

Head Start Program Performance Standards: Quality Component Overview

Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has been a consistent provider of early learning and care for children from low-income backgrounds at the most crucial time in their learning and development. For over fifty years, families across America have relied on Head Start programs to provide children the skills they need to be ready for school and families the assistance they need to support their children's learning. Head Start programs enable parents to participate in the workforce while their children receive high-quality, comprehensive services that prepare them for kindergarten. The chart below is an overview of the quality components of the 2016 Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) Final Rule.

The new HSPPS incorporates up-to-date research and best practices while allowing for locally-driven decisions that respond to children's needs in the context of their community. These standards will improve program quality, reduce the burden on programs, and improve regulatory clarity and transparency. They provide a clear road map for current and prospective grantees to support high-quality Head Start services and to strengthen the outcomes of the children and families who receive these services.

Quality Component

Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule

Full-Day, Full-Year Service Duration

Compliance Date: August 1, 2021

Gradual shift to increase annual Head Start hours of planned class operations, in response to research-based evidence that increased time and opportunities for high-quality early learning opportunities are a pivotal component to achieving the positive effects of Head Start.

[Center-Based Option 1302.21](#)

[Home-Based Option 1302.22](#)

[Family Child Care Option 1302.23](#)

Reconciling what research tells us about best practices for the dosage of early learning with the practical costs associated with increasing service duration for a program, the final rule outlines a gradual phase-in to increased service duration over a period of two and five years for Early Head Start and Head Start, respectively.

Outcomes-Based Standards

Compliance Date: August 1, 2017

Locally-driven decision-making that looks to research and best practices promotes innovation and flexibility that enables programs to deliver high-quality services through its family partnership, classroom standards, child attendance, and positive learning environments that support positive child outcomes.

The new performance standards move away from prescribing extensive detail where it is unnecessary for the attainment and maintenance of high-quality and move towards a systems approach that allows for local innovation and flexibility. Programs can adjust policies and procedures as informed by their community's needs, research and best practice.

[Family Partnership Services 1302.52](#)

Family partnership is key to Head Start's mission, and the final rule elevates the importance of aligning family components, such as intake and family assessment procedures, to achieve the outcomes of the Parent, Family, and Community, Engagement Framework. The critical function of partnering with families for the growth and success of Head Start children is reflected at the local and national level of Head Start programs.

[Parent Committees 1301.4](#)

Parent committees, which can vary from region to region, are a part of the formal governance structure of Head Start. They advise staff in developing and implementing local program policies, activities, and services to ensure children and family needs are met. Parent Committees also participate in the recruitment and screening of Early Head Start and Head Start employees, and formally communicate with the policy council and policy committee at the delegate level.

Quality Component

Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule

CONTINUES **Outcomes-Based Standards**

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[Attendance 1302.16](#)

Research shows that consistent class attendance is an important contributor to positive child outcomes. As such, the HSPPS emphasize the importance of regular attendance, and identifies approaches for addressing low-attendance. The goal is to partner with families, including those experiencing homelessness, to assess needs in order to diminish or remove their barriers to regular attendance.

[Child Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well-Being 1302.45](#)

Positive learning environments are key for preparing children for school. In developing learning environments that meet children's needs in the classroom, center-based and family child care programs must ensure that teachers and other relevant staff provide responsive care, effective teaching, and an organized learning environment that promotes healthy development and children's skill growth. The Head Start expectation is that positive learning environments are inclusive of all children and avail all children of the opportunity for full participation.

[Suspension and Expulsion 1302.17](#)

Disrupting a child's continuity of care by removing them from the learning environment through expulsion is prohibited and only in extremely rare circumstances is a temporary suspension appropriate. Continuity of care and access to high-quality learning experiences are major contributing factors to a child's school readiness.

[Teaching and the Learning Environment 1302.31](#)

Programs must ensure teachers implement organized learning environments with developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, and indoor and outdoor learning experiences that provide adequate opportunities for choice, play, exploration and experimentation among a variety of learning, sensory, and motor experiences.

[Curricula 1302.32](#)

Programs may select what early learning standards classrooms implement and make appropriate adjustments and adaptations, provided that the classroom standards guide the intentional learning experiences in center-based and family child care programs. Programs must implement developmentally appropriate, research-based early childhood curricula that are aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five and, as appropriate, state early learning and development standards, and are sufficiently content-rich to promote measurable progress toward development and learning outlined in the Framework.

*As Head Start shifts towards an outcomes-focused culture, its monitoring process will be revised accordingly.

Quality Component

Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule

Reduction of Burdensome Requirements

Compliance Date: November 7, 2016

The final rule significantly reduces the number of regulatory requirements without compromising quality.

[Determining Program Structure 1302.20](#)

[Center-Based Option 1302.21](#)

[Locally-Designed Program Option Variations 1302.24](#)

[Designation Renewal Purpose and Scope 1304.10](#)

Prescriptive requirements related to governing bodies, appeals, and audits have been removed and replaced by an emphasis on supporting local flexibility to meet community needs. The HSPPS align to the Head Start Act for improved consistency in implementation of the law and its regulations. Instead of requiring that all programs extend service duration to 6 hours a day, 180 days a year, the final rule instead includes a total number of annual hours for Early Head Start and Head Start. This approach, which will phase in gradually over five years, allows local flexibility and is consistent with how the majority of states set minimum requirements for how local education agencies set their calendars. Where appropriate, relevant requirements have been aligned, such as the community needs assessment with the five-year grant cycle. Other examples where local flexibility has replaced prescriptive requirements for an elevated focus on outcomes includes the new flexibility in structural requirements of program models, such as group size and ratios, local variations for effective and innovative curriculum and professional development models, and support for local innovation through a process to waive individual eligibility verification requirements.

Mixed-Delivery System Improvements

Compliance Date: August 1, 2017

Head Start grantees deliver services within a mixed-delivery system that includes child care and state pre-K. In large part due to a concerted effort in the performance standards to streamline requirements and minimize administrative burdens at the local level, Head Start programs are better positioned to collaborate with other programs and funding streams.

[Education and Child Development Program Services Subpart C Purpose 1302.30](#)

[Safety Practices 1302.47](#)

[Community Partnerships and Coordination With Other Early Childhood and Education Programs 1302.53](#)

A program must take an active role in promoting coordinated systems of comprehensive early childhood services to low-income children and families in their community through communication, cooperation, and the sharing of information among agencies and their community partners, while protecting the privacy of child records. Additionally, programs, with the exception of American Indian and Alaska Native programs, must participate in its state or local QRIS if it accepts Head Start monitoring data to document quality indicators, if its participation would not impact a program's ability to comply with the HSPPS, and there is no compelling reason presented to the Office of Head Start to not participate. Programs, with the exception of American Indian and Alaska Native programs unless they would like to and to the extent practicable, should integrate and share relevant data with state education data systems, to the extent practicable, if the program can receive similar support and benefits as other participating early childhood programs.

Quality Component

Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule

CONTINUES **Mixed-Delivery Systems Improvements**

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In addition to aligning the HSPPS with the Head Start Act of 2007, the health and safety training for Head Start staff is now aligned to the health and safety requirements in the CCDBG Act, thus relieving the burden of different or conflicting licensing standards. HSPPS also establishes a more flexible focus on learning, socialization and conversation during meals, which in turn may support better collaboration with community partners like schools.

Preschool Slot Assessment

Compliance Date: November 7, 2016

The HSPPS final rule requires analysis of the service area population to inform slot prioritization. It also promotes active recruitment of vulnerable populations, including homeless children and children in foster care, and allows programs to reserve slots for special populations.

[Determining Community Strengths, Needs, and Resources 1302.11](#)

[Recruitment of Children 1302.13](#)

[Enrollment 1302.15](#)

The community-wide strategic planning and needs assessment requires programs to examine the eligible population in their service area, including race, ethnicity, and languages spoken. A program must then use this information when it establishes selection criteria and prioritization of participants. In addition to the existing requirement that programs serve children with disabilities as at least 10 percent of their funded enrollment, programs must actively recruit other vulnerable populations, including homeless children and children in foster care. The community assessment gives programs flexibility to define these populations as they relate to their community's context. Programs have the option to reserve up to 3 percent of slots for special populations. The selection process requires that programs prioritize serving younger children if they operate in a service area where high-quality, publicly funded pre-kindergarten is available.

Standards, Professional Development, and Continuous Improvement

Compliance Date: August 1, 2017

To provide high-quality early childhood education services, the HSPPS stress how standards, professional development, and continuous improvement relate to and inform one another in a program's approach to serving Head Start children.

[Training and Professional Development 1302.92](#)

While programs implement developmentally appropriate, research-based early childhood curricula, it is equally important that staff have access professional development opportunities that support their best practices. Programs are required to implement a system to ensure all staff members receive the supportive training and development they need to provide high-quality services, and programs have flexibility in determining a process by which they assess staff. All staff are required to receive training on best practices for family engagement strategies, and the entire teaching team, not just lead teachers, are required to receive research-based training. Teacher and leader licensing requirements specify the minimum staff qualification and competency requirements to ensure staff, consultants, and contractors have sufficient knowledge, training and experience. This includes program directors, who are required to attain at least baccalaureate degrees and have, at minimum, background experience in administration, in addition to supervision of staff and fiscal management.

Quality Component

CONTINUES **Standards, Professional Development, and Continuous Improvement**

Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule

CONTINUES **Standards, Professional Development, and Continuous Improvement**

[Suspension and Expulsion 1302.17](#)

[Staff Qualification and Competency Requirements 1302.91](#)

The new performance standards recognize the need to support the development of both English and the home language for children who are dual language learners to ensure meaningful outcomes, and ensuring their teachers are highly qualified is crucial to accomplishing this end. Recognizing the potential challenges in finding highly-qualified bilingual teaching staff, the performance standards encourage programs to collaborate with outside entities, and requires programs to identify volunteers who can be trained to work in the classroom that can provide high-quality input in children's home language(s).

Other necessary experience and competencies, including experience in early childhood, is defined at the local level. In addition to holding staff qualifications to a high enough standard to ensure high-quality service delivery, programs have flexibility to develop their own approach to ensure staff wellness, and are required to support teachers' ability to address challenging behaviors in the classroom.

[Achieving Program Goals 1302.102](#)

Programs have local flexibility to set their own goals and measure children and families' progress towards these goals. Continuous quality improvement includes planning, goal setting, and monitoring short- and long-term progress towards achieving program goals, which address health and safety practices, all elements of high-quality service provision, and continuous quality improvement for all programs, not just those with identified quality issues or deficiencies.

Quality Component

Head Start Program Performance Standards Final Rule

Mixed-Income Programs

Compliance Date: November 7, 2016

Head Start programs are required to consider if implementing a mixed-income delivery model is feasible without compromising slots to Head Start eligible children.

[Determining Community Strengths, Needs, and Resources 1302.11](#)

Research finds such models to be beneficial to the educational outcomes of children from low-income families. If such a model is feasible, programs are encouraged to introduce this shift for its research-backed positive impact on child outcomes. However, programs are prohibited from enrolling children from diverse economic backgrounds if this would result in serving less than their eligible funded enrollment. Children funded through other sources must not receive services over children eligible for Head Start.

Data Privacy

Compliance Date: August 1, 2017

Where appropriate for Head Start and Early Head Start, education programs that receive funds under a program administered by the Department of Education are subject to the confidentiality provisions of FERPA, and must comply with the confidentiality provisions.

[Establishing Procedures 1303.20](#)

Parents have the right to inspect, ask to amend, and obtain copies of their child's records, request hearings, and inspect written agreement. The Office of Head Start is committed to providing support for programs to understand, build capacity, and comply with the new privacy regulations as programs must ensure staff, consultants and volunteers comply with program confidentiality policies.