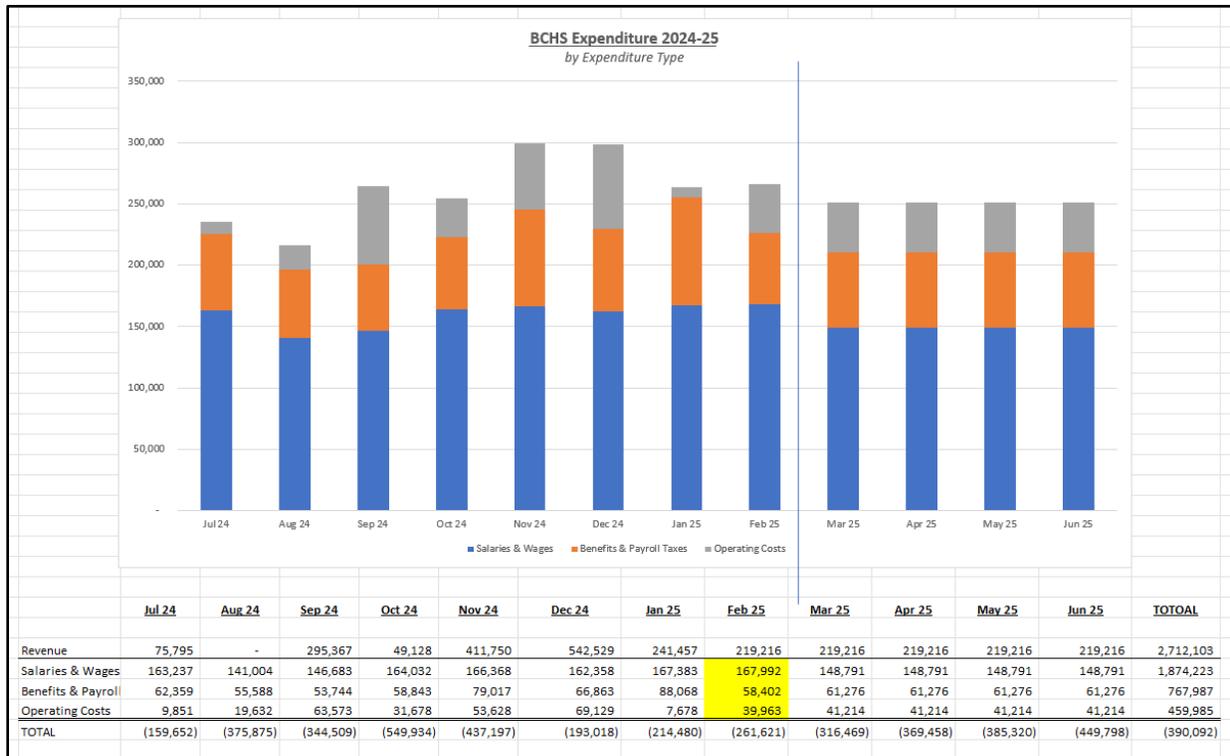
Background

For the 2024-2025 school year, Head Start is serving 110 preschoolers at three locations: Woodlands, Dagny and Mapleton.

The cost of the 2024-2025 school year Head Start program is expected to be \$3.1M. Program revenue sources and expenses are:

Funding Source	Amount
Federal Head Start Grant	\$1,561,229
Boulder County GF transfer	\$727,204
CCAP	\$180,875
Universal Pre-K	\$149,645
CCS	\$11,944
Buell	\$71,000
Donation	\$10,206
TOTAL	\$2,712,103.00

Expense	Amount
Payroll	\$2,642,210
Operating	\$459,985
TOTAL	\$3,102,195.00



Current staffing (without vacancies): 33 Staff Total

- 1 Division Manager (DM)
- 1 Education Services Manager (ESM)
- 1 Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (ECMHC)
- 1 Health Safety Nutrition Coordinator (HSNC)
- 1 Center Director (CD)
- 3 Family Advocates (FA)
- 7 Teachers (T)
- 6 Teacher Assistants (TA)
- 8 Classroom Aides (CA)
- 3 Kitchen Aides (KA)
- 1 Administrative Assistant

Options for 2025-2026 School Year

Staff have not yet received a response to the request to reconsider our eligibility for federal Head Start funding for the 2025-2026 school year. As the current grantee, Boulder County is expected to receive additional guidance from the Office of Head Start on [transitioning Head Start to another provider](#). Without additional guidance, it's difficult to predict what will happen with the Head Start program in the Boulder Valley School District area for the 2025-2026 school year.

The top priority for staff is to maintain the connection to the federal Head Start program because of the financial and program supports Head Start offers. If the county's request for reconsideration is

denied, then continuation of a child care program through Boulder County would need to be renamed as a different program. Families with children currently enrolled in Head Start would be offered child care under transitional management, and they could select a provider other than Head Start.

Staff researched licensing requirements and is confident current licensing can be maintained with a change in program name. Staff also understands the need to continue to address program deficiencies in the areas of safety and communication that led to the Head Start grant not being renewed.

Finally, staff reviewed the core reasons to continue a child care program, particularly if it may be in competition with a different Head Start provider. Staff believes there is value in Boulder County government continuing to provide child care because of the direct connection to children and families we serve through other programs. No other child care providers can provide the same range of referrals and integrated services as Boulder County through the FAs, ECMHC, HSNC, and education staff who work in our child care program. In addition, federal Head Start staff and funding are being cut, creating concern about the stability of the program nationwide.

With these parameters in mind, three options make sense to consider for the next school year. Under any option, staff recommends ending service at one location next school year. This will address some of the remaining safety and communications program deficiencies by consolidating locations.

Option 1: One site only

Staff believes a small program at one site could operate using existing county resources for 2025-2026, without an increase in funding. This program would serve about 32 preschoolers in two classrooms. This model requires about 10 staff, meaning there would be a large number of layoffs. A Center Director would run the program, with a Family Advocate in partnership or as a direct report. ECMHC and HSNC would report to the Center Director, along with two Teachers and Teacher's Aides. The Classroom Aides and Kitchen Aide could be staff or hourly roles. The Center Director would report to a different Division Manager within Community Services, eliminating the current Head Start Division Manager role. Estimated cost: \$775,000

Option 2: Two sites

A larger program at two locations also is a viable option for the 2025-2026 school year and would require additional local funding. This program would serve about 80 preschoolers in five classrooms. With the added challenge of operating across disbursed sites, additional management staffing is required. This model requires retaining the Head Start Division manager role, along with two Center Directors and Family Advocates. Three more classrooms requires three more Teachers and Teacher's Aides, along with three Classroom Aides and one Kitchen Aide that could be hourly roles. The total staff size would be about 24, requiring fewer layoffs. There also would be a need for additional expenses for staff training/coaching outside of the Head Start system. Estimated cost: \$2M

Option 3: Do nothing

Boulder County could end its child care program. This would save the county roughly \$727,000 a year. This option is inconsistent with preliminary direction received in March and would result in layoffs of about 33 staff. Some families may experience a challenge in finding child care, if they do not wish to transfer to the interim provider.

Not viable option: Keep all three sites

Staff considered whether operation of all three sites is viable for the fall. Retaining all three sites poses safety and communication challenges that staff believe can't be addressed successfully during the months before school begins in the fall.

Direction requested: Do Commissioners prefer staff to pursue Option 1, 2 or 3 for the 2025-2026 school year? Staff recommends option 2.

Considerations for the 2026-2027 School Year

With additional time for planning and the potential for more certainty in federal funding sources, staff believes other options are worth considering. No BOCC direction is requested at this time. Staff anticipates bringing forward more specific information for discussion in the coming months. These long-term options could include:

- Reapplication for Head Start federal funding for the 2026-2027 school year as a standalone program.
- Recruiting a partner to collaborate on a local child care program, with or without federal funding.
- Designing a standalone program, with a goal to own, operate and maintain a preschool facility to ensure future stability and improve operational efficiency.

Next steps

With Commissioner direction, staff will immediately begin planning for the 2025-2026 school year. Communication of this direction to impacted staff and families will be a top priority, followed by communications to other county staff and partner agencies.