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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

SUBJECT: Statutory Degree and Credentialing Requirements

INFORMATION:

The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to remind programs of the current requirements for Early Head Start center-based teachers [Sec. 645A(h)], as well as the requirements taking effect October 1, 2011, for preschool Head Start classroom teachers. Grantees must make every effort to reach and sustain compliance with the requirements for center-based teaching staff, hiring qualified staff in accordance with the Head Start Act of 2007 [Sec. 648A(a)(3)(B)].

This IM builds upon two previous IMs on the subject of center-based teaching staff qualifications affecting Head Start and Early Head Start programs: [ACF-IM-HS-08-12](#) issued on August 19, 2008, and [ACF-IM-HS-10-06](#) issued on October 27, 2010.

The attached question and answer document addresses two major requirements: first, the statutory requirements related to qualifications for center-based Early Head Start teaching staff, which were effective September 30, 2010; and second, the preschool requirements effective October 1, 2011.

Grantees should review the credentials of each center-based preschool, and infant and toddler teacher, and must be able to demonstrate that staff meets the requirements of the 2007 Head Start Act.

Please direct any questions on this IM to your Office of Head Start Regional Office.

/ Yvette Sanchez Fuentes

/ Yvette Sanchez Fuentes
 Director
 Office of Head Start

Requirements for Early Head Start Infant and Toddler Center-based Caregiver/Teaching Staff

What are the current requirements for Early Head Start (EHS) teacher qualifications?

Section 645A(h)(1) of the Head Start Act requires that not later than September 30, 2010, all teachers providing direct services to children and families participating in center-based EHS programs have a minimum of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and have been trained or have equivalent coursework in age-appropriate early childhood and child development.

Are there alternatives to the CDA that would qualify an infant-toddler teacher for EHS?

There are a number of alternative credential programs available for infant and toddler teachers. There are a number of State agencies, State boards and commissions, as well as accredited colleges and universities that have developed infant-toddler certificate and degree programs that meet or exceed the requirements for a CDA. Those programs that require more than the CDA may award college credit that accrues toward a 2-year degree. Teachers who successfully complete such certificate programs that meet or exceed the 120 educational clock hours (120 hours) and professional experience requirements of at least 480 hours as required for the CDA are considered by the Office of Head Start (OHS) to meet the EHS credential requirement.

EHS programs that collaborate with other early childhood systems and programs may have additional alternatives available. Some agencies meet the CDA requirement by utilizing teachers, employed by their partners, who have successfully completed teacher certifications.

What are the criteria a "State-awarded" certificate must meet for EHS teachers to be qualified?

State-awarded certificates should be age specific to the children each teacher works with and must meet or exceed the minimum requirements for obtaining a CDA. It is highly recommended that certificates provide credits toward a 2-year degree at an accredited college or university. Such certificates must include content explicitly related to the care and early education of infants and toddlers.

Head Start Requirements for Preschool Center-based Teaching Staff

Note: A few of the Q/As in the following section apply to both EHS and Head Start center-based teaching staff.

What are the requirements for preschool Head Start teachers as of October 1, 2011?

By October 1, 2011, each preschool Head Start classroom in center-based programs must have a teacher who has at least one of the following:

1. An associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in early childhood education; or
2. An associate degree in a field related to early childhood education and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-age children; or
3. A baccalaureate or advanced degree in any field and coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education, with experience teaching preschool-age children; or

4. A baccalaureate degree in any field and has been admitted into the Teach for America program, has passed a rigorous early childhood content exam such as the Praxis II, has participated in a Teach for America summer training institute that includes teaching preschool children, and is receiving ongoing professional development and support from Teach for America's professional staff.

What counts as "coursework equivalent to a major in early childhood education"?

Generally, this would be determined by the specific, accredited college or university offering the courses in degree programs. Coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education includes, but is not limited to, courses that focus on child development, early childhood education, early childhood curriculum (as a whole or by domain such as math, science, or literacy), early childhood teaching/instruction, child assessment, psychology, family development, health and physical development, mathematics, science, and children's literature. Such courses may be offered in various departments, such as education, home economics, music, art, library sciences, physical education and recreation, psychology, family studies, and others.

It is up to each prospective employee to provide the Head Start program with information on the college courses taken and to demonstrate that the courses address early childhood education and child development with a focus on children ages 3 to 5. In some cases, programs will need to examine the college transcripts and review course descriptions or syllabi provided by the candidate in order to determine the relevance of the coursework to early childhood and to the roles of preschool teachers in the Head Start program.

Head Start agencies in States that license or certify State pre-k teachers may also choose to accept the type(s) and number(s) of courses recognized by the State education agency as qualifying teachers to teach preschool-aged children in that State as "coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education" *as long as they also have experience teaching preschool-aged children.*

Does a person with an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree in a field other than early childhood education need experience teaching preschool-aged children in addition to the courses equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education?

Yes. An individual who has a degree in a field other than early childhood education must have experience in an early childhood setting with children ages 3 to 5 in addition to courses equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education to meet the qualifications requirement. The Head Start Act does not prescribe the kind or duration of qualifying experience; each grantee may establish its own criteria.

Does a person with an early childhood education degree need additional experience in working with children to be qualified as a Head Start teacher?

No. A teacher who has an associate, baccalaureate, or an advanced degree in early childhood education does not need additional work experience with children to be qualified as a preschool Head Start teacher.

Does a person with a degree that includes student teaching and/or other supervised practicum experiences in an early childhood setting/classroom need additional experience in working with children to be qualified as a Head Start or Early Head Start teacher when the experience matches the age(s) of children assigned to the teacher?

No. A teacher who has a degree that includes student teaching or other experiences in a supervised placement with infants, toddlers, or preschoolers does not need additional employment experience with children to be qualified because the college placements are supervised and certified by the college and the State as an acceptable part of the requirements for their degree program.

Must all the courses that total toward the "equivalency" for a major in early childhood education come from one college?

No. Teachers who already have a degree in a field other than early childhood education may combine the records of coursework completed at more than one accredited institution.

If a teacher has a bachelor's degree in a field other than early childhood education can the "coursework equivalent to a major" be earned at the associate degree level or must they be earned at a 4-year college?

The additional courses may be earned from accredited 2-year and/or 4-year colleges and universities.

Do one-credit courses count toward the requirement for coursework equivalent to a major?

In cases where the college or university requires one or more specific one-credit courses, those would count toward the requirement for coursework equivalent to a major in early childhood education. Courses given for one credit rarely provide the intensity of study or the depth of content necessary for mastery of a subject or improvement of teaching skills.

Do courses paid for with Head Start funds need to count/accrue toward a qualifying degree?

For teachers who do not yet have a qualifying degree, and for whom Head Start is paying tuition and/or releasing them from their teaching responsibilities, all courses taken need to count/accrue toward earning a qualifying degree. Therefore, for teachers who do not have qualifying degrees, college coursework needs to be earned as an enrolled student in a course of study in Early Childhood Education at an accredited institution that can award the degree.

Are there alternate routes for teachers with a 4-year degree in a field other than early childhood education (ECE) to be considered qualified as a preschool teacher?

Yes. Individuals who have a baccalaureate degree in a field other than ECE are qualified as preschool teachers when they have been admitted into the Teach for America program; **and** passed a rigorous early childhood content exam such as the Early Childhood Praxis; **and** participated in the Teach for America training institute that includes teaching preschool children; **and** receive ongoing professional development and support from the Teach for America's professional staff.

Individuals with non-early childhood education degrees may use the options provided under the list of alternatives for teachers with a degree in elementary education **with** experience teaching preschool children.

Does a teacher with a degree in elementary education meet the October 1, 2011, requirements?

Teachers with a degree in elementary education are part of the larger category of those who have a degree in a field other than early childhood education. Teachers with a degree in elementary

education, **and** with one of the following, **and** with experience teaching preschool children are qualified to teach in preschool classrooms on and after October 1, 2011:

- Coursework equivalent to a major in early childhood education comparable to State accredited programs of study for early childhood education degrees; or
- A State-issued license to teach preschool/pre-k where the license prerequisites include completion of coursework equivalent to a major in early childhood education; or
- Evidence that the specific degree from a specific college included pre-k in the degree study program, as often demonstrated through an endorsement or specialization noted on the diploma, license or transcript.

Does Head Start accept college degrees earned in foreign countries as meeting the qualified teacher mandate for preschool classrooms?

In order for a teacher with a degree from a foreign institution to be qualified under the October 1, 2011, requirements, the teacher candidate must verify that the degree or degree equivalency (see below) meets one of the basic requirements of a qualifying degree contained in Section 648A of the Head Start Act.

Teacher candidates or applicants who meet one of the basic requirements above must also establish equivalency with U.S. higher education standards. Teacher candidates with foreign credentials would need to show that their educational credentials have been evaluated by a private organization that is deemed qualified by the U.S. Department of Education and specializes in the evaluation/interpretation of foreign education programs. Such education must be deemed equivalent to that gained in an accredited U.S. education program, or full credit has been given for the courses at a U.S. accredited college or university. For further information, visit: <http://www.ed.gov/>.

When an independent review determines that the degree does not qualify the person, the person would need to earn enough course credits to have the equivalency of a major at a college or university in the U.S. or follow the routes described previously under, "Are there alternate routes for a teacher with a 4-year degree in a field other than early childhood education to become qualified as a preschool teacher?" Under any of the categories of the Head Start Act, this person must also have preschool teaching experience.

Which teachers with a currently valid CDA can work in preschool classrooms on and after October 1, 2011?

Section 648A of the Head Start Act requires that when a classroom in a center-based Head Start program does not have a teacher with a qualifying degree, that classroom **must have** a teacher with at least a valid CDA appropriate to the age of the children being served, or a State-awarded certificate to teach preschool that meets or exceeds the requirements of a CDA, **and** the teacher must be on individually approved waiver, **and** the teacher must be enrolled in a program leading to a minimum of an associate degree in early childhood education or a related field with coursework that is the equivalent of a major in early childhood education and that will be completed within a reasonable period not to exceed the 3-year waiver period.

Under what conditions can a waiver be granted? (See related instruction on requesting waivers.)

As of October 1, 2011, a 3-year waiver can only be granted for individual preschool, center-based teachers when a Head Start agency successfully demonstrates it has attempted to recruit a qualified teacher candidate.

Under that condition, *a waiver can only be considered for a preschool classroom teacher who is enrolled in a program of study leading to at least a 2-year degree in early childhood education* **and** who has at least one of the following at the time of the waiver request:

1. the teacher has a valid CDA or a state-awarded certificate for preschool teachers that meets or exceeds the requirements of a CDA; or
2. the teacher demonstrates she/he has completed all CDA prerequisites and can demonstrate that she/he is merely awaiting direct assessment from the Council for Professional Recognition; or
3. the teacher can demonstrate that she/he has completed all prerequisites for a State-awarded preschool certificate meeting or exceeding the requirements of the CDA credential and is awaiting the award of the certificate.

Is there an exemption or 'grandfather clause' in the October 1, 2011, requirements for teachers who have been teaching in Head Start for a certain number of years?

No. The Head Start Act does not provide for exemptions or grandfathering of teachers who are already teaching in Head Start. The purpose of the mandate is to ensure that each teacher is qualified and can provide experiences of consistently high quality for children.