

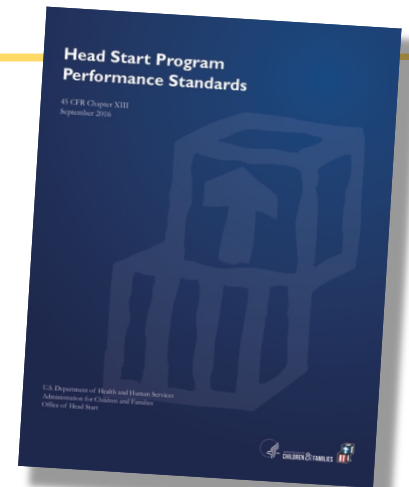
Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)

Preamble—Part I: Executive Summary

Head Start currently provides comprehensive early learning services to more than 1 million children from birth to age five each year through more than 60,000 classes, home visitors, and family care partners nationwide. Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has been a leader in helping children from low-income families enter kindergarten more prepared to succeed in school and in life. Head Start is a central part of this Administration's effort to ensure all children have access to high-quality early learning opportunities and to eliminate the education achievement gap. These regulations are intended to improve the quality of Head Start services so that programs have a stronger impact on children's learning and development. It also is necessary to streamline and reorganize the regulatory structure to improve regulatory clarity and transparency so that existing grantees can more easily run a high-quality Head Start program and so that Head Start's operational requirements will be more transparent and seem less onerous to prospective grantees. In addition, this regulation is necessary to reduce the burden on local programs that can interfere with high-quality service delivery. We believe these regulatory changes will help ensure every child and family in Head Start receives high-quality services that will lead to greater success in school and in life.

In 2007, Congress mandated the Secretary to revise the program performance standards and update and raise the education standards. Congress also prohibited elimination of, or any reduction in, the quality, scope, or types of services in the revisions. Thus, these regulatory revisions are additionally intended to meet the statutory requirements Congress put forth in the bipartisan reauthorization of Head Start in 2007.

The HSPPS are the foundation on which programs design and deliver comprehensive, high-quality individualized services to support the school readiness of children from low-income families. The first set of Standards was published in the 1970s. Since then, they have been revised following subsequent Congressional reauthorizations and were last revised in 1998. The program performance standards set forth the requirements local grantees must meet to support the cognitive, social, emotional, and healthy development of children from birth to age 5. They encompass requirements to provide education, health, mental health, nutrition, and family and community engagement services, as well as rules for local program governance and aspects of federal administration of the program.



This final rule builds upon extensive consultation with researchers, practitioners, recommendations from the Secretary's Advisory Committee Final Report on Head Start Research and Evaluation, and other experts, public comment, as well as internal analysis of program data and years of program input. In addition, program monitoring has also provided invaluable experience regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the previous program performance standards. Moreover, research and practice in the field of early childhood education has expanded exponentially in the 15 years since the program performance standards governing service delivery were last revised, providing a multitude of new insights on how to support improved child outcomes.

The Secretary's Advisory Committee, which consisted of expert researchers and practitioners, chartered to provide "recommendations for improving Head Start program effectiveness" concluded early education programs, including Head Start, are capable of reducing the achievement gap, but that Head Start is not reaching its potential. As part of their work, the Committee provided recommendations for interpreting the results of both the Head Start Impact Study (HSIS), a randomized control trial study of children in Head Start in 2002 and 2003 through third grade, and the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSREP), which was initiated in 1996 and followed children who were eligible to participate in Early Head Start. The Committee concluded that these findings should be interpreted in the context of the larger body of research that demonstrates Head Start and Early Head Start "are improving family well-being and improving school readiness of children at or below the poverty line in the U.S. today."

The Committee agreed the initial impact both Head Start and Early Head Start have demonstrated "are in line with the magnitude of findings from other scaled-up programs for infants and toddlers... and center-based programs for preschoolers..." but also acknowledged "larger impacts may be possible, e.g., by increasing dosage in [Early Head Start] and Head Start or improving instructional factors in Head Start." The Committee also addressed the finding that these impacts do not seem to persist into elementary school, stating the larger body of research on Head Start provides "evidence of long-term positive outcomes for those who participated in Head Start in terms of high school completion, avoidance of problem behaviors, avoidance of entry into the criminal justice system, too-early family formation, avoidance of special education, and workforce attachment." Overall, the report determined a key factor for Head Start to realize its potential is "making quality and other improvements and optimizing dosage within Head Start and Early Head Start." The final rule aims to capitalize on the advancements in research, available data, program input, public comment, and these recommendations in order to accomplish the critical goal of helping Head Start reach its full potential so more children reach kindergarten ready to succeed.

This final rule reorganizes previous program performance standards to make it easier for grantees to implement them and for the public to understand the broad range of Head Start program services. Our previous program performance standards consisted of 1,400 provisions organized in 11 different sections that were amended in a partial or topical

fashion over the past 40 years. This approach resulted in a somewhat opaque set of requirements that were unnecessarily challenging to interpret and overburdened grantees with process-laden rules.

This rule has four distinct sections: (1) *Program Governance*, which outlines the requirements imposed by the Head Start Act (the "Act") on Governing Bodies and Policy Councils to ensure well-governed Head Start programs; (2) *Program Operations*, which outlines all of the operational requirements for serving children and families, from the universe of eligible children and the services they must be provided in education, health, and family and community engagement, to the way programs must use data to improve the services they provide; (3) *Financial and Administrative Requirements*, which lays out the federal requirements Head Start programs must adhere to because of overarching federal requirements or specific provisions imposed in the Act; and (4) *Federal Administrative Procedures*, which governs the procedures the responsible [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services] HHS official takes to determine the results of competition for all grantees, any actions against a grantee, whether a grantee needs to compete for renewed funding, and other transparency-related procedures required in the Act.

We also reorganized specific sections and streamlined provisions to make Head Start requirements easier to understand for all interested parties—grantees, potential grantees, other early education programs, and members of the general public. We reorganized subparts and their sections to eliminate redundancy, and we grouped together related requirements. Additionally, we systematically addressed the fact that many of our most critical provisions were buried in subparts that made them difficult to find and interpret, and did not reflect their centrality to the provision of high-quality services. For example, we created new subparts or sections to highlight and expand, where necessary, upon these important requirements.

We also streamlined requirements and minimized administrative burden on local programs. In total, we significantly reduced the number of regulatory requirements without compromising quality. We give programs greater flexibility to determine how best to achieve their goals and administer a high-quality Head Start program without reducing expectations for children and families. We anticipate these changes will help move Head Start away from a compliance-oriented culture to an outcomes-focused one. Furthermore, we believe this approach will support better collaboration with other programs and funding streams. We recognize that grantees deliver services through a variety of modalities including child care and state pre-kindergarten programs. Additionally, we removed other overly prescriptive requirements related to governing bodies, appeals, and audits.

We include several provisions to support local flexibility to meet community needs and to promote innovation and research. We give Head Start programs additional flexibility in the structural requirements of program models, such as group size and ratios. Further, we permit local variations for effective and innovative curriculum and professional

development models, giving flexibility from some of these requirements if the Head Start program works with research experts and evaluates the effectiveness of their model. We also support local innovation through a process to waive individual eligibility verification requirements, which will allow better coordination with local early education programs without reducing quality. Collectively, these changes will allow for the development of innovative program models, alleviate paperwork burdens, and support mixed income settings.

We believe the benefits of these changes will be significant for the children and families Head Start serves. Strengthening Head Start standards will improve child outcomes and promote greater success in school as well as produce higher returns on taxpayer investment. Reorganizing, streamlining, and reducing the requirements in the regulation will make Head Start less burdensome for existing grantees and more approachable for potential grantees, which may result in more organizations competing for Head Start grants.

These changes are central to the Administration's belief that every child deserves an opportunity to succeed.

Source: *Head Start Program Performance Standards Preamble—Part I*; retrieved Dec. 30, 2016, from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/preamble-part1.pdf>

