Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

The True Cost of Reopening Head Start:
Stories from the Front Lines

As many Head Start programs prepare to re-open for a new school year and others continue providing in-person services over the summer, the reality of additional COVID-related costs continues to become clearer. This summer, NHSA is meeting virtually with Head Start directors from each state and territory to hear firsthand of the latest challenges they are facing with respect to reopening or staying open. Their stories underscore the urgency of securing $1.7 billion in COVID-19 relief funding to help address additional costs.

Challenges with Facilities

“...My program partners with our school district, but this year the school will only have room for our four year olds in order to comply with social distancing requirements. We are trying to find a place for our three year-olds, but so far have not been successful.”

“...Our programs have strong partnerships with the public schools. Even so, we’ve lost our classroom space in two elementary schools because they need the additional classroom space to spread out their kindergarteners. So now we are struggling to quickly find new space that is affordable and safe. This is disruptive and expensive.”

“...We rent space from school districts who are now closing. It is unclear whether we will be able to still access this space.”

Challenges Specific to Rural and Native Communities

“...We serve four communities that are very remote. We have organized virtual trainings led by an Oklahoma company that specializes in trauma training for Native communities. We desperately need this training, given what we are seeing with our children and families, but we are worried staff won’t have Internet access to be able to participate. Also, quarantine restrictions between villages have been strict to try and keep the virus at bay. It is unclear whether these restrictions will prevent in-person training. Additional transportation is also a challenge given how remote we are.”
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**Staff Health and Turnover**

“Staff mental and physical health have always been a top priority, but recently, we are seeing it play out in new ways. It is difficult to know what is the ‘right’ thing to do when official guidance is always changing and school district plans are uncertain, all of which is taking a toll. When we announced we were reopening our center in August, we had three teachers say they were not coming back. I expect more will do so in upcoming weeks. Now I have to scramble to find qualified replacement teachers, which is not easy.”

**Cost of Cleaning and Cleaning Supplies**

“Cleaning and cleaning supplies are a bigger investment in our budget than we’d originally anticipated a few months ago. We’ve created a tracker to get a better sense of how many supplies are needed, but we know that costs will be increasing once more students enroll in the fall.”

The price of cleaning supplies has tripled in recent months. We can’t even get the products we typically use due to shortages. We’re finding that alternative products can have restrictions on how they are used in places where young children touch, which takes more staff time to use properly. We are also looking at other additional options like UV cleaning and sprayers.”

**Additional Transportation Costs**

“Since our children are so young, we need an adult on each bus in addition to the driver. Since the maximum bus capacity is lowered to six, we’re only able to have five children on each bus. This is incredibly expensive!”

**Technology Needs**

“We have a new understanding of the financial challenges faced by staff. We were surprised how many programs had to supply technology support for staff for them to be able to deliver services remotely.”

When we first shut down, we knew staff needed tech support, such as tablets and software, to be able to work remotely with their children. What we did not anticipate was how many staff also needed broadband support so they can actually use the online learning tools effectively. This continues to be a significant need.”