

Head Start Proposes Eliminating New Duration Requirement

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The Office of Head Start (OHS) proposes to eliminate the full-day, full-year duration requirement for Head Start center-based programs. Currently, Head Start programs are required to provide a minimum of 1,020 annual hours for all center-based slots by August 1, 2021 ([45 C.F.R. § 1302.21\(c\)\(2\)](#)). This was a significant change under the new Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), which took effect in November 2016.

In a proposed rule published in a [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking \(NPRM\)](#) on March 26, 2019 (84 FR 11269), OHS noted two primary reasons for eliminating the duration requirement. First, while OHS continues to believe that increasing Head Start services to full-day, full-year programming has significant developmental benefits for low-income children, without additional funding from Congress, Head Start programs would be forced to reduce the total number of children they serve in order to expand duration. As OHS noted, “the tradeoffs associated with providing longer services for some children at the expense of providing no services for other children are too severe.” Due to insufficient funding in FY 2018, OHS already waived the duration requirements that at least 50% of a Head Start grantee’s center-based slots meet the full-day, full-year requirements by August 1, 2018. This proposed rule would eliminate the duration requirement entirely.

Second, OHS indicated that the HSPPS’ original approach of requiring all center-based programs to increase their hours of operation was too prescriptive. By eliminating the duration requirement, programs have the autonomy and flexibility to design a schedule that best meets their community’s needs. The NPRM notes that programs can still decide to offer full-day, full-year services if they determine this would be in the best interests of the families they serve.

In place of the extended duration requirement, OHS proposes to leave in place the long-standing Head Start center-based service duration minimums. Center-based programs would have to provide services for a minimum of 3.5 hours per day for 160 days per year (if they operate for 5 days per week) or 128 days per year (if they operate for 4 days per week), and a minimum of 3.5 hours per day for 128 days per year if they

operate double sessions 4 days per week. Programs can continue to request to operate locally-designed program option variations under [45 C.F.R. § 1302.24](#).

OHS is inviting the public to weigh in on the proposed elimination of the duration requirement by submitting comments electronically via Regulations.gov at https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=ACF_FRDOC_0001-0086. Comments are due by 11:59 p.m. EDT on May 28, 2019.