Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule: General Fact Sheet

SUMMARY

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) published a final rule on September 1, 2016 revising the **Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)** to strengthen and improve the quality of Head Start programs. This action is part of the Administration's early learning efforts to ensure that all children start school ready to succeed.

The bipartisan *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* called for a review and revision of the HSPPS to ensure that all Head Start programs provide high quality, comprehensive services, and for the development of new, research-based education Performance Standards related to school readiness for Head Start children. The Administration for Children and Families issued a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) in June of 2015 and received 1,000 comments on the proposed standards. The new Program Performance Standards incorporate key feedback and set a high bar for Head Start quality. The new HSPPS put in place higher standards based on years of research and effective practice in Head Start, providing for effective teaching, staff professional development, and high-quality curriculum in Head Start; strong parent engagement and involvement in programs; comprehensive health services and child safety; effective management; and a full school day and year of services for all Head Start children. At the same time, the new Program Performance Standards make program requirements easier for current and future program leaders to understand and reduce administrative burden so that Head Start directors can focus on delivering high-quality comprehensive early learning programs that help put children onto a path of success.

This rule builds on previous work from this Administration to strengthen Head Start. Beginning with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which invested $2.1 billion in Head Start and Early Head Start to reach an additional 61,000 children and families, the President has made quality improvements in the Head Start program a high priority. This was followed by actions in 2011 to require all Head Start grantees that fail to meet a new set of rigorous benchmarks to compete for continued federal funding. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued new eligibility rules that ensure Head Start serves our neediest and most vulnerable children.

Beginning in 2014, Congress appropriated funding to create Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships and fund additional Early Head Start Expansion, including $635 million in 2016. In addition, in 2016, Congress provided $294 million to increase the number of Head Start children who attend a program that provides a full school day and full school year of early learning. The President has requested additional funding for 2017 to build on this progress of expanding full school day and year offerings in Head Start, consistent with the new requirements in this rule.

Head Start has long been a leader in providing comprehensive high-quality early learning opportunities, having served more than 33 million low-income children and their families over the last 50 years. But Head Start can and must do more. Findings from monitoring reviews and research confirm that there is significant variation in quality among Head Start programs and stronger outcomes are achievable. The new Program Performance Standards are an important next step in

the program's history, establishing a set of 21st century Performance Standards that will result in higher quality Head Start programs and better outcomes for children and families.

MAJOR PROVISIONS

Promoting Effective Teaching and Learning in Head Start Classrooms
A high-quality early learning program has well-trained, caring teachers who deliver a comprehensive and rigorous curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and that promotes all aspects of early learning necessary for school readiness, including social and emotional well-being and cognitive development. The new HSPPS set high standards for effective teaching and learning in every classroom.

The new Standards:

- Strengthen education services and curriculum requirements to ensure effective teaching in Head Start, based on the best research about how children learn and develop
- Require teaching practices, program curricula, and assessments align with the new **Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five**
- Require a system of evidence-based professional development activities, including mentor-coaching to build teacher skills and core competencies
- Require systematic local use of valid and reliable assessment data that provides useable information for teachers to individualize and improve services
- Clearly prohibit the expulsion of children from Head Start programs and set strict limitations on the use of temporary suspension, consistent with long-standing Head Start policy

Expanding Time for Learning and Healthy Development
The new Program Performance Standards increase the minimum levels for program duration to ensure teachers have the time they need to implement effective practices that will improve child outcomes. The new Standards set the expectation that, over time, nearly all Head Start programs will serve children for a full school day and full school year. Specifically, the new Standards require Head Start center-based programs to operate 50 percent of their slots for 1,020 hours (approximately equivalent to a 6-hour day for 170 days) per year by August 1, 2019; Head Start center-based programs to operate 100 percent of their slots for 1,020 hours per year by August 1, 2021; and Early Head Start center-based programs to operate 100 percent of their slots for 1,380 hours per year by August 1, 2018.

- Research shows that disadvantaged children benefit from more exposure to enriching early learning programs than is provided by the part-day, part-year programs under the current minimum Head Start standards. Research on full-day programs, instructional time, summer learning loss, and attendance all indicate that dosage is central to improving child outcomes.
- Many programs already provide 1,020 or 1,380 hours, but a significant number do not.
- The new Standards include higher minimums for service duration so teachers can provide the individualized and content-rich learning that is important for child outcomes.
- These new Standards give programs flexibility to structure these hours in a way that best meets the needs of children and families in their communities, and allows programs to request a waiver of these requirements to operate a locally designed program option.
- The new Standards recognize the importance of resources to expanding the duration of Head Start programs and provide the HHS Secretary the flexibility to reduce the required percentage of students attending full school day and year programs if adequate funds are not available.

- Congress appropriated $294 million in fiscal year (FY) 2016 to increase the duration of Head Start and Early Head Start services, which the administration is in the process of awarding to grantees to ensure more grantees. The President's FY2017 budget requests additional funding to further expand full school day and year offerings, with the goal of putting the program on track to meet the targets in the rule.

Maintaining and Strengthening Head Start's Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement
The new Program Performance Standards maintain Head Start's commitment to comprehensive services as central to helping children succeed. They strengthen several aspects of parental engagement services, compared to the NPRM, in response to comments.

The new HSPPS:

- Require that all staff receive individualized professional development ensure high-quality comprehensive service delivery
- Maintain Head Start's family partnership agreements and home visits for families, and strengthen parent engagement by providing new opportunities for parents to participate in an evidence-based parenting curriculum
- Retain core health services and streamline requirements to make them easier to implement
- Strengthen mental health services to support teachers with effective classroom management through clearer requirements about the expectations for using mental health consultation
- Require programs serve dual language learners (DLLs) using a research-based approach that recognizes bilingualism as a strength and includes the provision of an interpreter for assessment and screening of children if needed
- Maintain and strengthen services for vulnerable populations, such as homeless children, children in foster care, and children with disabilities, to ensure they are getting the help they need to succeed
- Retain parents' critical decision-making role as leaders in program governance and operations, including maintaining the requirement for a parent committee at the program level

Ensuring the Health and Safety of Head Start Children
The new Program Performance Standards maintain and strengthen Head Start's high bar for child safety and require programs to implement a system of health and safety policies, practices, and procedures that includes ongoing training, oversight and correction, and continuous improvement. They also give programs greater flexibility to adjust their policies and procedures according to the most up-to-date information about how to keep children safe.

- The new rule strengthens the standards of conduct for staff, including explicit safety training and strong codes of conduct that help keep children safe.
- The new standards require programs to conduct state, local, or tribal, and federal criminal background checks on prospective and current employees, and clear them through available child abuse and neglect and sex offender registries every five years, consistent with new requirements for all states in the federally-supported child care subsidy system.

Promoting Effective Management and Continuous Improvement of Head Start Programs
The new Program Performance Standards will facilitate stronger program management and ensure that programs are using data to improve their programs on an ongoing basis.

The new Standards:

- Codify best practices for the appropriate use of data, which includes establishing goals and measurable objectives, and using data, ongoing oversight, and correction to set and revise goals and objectives to best meet the needs of children and families
- Reduce bureaucratic burden by focusing on outcomes over processes and plans, eliminating Head Start-specific requirements where government-wide procedures exist, giving grantees more flexibility in holding sub-grantees accountable, and reducing the number of regulations by approximately one-third
- Include procedures for sharing data and protecting personally identifiable information, balancing the need to protect privacy while ensuring Head Start programs participate in state and local data systems, including those developed through the statewide longitudinal data systems grant program