

Healthy Children Are Ready to Learn

Being Healthy Is Critical To School Readiness

Health and school readiness begin long before a child enters a classroom. “Striking disparities in what children know and can do are evident well before they enter kindergarten. These differences are strongly associated with social and economic circumstances and they are predictive of subsequent academic performance (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).” Young children who are healthy and safe are more prepared for school.

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are listed to show relevant and related information within the HSPPS. Information in this document is not intended to be a summary of the HSPPS.

How Does Health Affect School Readiness?

Children Who Are Physically Healthy Can Fully Participate In Learning

“Virtually every aspect of early human development - from the brain’s evolving circuitry to the child’s capacity for empathy, is affected by the environment and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood years (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).”

- **Health.** When children have ongoing care and immunizations (a medical home) needed to keep them healthy, they are more prepared for school. When children are sick, they can access immediate care and return to program activities. Time spent learning leads to academic success. *1304.20(a)*
- **Oral health.** Children with healthy teeth are better able to eat, speak, and focus on learning. Children need ongoing oral health care from a partnership between families and oral health professionals (a dental home). *1304.20(a)*
- **Motor development.** Activities that get children moving build large and small muscles. Strong large and small muscles support later reading, writing, and math skills. *1304.21(a)(5)(i); 1304.21(b)(3)*
- **Physical activity.** Children need daily exercise to be fit in both mind and body. *1304.21(a)(5)(i-ii)*
- **Nutrition.** Children who eat nutritious food during every meal stay healthy and have energy to learn. *1304.23(b)*
- **Sleep.** When children get a good night’s sleep, they can pay attention, remember what they learn, and manage their feelings (Owens et. al., 2012).

Children Who Are Mentally Healthy Can Focus On Learning

- **Mental health.** Children who feel good about themselves can learn new skills. When children can share their feelings, they learn how to interact well with others. When children are well liked, they do better in school. *1304.24*
- **Self-regulation.** Children who can manage their feelings and behavior can be actively involved in learning. *1304.21(a)(3)(i)(c)*



- **Prosocial behavior.** Children who can get along with others and follow directions are able to focus on learning. *1304.24*
- **Positive experiences.** A child's experiences affect how his or her brain develops. Learning happens when environments make children feel safe and valued. Children benefit from relationships with adults they know and interact with often. *1304.21(b)(1)*
- **Play.** When children play, they use their imagination and creativity. These skills help them grow in all developmental areas. *1304.21(a)(4)(i)*

Family Health and Wellness Support Healthy Child Development

- **Prenatal services.** Prenatal services set the stage for children's healthy development. *1304.40(c)*
- **Nurturing and responsive relationships.** Relationships that respond to a child's needs build healthy brain development. Beginning at birth, daily interactions with adults shape children's school readiness skills. Positive early relationships help them relate to others. Also, positive early relationships teach children how to behave in learning environments. *1304.21*
- **Health literacy.** Families can keep their child healthy when they have and can use basic health information. *1304.20(f)(2)*
- **Cultural and linguistic responsiveness.** Families need information in their own language to keep their children healthy and ready for school. Information should also reflect their home culture. *1304.20(f)(2)*
- **Family wellness.** When families have access to services that keep them healthy and financially secure, they can support their children's learning. *1304.40*

Comprehensive Services Ensure Children Are Ready For School

- **Promotion and prevention.** Services that promote health and prevent illness and injury help children succeed in school. When children are healthy, they can focus on what they are learning.
- **Daily child health checks.** Checking children's health every day helps identify problems that have an impact on learning. *1304.20(d)*
- **Screening:** Screening (vision, hearing, developmental and behavioral) helps determine whether a child needs additional help. Early identification puts children on track for success in school. *1304.20(b)*
- **Early intervention and treatment.** Early intervention and treatment for children with special health needs or disabilities helps them develop strategies for learning.
- **Access to specialized professionals.** Children benefit from working with staff members who are experts in disabilities, mental health, and health. These specialists provide children the necessary services to make educational progress. *1304.52(b)-(g)*
- **Individualization.** Children do best when they receive support that is targeted to their needs. *1304.20(c)(1)(ii)*



Coordinated Systems Support Health Services

- **Management systems to support health services.** Services for children and families need internal systems to maintain and improve them. These include planning, communication, record keeping and reporting, ongoing monitoring, and self-assessment. *1304.51*
- **Communication and collaboration.** Often, children and families get support from more than one service provider. Services are most effective when service providers share information with each other. *1304.41*
- **Safe and secure environments.** Children need a safe environment to explore and to take risks, build curiosity, and actively engage in learning. *1304.22(d)*
- **Daily environmental safety checks.** Children can play safely when staff members check environments before each use.

References

Owens, J.A., Wise, M., Akanli, L., Alfano, C., Alves, R., Anders, T., et. al. (2012). A letter in defense of sleep recommendations. *Pediatrics*, 129(3):548 -556. Retrieved from http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/02/08/peds.2011-2039.abstract/reply#pediatrics_el_52937

Shonkoff, J.P. and Phillips, D.A. (Eds.); Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development; Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.