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Private donors offer \$10 million to reopen Head Start programs in six states

By Niraj Chokshi October 7, 2013



Students in a Washington Head Start classroom welcome Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) (Kai-Huei Yau/Associated Press)

Early childhood programs in six states, serving more than 7,000 children, will reopen their doors thanks to a private donation.

Seven Head Start programs were closed last week after the federal government shutdown Oct. 1. Those closings left 7,195 low-income children without access to the program, according to the nonprofit National Head Start Association.

But philanthropists [Laura and John Arnold](#) offered up to \$10 million in emergency funding to reopen those programs — some as soon as Tuesday morning — and to prevent others from closing. The money will be paid back without interest if the Head Start programs receive funding for a full year once the government reopens. The closed programs are in Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Mississippi.

Federal Head Start grants are doled out to state programs on varying schedules. Grant renewals for 23 programs — including those shut down — were up Oct. 1, the day the government shutdown began. Those programs serve a total of nearly 18,800 children.

Head Start was reeling from the cuts implemented under sequestration, which represented the program's [largest funding hit](#) since it started in 1965, according to the NHSA.

“The Arnolds’ most generous act epitomizes what it means to be an angel investor,” NHSA Executive Director Yasmina Vinci said in a statement. “They have selflessly stepped up for Head Start children to ensure their path toward kindergarten readiness is not interrupted by the inability of government to get the nation’s fiscal house in order.”

But, Vinci added, such a model is unsustainable, and lawmakers should work to quickly reopen the government.