

NATION & WORLD EXTRA



Alexis Ruiz and Adriana Garcia set out fresh fruits and vegetables for lunch at John B. Wright Elementary School in Tucson, Arizona. The Tucson Unified School District receives federal funding for local farm produce.

Head Start preschool programs hit by cuts

Parents, advocates worry about future

Richard Cowan
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Head Start preschool programs for low-income U.S. children are scrambling to cope with funding cuts and delays, as they feel the squeeze of President Donald Trump’s cost-cutting drive.

Local administrators and advocates for the program that serves nearly 800,000 children and families say the closure of five U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offices that oversee the program in Chicago, Boston, New York, Seattle and San Francisco has led to delays in processing grant applications.

Adding to the strain, Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency released \$943 million less in congressionally-approved funding for distribution through April 15 compared with the previous year, according to congressional Democrats’ most recent estimates.

The delays left hundreds of families searching for costly private care for children through the age of five, according to Head Start association executives in Wisconsin, Illinois and Washington state.

Administrators have sought bank loans or other lines of credit to meet their payrolls, as grant approval deadlines loomed.

Congress appropriated \$12.27 billion to the program in the fiscal year ending September 30. That funds 17,711 Head Start centers across the country, according to Tommy Sheridan, deputy director of the National Head Start Association.

“The administration continues to slow-walk grants,” Jennie Mauer, executive director of the Wisconsin Head Start Association, said in a telephone interview.

A Department of Health and

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Maria Castro, who has some of her children enrolled in the Head Start early education program for low-income Americans, sits for a portrait as her partner and children read books at the Educare library in Chicago, Illinois. JIM VONDRUSKA/REUTERS

FOOD FIGHT

Health secretary calls for healthier school meals as Trump cancels program that funds current ones

Renee Hickman
REUTERS

TUCSON, AZ – First-graders at John B. Wright elementary school in Tucson bounced into the brightly lit lunchroom, chattering with friends as they grabbed trays featuring juicy mandarin oranges, cherry tomatoes and butter lettuce, all grown at nearby farms that coax fresh produce from the Sonoran Desert.

Those fruit and vegetables were supplied with the help of the federal Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program, which was set to distribute \$660 million to school systems and child care facilities in 2025, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The USDA abruptly canceled the program in March as part of President Donald Trump’s plans to gut the federal government.

“People think it’s crappy food, it’s processed, unhealthy, they think it’s mystery meat,” said Lindsay Aguilar, who heads up the Tucson Unified School District’s nutrition program. “Parents associate it from when we were in school 23 years ago. It is completely different from what it used to be.”

The Trump administration’s mixed messages on school meals – funding cuts alongside calls for healthier, and more costly options – create a challenge for those involved with school nutrition programs, they told Reuters. As part of his Trump-inspired campaign to “Make



America Healthy Again,” Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has accused schools of feeding children unhealthy food laden with food dyes and additives. “We need to stop poisoning our kids and make sure that Americans are once again the healthiest kids on the planet,” Kennedy said at an event with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins in late April adding that the two agencies would be “looking at” school meals. Aguilar is skeptical. “In my opinion, if

“Parents associate (school lunch) from when we were in school 23 years ago. It is completely different from what it used to be,” says Lindsay Aguilar, food service director for Tucson Unified School District.

PHOTOS BY CAITLIN O’HARA/
REUTERS

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Iran faces U.S. without Plan B as nuclear red lines collide

Sanctions, military threat, unrest possible without deal

Parisa Hafezi and John Irish
REUTERS

DUBAI – While rising U.S.-Iran tensions over Tehran’s uranium enrichment jeopardize nuclear talks, three Iranian sources said on May 20 that the clerical leadership lacks a clear fallback plan if efforts to resolve a decadeslong dispute collapse.

With negotiations faltering over clashing red lines, Iran may turn to China and Russia as a “Plan B,” the sources said, but with Beijing’s trade war with Washington and Moscow distracted with its war in Ukraine, Tehran’s back-up plan appears shaky.

“The plan B is to continue the strategy before the start of talks. Iran will avoid escalating tensions, it is ready to defend itself,” a senior Iranian official said. “The strategy also includes strengthening ties with allies like Russia and China.”

On May 20, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei rejected U.S. demands to halt uranium enrichment as “excessive and outrageous,” warning that the talks are unlikely to yield results.

After four rounds of talks aimed at curbing Iran’s nuclear program in return for sanctions relief, multiple stumbling blocks remain. Tehran refuses to

ship all of its highly enriched uranium stockpile abroad or engage in discussions over its ballistic missile program, two of the Iranian officials and a European diplomat said.

The lack of trust and President Donald Trump’s decision to pull out of a 2015 accord with world powers has also raised the importance for Iran of getting guarantees that Washington will not renege on a future accord.

Compounding Tehran’s challenges, Iran’s clerical establishment is grappling with mounting crises – energy and water shortages, a plummeting currency, military losses among regional allies, and rising fears of an Israeli

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