

Approval of the EHS Locally Designed Program Option Variations & Waiver of Group Size for Center-Based Services





Department of Human Services
Early Head Start Program
Program Year 2023-2024
Request for Waiver

The City of San Antonio, Department of Human Services (DHS), Head Start Program operating an Early Head Start Program (DHS Early Head Start), respectfully requests a waiver from the Office of Head Start (OHS) for two 24 months – 36 months classrooms to increase group size from 8 to 10 under the Head Start Program Performance Standard 1302.24 Locally-Designed Program Option Variations. After analyzing program data, including the updated 2022 Community Assessment, DHS Early Head Start believes with this change the program will be in a better position to reach full enrollment and better meet the needs of the families and community.

DHS Early Head Start has spent the last two and half years recruiting for home-base families, educating community partners on the benefits and services of a home-base programing and continues to struggle to be fully enrolled. For the 2022-2023 program year, the program has been under enrolled by 61% having only 39% of the home-base slots filled. On average 11 home-base children have been enrolled leaving 17 vacancies while the center-base program has had on average over 50 children on the waitlist.

According to the DHS 2022 updated Community Assessment, there are an estimated total of 26,129 eligible children under five years of age within the DHS Head Start service area, including 4,136 within EISD service area. The service area also contains a higher

concentration of Hispanic residents than most other Bexar County school districts, with EISD comprised of approximately 95% Hispanic residents which is higher than Bexar County (60%) and the state of Texas (39%). Also, 69% of EISD residents speak a language other than English, generally Spanish in EISD (69%). Additional needs and considerations of DHS Early Head Start children and families stem from many participants and families experiencing homelessness, foster care, and/or having a disability.

As noted in the updated 2022 Community Assessment, the average educational attainment among adult residents of EISD is less than that of the city, county, state, and nation. Half of the adult population of EISD has not completed a high school diploma. Only 5% of EISD residents had earned at least a bachelor's degree, compared to the city of San Antonio (26%), and Bexar County (28%). Households in EISD rely on public assistance. Almost one-third of EISD households use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 13% of EISD households rely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are other public assistance programs utilized in the Head Start service area. Local government and non-profit organizations provide additional support services to the DHS EHS families. Metro Health provides immunizations, dental services and San Antonio Food Bank provides food and grocery products in the EISD service area to the children and families in the DHS Early Head Start Program.

Currently the center-based program at Stafford EHS has 13 classrooms and maintains a group size of eight children with two teachers for all ages. With the recent submission for the Change in Program Option requesting to move 12 home-base slots to center-base slots, DHS EHS will add one more classroom to increase total number of classrooms to 14 at the start of the

2023-2024 program year. As a short-term strategy for the 2023-2024 program year, DHS EHS views increasing two classrooms servicing children 24 months and up as an auspicious approach as well as developmentally appropriate for children to experience a slightly larger class size as they are preparing to move into Pre-K. Having a maximum group size of 10 with two teachers for the indicated age group is still well under Texas Minimum Standards and can easily continue the high-quality standards of the EHS expectations. This would be a temporary situation for the 2023-2024 program year as DHS EHS has the intent of submitting a change in scope to increase EHS services for our next five-year cycle and beyond.

DHS EHS will ensure the two classrooms will continue to deliver the full range of services, consistent with HSPPS 1302.20 (b) and continue to achieve program goals as defined in subpart J of the HSPPS. Additionally, DHS EHS will continue to support classroom teachers through coaching and modeling to ensure effective teaching practices meet nurturing and responsive practices, interactions and environments foster trust and emotional security. All aspects of the learning environment will continue to meet the needs of the children with a focus on inquiry, the promotion of critical thinking and problem solving, communication and language rich. DHS EHS will ensure the learning environment continues to be well-organized with developmentally appropriate schedules and lesson plans, that promote relational learning, individualization and small group activities as well as offer indoor and outdoor learning experiences that encourage opportunities for play, exploration and experimentation.

DHS Early Head Start Program views this as an opportunity to support our oldest transitioning toddlers, which currently move from a classroom of eight to a classroom of 17 three-year-olds, in a more conducive environment to adjust to a larger group of children as many

of our transitioning three-year-olds move from the EHS program to the Stafford Pre-K Head Start program.