

Head Start Program Performance Standards: Family Child Care Program Option

Maggie Quinn: Today we're going to be talking about the Family Child Care Program Option. We're going to be pulling in pieces from across the new standards, from the structure of the program option and then Sarah's going to tell us a little bit more about the design and delivery of educational services and staff qualifications.

Sarah Merrill: Right and I'm glad you mentioned the cross referencing. We're really going to be highlighting three sub-sections. Sub-section B, which is program structure, Sub-part C, which is the education and child development services, and Sub-part I, which is HR management, but really, we expect children in all program options to receive the comprehensive services, so if you're providing this model, you have to know the whole girth of standard, and I think, before we go on, for the education piece what might be new is that we speak to them as teachers and teaching experiences, so when you see that term, think family childcare provider as well as center based.

Maggie: Section 130223 tells us that programs may either have a legally binding agreement or contract with family childcare providers or they may directly employ the family childcare providers. Programs must also ensure that family childcare homes are available that can accommodate children with, and families with disabilities, so programs need to ensure that children can be served in the family childcare program option, not necessarily that all family childcare homes are fully accessible to children with disabilities.

Sarah: This sub-part also outlines the ratios and group sizes for family childcare homes and the requirements haven't changed. Some of the language has been edited a little bit for more clarity but there won't be any surprises to those programs already providing this program option.

Maggie: That's great, so one question we hear a lot is how programs can maintain ratios when family childcare providers need to use the bathroom.

Sarah: Or phone calls or whatever else, so the standards address this. They are clear that you must maintain appropriate group sizes and ratios during all program hours and that means all program settings but for a family childcare settings, we've added the language that programs must ensure providers have systems to ensure safety of any child not within view for any period.

Maggie: Does that imply that children are ever unsupervised?

Sarah: Never unsupervised. The language is really intended to allow some flexibility and really honor the realities of providing services for young kids, mixed age groups for example, some children might be napping while others are engaged in playful learning experiences, so programs need to work with the providers and figure out how they can ensure all this happens, and children are safe, and still supervised while they're having their schedules be flexible, right.

I think also, it's important while they're trying to unpack this is, one thing to remember is that the family childcare providers have to be at least enrolled in a credential program or in a degree program. If it's the credential program, they have to attain that credential within eighteen months of providing services but that will make sure they have a knowledge of how to deliver

those services and I think part of that conversation, along with ongoing training and professional development opportunities within the program of how to manage answering the phone or you know, all the nuances, while children are needing to nap and use the bathroom and all of that, let alone the adult too, right.

Maggie: Yeah, and that's actually a great connection back to Sub-part B because we know that programs are required to make substitute staff and assistant providers available with the necessary training and experience to ensure that quality services are not interrupted, so that would allow them to attend these trainings or work on their credential.

Sarah: That makes sense.

Maggie: Also, the new standards require family childcare programs to operate sufficient hours of, sufficient hours to meet the childcare needs of families, which is old language, but also not less than 1380 hours per year.

Sarah: Do you think programs are going to have a hard time meeting this new hours?

Maggie: We really don't. We've looked at our program data and nearly all of our family childcare programs are operating for many more hours than this minimum requirement and those that are below are really, really close, so ...

Sarah: That makes sense. Are the family childcare slots part of the 50 or 100% requirement for higher service duration?

Maggie: They are not. They're completely different program options and they're not counted as part of the Head Start Center based service duration requirements.

Sarah: I think we could say that many times. They're two separate group care type setting but two different program options.

Maggie: Right.

Sarah: I think what's not new but also just good to remind programs is that providers in settings need to be licensed by state and tribal and local entities who make regulations and requirements around this type of program option, and when they vary from the performance standards, you are required to follow the more stringent, and that's about health and safety measures, teacher and the childcare providers staff qualification and any other nuances, ratios and group sizes as well.

Maggie: Okay, so lastly, the new standards maintain the requirement for programs to offer, to have a child development specialist, so what is the child development specialist do?

Sarah: Right. Well, they're critical. They provide a lot of support for the providers who work in their home and it can be kind of isolating unless you have another provider there with you, and it's making sure that the children who are enrolled receive the high quality services, so they conduct regular announced, and also some unannounced visits, at least every two weeks to each provider. They help with communication between the program, the providers and the

enrolled families. They also suggest areas for technical assistance, so really to make sure that the quality services and the comprehensive services are delivered in a meaningful way to the children and families who are enrolled.

Child development specialists also have staff qualifications that they need to meet, so they need to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. They could also have an advanced degree and this is in child development, early childhood education or a related field.

Maggie: Do they need to meet that right away when the standards come out?

Sarah: They have a delayed compliance, so it's giving programs a chance to make sure that their staff, who they already have hired, have the time to meet this requirement. Again, it links back to providing training and professional development, not only for the child development specialist, but they need to be able to provide those supports to the providers with whom they work with, so I think that's an important nuance. They can also provide the program with a lot of valuable information about the providers with whom they work, what are their strengths, what are the areas that they might need additional supports, and in making sure that they deliver the curriculum with fidelity, that it's really rich learning environment, rich language, so that the children are growing and learning as we expect them to do.

Maggie: They're really an important part of delivering the full range of services for children of the family childcare option.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Maggie: Great. Well, I think that basically wraps up our overview of the family childcare option.

Sarah: Thanks for joining us.