

Region II Head Start Association Board Report – January 2026

Across Region II — New York, New Jersey, Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico — Head Start Associations continue to provide critical leadership during a period marked by financial strain, workforce shortages, and growing family needs.

In New York State, the Association remains deeply engaged in federal shutdown monitoring, workforce development, and family-focused partnerships. NYSHSA's advocacy has resulted in significant progress, including automatic WIC eligibility for all Head Start and Early Head Start children (including those on waitlists) and active state-level fiscal analysis of UPK funding. Planning is well underway for the Region II Virtual Conference on March 11, 2026, with national leadership and professional development at the center of the agenda.

In Puerto Rico, the Association has made major advances in disability inclusion and interagency collaboration. Meetings with the Department of Education's Special Education Coordinators are moving Head Start toward formal recognition as an educational placement under IDEA, and a new partnership with the Puerto Rican Association of Children with Disabilities (APNI) will strengthen family advocacy, outreach, and access to specialized services. Legislative efforts are focused on stabilizing the State Collaboration Office and improving Head Start-to-kindergarten transitions across the island.

In New Jersey, programs continue to confront serious financial, workforce, and enrollment pressures. The Association was able to distribute emergency food assistance to all grantees through a private donation, allowing programs to provide food directly to children and families facing increasing food insecurity. Programs are strengthening partnerships with local school districts to support smoother transitions and better alignment of services, but teacher recruitment and retention challenges remain severe and continue to limit classroom capacity and enrollment. At the state level, child care subsidy shortages and long waitlists are leaving many families without reliable access to early learning and care.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, Fiscal Year 2026 is expected to mark the completion of all six major construction projects currently underway for the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services, Office of Head Start. These projects represent the effective use of nearly \$42 million in Disaster Recovery Funds—funding that is separate from federal operational support for the Head Start program. Facilities are being built across St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John with completion anticipated to be between Q1 FY 2025 and Q1 FY 2026. The Virgin Islands will soon benefit from state-of-the-art educational spaces designed to support long-term growth and success.

Future conferences: **Region II** Virtual Professional Development Conference (March 11, 2026, New Jersey Head Start Association Professional Development Conference (May 18-21, 2026), New York Head Start Association Professional Development Conference (May 18-21, 2026), and Region II Head Start Association Professional Development Conference (October 26-29, 2026 in PR)