



Improving Head Start Workforce Compensation, Wellness, and Career Advancement





Katie Hamm

*Acting Director, Office of Head Start and
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Early Childhood Development*

Shawna Pinckney

*Associate Deputy Director
Office of Head Start*

Colleen Rathgeb

*Director, Division of Planning, Oversight, and Policy
Office of Head Start*

Amanda Bryans

*Education and Research to Practice Supervisor
Office of Head Start*



Commitment to the Early Childhood Workforce

- A key part of the ACF mission is to support programs to provide high quality early care and education services that meet the needs of children and their families in communities across the country.
 - This includes a qualified and stable workforce
- To do this, we need:
 - An ECE system that attracts, prepares, supports, and retains a qualified, diverse workforce across settings and programs.
 - Appropriate compensation, including benefits, that demonstrates the value of the workforce to our communities.
- Meeting these needs requires big changes within the ECE system

Stabilizing the Head Start Workforce

- The Office of Head Start (OHS) recognizes and values the commitment of program staff to the mission of Head Start
- Head Start program staff are highly qualified
 - Credentials and qualifications of staff have significantly increased
 - Compensation has been persistently low
- Stagnant wages and lack of comprehensive benefits make it difficult to recruit and retain staff, which impedes programs from serving their funded enrollment.
- Changes are needed to stabilize the workforce and ensure the long-term viability of the Head Start program.

Overview of New Information Memorandum

- ACF-IM-HS-22-06: Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce
- Released September 12th, 2022

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No. ACF-IM-HS-22-06	2. Issuance Date: 09/12/2022
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start	
	4. Key Words: Head Start Workforce; Compensation; Wages; Benefits; Bonuses; Recruitment and Retention; Apprenticeship; Career Pathways; Teacher Qualifications Waiver	

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: All Head Start and Early Head Start Grant Recipients

SUBJECT: Strategies to Stabilize the Head Start Workforce

INFORMATION:

The federal Head Start program is a nationally recognized leader in the field of early childhood education for providing innovative, high-quality services to the children and families who will most benefit from early education and comprehensive services. In this memo, "Head Start" refers to Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start programs, services, and staff, unless otherwise specified. The credentials and qualifications of Head Start staff have significantly increased over the past decade, while their compensation has been persistently low. Stagnant wages and lack of comprehensive benefits and wellness supports make it difficult to recruit and retain staff, which contributes to classroom closures and high caseloads for current staff. A well-compensated and supported workforce is essential to providing high-quality services to promote children's optimal development and family well-being. The Office of Head Start (OHS) draws upon the legacy of Head Start leadership in the early childhood field to encourage programs to appropriately compensate and support their staff.

Head Start staff are deeply committed to the mission of the program and are highly qualified professionals. OHS encourages programs to look holistically at their organizational structure and identify sustainable ways to support and compensate staff accordingly. As needed, OHS encourages grant recipients to consider restructuring their programs as a sustainable mechanism for providing increased compensation and other necessary supports to staff. This requires a balance of effectively providing high-quality, comprehensive services to the highest need children and families while improving staff compensation and supports. This may include consolidating grants, restructuring management or organizations, or requesting a reduction in the overall number of funded slots while continuing to prioritize services to the children and families who are most in need.

Key Messages

- Strongly encourages programs to look holistically at their organizational structure and identify sustainable ways to stabilize their workforce
- Recipients can consider restructuring their programs, which may include:
 - Restructuring management or organization structure
 - Requesting a reduction in funded enrollment
 - Consolidating grants
- Requires a balance of effectively providing high-quality comprehensive services to highest need children and families while also improving staff compensation and supports
- Programs should make decisions through thoughtful, data-informed strategic planning

Permanently Increase Compensation

- Programs may request an enrollment reduction to increase compensation
 - Address compensation issues for which there are pressing staffing challenges
 - Consider equity issues in pay and benefits
- Data informing these changes can be found in the wage comparability study, as well as other data points, including:
 - Current enrollment and staffing including where staffing challenges exist and why
 - Wages and benefits offered by local or neighboring elementary schools
 - Local cost of living



Shasta County Head Start

Restructured their program and requested an enrollment reduction to better meet the needs of families and improve compensation for their workforce.



Head Start, Inc.

Overhauled their benefits packages to better meet the needs of their workforce, including maternity leave and access to employee assistance programs.



Offer Financial Incentives

- Programs can offer bonuses, short-term pay increases, or other financial incentives to staff.
 - American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds; other COVID-19 relief funds; base grant operations funds may be used to fund incentives
- Reevaluate the size of monetary incentives that are necessary and reasonable
 - What is “necessary and reasonable” during COVID-19 pandemic and workforce shortage is likely different than before (see [ACF-IM-HS-21-01](#))
 - May be appropriate to consider incentive amounts larger than previously offered
- See [ACF-IM-HS-22-04](#) – Competitive Bonuses for the Head Start Workforce

Compensation During Closures and Transitions

- When centers are closed or in-person home visits are suspended due to a disaster, programs can provide compensation for up to two weeks to staff who are unable to work
 - See [ACF-IM-HS-19-01](#)
- Programs also may continue to pay health insurance premiums for up to 90 days for staff subject to furlough, such as during a summer break
 - See [ACF-IM-HS-21-02](#)



Inspire Development Centers

Provides financial incentives to retain and recruit employees.



Qualification Waiver for Preschool Teachers

- A program may request a waiver of up to 3 years for the qualification requirements for a Head Start center-based preschool teacher who meets certain requirements:
 - Enrolled in a program that grants a qualifying degree that will be completed within 3 years
 - AND have a current CDA or state issued equivalent
- Waiver requests must include evidence that the program has unsuccessfully attempted to recruit a qualified teacher
- Qualification waivers may be submitted for individual teachers for a period not to exceed three years
- OHS Regional Office staff review and grant approvals for qualification waivers

Positive and Empowering Work Environment

Supporting staff goes beyond compensation- programs should provide a healthy work environment.

- Strategies to support staff could include:
 - Regularly scheduled breaks
 - Brief unscheduled wellness breaks
 - Reflective supervision
 - Two-way communication with staff
 - Robust orientation and onboarding
 - Clear personnel policies and procedures
 - Promoting clear staff roles and responsibilities
- See [ACF-IM-HS-21-05](#) Supporting the Wellness of All Staff in the Head Start Workforce



Educational Attainment and Career Advancement

- Programs may advertise these benefits to recruit new staff and encourage existing staff to use educational benefits, such as
 - Tuition and fee support
 - Opportunities for career growth associated with increased educational attainment
- Apprenticeship programs support educational growth and consistent pools of staff
 - Apprentices could start as paid substitutes, floaters, or bus monitors and then move into other positions as they obtain the required credentials
- Partnerships with high schools, community colleges, and other higher education institutions can promote successful completion of degree or credential requirements
 - Facilitate courses being offered at times that accommodate full-time workers or in non-English languages
 - Create cohorts of learners and facilitate shared support systems

Parents in Community Action (PICA)

Operates a training program that helps Head Start parents learn new skills, gain hands-on work experience, and provides a pathway to permanent employment in the Head Start program.



Child Care Resource Center (CCRC)

Operates a training program that helps Head Start parents learn new skills, gain hands-on work experience, and provides a pathway to permanent employment in the Head Start program.



Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)

- Most HS programs are considered public service employers, meaning staff can apply for PSLF
 - PSLF forgives remaining federal student loans after 120 payments (~10 years)
- A limited PSLF Waiver is available until Oct 31st, 2022
 - Those who weren't eligible for PSLF before may be eligible now
 - Past periods of repayment, even if only partial or no payments were made, may now count towards forgiveness
- ACF/Ed hosted a Joint Webinar to raise awareness
- ACF has a PSLF landing page with additional resources



RESOURCES

- Learn more from this [one-pager](#) and recent [webinar](#) about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program and how you or your staff might qualify
- See these [Strategy Resources to Address the Early Care and Education Workforce Shortage](#)
- See this collection of [Resources to Build and Retain a Strong Education Workforce](#)
- See this [brief](#) and this [webinar](#) on ECE apprenticeship programs, as well as this [webinar](#) on connecting parents to apprenticeships
- See this [webinar series](#) on promoting the wellness of Head Start staff

The “State of the Field Analysis Regarding Head Start Background Checks Standards”

Head Start Background Checks Task Force



What is Our Action Plan?

September and October



- ✓ Workforce/Background Check Processes Survey to a subset of Head Start/Early Head Start grant recipients



- ✓ Update FAQs
- ✓ Ongoing Collaboration with OCC and Engagement of Head Start Collaboration Offices



- ✓ Launch Social Media Campaign to Gather More Information



- ✓ Host Listening Session with Head Start Leaders (NHSA)



THANK YOU!

