SchoolHouse Connection

Overcoming Homelessness Through Education

The Head Start Program Performance Standards and Homelessness

In September 2016, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued final regulations to implement the Head Start Act. These regulations, known as the Head Start Program Performance Standards, apply to Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The full regulations are available here.

For more information on early childhood education and homelessness, see www.schoolhouseconnection.org.

§1302.11 Determining community strengths, needs, and resources.

- Head Start programs must conduct community needs assessments at least once over their five-year grant period. These needs assessments must use data that include children experiencing homelessness, in collaboration with, to the extent possible, McKinney-Vento local education agency liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432(6)(A)). [45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(i)]

- Head Start programs must annually review and update the community assessment to reflect any significant changes, including rates of family and child homelessness. [45 CFR §1302.11(b)(2)]

§1302.12 Determining, verifying, and documenting eligibility.

- Children who meet the definition of homelessness in the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act are categorically eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start. [45 CFR §1302.12(c)(iii)]
  (This means that homeless children do not need to prove income; they are eligible for Head Start by virtue of meeting the definition of homelessness.)

- If a program chooses to enroll participants who are not categorically eligible, and whose family incomes are between 100 and 130 percent of the poverty line, it must be able to report to the Head Start regional program office how it is meeting the needs of low-income families or families

potentially eligible for public assistance, homeless children and children in foster care, and include local demographic data on these populations. Enrollment policies and procedures also must be reported. [45 CFR §1302.12(d)(2)]

- A program's policies and procedures cannot require families to provide documents that confirm a child's age, if doing so creates a barrier for the family to enroll the child. [45 CFR §1302.12(h)]

- To verify whether a family is homeless, a program may accept a written statement from a homeless services provider, school personnel, or other service agency attesting that the child is homeless or any other documentation that indicates homelessness, including documentation from a public or private agency, a declaration, information gathered on enrollment or application forms, or notes from an interview with staff to establish the child is homeless, or any other document that establishes homelessness.[1] [45 CFR §1302.12(i)(3)]

§1302.13 Recruitment of children.

- In order to reach those most in need of services, Head Start programs must develop and implement a recruitment process designed to actively inform all families with eligible children within the recruitment area of the availability of program services, and encourage and assist them in applying for admission to the program. A program must include specific efforts to actively locate and recruit children with disabilities and other vulnerable children, including homeless children and children in foster care. [45 CFR §1302.13]

§1302.14 Selection process.

- Head Start programs must annually establish selection criteria that weigh the prioritization of selection of participants, based on community needs identified in the community needs assessment, and including whether a child is homeless or in foster care. [45 CFR §1302.14(a)(1)]

§1302.15 Enrollment.

- If a Head Start program serves homeless children or children in foster care, it must make efforts to maintain the child's enrollment regardless of whether the family or child moves to a different service area, or transition the child to a program in a different service area, according to the family's needs. [45 CFR §1302.15(b)(3)]

- If a Head Start program determines from the community assessment that there are families experiencing homelessness in the area, or children in foster care that could benefit from services, the program may reserve one or more enrollment slots for

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[1] If a family can provide one of the documents described in this section, Head Start staff must describe efforts made to verify the accuracy of the information provided and state whether the family is eligible because they are homeless. If a family cannot provide one of the documents described in this section to prove the child is

homeless, a Head Start program may accept the family's signed declaration to that effect, if, in a written statement, program staff describe the child's living situation that meets the definition of homeless Program staff may seek information from third parties who have firsthand knowledge about a family's living situation, if the family gives written consent.

pregnant women and children experiencing homelessness and children in foster care, when a vacancy occurs. No more than 3 percent of a program's funded enrollment slots may be reserved. If the reserved enrollment slot is not filled within 30 days, the enrollment slot becomes vacant and then must be filled within 30 days. [45 CFR §1302.15(c)]

- A program must comply with state immunization enrollment and attendance requirements, with the exception of homeless children. [45 CFR §1302.15(e)]

§1302.16 Attendance.

- To support the attendance of homeless children, Head Start programs must allow homeless children to attend for up to 90 days or as long as allowed under state licensing requirements, without immunization and other records, to give the family reasonable time to present these documents. [45 CFR §1302.16(c)(1)]

- If a child experiencing homelessness is unable to attend classes regularly because the family does not have transportation to and from the program facility, the program must utilize community resources, where possible, to provide transportation for the child. [45 CFR §1302.16(c)(2)]

§1302.53 Community partnerships and coordination with other early childhood and education programs.

- Head Start programs must establish necessary collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations that may include

housing assistance agencies and providers of support for children and families experiencing homelessness, including the local educational agency liaison designated under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. [45 CFR §1302.53(a)(2)(vi)]

§1302.72 Transitions between programs.

- For families and children moving out of the community in which they are currently served, including homeless families and foster children, Head Start programs must undertake efforts to support effective transitions to other Early Head Start or Head Start programs. If Early Head Start or Head Start is not available, the program should assist the family to identify another early childhood program that meets their needs. [45 CFR §1302.72(a)]

1305.2 Terms.

- The term "homeless children" is defined to mean the same as homeless children and youths in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act at 42 U.S.C. §11434a(2). [45 CFR §1305.2]