

CORRESPONDENCE

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No. ACF-PI-HS-21-02	2. Issuance Date: 03/19/2021
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start	
	4. Key Words: Head Start Program Performance Standards; HSPPS; Final Rule; Regulation; Head Start; Center-Based Program Option; Service Duration; 1,020 Annual Hours; Planned Class Operations; 45 percent	

PROGRAM INSTRUCTION

TO: All Head Start Grantees Operating the Center-Based Program Option

SUBJECT: Head Start Center-Based Service Duration Requirement for 45 Percent of Slots

INSTRUCTION:

By August 1, 2021, each Head Start program must provide at least 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations over the course of at least 8 months per year for at least 45 percent of Head Start center-based funded enrollment or submit a request for a waiver of this requirement. In some instances, a program partnering with their local education agency (LEA) may need to align their program schedule with the LEA to support service delivery. This could include shared use of facilities space or transportation. In such instances, if the total number of annual hours is less than 1,020 or less than 8 months per year but aligns with the annual hours required by the LEA for grade one, these center-based slots are still considered to meet the requirement and count toward the 45 percent of slots without the need for a waiver. These requirements are outlined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) at [45 CFR 1302.21\(c\)](#).

Some programs may not believe 1,020 annual hours for at least 45 percent of their Head Start center-based funded enrollment best meets the needs of their families and communities. These grantees are strongly encouraged to review all relevant program data and discuss options with their Regional Office. By August 1, 2021, such programs must submit a waiver request to operate an alternative program schedule for approval, consistent with the requirements in [45 CFR 1302.24\(a-c\)](#). More information on waiver requests is provided below.

Background

The Office of Head Start (OHS) established requirements in the 2016 HSPPS [final rule](#) for programs to provide longer service duration, which research links to stronger child outcomes. The provision in 45 CFR 1302.21(c)(2)(iv) [was lowered by the Secretary](#), based on an assessment of available funding, from 100 percent of a program's Head Start center-based slots that must operate for at least 1,020 annual hours to 45 percent. The implementation timeline established in 2016 for the longer duration requirements was intended to provide programs

sufficient time to plan and implement program designs that best meet community and family needs while also ensuring children have greater access to increased learning time to prepare for kindergarten. Congress provided more than \$550 million in supplemental funding to Head Start grantees in fiscal years 2016 and 2018 to support this increase in service duration.

Importance of Longer Duration

Research supports the importance of longer preschool duration in achieving meaningful child outcomes and preparing children for success in school. Preschool programs providing fewer annual hours of service may not have as much time to adequately support strong early learning outcomes for children and provide necessary comprehensive services. The long summer break in many programs likely results in summer learning loss that undermines gains children make during the program year. Programs operating for longer hours may also better support parents' education, job training, and employment opportunities.

Finally, children who have not had access to in-person learning due to the ongoing public health emergency may particularly benefit from more learning time in Head Start programs to help them arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed.

Implementation

Grantees have the flexibility to design programs with varying hours per day and days per year, as long as at least 45 percent of children in center-based slots receive at least 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations over the course of at least 8 months or, where appropriate, align with LEA calendars. As described above, slots operating in programs partnering with an LEA for Head Start service delivery may operate for fewer than 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations or fewer than 8 months of service if this program schedule aligns with the annual hours required for first grade by the LEA and the alignment is necessary to maintain these partnerships.

The 45 percent calculation includes each grant's Head Start center-based funded enrollment and any slots for which a locally designed program option waiver has been approved for requirements not related to service duration, such as ratios or group size.

As August 1, 2021 approaches, programs are encouraged to review their Head Start center-based program designs to determine whether their program schedule (under normal operations) provides at least 1,020 annual hours over at least 8 months per year for at least 45 percent of their center-based enrollment or if action is needed to meet the requirement. Programs not yet meeting the 45 percent requirement should review their community needs assessment, self-assessment, and budget to develop their proposed approach. They are also encouraged to consult their Regional Office for guidance. Program design should reflect how services would be delivered during normal operations, rather than temporary service delivery plans during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 public health emergency.

Waiver Requests

Programs may request a waiver of the requirement to provide at least 1,020 annual hours for at least 8 months per year for 45 percent of their Head Start center-based funded enrollment to better meet the unique needs of their communities or to demonstrate or test alternative approaches for providing program services. Waiver requests must be submitted to the Regional Office through an annual funding application or change in scope amendment in the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES) by August 1, 2021. To be considered for approval, the waiver request must:

- Demonstrate that the proposed program design will deliver the full range of services consistent with [45 CFR 1302.20\(b\)](#) – *45 CFR 1302.24(a)*
- Demonstrate how the proposed program design is consistent with achieving program goals in [Program Management and Quality Improvement, 45 CFR Part 1302 Subpart J](#) – *45 CFR 1302.24(a)*
- Provide evidence that demonstrates the proposed program design effectively supports appropriate development and progress in children’s early learning outcomes – *45 CFR 1302.24(c)(4)*
- Provide evidence that the proposed program design better meets the needs of parents than the service duration minimum of 45 percent of Head Start center-based slots operating for at least 1,020 annual hours over 8 months per year – *45 CFR 1302.24(c)(5)*
- Assess the effectiveness (or provide a plan to assess the effectiveness) of the proposed program design in supporting appropriate development and progress in children’s early learning outcomes – *45 CFR 1302.24(c)(5)*

Waiver requests are subject to approval by OHS and may be revoked based on progress toward program goals ([45 CFR 1302.102](#)) and monitoring ([45 CFR 1304.2](#)).

Next Steps

We understand programs are focused on responding to the needs of children and families during the pandemic. However, we urge grantees to take the time to thoughtfully consider their future program design and the benefits of longer service duration. Benefits include promoting school readiness and stronger child and family outcomes, supporting the needs of parents, delivering the full range of services, and meeting program goals. Your Regional Office staff is available to provide direction, guidance, and training and technical assistance resources to support your program in delivering on the Head Start program’s mission of preparing children and families for school and beyond.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of children and families.

/ Dr. Bernadine Futrell /

Dr. Bernadine Futrell
Director
Office of Head Start