

Revised-Head Start Program Performance Standards: Human Resources & Professional Development

(upbeat music)

Jamie Sheehan: Hi and welcome. We're happy to be with you today to talk about human resource management and Subpart I.

Sarah Merrill: And that's great because we know the key to high-quality services is really ensuring that programs have high-quality staff, and that's really what encompasses this whole subpart. We know staff need to be safe and healthy to be around children and family, and so programs really need to ensure that they are those things, as well as that they have sufficient knowledge, experience, and competencies to fulfill their roles. And programs can continue that growth and development by providing ongoing and essential training and professional development opportunities.

So, Subpart I is broken down into five sections. One high level overarching thing to know is that the standards really codify what's listed in the Head Start Act of 2007, and they also help to align with the pending childcare development fund regulations.

Jamie: Right, thanks Sarah. So, some key themes in this subpart are a more comprehensive requirement for background checks, as well as a focus on staff qualifications and competencies, which is new. A stronger system of professional development including a coordinated coaching strategy, which is pretty exciting, and what's also important is that they're some delayed compliances for some of the requirements in this section.

So, now we're gonna talk a little bit more about some of the requirements in each of the sections, but we encourage you to really give them a read through. So, one thing that's really new in this section is around background checks. But one of the other things that's also new is staff performance appraisals. So, they're no longer a requirement in the regulation, but grantees and programs do need to access their staff need.

Sarah: And I think it's also important to know that the regulations are written to allow for program thoughtfulness. So, if they're finding appraisals to be helpful and really meaningful, they can still use them, but they're not required.

Jamie: Right, right. But we are requiring written personnel policies, as well as standards of conduct to be a part of their personnel policies. So, I'm gonna break down some of the, all of the background checks, and hopefully in a way that is very intentional. So, the background checks that are needed prior to employment for all employees, consultants, and contractors, including those who are providing transportation: The first background check that needs to be done is a sex offender registry check. And then another check needs to be done which requires either a state or tribal criminal background check, with fingerprinting, or an FBI check that also requires fingerprinting. So those, one or the other, of the fingerprinting needs to be done along with the sex offender registry check.

Sarah: So, there's two.

Jamie: So, those are the two, prior to employment. So, until those background checks are completed, no one should be starting. After those results are back, someone could start but couldn't be left alone with children at all, could have no unsupervised access to children. Then there's two more that need to be done, which you can all be started at the same time. But the other two are whichever fingerprinting wasn't done, that one needs to be done. So, whether you did the FBI first, then you need to do the state second. And then also a state background check for child abuse and neglect.

Sarah: And is there a timeframe to get all of them?

Jamie: So glad you asked, Sarah, there is. There's actually a 90 day timeframe for those to be completed. So, there are four background checks all together, and there's also a requirement that programs use to disqualification factors that are in the CCDF regulation, and that all background checks be conducted every five years, for all employees, consultants and contractors. In this section, we also talk about standards of conduct. It's a list in the regulation and it's not exhaustive at all; grantees could certainly add additional items that they find that are relevant for their community, and those standards of conduct apply to all staff, consultants, contractors and volunteers. Personnel policy should also include the procedures for what happens if someone violates the standards of conduct.

Sarah: Makes sense. Well thanks, Jamie, I'll go ahead and take the next section which outlines the educational qualifications and the competency requirements. And this again, is for staff and consultants and contractors who manage or deliver the services to children and families. And again, you would mention the rational, but it's about having educated and competent staff who deliver these high-quality services.

So, this section is broken down into three parts, I should say six parts, and it outlines the requirements for directors, physical officers, child and family service management staff, and child and family services staff as well as coaches. So, let me try to do this highlights as organized as I possibly can. So, for directors, physical officers, and the management staff of the family health and disability services, they have provisions for staff who are hired after this effective rule. So, anyone who's newly hired will have to follow these qualifications. And it's also been written so that it allows for program flexibility and just understanding that their variance program structures, so we'll talk about that a little bit.

So, directors need at least a bachelor's degree, and they also need experience in supervision, physical management and administrations, but programs really get a chance to unpack what that means for them in delivering high-quality services. When it comes down to physical officers, programs need to access their staffing needs and figure out how securing regularly scheduled and ongoing services with a physical officer who has efficient knowledge and experience best meets their program needs, but that the school officer needs to be a certified public accountant or have a bachelor's degree in accounting, business management, physical management, or a related field, and again, programs need to sort of address that.

Now, we're onto management of the health, disabilities and family services. They need bachelor's degrees related to one or more of the disciplines in which they provide oversight. So, we know some programs may hire three different managers, other programs may hire one manager who does two of those disciplines, so there's some program flexibility, but we still want these staff to be, obviously, qualified and educated. There are no changes for education management. It just codifies what's written in the act. I think that will be familiar with programs.

Also, in line with management and oversight are some new qualifications for the child development specialist who support family childcare providers. They too need a bachelor's in child development, or early childhood education, and there's a timeframe with this. So, they have about a year to get that staff up to requirements. And also, coaches, especially those who are related to what you're gonna talk about in a few minutes, the coordinated coaching strategy. They will need a bachelor's in early childhood and education. And again, it's really so that they have the knowledge and experience that helps them better support the staff that they're providing oversight with.

Alright, so now we're gonna talk a little bit about the direct service staff. There are no new education requirements for infant/toddler teacher, preschool teachers, preschool assistant teachers. The regs just codifies what the act already spells out, and it also clarifies when state-awarded or comparable credentials are also when they meet the requirements, I think we've been a little fuzzy about that in the past, and now it's clearer. For family childcare providers, they need to not only have early childhood experience, but they, at a minimum, need to be enrolled in a family childcare CDA or an equivalent program, and they need to have that credential attained within 18 months of providing services.

Providers could also be enrolled in a degree program as well, that's another option for programs to consider. Home visitors have a new requirement. They have to have a minimum of a home visitor CDA or a comparable credential, or they can have coursework that's equivalent within a degree program. And again, this has a timeframe. 2018, programs need to keep this in their planning. New to all of those roles, so it's the teachers, the assistant teachers, the family childcare providers, and the home visitors, programs most ensure they have competencies that are related to their job and role and the regs spell those out.

But it's really to help ensure that they are able to help children progress across the developmental spectrum and meet developmental goals as outlined in the early learning outcomes framework. We have some new qualifications for family service staff, and those are the staff who help families, the family partnership process; so, these are for staffs who are hired after this rule goes into effect. And at a minimum, they need a credential or a certificate in social work, human services, family services, counseling or a related field, and they have 18 months to get that credential.

And we also spell out some health qualification, health professional qualifications, and that's broken down into three parts. So, staff who perform health procedures, they need to be licensed or certified health professionals, mental health consultants need to be licensed or certified mental health consultants that are professionals, and when available in the community, have experience working with young children and families.

And then staff and consultants who support nutrition services, they either need to be a registered dietician, or be a nutritionist with appropriate qualifications. And what I didn't start off with is the general paragraph and that, make sure that programs ensure that their staff meet these qualifications, but it also ties into ensuring that they have ongoing training in professional development so that staff are able to fulfill their roles and responsibility and I just thought I'd put that at the end because it segways to what you're gonna be talking about.

Jamie: Right, something near and dear to both of our hearts is this staff professional development. So, in 1302.92 is training and professional development which includes areas of orientation, so that all staff, new staff, consultants, volunteers, all have to have some time of orientation to the program. And that we'll also still looking for 15 clock hours for all staff for training, which includes training on child abuse and neglect, and more specifically, we're gonna talk a little bit more about coaching, but the coaching hours can also count towards those 15 hours as well.

Sarah: That's a minimum.

Jamie: That is a minimum. But so, they certainly can probably get a lot more hours with the coaching component that we'll talk about. So, we're really looking at a systematic way to approach staff training and professional development, which is what we love. (laughs)

Sarah: The staff appreciate that, too.

Jamie: Right, so we talk about staff qualifications and competencies, but then also building on that is to increase staff knowledge and skills in new areas, and then continue to grow professionally. And then also in this area we will talk about a research based coaching strategy for all education staff. As you mentioned, a part of that, the coaching requirement, is to have a coach with a BA, but there's also a delay and this is well for August 1st, 2017.

So, what we're really looking for in the coordinate to coaching strategy is that programs have the flexibility to design a coaching program that fits for them, fits their professional needs of their staff and programs have the flexibility, again, to decide how their coaching design will be implemented. But what we are requiring is that all education staff are assessed so programs can figure out which assessment how they'll access the staffing need, and that they'll also be provided intentional coaching to those education staff who are determined who would both benefit from coaching, but certainly all staff could probably benefit from coaching, but what we really wanna focus on is those staff who would really best benefit from coaching.

Also, in the regulation is that the coaching strategy uses the assessment data to apply to their coaching strategies and that the coaching utilizes the assessment to drive their school readiness goals, that everything is sort of connected between school readiness goals, their curriculum, their teaching practices, and so everything is sort of coordinated within this coaching strategy.

We'll also want coaching strategies that establish as policies and communication procedures, and that we want the coaching strategy to be strength based, and that includes opportunities for staff to be observed, receive feedback and see effective modeling of effective teaching practices that are all tied together. So, not everyone, maybe have program designs would be needed coaching, but that we still want professional development system to support all education staff. So, they're not receiving coaching, what other systems are in place.

Sarah: Well, the next section speaks to staff health and wellness and I alluded that to that in the beginning that we want staff who are well, so they're two parts to that and so programs need to an initial screen for staff, which may include screeners or tests for communicable diseases as appropriate by state or local laws. And then they need to do periodic reexaminations. We don't speak to the timeframe, so programs need to figure that out. But again, we don't want, I should say it strength-base. We want programs to really ensure that staff don't pose any significant risk to the health and safety of the children and the families who are in that program. What's new is that programs also must make mental health and wellness information available to staff. And again, it's related to issues that may affect their job performance, and again provide staff with opportunities to learn about these types of activities. And again, a well-balanced healthy staff makes for high quality services.

Sarah: Yeah, sure does. And what also makes for great services is the added benefit of volunteers. So in 1302.94 is about volunteers. And so, we're still looking for volunteers to be screened for appropriate communicable diseases as appropriated by the state tribal and local laws. And if those aren't available for volunteers, we're asking programs to use their HASC to sort of, determine what needs to be done. One key element of the use of our volunteers is that they're never to be left alone with children. So, within our reg, we're not requiring any volunteers to have background checks for parents or volunteers. However, if a program within your state or local childcare licensing authority may have more stringent requirements, so the program would need to follow that. We're also looking for volunteers to have an orientation and abide by the standards of conduct.

Sarah: That makes sense.

Jamie: Yeah, so that's actually the very last piece of human resource management.

Sarah: Well thanks for joining with us!

Jamie: Thank you.

(upbeat music)