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PROGRAM INSTRUCTION

TO: All Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees, including Delegate Agencies and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grantees

SUBJECT: Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) Final Rule

INSTRUCTION:

The Office of Head Start (OHS) announced in the Federal Register the first comprehensive revision of the [Head Start Program Performance Standards \(HSPPS\)](#) since their original release in 1975. The publication of this regulation marks an important milestone in the history of the Head Start program. The new standards build upon 50 years of leadership in comprehensive early childhood services and will further raise the quality of Head Start programs. The new HSPPS are streamlined, simplified, and reorganized to improve clarity and transparency to support high-quality program delivery and minimize administrative burden.

This final rule has been nearly a decade in the making, fulfilling Congress’s call for a review and revision of the Program Performance Standards in the bipartisan *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*. The new standards were developed by incorporating the growing body of research on effective early care and education, consultation from subject matter experts and representatives from grantees and Indian tribes, and thoughtful consideration of the 1,000 public comments received on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM). The result is a new set of standards that reinforces Head Start’s position as a leader in the field of comprehensive early education, reflects best practices for teaching and learning, allows local flexibility, and reduces the number of federal requirements by approximately one-third.

Key Changes from Current Program Performance Standards

The most significant change in the new standards is requiring programs, over time, to offer longer service duration, which research links to stronger child outcomes. The new standards require that all Head Start center-based programs offer at least 1,020 annual hours of service for preschoolers by August 1, 2021, with at least 50 percent of their center-based preschool slots meeting this requirement

by August 1, 2019. Early Head Start center-based programs must also provide 1,380 annual hours of service by August 1, 2018. These requirements will help programs to meet children’s learning needs while allowing local flexibility to design schedules that best meet community and family needs.

This extended timeline allows substantially more time than was proposed in the NPRM to allow a sufficient period of time for program planning, while still ensuring that more children will gain greater access to increased learning experiences needed for strong outcomes. The final rule also reserves authority for the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to reduce the requirement based on available funding.

A second major focus of the new standards is to solidify the critical role of parents in the program, which has been a long-standing cornerstone of the Head Start program. The final rule clearly acknowledges that parents are their children’s best advocates, better articulates family partnership services requirements, and maintains the parent committee requirement. We also revised the governance impasse procedures to require mediation or arbitration if necessary to resolve disputes between the governing body and the Policy Council. These changes reflect our belief that parents are foundational to Head Start’s success and that the program’s two-generation approach is integral to its impact on children and families.

Effective Date

The new Head Start Program Performance Standards are effective as of November 7, 2016, which is 60 days after their publication. However, in order to afford grantees a reasonable period of time to implement certain provisions that have changed significantly from previous standards, the final rule allows programs additional time to comply with these specific provisions. The compliance dates for the applicable provisions can be found in the final rule under *SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION, Table 1: Compliance Table*. We urge grantees to use this interim period to make adjustments as needed to assure full compliance with the new HSPPS.

The following provisions have a compliance date of **August 1, 2017**:

- §1302.22(c)(1) – Early Head Start home-based service duration
- §1302.32(a)(1)(ii) and (iii); §1302.32(a)(2); and §1302.32(b) – Curricula for center-based and family child care programs
- §1302.33(b)(1), (2), and (3); §1302.33(c)(2) and (3) – Assessment
- §1302.35(d)(1) through (3) – Curriculum for home-based programs
- §1302.53(b)(2) – Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)
- §1302.53(b)(3) – Data systems
- §1302.90(b)(2), (4) and (5) – Complete background check procedures
- §1302.92(c) - Coordinated coaching strategy and coaching staff qualifications
- §1302.101(b)(4) – Management of program data

The following provisions have a compliance date of **August 1, 2018**:

- §1302.21(c)(1) – Early Head Start center-based service duration
- §1302.91(e)(4)(ii) – Child Development Specialist staff qualifications
- §1302.91(e)(6)(i) – Home visitor staff qualifications

The following provisions have a compliance date of **August 1, 2019**:

- §1302.21(c)(2)(iii) and (v) – Head Start center-based service duration: 50 percent of slots at 1,020 annual hours

The following provision has a compliance date of **August 1, 2021**:

- §1302.21(c)(2)(iv) – Head Start center-based service duration: 100 percent of slots at 1,020 annual hours

Implementation Support

In order to support the Head Start community in understanding and successfully implementing the new standards, we will offer a comprehensive series of training and technical assistance (T/TA) supports across a variety of platforms over the 2016–2017 program year. These opportunities will be targeted to stakeholders at every level—from grantee management staff, boards, and Policy Councils to federal and contract staff and T/TA providers.

To establish a common, in-depth understanding of the new HSPPS and expectations for implementation that will lay the groundwork for consistent support to grantees across the country, we held an in-person training for federal program specialists last month. Throughout this program year, we will deliver a series of interactive webinars and webcasts to help grantees explore, understand, and fully implement the new HSPPS, with strategies for working with staff, governing bodies, and families as programs make changes to adopt the new standards. Our support for grantees will begin with a webcast and question and answer session with OHS leadership. There will also be a virtual HSPPS Showcase that will address specific areas of the new standards, which will become available on the [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#) in early September. We will host monthly webinars to support understanding and implementation for grantees, T/TA providers, Regional Office staff, and other stakeholders. More information about these monthly opportunities will be available soon.

Additionally, OHS staff and T/TA providers will be presenting on the new standards at regional, state, and national conferences throughout the fall, winter, and spring. Our initial T/TA period will culminate with the OHS Birth to 5 Leadership Institute for management teams in the spring to consolidate and build upon the learning that has taken place throughout the program year.

Next Steps

Programs are urged to take the time to read the final rule in its entirety, including the preamble and the text of the regulation. Programs are also encouraged to participate in the OHS web-based and in-person T/TA opportunities that will be offered during this program year. Programs will need to discuss and plan for the implementation of the new standards with their staff, governing bodies, and parents. OHS and

our T/TA partners will continue to provide direction, guidance, and resources that support fulfilling our promise to prepare our children and families for school and beyond.

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

/ Blanca Enriquez /

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