

Expectations for the 2022-2023 Program Year

Glenna Davis: Hello, and welcome, everyone, to Expectations for the 2022-2023 Program Year. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to Dr. Bernadine Futrell. Dr. Futrell, the floor is yours.

Dr. Bernadine Futrell: Thank you so much, Glenna. Hello, Head Start. Hello, everybody. Thanks so much for the work that you do, for being here today and just moving forward. And I want to pause and recognize that it's been over two years of navigating COVID-19 and these unprecedented times for our Head Start families, communities, and our workforce. And through it all, you all have provided vital family and child services and supports. You've led in a way that has allowed more people to be reached, to be connected, and to be supported by Head Start. In a time where we were trying to move forward, you all stood up and said – you stood up, and you became the front line for the recovery. Focusing on health, focusing on comprehensive services, and connecting children and families.

We have a lot of things that we've gone through, a lot of things that we can celebrate and be proud of over the last maybe two years. And then there's so many things that we just need to pause, reflect, and give space to. That's why this year, for the Office of Head Start, for our Head Start programs, it's going to be a season of ongoing recovery, response, and renewal as outlined in my recent letter. The goal is to really partner together with all of you – the Head Start community – as we move forward, as we continue to move forward, as we continue to do the work of ensuring the Head Start promise for children and families across our nation.

This means that as we enter this program year, we're going to focus in on those essential elements that we've identified, and we believe that are going to be necessary for us to prioritize in order to move forward. Those are what we're calling our OHS Big Four Priorities, because the work that we do directly impacts not only the hearts of those who are enrolled in Head Start, the hearts of the communities but the hearts of each and every one of you, our Head Start workforce. As we do this heart work for Head Start, we're prioritizing leaning into advancing equity to ensure that we are promoting cultures of belonging. And we're identifying and removing any barriers to access for a high-quality Head Start program that may be there as we work in stride to reconnect children and families to our families.

We are prioritizing investing in you, our Head Start workforce. It's long overdue, and the pandemic has surely called us to the point where we have to do something so that we can not only invest in developing a pipeline, but really to invest and honor all of you who have served and led in Head Start programs during these most difficult times. We're also prioritizing supporting our pandemic response and our recovery. Quite simply stated, that means we're leaning into your local expertise and inviting you to help guide and direct what's best for your program in terms of the recovery. What do you need in order to reopen safely and provide services for children and families?

And today's conversation focuses on our fourth of our Big Four, and that's reaching more children and families. The idea for this is to ensure that we can reconnect the children and families who have been disconnected from Head Start during this pandemic, and we can also reach and inspire and connect with new families to continue to move forward towards providing the Head Start services for children and families and communities across the nation. We're going to talk about that today during this webinar.

The whole ... Our approach this year – again, a season of recovery, response, and renewal – is an effort for us to work together with you to ensure that you are in the best position to support and partner with children and families in your communities. I want to welcome you to today's webinar, and we welcome your questions, and we hope that this information provided will do just that – to help put you in the best position to support children and families in this coming program year. And with that, it's my pleasure to introduce you all to Larissa, who will take us through our program for today. Thank you.

Larissa Zoot: Thank you so much, Dr. Futrell, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm sorry, can you go back one slide please? You had a welcome from Dr. Futrell who laid out our priorities. I am Larissa Zoot at the end of the list. We will have several other presenters today as well. Heather Wanderski is the director of the Program Operations Division. Adia Brown is a supervisory social science analyst and leader of the monitoring team, and Kate Troy unfortunately could not be with us, but Sarah Bloom is joining us in her place, and she is a management and program analyst in the Program Operations Division.

Dr. Futrell spoke about the season of ongoing recovery, response, and renewal. Grant recipients received a letter from Dr. Futrell on May 17th. Most of you have seen it, I'm sure, and it's probably why many of you are here today. If you have not seen it, you can find it on the OHS blog on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. In the letter, Dr. Futrell acknowledges the hard work of programs throughout the pandemic, and she lays out expectations for the 2022-2023 program year. The letter speaks to monitoring, CLASS, the Full Enrollment Initiative, and it encourages creativity and flexibility in the use of CARES Act, CRSSA, and American Rescue Plan funds to address needs in the coming program year.

With the letter and this webinar and the many resources available, it's our intention at the Office of Head Start to help meet the challenges of the year ahead and to help programs feel ready not only to meet those challenges of the coming year, but also to move forward stronger than ever. Next slide, please. We're going to start with the CLASS – Classroom Assessment Scoring System. Then we'll spend some time on the Full Enrollment Initiative. Next, we'll spend some time talking about the interim final rule with comment period, and finally, we'll have some Q&A. With that, I'm going to turn it over to Adia to start us out with CLASS.

Adia Brown: Good afternoon, everyone. Well, I'm here today as usual, but I'm here excited for you guys. Recovery has been a big deal for the Office of Head Start. One of the things that we want to make sure is that all of the grantees have an opportunity to recover from the pandemic, that we can sort of have an on-ramp to all of the different systems that we use in the

Office of Head Start, and CLASS is one of those things. I know you guys have been waiting to hear what we're going to do in 2023 and how we're going to handle CLASS reviews. Well, we're actually going to do CLASS reviews in FY2022, 2022-2023, so we're going to do CLASS reviews. We're going to come out. We're going to actually do reviews. But we will not use those scores from the reviews for competition determinations.

This is something that we're doing this year that's very different than what we've ever done before, but we know that grantees need the time to actually recover from the grantee. We know that you need time to bring on staff. We understand that there's experiences that the children are having in Head Start classrooms, that they're coming back to the classroom from the pandemic, that many children have behavior problems, that many children have some mental health issues that we need to address. We want to come into the programs, and we want to utilize CLASS. CLASS is still very important to us. We want to utilize CLASS so that we understand what's happening in Head Start classrooms and so that we can offer training and technical assistance where people actually need it.

We think that's really important, and I see in the chat that you do too. I see lots of “thank-yous” and “wonderfuls” and all those different things, because we really want to make sure that as we on-ramp back to what is going to be –whatever the new normal is after this pandemic, that we give grantees an opportunity to grow, and we give our grantees an opportunity to do the things that they do really well, so we're going to do CLASS. We're going to learn from it, but we're not going to use those scores for DRS competition. OK? Is that all right with everybody? I'm seeing a lot of “OKs.” Let's go on to the next slide.

My team put some more information in here about the reason why we still think CLASS is super important. CLASS is super important because it's vital in helping us understand mental health, social and emotional wellness of children, and really helps us with the foundations of relationships, and all those things that are super important for children as they come into programs for young children and early childhood education. We all know that this stuff is important. You do too, and the reason why we're still doing CLASS is because we want to learn about those things, and we want to make sure that programs are really gearing up to do all the wonderful things that you do for children. We also want staff to feel supported. We want them to understand that we understand the experience that they're going through. We want to be able to give the technical assistance and support that's needed when we can, OK? We can go to the next slide.

I wouldn't just come on and just tell you that we're going to do CLASS and not give you some resources. There's tons of resources here for you to be able to utilize as you start to get your staff back into the position where we can eventually score CLASS scores. We're not going to do it this year, but eventually that's going to happen. We want you to spend the entire year working with the staff on their interactions with children. We want you to work on them about how to emotionally support children in the classroom. We want you to take this year to think about instructional support and how that's working, and what are things that you need, and

how you can get more coaching to all of the very new stuff that we have in Head Start? Want you to learn more about CLASS. Want you to think about your approaches to learning.

All of these resources are here to support you and your staff in being able to really on-ramp back to a new normal for Head Start. There's lots of resources. There's lots of support. There's lots of things that we want to do to make sure that Head Start remains the nation's laboratory for high-quality child care. We know that you guys can do it out there. We're excited to do it with you, but we want to make sure that you have the time and the resources to be able to do it really well. Thank you, Larissa. I'll pass it on to Heather.

Heather Wanderski: Thanks, Adia. I think as we talk about our road to recovery, we thought it would be good to visually share with you where we are on the road when it comes to enrollment since it's taken us several years to actually get here. You'll see – I have a visual here – we started on this journey together in April of 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to all the questions that we were getting around enrollment at the very start, we recognized that there was an issue and that we had programs that were closed and didn't know how to report enrollment. At that point in time, we issued a set of policy questions and answers. And at that time, we suspended issuance of all initial underenrollment notification letters until further notice so that any recipient with 4 consecutive months of underenrollment would not enter into the full enrollment process. And at that point in time, we made a commitment to recipients that we would give them a reasonable notice prior to restarting the process.

Then for the next year, for the 2020-2021 program year, we essentially allowed programs to have full flexibility in how services were provided. We saw a fair number of programs that remained open and continued to provide in person services. We also saw a fair number of programs that only provided virtual services to children and families. And then we did have ... We had a substantial number of programs operate a hybrid model with a combination of both in-person and virtual and remote services.

Then toward the end of that year, the Office of Head Start in June of 2021, we kicked off our first of a series of webinars as part of our Head Start Forward campaign, where we outlined expectations for a return to full in person comprehensive services and approved program options beginning at the start of the '21-'22 program year as local health conditions allow. And while recognizing that programs were most likely going to be challenged, we offered a ramp-up period to provide some additional time to help make that transition to full in-person services. And at the time, we also communicated that all recipients who were involved in any aspect of the Full Enrollment Initiative prior to the pandemic would ultimately have their enrollment status reset.

Now as we prepare for the upcoming '22-'23 program year, we're restarting the Full Enrollment Initiative process as part of our continued journey. I think one of the primary goals that Dr. Futrell mentioned at the beginning of the webinar is really our need and our commitment to reaching as many children and families as we can. And our plan through this process is to

partner with you to work on this together. When we think about and prepare for the '22-'23 program year, we know that providing high-quality services to children and families in safe, healthy settings is really paramount. And that we also know that you are still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. We also recognize that the needs of communities have changed and that programs need to change in order to meet the needs of their communities.

I think what I want to stress here is that the community assessment and any updates that you do are really a vital tool in helping you to understand what the needs are of your community, the trends, what you're seeing when it comes to Head Start eligible children and families within a particular service area. I think data gleaned from the community assessment should be used to inform your planning. You should be thinking about service delivery, program options, locations of centers, how long you're operating and providing services, whether or not you need to consider a change in scope to make those necessary changes, looking at your recruitment and selection criteria, staffing. I think staffing is sometimes overlooked, but really you should be thinking about patterns in classrooms, family service caseloads, coaching, monitoring of ongoing quality improvement. What does that look like for your programs, and what data do you have that you can use to reflect on when you're thinking about your community assessment?

But ultimately, I think one thing that I really want to stress because I regularly hear questions that bubble up, but I need to make sure programs understand that if your community needs have changed, your program may need to change as well. Thinking about if your program determines that your pre-pandemic options that you were providing or the services that you were delivering before the pandemic are not the same needs that exist now, then you may need to shift and adjust. And it may require you coming in for modifications to that service delivery option, that change in scope that I was referencing.

And as I mentioned, I think a big component of your community assessment should be focused on data regarding child and family needs, but you should also be looking at data around what it takes to operate that program within your community, like thinking about recruitment and retention of staff. What does your data show? I think changes that are made within your delivery model should be taken into consideration when you're thinking about your staffing patterns to make sure that you're still able to continue to provide quality services while aligning with your program budget.

To be clear, the Office of Head Start will resume the practice of tracking and monitoring enrollment beginning September 2022. This will include evaluating monthly enrollment reports to determine which programs will enter into the Full Enrollment Initiative. And just to clarify a couple of key points, as part of the restart, all instances of prior underenrollment will be reset in September of 2020 – and this includes grant recipients who were part of the Full Enrollment Initiative prior to the pandemic. Any recipients who were previously designated as chronically underenrolled will no longer carry that designation. If you previously were designated as chronically underenrolled, your enrollment status will be reset as well. But it's important to

note that if there were any prior adjustments taken to either your funding or enrollment levels prior to the pause, that those designations and adjustments will remain in effect.

Enrollment reported for September of 2022 will be the first month that OHS will evaluate reports as part of the Full Enrollment Initiative. But I think one point of clarity is that our initial focus is going to be on recipients who are significantly underenrolled, basically those who are serving less than half of their funded enrollment. Ultimately, our plan is to engage with all programs who are underenrolled but may have higher rates of enrollment over the course of the next year, and that would be for consideration and entry into the Full Enrollment Initiative. But really our focus right now is really on wanting to provide those who need the most support – those that are significantly underenrolled – with technical assistance as quickly as possible. I think a good way to think about or frame it in your mind is like a staggered approach. We're going to focus on those who are significantly underenrolled and move toward engagement with other programs along the way over the course of the next year.

For Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, we're going to be doing something a little different. We plan to restart the Full Enrollment Initiative for migrant and seasonal programs like everyone else in September of 2022. However, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs report enrollment cumulatively, and we actually don't know if a program has reached full enrollment until they reach the end of their budget period. Therefore, we're going to be evaluating enrollment reports and making determinations for inclusion into the Full Enrollment Initiative for migrant and seasonal programs after the program has completed a full budget period, after we start the process in September of 2022. There will be no staggered start for the migrant, seasonal programs.

I'll give you for an example to kind of help unpack that because that was a lot. Let's take a program that has a budget period that ends on September the 30th. If we look at the cumulative enrollment report as of September 2022, we would be evaluating that program on 11 months of enrollment prior to the restart of the process and only 1 month after we restart. I think generally, we can all agree that that's not our intent, and that really doesn't give our Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs the opportunity to be able to demonstrate full enrollment. Really, in that instance, we want to give the program the opportunity to be evaluated on 12 months of enrollment after we restart the Full Enrollment Initiative. Instead, we will be evaluating in that scenario that particular program in September 2023 instead. I think ... And that would be the case for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs that the enrollment reports will be evaluated for inclusion in the Full Enrollment Initiative. They will be evaluated between September 2023 and August of 2024.

What we've been hearing and what we know from all of our work within Head Start is that staff who are happier, healthier, less stressed are able to really have high-quality interactions with our children. And that's really, I think, the goal for everyone. We are really encouraging programs to create a working environment that promotes that culture, that really helps support wellness for their staff. I think that this really ... We want to make sure we're emphasizing that

this starts with leadership within the programs. Leaders within the program should be modeling and promoting staff well-being and infusing every opportunity they can to support wellness for everyone and supporting those positive interactions. I think we are continuously wanting to support and providing resources around this particular topic since we know it does impact and has a significant impact on our programs.

But one of the things ... Or there are a couple of things that we want you to be thinking about as you move and try to address some of the workforce challenges that exist. Some of the things you may want to consider are things like applying for a teacher qualification waiver for Head Start staff. I think one of the things that we want to make note though is that the Head Start Act does not include a provision for qualification waivers for Early Head Start staff. And also too while you can apply for a teacher qualification waiver for Head Start staff, some good candidates may not meet actually the waiver requirements. The Office of Head Start may not be able to provide you a waiver in all cases. I realize I just said that, and I want to unpack that a little bit for everybody to understand because we know this is a real challenge for our programs.

Essentially the first priority for our programs when it comes to hiring is really to try and find staff that have the required qualifications to work as teachers in our Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms. However, if you've exhausted all avenues to hire qualified staff, you could choose to hire staff who do not meet the degree or credential requirement. But if you go that route, you should ensure that that particular staff person that you're hiring has an active professional development plan in place and that you are providing the necessary support that that employee needs to achieve that required degree or credential within a specified period of time. You should be, as part of that active plan, be checking in on how they are doing. You should be providing support for them to be able to attain that degree or credential, and that you should be checking in with them to make sure that they see it through to completion.

I think ... And the other thing too is that if a program opts to go this route, that program should be documenting policies and procedures that are implemented when an agency is unable to hire a fully qualified staff member and instead chooses to employ someone who doesn't have the required credential. And that would also include a time line for when the staff do not – when they need to actually acquire that degree or credential.

One of the other things to keep in mind is that if you're going to go that route, you should be thinking about the additional oversight and other professional development support that that particular staff member may need like coaching, observations, any other things that you may need to think about when going or thinking about that. One of the things that we have heard is that grant recipients have expressed concern about compliance in the event that they are monitored around the education or the qualifications for staff. And just I want to reiterate that recipients being monitored will be asked to demonstrate their written policies and procedures just as I described, including evidence of how you've implemented those procedures with clear

time lines for completion of staff credentials and be able to demonstrate that you are actively supporting your staff through an active professional development plan.

Again, I think a lot of staff or a lot of programs out there are struggling with, “What do I do in these situations?” I wanted to make sure that you all were aware that this is how we have been monitoring and that this is our stance when we are met with an inability to provide you with a waiver but just giving some additional supports and ideas for what you could be doing in these situations for staff who may be able to support your program but might not meet the specific degree or credentialing at the point in time that you need to hire. I think too we're also encouraging programs to consider starting apprenticeship programs or what we call “grow your own programs.” We know there are lots of resources out there. There are parents. You could be thinking about college students. You could be thinking about high school students that may be great resources and that could serve as potential substitutes and maybe even eventual staff to help grow and build your program up. We do encourage our programs to look into those opportunities.

We also recently hosted a webinar that talked about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness. Certainly, that is available to borrowers with certain types of federal student loans. Many of our Head Start programs are qualified employers, so that could be an added benefit for many of your staff out there or people who are looking to become employees of a Head Start program. We also know that salaries continue to be an ongoing concern for many programs, and we're strongly encouraging all of our programs to use their American Rescue Plan funds, operation funds, any other source of COVID funds to offer competitive financial incentives for staff to help stabilize your workforce in the near-term. Certainly, that is an option worth exploring if you have not already done so.

I would think that the expectation that we laid out – and I think it was in June of 2021 for the '21-'22 program year, is that the expectation that programs need to prioritize recruitment of eligible children and families – that expectation has not changed from last year to this year. That, everybody should be relatively familiar with. As I talked about before, programs need to be updating their community assessment to guide recruitment efforts and ensure that you are reaching families most in need of services. One of the things that we talk about is strategic planning, and that really should be done in consultation with your governing bodies or your Tribal council. That piece is vital. They should be encouraged to play an active role in that process.

I think based on community assessment data, delivery of services needs to be responsive to the community as we've already identified. You should be considering regular, ongoing communication and feedback from your families as part of your decision-making process. You should be thinking about and revisiting your selection criteria based on findings from your updated community assessment. And programs should also be including specific efforts to actively locate and recruit all eligible children within the service area, particularly focused on families who may be categorically eligible. Expand marketing – thinking about additional reach.

And then development of new partnerships, particularly those that will support reaching families, and I'll say one of the latest ones is for families who are enrolled in SNAP. If you maybe haven't explored that as an opportunity, that may be one that may be a new partnership to identify and reach out on. But again, I can't say it enough, but supplemental COVID funds can and should be used to support enhanced community partnerships and all of your recruitment efforts.

Speaking of SNAP, as you may recall – and it would be strange if I didn't say that after having just talked about the partnership piece – in April of 2020, we included the receipt of SNAP benefits in the interpretation of public assistance when determining Head Start eligibility. Adding SNAP really helped to address some of the barriers that we had for participation in Head Start. We did that by reducing the challenge for families of navigating multiple federal programs through their eligibility process and also supporting the better alignment and coordination across public benefit programs. And I want to reemphasize that our data shows that 80% of SNAP recipients are living under 100% of the federal poverty guidelines and are already income eligible for Head Start. As most families receiving SNAP are already eligible, this policy really makes it easier for them to enroll since they are now considered categorically eligible. In these instances, and I'll reemphasize this again, income verification is not required. This applies obviously to families who are eligible receiving TANF, SSI, and those experiencing homelessness and children in foster care. Those are families who are categorically eligible for Head Start.

Programs need to be reviewing your existing policies and procedures to determine the need for any updates to make sure that you are determining eligibility and meeting requirements based on 45 CFR 1302 Subpart A. Newly eligible SNAP recipients are not guaranteed a spot in the Head Start program, but programs need to continue to ensure that they're enrolling children and families most in need of services. And as a result of that, and as a result of this becoming – falling under the definition of public assistance, you may need to revisit your selection criteria to ensure that those determinations are still being made, and it's still happening with this update. Checking to make sure your selection criteria is still in line with the prioritizing families most in need. And then here we have, I finish out – round this out to say to verify SNAP recipient or potential eligibility, programs need to collect and making a copy of documentation from the state, the local, or the tribal public assistance agency that provides those determinations. This is really on those programs to be able to support you with providing the correct documentation.

Similar to what Adia provided with her supports and resources around CLASS, we did the same here for enrollment. We put together a whole litany of resources and supports. Some of these resources have been around for quite a long time while others were recently unveiled at the ERSEA Institute back in May. You see here that we tried to make this really about a one-stop shop for our programs. You'll be able to find highlighted resources that may be useful in your planning. I hope ... I'm not going to go through and list them all or talk about them. The great part about this is that you'll have access to these slides, and all of the resources will be

hyperlinked directly to where you can find all of this wonderful information around planning, around eligibility, recruitment, enrollment, all our #GetaHeadStart recruitment resources, our online social media campaigns. It's a wonderful set of resources. I do encourage you to dive deep into this particularly if enrollment continues to be a support where you need additional help.

At this point, I want to turn things over now to Sarah Bloom to talk more about the Interim Final Rule on masking and vaccination requirements and what we can look forward to for the expectations for the upcoming year. Sarah?

Sarah Bloom: Thanks so much, Heather. Happy to be here with you all. Heather is right. She introduced me and let you all know that I'm going to speak a little bit to the Interim Final Rule with Comment period. Specifically, we really want to talk about the mask requirement updates because I know it can be just kind of challenging to follow with all of the information that's out there regarding the pandemic.

From the onset, just want to emphasize for folks that wearing a mask continues to be a key strategy to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Head Start programs. Head Start programs serve children under 5 years of age, and I want to remind folks that those folks are not yet eligible for vaccination. Mask use lowers the risk of spread between people, protecting both the wearers and those around them, including those who cannot be vaccinated. Mask use is particularly important to protect children with disabilities, some of whom may be more susceptible to complications from COVID-19. At this time, I know we've gotten a couple of questions in the chat as we've been rolling, but just want to make sure this is answered clearly for folks. Head Start programs should continue to follow the requirements laid out in the IFC in all states not subject to preliminary injunctions.

The reason that that might be tricky to folks is because we know in late February – I believe it was February the 25th – the CDC came out with recommendations that people should wear masks depending on their COVID-19 community level, which is a metric that combines total new cases with indicators that measure potential local health system strains. On just Friday – so last week – the CDC then released supplementary guidance for ECE and K through 12 settings to further elaborate on what that guidance means in those settings. When those new CDC recommendations went out in February, OHS sent out an e-blast to explain how the new CDC mask recommendations differ from the masking requirement in the IFC. At this time, the IFC remains the applicable regulation for Head Start programs except in those parts of the country where OHS is subject to preliminary injunctions and temporary restraining orders which has prevented implementation and enforcement of the rule.

I know I just said a lot, and I just want to pause to take the time to just acknowledge how challenging this is. I know that some of you have expressed this to us, and I just want you to know that we hear you, and we're here for you, and we just appreciate all that you've done and continue to do to protect our kids, families, and staff. And with that, the pause on monitoring

for compliance with the mask requirement remains, and our OHS programs will receive at least 2 weeks of notice prior to implementing any changes. Next slide, please.

Just looking at the IFC generally, want to remind folks that OHS received more than 2,700 comments on the IFC, and we really appreciate receiving feedback, and we just value your input so much. We are working to address inconsistencies in masking guidance as part of the final rulemaking process. We are currently drafting and clearing a final rule which takes time. We do not yet have an estimated publication date. We know some folks have reached out and are interested in a litigation update, and I just want folks to know that we are continuing to litigate all the cases. With that, I'm going to pass over to Larissa.

Larissa: Great, thank you so much, Sarah. The chat box and the Q&A panel have been lively throughout our presentation so far. And I just dropped a note in the chat to remind everyone, please put your questions in the Q&A panel so that they are recorded there. We save both, but we work primarily with the Q&A in terms of creating some follow-up questions and FAQs. We've actually prepared some frequently asked questions and responses for you, and I think they're going to address many of the things that have gone into chat so far. And the first couple of questions are for Adia. The first one is, "The Office of Head Start will not be using scores from CLASS reviews to make competitive determinations. Will CLASS quality thresholds be addressed?"

Adia: Yeah, the Office of Head Start will not be using ... Sorry about that, everybody out there in Head Start world. The Office of Head Start will not be using the CLASS scores to make competitive determinations, but we're going to use all the scores to really think about quality and how we can support grantees through technical assistance. All of the scores even if they fall into the quality threshold or they fall into the competitive threshold, for both of those things and we want to provide Head Start programs with as much technical assistance as possible to help them build on the program's quality and improvements where we can.

Larissa: Thank you, Adia. The next question, "When will the Office of Head Start resume using scores from CLASS reviews to make competitive determinations under DRS?"

Adia: For this entire program year, we are not going to use those scores to make the competitive determinations because as I said earlier, we want to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to recover. We understand the workforce issues. We understand all of the issues about children coming back into the program. All these things are really important. But next year, we will resume using CLASS for competitive determinations. This is like an on-ramp. We're giving everybody an opportunity to get technical assistance and the support that they need right now, and then by the time we get to next year, we'll be ready to use those CLASS scores again.

Larissa: Thanks so much, Adia. I'm going to turn to Heather now with the next few questions. "Programs are still experiencing in communities outbreaks of COVID-19. How should we manage programming?"

Heather: I'm glad the question got asked. This continues to come up, and I'm glad that we continue to address it. Programs can continually continue to temporarily use virtual and remote services in cases where a program is experiencing high COVID-19 transmission in their service area. But I think it's important and key to make note that programs are expected to have plans in place that allow for them to adjust to those changing community conditions, and that those plans need to be established within your program's policies and procedures. It really is also important to highlight and note that programs should be consulting the CDC guidelines, the state and local health department guidance, as well as looking at local school district decisions when they're thinking about and making determinations on whether they will remain open.

And the other thing too to make note is that we understand that virtual and remote services can impact the ability to offer sustained quality services. It also creates some stress for children and families when our programs do close and that that obviously has an impact and can be disruptive to the children for their learning, for their socialization, for the families who need to be able to work and for continuity of services. To that end, programs really need to be in communication with their Regional Office if you do plan to use any short-term virtual or remote services in response to a surge in your community and that you should be reassessing with your program specialist if you need to extend that beyond a 2-week period. Really looking at that, we wouldn't want programs to make determinations for longer than 2 weeks at a time because we do know how disruptive that can be to a child and their family.

Larissa: Thanks, Heather. The next question we have for you, "Does the Office of Head Start have recommendations on how to best use Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations, those are the CRRSA funds, and the American Rescue Plan, ARP, funding?"

Heather: Larissa, of course we've got lots of recommendations, and we are really trying to get out there. I think I've made a couple of suggestions already in the webinar today. I think where we are really trying to help programs focus their efforts on are where we are hearing that there are the biggest concerns around addressing full in-person services. For example, we are hearing loud and clear that programs are experiencing workforce challenges. While there are limitations with the COVID funds being onetime in nature, we have been recommending and suggesting for programs to consider providing incentives to support retention of staff and things like hiring bonuses, retention, return to work incentives, child care stipends, temporary raises of pay. All of those things come to mind. I think that's one of the things that we hit on I think right away.

Another one that we talk about and what we're hearing that also rises to the level of importance is staff wellness and mental health. As staff are really working toward meeting the – trying to stay open, I know that there are a lot of vacancies within programs. That puts a lot of stress on your existing staff. Just being able to really have the opportunity to enhance and think about any supports you may need to provide to them, invest in opportunities for the staff that are there. You may want to consider multiple resources to provide support and just be thinking about all of those needs of your existing staff. We're hearing enrollment and recruitment is

ongoing. Obviously, program funds can be used to purchase services, materials, and technology to ramp up your recruitment and enrollment efforts.

We have here ... We talk about family supports, really getting out and encouraging and supporting families. We talk about and think about things like, for ongoing consideration, cleaning supplies. I think personal protective equipment, additional classroom and outdoor space. All of these things are ones that I think if you regularly come to our webinars are things that we are talking about pretty consistently. And I know that if Amanda Bryans was on, she would be very upset with me if I did not say the word transportation. We know that absolutely transportation is a necessary service that our families need in order to reach our programs. Thinking about and making sure that we are able to support them by providing transportation if that's something that maybe you have discontinued in the past and maybe want to revisit now or considering expanding. That is certainly something that we are encouraging our programs to consider as well. Thanks, Larissa.

Larissa: Thanks, Heather. We're still going to keep you on the hot seat for a little bit longer.

Heather: Ah, OK.

Larissa: Next question, "Does the Office of Head Start expect full enrollment?"

Heather: Yes, Head Start programs are expected to provide services to 100% of the children that they're funded to serve. This is really clear in the Head Start Act that our programs are expected to enroll 100% and that they're actually supposed to be maintaining active wait lists at all times with ongoing outreach to the community and activities to be able to identify and address underserved populations. But I want to be clear though that the Full Enrollment Initiative, this whole process was created to operationalize that provision in the Head Start Act. The process is really intended to support grant recipients in establishing deliberate and thoughtful strategies to reach full enrollment. This is our opportunity to partner together to be able to do that. We want to help support our programs in reflecting and redesigning operations to support and sustain quality programming.

We know that programs who engage in the process are going to receive support from our technical assistance systems, from the Regional Offices, as well as general technical assistance supports in webinars that we are already providing. I know we did a lot of work around the Enrollment Forward series as well as Prioritizing Staff Wellness webinar series. We're going to continue to be able to engage in more general ways, but we want to be able to engage with programs more specifically around where they may be having issues with their specific programs.

Larissa: Thanks, Heather. I think all that additional context is so helpful. The next question is, "If my program is underenrolled, when will I be placed on an underenrollment plan?"

Heather: OK, good question. And beginning in September of 2022, we are going to resume tracking and monitoring monthly enrollment reports. Recipients with four or more consecutive months of underenrollment will receive an Underenrollment Letter from the Regional Office.

That could be as soon as January of 2023. The Underenrollment Letter will officially start the 12-month time frame that more formally addresses – that will help support the enrollment challenges that a program may be experiencing. And during this 12-month period of time, recipients will be developing a plan and a timetable for reducing and ultimately eliminating underenrollment in collaboration with the Regional Office.

Essentially, successful completion of an underenrollment plan would conclude if a recipient is able to achieve and maintain at least 97% enrollment for six consecutive months following that 12-month period. I think one thing that I want to make note of specifically here though is that it could be as early as January 2023, but it may be later than that depending on if a program is significantly underenrolled or not. If you have higher levels of enrollment, it may be a little while until we actually reach out with an Underenrollment Letter to engage you in the process. Just to be clear, it could be as early as January 2023, but it may be later.

Larissa: Great. Thank you, Heather. One more question, and then you can take a deep breath. “If my program is not significantly underenrolled, does the Full Enrollment Initiative apply to me?”

Heather: Yeah, that's a great follow-up question because I want to make sure that I'm clear. Yes, the Full Enrollment Initiative applies to all Head Start and Early Head Start programs that are underenrolled. We are going to resume tracking and monitoring monthly enrollment reports in September of this fall to determine which programs will enter into the Full Enrollment Initiative. While we'll be starting with programs that are significantly underenrolled, we will be periodically engaging with programs with higher rates of enrollment over the course of a year.

We're not going to be starting everyone in the process at the same time, and I think I referenced it earlier as like a staggered start. If you can think about that over the course of a 12-month period, it will be staggered in our approach in that we will be reaching out periodically to those, but expect that we will touch everyone if you have demonstrated four consecutive months of underenrollment in your program that we will, over the course of the next year, be reaching out. But that our focus initially will be on those most significantly underenrolled. Thanks, Larissa.

Larissa: All right. Thanks so much, Heather. I'm going to turn back to Sarah for just a couple of last questions. Sarah, “does the vaccine requirement apply to Part B and Part C providers, for example special education and related service providers for preschoolers and infants and toddlers?”

Sarah: Thanks so much for asking, Larissa. No, these providers are not covered by the vaccine requirement. Part B and C providers are not considered staff of the Head Start program nor is there a contractual relationship.

Larissa: Thanks, Sarah, and just one more. “How should programs implement the vaccine requirement for partners, such as school districts or other partnerships in service delivery at

this point in the year, understanding that contracts and memoranda of understanding are in place?”

Sarah: That's an important question, so first, when we're just using that term partnerships, just want to be clear to folks that Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships are covered to the same extent as standard Head Start and Early Head Start programs. For other provider relationships, programs should work to resolve issues with contracts or MOUs, including for staff working with enrolled children, that arise from the IFC in a manner that minimizes disruption of services to children and families for the balance of the program year. Programs should make decisions that cause the least amount of disruption and also support ways to safely get through this program year.

Larissa: Thank you so much, Sarah. And I just want to thank everyone for joining us today for the webcast. The PDF of the slides has been dropped in chat a number of times. Thank you so much, Glenna. It also will be posted to ECLKC once it's ready, and the webinar will be available on demand. OHS will also review the questions, and we will do our very best to develop additional FAQs as needed. Thank you so much, everyone, and have a great afternoon.