

## Achieving and Maintaining Full Enrollment

ACYF Administration on Children, Youth and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Administration for Children and Families	
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### PROGRAM INSTRUCTION:

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

**SUBJECT:** Achieving and Maintaining Full Enrollment

### INSTRUCTION:

This Program Instruction explains the Head Start Bureau's policies and expectations regarding grantee compliance with the requirements of 45 CFR Part 1305 - Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance in Head Start, particularly the need to achieve and maintain full funded enrollment.

We all understand how important a Head Start experience can be in the lives of our nation's disadvantaged children and families. In recognition of this, in fiscal year 2004 the Congress appropriated funds to promote the school readiness of 909,000 low-income children through the provision of comprehensive Head Start services. However, annual Program Information Report (PIR) data, as well as non-compliance findings from on-site program reviews, indicate that an increasing number of grantees are having problems maintaining their full funded enrollment. By accepting a Head Start grant your agency is agreeing to the terms of that grant, including the requirement that you serve the full number of children for whom you have been funded. We cannot allow potentially thousands of children to be denied a Head Start experience because some grantees do not achieve and maintain their full funded enrollment

### Giving all eligible children a chance to participate in Head Start

Because Head Start is not able to serve all of the low-income children who meet its eligibility criteria, one of the most important responsibilities grantees have is to decide which children are selected to be enrolled and which are not. Your agency is required by 45 CFR 1305 to take a number of important actions, including:

- Conducting a Community Assessment of the strengths and needs within your approved service area.
- Using the assessment to determine your program's design option(s), the high-need areas from which children will be recruited (if your program does not have the resources to reach your entire service area), the location of centers, and the criteria that define the types of children who will be given priority for recruitment and enrollment.
- Recruiting the greatest number of children possible so they can be considered for selection and enrollment.
- Enrolling the children and families with the greatest need for Head Start services.

Although it may not be possible to serve all the low-income children in your service or recruitment area, each eligible family has a right to learn about Head Start and be given a fair chance to have their child considered for enrollment. This means taking steps such as providing recruitment materials in the languages of the major population groups who live in your area and hiring staff who can do outreach to these families in their languages.

In many communities throughout the country, there have been dramatic changes in population and demographics over the past decade, such as the large number of Hispanics living in areas where they have not traditionally lived. Are there new populations who have moved into parts of your service area where your Head Start program does not recruit children? Does the location of your program's centers or its transportation services make it difficult or impossible for these families to enroll in Head Start? It is important that you regularly review your designated recruitment areas to be sure they continue to be appropriate. We urge you to make special efforts to reach populations who historically have been underserved. Changing demographics should result in a changing Head Start program

It is particularly important for programs that are having difficulty maintaining full enrollment to take steps to reach new populations and unserved neighborhoods and to revitalize outreach and recruitment efforts.

### Maintaining full enrollment

Another critical part of 45 CFR 1305 concerns maintaining full enrollment. The regulation requires that "A Head Start

grantee must maintain its funded enrollment level” and further states that, in order to do this, “Each Head Start program, except migrant programs, must obtain a number of applications during the recruitment process ... that is greater than the enrollment opportunities that are anticipated to be available over the course of the next enrollment year in order to select those with the greatest need for Head Start services.” It should be noted that programs are expected to be at full enrollment on the first day of their enrollment year.

The regulation also requires that, “...no more than 30 days may elapse before a vacancy is filled”, except that, “A program may elect not to fill a vacancy when 60 calendar days or less remain in the program’s enrollment year.” Grantees complying with these requirements will ensure that the maximum number of eligible children possible receive the benefits of Head Start services. Such grantees should not have any problems maintaining full enrollment.

Grantees that are not maintaining full enrollment or anticipate they may soon be at less than full enrollment (for example, because they have no waiting lists) must immediately contact their ACF Regional Office. In most cases, the Regional Office will schedule an on-site visit to assess the reasons for this and, in conjunction with the grantee, make a judgment about how to resolve this issue.

If enrollment issues are due to changing demographics that have resulted in there being insufficient numbers of eligible children in the grantee's service area, one approach could be for the ACF Regional Office to reduce, through issuance of a Financial Assistance Award, grantee enrollment with a proportionate reduction in funding. In situations where an enrollment reduction is not appropriate, such as when there are still many unserved Head Start-eligible children in the grantee’s service area, the grantee and the Regional Office will need to develop a strategy for reaching full enrollment as soon as possible. In most cases, this will include designating the grantee’s enrollment problem as a non-compliance finding which will need to be corrected within 90 days. The Regional Office and, as appropriate, the T/TA system will work with the grantee during this 90 day period. If this problem is not corrected within 90 days, the grantee will be designated as deficient and will be required to correct this deficiency within a specified period of time that, generally, will not exceed 90 additional days. Failure to correct any identified deficiency will, as required by law, result in ACF initiating proceedings to terminate the agency’s Head Start grant, in whole or in part.

Enrollment problems identified during a monitoring review will be treated as a non-compliance finding, subject to the above process, unless the Regional Office believes that the problem is of such scope and severity that it should immediately be treated as a deficiency.

If your program is considering changing your program’s design or enrollment, the changes will eventually require ACF approval. We encourage you to contact your ACF regional office early to discuss these changes.

In summary, the Head Start Bureau, in conjunction with the ACF Regional Offices, intends to move aggressively in the coming months to assure that each of the 909,000 children whom grantees have been funded to serve will, in fact, receive the benefits of Head Start. Thank you for your continuing commitment to Head Start.

/s/

Joan E. Ohl  
Commissioner