

Overview Fact Sheet

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The Head Start program is a national leader defining high-quality early education and services, especially for children who are furthest from opportunity. The Office of Head Start (OHS) is proposing significant changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) in a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that would ensure fair compensation is a key component of high-quality early care and education. These proposed changes, if enacted, would stabilize the Head Start workforce and improve the quality of the comprehensive services that Head Start families count on.

Please see the [NPRM \(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking\) in the Federal Register](#) for a complete description of the proposed changes. The preamble of the [NPRM \(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking\)](#) provides the reasoning and research that supports each of the proposed changes.

NPRM Goals

OHS (Office of Head Start) is proposing updates to the HSPPS (Head Start Program Performance Standards) that will benefit the Head Start workforce, children and families, and programs.

Significantly increase compensation for many Head Start staff.

Head Start program staff are the cornerstone of the Head Start mission to provide high-quality early education and comprehensive services to children and families who need them. The proposed regulations would require programs to compensate Head Start staff in ways that reflect the demands and educational requirements of their positions. They would also ensure all Head Start staff are offered a sufficient wage based on the cost of living in their area. These proposed changes will support dedicated Head Start staff, who are mostly women of color, in building sustainable careers around the challenging yet rewarding jobs of supporting the children and families who need them. The changes will also help programs hire and retain qualified and experienced staff, reversing trends of high turnover.

Integrate mental health services into Head Start programming more broadly.

The proposed regulations include several changes to improve mental health supports in Head Start programs. These changes would better integrate mental health into every aspect of program services and elevate the role of mental health consultation. They would help address the increasing rates of mental health concerns in children and adults in Head Start programs and facilitate a proactive approach to support the overall well-being of children, families, and staff.

Enhance services to help Head Start programs effectively and equitably meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve.

The NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking) proposes several other changes to promote consistent quality services across Head Start programs. For instance, it proposes a cap on the maximum caseload of families for each family service worker to ensure these staff can dedicate the time needed to support the individual goals of each family. Other changes would support core Head Start principles, like implementing enhanced and strong comprehensive services, serving the children who are most in need, respecting diversity, and promoting equity.

Overview of Major Proposed Changes

OHS (Office of Head Start) is proposing that the HSPPS (Head Start Program Performance Standards) be updated in areas including workforce supports, mental health, and quality improvement in the following ways.

Workforce Supports

To improve staff wages, the NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking) proposes the following:

- All staff must receive competitive wages with an updated salary scale that applies to all positions.
Programs must make progress toward achieving pay parity for Head Start education staff with kindergarten through third grade teachers in local elementary schools. As a first step in achieving this broader goal, programs must pay annual salaries to these staff that are at least the same as preschool teachers in public school settings.
- Wages must be comparable across Head Start Preschool and Early Head Start programs.
- Minimum pay in programs must be sufficient to meet basic cost of living in the local area.

To improve staff benefits, the NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking) proposes the following:

- Provide or facilitate access to health insurance
- Paid sick, personal, and family leave for full-time staff

- Free or low-cost short-term mental health services for full-time staff
- Facilitate connection to:
 - Child care subsidies for any eligible staff
 - Public service loan forgiveness for eligible staff

To enhance staff wellness and engagement, the ~~NPRM.(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking)~~ proposes the following:

- All staff must receive regularly scheduled breaks during their work shifts
- Classroom staff must have access to brief unscheduled wellness breaks as needed
- Management style that positively promotes high-quality job performance

Mental Health

Addressing mental health supports, the ~~NPRM.(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking)~~ proposes the following:

- Require a multidisciplinary mental health team responsible for program-wide activities, including coordinating wellness supports and annual review of mental health consultation services
- Clarify expectations for program-wide wellness supports
- Provide mental health consultation services at least monthly
- Allow programs to work with mental health consultants who are providing services under the supervision of another licensed mental health professional
- Integrate mental health into support services for families
- Facilitate proactive screening and follow-up for children's mental health needs
- Incorporate strengths-based language throughout the ~~HSPPS.(Head Start Program Performance Standards)~~
- Provide clearer requirements for suspension and expulsion, including definitions of these terms

Other Quality Improvements

To better engage with families, the ~~NPRM.(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking)~~ proposes the following:

- Establish a maximum caseload of 40 families per family service worker to facilitate delivery of high-quality family support services, including health, parenting, and economic support, which requires a dedicated, individualized approach
- Require the use of effective, accessible forms of communication in all interactions with families
- Streamline enrollment processes to minimize burden on families

To improve child health and safety, the ~~NPRM.(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking)~~ proposes the following:

- Clarify which safety incidents should be reported to ~~OHS.(Office of Head Start)~~
- Enhance prevention of safety incidents
- Protect children from exposure to lead in the water and paint of Head Start facilities through regular testing and, if needed, remediation

To identify and meet community needs, the ~~NPRM.(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking)~~ proposes the following:

- Identify and, if possible, resolve barriers to enrollment and attendance
- Streamline the process and frequency of the community assessment
- Ensure responsive, high-quality services for expectant families
- Revise definition of 'income' to provide a clear, finite list of income sources that should be counted for eligibility determination
- Adjust a family's gross income to account for excessive housing costs in their community, for eligibility determination purposes

Regarding program structure, the ~~NPRM.(Notice of Proposed Rulemaking)~~ proposes the following:

- Require that Early Head Start center-based services be provided across at least 46 weeks per year
- Encourage lower teacher to child ratios for Early Head Start classrooms serving the youngest children
- Clarify the requirements for:
 - Maximum group size in family child care settings for infants and toddlers and mixed aged preschool groupings
 - Provider qualifications in family child care settings

Read more:

[Policy](#)

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