

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No. ACF-PI-OHS-23-04	2. Issuance Date: 11/20/2023
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start	
	4. Key Words: Head Start Workforce; Wages; Benefits; Mental Health; Quality Improvement	

## PROGRAM INSTRUCTION

**TO:** All Head Start and Early Head Start Grant Recipients

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming – Public Comment Period

## INFORMATION:

The Office of Head Start (OHS) has a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register, [Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming](#). The publication opens a 60-day public comment period. OHS is soliciting feedback on these proposed changes and will use comments submitted by the public in making decisions for the final rule.

This [NPRM proposes](#) new and enhanced changes to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) in three main areas: workforce supports, mental health, and other quality improvements. The proposed revisions would ensure OHS provides clear federal requirements for:

- Wages and benefits to support the Head Start workforce
- Better integration of mental health into all levels of Head Start programming
- Enhanced standards in other service areas to promote quality improvement and clarity of requirements

The current HSPPS remain in effect until a final rule is issued.

## Workforce

This NPRM proposes standards for staff compensation that require programs to promote competitive wages for staff by August 2031. More specifically, the proposed standards would require programs to pay education staff annual salaries that are comparable to public school preschool teachers. This represents progress towards an ultimate goal of pay parity for Head Start education staff with kindergarten through third grade teachers. The NPRM also proposes to require programs to pay all staff a wage that is at least sufficient to cover basic costs of living.

Finally, it proposes to require programs to provide or facilitate access to comprehensive benefits for full-time staff, including health insurance, paid leave, and short-term behavioral health services.

The diverse Head Start workforce has long subsidized the cost of Head Start services through low wages. This NPRM supports Head Start programs in maintaining a diverse and well-qualified workforce by ensuring staff are more fairly compensated, which in turn promotes more stable, high-quality services for enrolled children and families.

## **Mental Health**

The revisions in the NPRM would enhance existing requirements to integrate mental health more intentionally and consistently across program systems to support children, families, and staff. The proposal also includes new and updated requirements for a multidisciplinary team that is responsible for addressing mental health, reducing barriers to obtaining mental health consultation, and ensuring a proactive and preventative approach to identifying and supporting children's mental health needs.

## **Other Quality Improvements**

The changes in the NPRM enhance and clarify requirements in other service areas to promote consistent high-quality programming and support child well-being. These proposed changes include a cap for family service worker caseloads; enhancements to promote child safety in Head Start programs; and requirements for testing and addressing the presence of lead in water and paint of Head Start facilities. The NPRM includes revisions to the community assessment process, as well as new requirements for programs to identify barriers to program attendance, such as lack of transportation.

These changes will also help address some of the inequities perpetuated among the children and families served in Head Start programs. For instance, proposed changes clarify and update the definition of income used to determine a child's eligibility for services. Families in low-income communities and communities of color have underdeveloped infrastructure and are disproportionately exposed to related health and wellness risks. New proposed requirements to test Head Start facilities for lead in water and paint would help address these types of inequities.

## **Submit Your NPRM Comments**

Please read the full [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) and submit your comments by January 19, 2024. The Office of Head Start must consider all the comments submitted before finalizing any changes to the HSPPS.

To submit comments, follow the "Submit a comment" instructions in the Federal Register. To ensure OHS can most effectively respond to your comments, clearly identify the issues on which you are commenting. Please be as specific as possible in your comments. Provide the page number, identify the column, and cite the paragraph from the Federal Register document (e.g.,

page 10999, second column, 45 CFR §1305.6(a)(1)(i)). If you wish to comment anonymously, please enter "NA" in the required fields.

If electronic submission is not possible, you may send comments via the U.S. Postal Service to the address indicated in the Federal Register. In accordance with the instructions in the Federal Register, OHS reminds all interested stakeholders to submit comments in response to the proposed changes within 60 days of the NPRM's publication date.

Thank you for your work on behalf of children and families. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Sincerely,

/ Khari M. Garvin /

Khari M. Garvin  
Director  
Office of Head Start