

## Head Start Service Duration Requirements Take Effect August 1

By CAPLAW Staff  
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For Head Start grantees, the deadline to provide plans for at least 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations over the course of 8 months per year for at least 45 percent of their center-based funded enrollment is quickly approaching. By August 1, 2021, grantees must either share compliant program designs with their Regional Office or request a waiver of the requirement in the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES).

Under the 2016 Head Start Performance Standards, [45 CFR 1302.21\(c\)\(2\)\(iv\)](#), programs were originally required to provide longer service duration (defined as 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations over the course of at least 8 months per year) for all of their center-based programs. In January 2020, that requirement was adjusted down to just 45 percent of a grantee's center-based funded enrollment.

Grantees have the flexibility to design programs with varying hours per day and number of days per year, as long as at least 45 percent of children in center-based slots receive at least 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations over the course of at least 8 months or, where appropriate, align with local education agency (LEA) calendars. Slots operating in programs partnering with an LEA for Head Start service delivery may operate for fewer than 1,020 annual hours of planned class operations or fewer than 8 months of service if that program schedule aligns with the annual hours required for first grade by the LEA and the alignment is necessary to maintain the partnership.

As August 1, 2021 approaches, programs are encouraged to review their Head Start center-based program designs to determine whether their program schedule (under normal operations) meets the new service duration requirements. Programs not yet meeting the 45 percent requirement should review their community needs assessment, self-assessment, and budget to develop their proposed approach. They are also encouraged to consult their Regional Office for guidance. Program design should reflect how services would be delivered during normal operations, rather than temporary service delivery plans during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Programs may request a waiver of the requirement to better meet the unique needs of their communities or to demonstrate or test alternative approaches for providing program services. Waiver requests must:

- Demonstrate that the proposed program design will deliver the full range of services consistent with [45 CFR 1302.20\(b\)](#) – [45 CFR 1302.24\(a\)](#);
- Demonstrate how the proposed program design is consistent with achieving program goals in [Program Management and Quality Improvement, 45 CFR Part 1302 Subpart J](#) – [45 CFR 1302.24\(a\)](#);

- Provide evidence that demonstrates the proposed program design effectively supports appropriate development and progress in children's early learning outcomes – 45 CFR 1302.24(c)(4);
- Provide evidence that the proposed program design better meets the needs of parents than the service duration minimum of 45 percent of Head Start center-based slots operating for at least 1,020 annual hours over 8 months per year – 45 CFR 1302.24(c)(5); and
- Assess the effectiveness (or provide a plan to assess the effectiveness) of the proposed program design in supporting appropriate development and progress in children's early learning outcomes – 45 CFR 1302.24(c)(5).

Waiver requests must be submitted as an annual funding application or change in scope amendment in the HSES by August 1, 2021. They are subject to approval by OHS and may be revoked based on progress toward program goals ([45 CFR 1302.102](#)) and monitoring ([45 CFR 1304.2](#)).

For more information about the new service duration requirements, please see [Head Start Program Instruction ACF-PI-HS-21-02](#).

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