

Director Garvin Announces Updates to the Performance Standards

Khari Garvin: Hello, Head Start community. I am Khari Garvin, Director of the Office of Head Start, and I am excited to speak with you today about the recent updates to the Head Start Program Performance Standards. These updates represent a significant step forward for Head Start and the entire early childhood field.

They reflect our unwavering commitment to providing the highest quality services to children and families while also addressing the unprecedented challenges our programs have faced in recent years. Now, I want to emphasize that these changes are the result of extensive consultation with you, our Head Start community. We received over 1,300 comments from teachers.

Parents, program administrators, advocates, and even members of Congress. Your input was invaluable in shaping the updated standards. Let me highlight three key areas of change. One, supporting our workforce, two, emphasizing mental health, and three, enhancing quality improvements. First and foremost, we're addressing the staffing crisis head on.

Many of you have shared your struggles with recruitment and retention, and we've heard you loud and clear. We've taken decisive action to support our dedicated Head Start staff. The updated standards promote competitive pay and benefits that truly reflect the value and commitment of Head Start staff.

By August 2031, we are requiring programs to pay Head Start education staff, including teachers, assistant teachers, home visitors, and family childcare providers, even those working in Early Head Start salaries comparable to preschool teachers in their local public schools. In addition, we're ensuring that all staff earn a wage that is at least enough to cover their basic cost of living because people working in an anti-poverty program should not be earning poverty wages.

We're also making sure that programs are providing more enhanced benefits packages to staff including access to health insurance, paid leave, and short-term behavioral health services that don't break the bank. These changes aim to make Head Start a more sustainable career choice, reducing turnover and improving the quality and consistency of care for our children.

Second, we're placing a big emphasis on mental health. The updated standards require a multidisciplinary approach to mental health, recognizing that mental health is everyone's business. We're also requiring programs to integrate mental health across all program areas, including family support services, services for expectant families, and screening services.

This proactive strengths-based approach will better support the well-being of children, families, and staff alike. Lastly, we've made numerous quality improvements to help programs meet the evolving needs of their communities, and these include strengthening

family partnership services by promoting a reasonable workload for family service workers. Clarifying eligibility requirements, including a new provision that allows programs to deduct excessive housing costs when determining a family's income for eligibility purposes. Streamlining the community assessment process to reduce burden on programs while ensuring that they are still collecting and using crucial data, to inform their services.

We've also updated our child health and safety standards. This includes clearer requirements for incident reporting and prevention, training on mandated reporting of child abuse and neglect, and training on positive strategies to support social and emotional development. I want to emphasize that we understand these changes are significant.

That's why we provided extended implementation timelines for many of the new standards. For example, the wage requirements don't need to be fully implemented until August of 2031. And many other changes have timelines ranging from 60 days to 4 years. We encourage you to start planning now and make incremental progress towards these goals.

Change doesn't happen overnight, but together we can build a stronger, more sustainable Head Start program. In the coming weeks and months, you'll see more resources and support under our Nurturing the Promise campaign. This will include guidance documents, webinars, and regional roundtables to help you navigate these changes.

We're committed to providing you with the support you need to implement these updates successfully. Head Start has always been a leader in early childhood education, particularly for children and families furthest from opportunity. These updated standards reaffirm that leadership and our commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty.

I want to acknowledge that these changes may require some programs to restructure their budgets and even their program designs over the coming years. This may mean offering fewer slots to children in the future, especially if those slots are currently empty. Or exploring new options for blending and braiding Head Start funds with other funding sources.

Each program will have different needs and challenges in implementing these standards and we're here to support you through this process. Thank you for your unwavering dedication to Head Start children and families. The work each and every one of you does makes a profound difference in the lives of those we serve.

I'm excited about the future we're building together, and I look forward to partnering with you as we implement these important changes. Thank you for watching and remember to check the ECLKC website regularly for more information and resources as we embark on this journey of nurturing the promise of Head Start.

Thanks, everyone.

Narrator: For more information on the final rule, supporting the Head Start workforce, and consistent quality programming, please visit <https://qrco.de/bfNqmQ>

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