

# EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR CENTER-BASED PRESCHOOL ASSISTANT TEACHERS

## STAFF QUALIFICATIONS: STEPS FOR PROGRAMS TO CONSIDER



Use this brief to better understand the Head Start regulations and considerations for assistant teachers.

Local programs determine how their staff meet the Head Start regulations.

Follow these steps to help guide you in the process of determining and justifying how your assistant teachers meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS).

1. Read the HSPPS.
  - Know the specific education requirements for staff and consultant roles detailed in §1302.91.
  - Review the cross references to the staff and consultant qualification requirements in the Head Start Act and other relevant HSPPS.
2. Gather data to know your program's needs and expectations, based on:
  - Community, family, and child needs
  - Program goals including school readiness goals
  - Your existing continuous quality improvement system
3. Use all available information to ensure your program has:
  - Human resources and professional development policies and procedures to help you meet regulations
  - Clear program goals including school readiness goals
  - Qualified staff and consultants who can effectively support your program's goals and service delivery
  - An ongoing monitoring process that identifies and addresses challenges in hiring and retaining qualified staff and consultants

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?\*

\*For full text access the [HSPPS](#)

## KNOWLEDGE

§1302.91(e)(3) “A program must ensure Head Start [preschool] assistant teachers, at a minimum, [either]:

- have a CDA credential or a state-awarded certificate that meets or exceeds the requirements for a CDA credential,
- are enrolled in a program that will lead to an associate or baccalaureate degree or,
- are enrolled in a CDA credential program to be completed within two years of the time of hire.”



## COMPETENCIES

§1302.91(a) “A program must:

- Ensure all staff, consultants, and contractors...have sufficient knowledge, training and experience, and competencies to:
  - fulfill the roles and responsibilities of their positions...
  - ensure high-quality service delivery...
- Provide ongoing training and professional development to support staff in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.”

§1302.91(e)(5) “A program must ensure center-based...assistant teachers...demonstrate competency to:

- Provide effective and nurturing teacher-child interactions,
- Plan and implement learning experiences that ensure effective curriculum implementation and use of assessment and
- Promote children’s progress across...the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five and applicable state early learning and development standards, including for children with disabilities and dual language learners, as appropriate.”

## PLEASE NOTE!

Grantees have the flexibility to implement higher or more stringent requirements than those outlined in the regulations. To meet the Head Start requirements, a Head Start preschool assistant teacher could do one of the following:

- Be enrolled in a preschool center-based CDA program and can earn it within 2 years of hire
- Have a current national preschool center-based CDA issued by the Council for Professional Recognition
- Have a state-awarded certificate or credential that meets or exceeds the national preschool CDA requirements\*\*
- Be enrolled in a degree program
- Have an associates, bachelor, or advanced degree

\*\*A comparable credential is issued by state, territory, and tribal agencies, boards, and commissions as well as accredited colleges and universities and other early childhood organizations that offer certificates and degree programs.

## WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR HIRING STAFF

- Head Start preschool classrooms can be staffed with a teacher and an assistant or with two teachers. Staff-child ratios and group size maximums are determined by the age of most children in the class and the needs of the children [§1302.21(b)(1)(3)&(4)].
- Ensure assistant teachers have sufficient training, experience, and competency to be able to effectively support the delivery of preschool education services.
- Use the national preschool center-based CDA credential to help you determine if a state or comparable credential meets or exceeds the requirements.
- Review\*\*\* training and course content to determine if it includes early childhood education or child development. Make sure that decisions are based on more than just the course title or name of the department that issued the credits. To the extent possible, get course descriptions from awarding institutions. ECE or child development related courses may be offered in various departments—such as education, home economics, family and consumer science, human ecology, music, art, library science, physical education and recreation, psychology, family studies, and others.
- Access the T/TA system for support and connect with your regional office program specialist as necessary.
- Consider requirements detailed within the state/territory early care and education system (includes licensing requirements, requirements included within the Quality Rating and Improvement System, etc.).

\*\*\**In reviewing coursework taken by applicants, be sure to look beyond just the title or name of the department that issued the credits, as they are sometimes deceiving.*

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Use the annual professional development (PD) hour requirement to ensure assistant teachers effectively
  - support child development and learning;
  - implement and individualize curriculum for preschool children; and
  - complete training or coursework needed for their credential or degree.
 This can include ongoing training, taking college courses, and intensive coaching.
- Use individualized professional development plans and ongoing supervision to
  - support areas of need and interest such as planning and implementing curriculum for preschoolers, assessing young children's developmental progress; and
  - outline steps and ensure timely progress in attaining the credential or degree.
- Consider PD methods to help build assistant teachers into qualified preschool teachers.
- Enlist partners to support an ECE career pathway in your community.
  - Contact your child care resource and referral (CCR&R) agency to learn about trainings and courses. Determine if and how they connect to CDA credential or degree programs.
  - Create a cadre of CDA PD specialists to expedite the national CDA approval and renewal process. Identify local candidates from your program, ECE programs, and the community.
  - Partner with local colleges for an ECE degree program to ensure course offerings include adequate ECE content with an infant and toddler focus.
  - Create a cohort of students from your program and other ECE programs.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE ON THIS TOPIC?

- Head Start Regulations <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii>
  - Program Performance Standards on Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-91-staff-qualifications-competency-requirements>
  - The Showcase of Head Start Regulations on Staff Qualifications <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/showcase/staff-qualifications>
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards Excerpts on Staff Qualifications <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/staff-qualifications.pdf>
  - Section 648A of the Early Head Start Act on Staff Qualifications and Development <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/head-start-act/sec-645a-early-head-start-programs>
- Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>
  - Head Start Staff Qualifications <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/human-resources/article/head-start-staff-qualifications>
  - Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/relationship-based-competencies-support-family-engagement>
  - Steps Local Agencies Can Use to Determine Credential or Degree Equivalency <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/steps-local-agencies-can-use-determine-credential-or-degree-equivalency>
- National CDA Credential Program <https://www.cdacouncil.org/component/search/>
  - Preschool Center-Based Credential <https://www.cdacouncil.org/credentials/apply-for-cda/preschool>
  - Professional Development (PD) Specialists <http://www.cdacouncil.org/pd-specialists/role-a-responsibilities#>
  - The Council's Online Platform YourCouncil <https://www.cdacouncil.org/yourcda>
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/about-qris>
  - State QRIS info <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/states>
  - National Program Standards Crosswalk Tool <https://qrisguide.acf.hhs.gov/crosswalk/>