



ERSEA: Attendance

Good attendance is essential for children to benefit from their Head Start experience and for future school success. Programs must implement strategies to promote regular attendance.

THE GOAL

Encourage and support regular attendance to ensure that all children benefit from full participation in their Head Start program and develop important life habits that will serve them in school and beyond.

Have you considered:

- Have you educated staff and parents about the importance of regular attendance?
- Have you developed a plan for partnering with parents to promote regular attendance?
- Do you have targeted strategies for vulnerable populations?

Programs need to think expansively and incorporate all stakeholders as they develop strategies that promote regular attendance.

ATTENDANCE: PLANNING AND MONITORING FOR SUCCESS

Train all staff on the direct impact regular attendance has on school readiness and future school success. Research shows that one-third of chronically absent four-year-olds continue to be chronically absent in kindergarten. Of those students, more than 30 percent are still chronically absent in second grade. This has a direct and negative impact on student reading levels.

Have you considered:

- Have you developed a plan for collecting and analyzing attendance data?
- Have you created tip sheets that educate parents on the importance of regular attendance and what to do when a child is absent?
- Does your community assessment help you identify trends, health concerns, or cultural traditions that may impact regular attendance?
- Have you developed strategies that respond to child, family, and community barriers to regular attendance?

Consider ways your program's tracking system can be used to maintain attendance data and identify trends in absenteeism.

ATTENDANCE: MAINTAINING THE COURSE

Work with parents to develop strategies that support regular attendance such as establish predictable routines, schedule appointments/trips when the program is not in session, and develop backup plans to assist with transportation issues.

Have you considered:

- Have you established systems for monitoring the diverse needs of your families and community?
- Have you developed a success plan for children who are at risk for missing 10 percent of the program year?
- Have you helped families understand when children should stay home due to illness?
- Have you considered developing a social media campaign that educates the community on the benefits of regular attendance?
- Have you worked with partners to address communitywide issues that may be impacting regular attendance such as transportation, neighborhood safety, or health concerns?

Regular attendance has a direct impact on school readiness and future school success, not only in the learning it provides but also in the habits it instills. Because of this, programs need to have systems in place that continuously monitor child absences with an eye toward helping families identify strategies that help them overcome the hurdles that interfere with regular attendance.



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ERSEA: Prioritizing Eligibility and Meeting the Greatest Need

Eligibility is a critical component of and first step in the implementation of Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) services. Head Start programs must understand Head Start eligibility requirements which describe how to prioritize those most in need. The requirements also show how to identify the option that best meets child and family needs.

THE GOAL

Develop and implement systems to ensure identification and enrollment of children and families with the greatest need for Head Start services.

Questions to consider:

- Are you using community assessment data to identify and recruit all of the eligible children and families in the service area?
- Do your systems support appropriate data collection to ensure eligibility and timely updates to application information?
- Is your criteria for accepting over-income children consistent with the needs identified across your community?
- Are staff trained to conduct respectful and sensitive interviews?

Strong systems are critical for determining, verifying and documenting eligibility.

PLANNING AND MONITORING FOR SUCCESS

Ensure that all staff responsible for eligibility verification are knowledgeable about Head Start eligibility requirements as well as those of subsidies being used in child care partnerships. Consider reaching out to your Head Start State Collaboration office for support in navigating child care subsidy information.

Questions to consider:

- Have you created separate ERSEA training modules for staff, governing body/Tribal Council, and Policy Council that can be easily adapted or modified as needed? Consider including information on your program selection criteria.
- Have you developed your policies and procedures to be flexible to meet unique family circumstances across your communities?
- Do your eligibility policies and procedures align with the [McKinney-Vento Act](#)?
- Does your program have the human and fiscal resources to conduct eligibility verification in a culturally responsive manner, including trained staff and appropriate materials to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of families?
- Do your verification procedures clearly identify acceptable documentation?
- Is there a system for the ongoing review of eligibility records? Consider using random samples at various times throughout the program year.

Responsive training and professional development, strong recordkeeping and reporting systems, and comprehensive internal policies are critical components of eligibility verification and documentation.

MAINTAINING THE COURSE

Use your community assessment data to monitor changing demographics that could impact your identification of eligible children. Understand your state's child care system to support full-day programming and other partnerships. Consider making the child care subsidy application part of the program's enrollment packet.

Questions to consider:

- Have you worked to strengthen your partners' understanding of the Head Start mission and eligibility requirements?
- Are there opportunities to collaborate with other agencies for training staff on family interviewing skills?
- Do your policies address protocols for handling personally identifiable information (PII) and the retention and disposal of records?

Eligibility services provide a mechanism for ensuring consistent and appropriate enrollment practices. Comprehensive recordkeeping systems make it possible to monitor ERSEA practices. They also help program leaders use data to identify and evaluate necessary modifications. Staff who are knowledgeable of Head Start eligibility and child care subsidy requirements can initiate and support partnerships to meet family needs.



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ERSEA: Enrollment

Head Start's mission is to serve the neediest children and families, to promote school readiness, and to foster the self-sufficiency of low-income families. Programs must maintain their funded enrollment level and fill any vacancy as soon as possible. Any unenrolled slot is a lost opportunity for a family in need and does not maximize federal funds. Use this tip sheet to identify ways you can better reach and maintain full enrollment.

THE GOAL

Ensure that systems are in place to enroll the neediest families in a timely manner and maintain full enrollment throughout the program.

Have you considered:

- Are your management systems supporting your ability to adapt to changing family and community needs?
- Is the community assessment updated and used to monitor changing demographics and family needs?
- Do your internal technology, recordkeeping, and professional development systems sufficiently support the enrollment process?

Programs need to use components of their management systems to generate timely, reliable data that will inform their decision-making, allowing them to better meet the needs of families of today and tomorrow.

ENROLLMENT: PLANNING AND MONITORING FOR SUCCESS

Maintaining full enrollment requires targeted strategies for addressing current and future community, family, and child needs. It is important to adopt a systems approach when assessing programmatic strengths and needs. A strong community assessment process with regular updates is critical for providing the information required to understand family needs and shifting demographics. Also, cultivating a nurturing environment is important for retaining staff and keeping families enrolled.

Have you considered:

- Do you have adequate partnerships to spread the word and support service delivery?
- Do you have practices and policies in place that support staff retention and address staff turnover?
- Do your program options, schedule, and calendar meet the needs of families?
- Do you have a good understanding of the early childhood services offered in the community and how to partner with them?
- Do your recruitment strategies target vulnerable populations?

ENROLLMENT: MAINTAINING THE COURSE

Maintaining full enrollment may mean making programmatic changes to address shifting demographics. Ongoing monitoring of program services, self-assessments, and updates to the community assessment provide the data needed to plan and implement thoughtful adaptations to ensure responsive programs.

Have you considered:

- Have you established goals related to full enrollment based on the needs identified in your internal and external data?
- Are you working with governing body/Tribal Council, Policy Council, community partners, Regional Office, and T/TA providers to establish and implement enrollment strategies?
- Have you implemented systems to support regular attendance and ensure that staff understand the connection between attendance and enrollment?
- Do you understand the financial implications of maintaining full enrollment?
- Are you monitoring the effectiveness of your program's data system in supporting enrollment strategies, including staff data collection and analysis capabilities?
- Are your marketing strategies effectively reaching all constituents and emphasizing the importance of an early education experience?

Enrollment services are an important part of the full array of Head Start services and need to be included in planning and evaluation systems. As with all Head Start services, data is critical for understanding needs, making decisions, evaluating services, and planning for continuous improvement. The ability to respond to changing community, family, and child needs is a key factor in maintaining full enrollment.



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ERSEA: Thoughtful Selection Policies and Procedures

Your Head Start services must be designed to meet the unique needs of the community. It is important to ensure those families most in need receive services. These are fundamental concerns of Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA). Thoughtful selection policies and procedures ensure that children who would benefit most from Head Start services are identified and enrolled.

THE GOAL

Use your community assessment to establish selection criteria that prioritize children for enrollment. Prioritization must factor in family income, homelessness, children in foster care, age, and eligibility for special education or early intervention services.

Questions to consider

- Have you prioritized younger children where publicly funded pre-K is available?
- Have you reached out to families of children with disabilities and chronic health conditions?
- Have you prioritized children experiencing homelessness and children in foster care?
- Should you provide enrollment opportunities for children from diverse economic backgrounds?

Develop and maintain a waiting list that prioritizes children according to approved selection criteria. Test your selection criteria to ensure the validity of the process so the children most in need of services are given priority.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Careful planning and preparation ensures that you have the necessary data to develop and implement your selection criteria.

Questions to consider

- Does your community assessment process generate the data necessary to identify children most in need of services?
- Is your data collection system in place for tracking applications and other ERSEA information?
- Does your staff have the necessary data analysis skills and resources required for overall ERSEA management?

Review and revise selection criteria based on updates to the community assessment. Ensure there is a system in place to review and update application and enrollment forms. Ensure that all staff understand how to protect personally identifiable information. Implement procedures for communicating with parents to ensure timely exchange of information regarding application status, enrollment appointments, necessary enrollment documents, and waiting list status.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Engage the governing body and Policy Council in the development of selection criteria.

Questions to consider

- Does leadership understand the data in the community assessment and its implications for the selection of children?
- Does your program annually establish a selection criteria based on community needs data which includes consideration of prioritizing younger children?
- Have you trained leadership on applicable federal regulations?
- Does leadership recognize and support program policies and procedures?

Determining community strengths, needs, and resources is crucial to developing selection criteria that address identified needs and implementing responsive selection procedures.



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ERSEA: Strategies During a Pandemic

Extended closures due to a pandemic can require programs to rethink their eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA) strategies. Programs may need to modify their recruitment and selection activities. Changing demographics may require eligibility criteria to evolve (e.g., increased numbers of eligible families, changes to recruitment and service areas). Programs also need to consider how to deliver and adapt services in an informed manner as this situation unfolds, including remote or modified service delivery models. This tip sheet can help guide ERSEA planning and service delivery during times of transition.

ELIGIBILITY

During a pandemic, it is important to collect up-to-date information on local, state, and regional resources, needs, and demographic changes. These are critical to ensuring services continue in a responsive and efficient manner.

Questions to consider:

- How will the program collect relevant data needed for planning and decision-making?
- How is relevant data communicated to program leadership (e.g., governing body, Policy Council, and management staff)?
- How is the pandemic impacting child care partnerships?
- Are there changes in the local or state subsidy system that impact eligibility?

In order to maximize access to services during a time of increased need, it is important that staff understand all of the avenues to eligibility. Families experiencing financial hardship may encounter unexpected living situations. Use the [McKinney Vento definition of homeless](#) for determining eligibility. Programs should also reference [ACF-IM-HS-19-03](#) regarding eligibility for children in kinship care.



RECRUITMENT

Community-wide closures may impact normal recruitment activities. Consider making applications digital and sharing them via email, text, agency website, and social media. A shortened application with a telephone interview may be a more effective way to collect necessary information.

Questions to consider:

- How can technology help programs connect with families and community partners?
- Are there other social media groups or agency web pages that can be used for recruitment? Consider offering a reciprocal arrangement with partners.
- Have you created a [MyPeers](#) group to discuss recruitment activities and other ERSEA services?
- How will the program monitor electronic recruitment efforts?

It may be necessary to expand recruitment efforts and target areas to accommodate increased numbers of eligible families. Be sure to constantly monitor community data in order to locate and recruit families with the greatest need. It's important to work in partnership with your Regional Office.

SELECTION

The program's selection criteria may need to be modified to ensure children and families in most need are given priority.

Questions to consider:

- How is program leadership involved in the development and approval of the selection criteria?
- Does the community assessment or annual update offer data that informs these decisions?
- How will leadership communicate changes in selection criteria and enrollment processes to related stakeholders?

Keep track of the latest Office of Head Start (OHS) guidance, Information Memoranda (IMs), and Program Instructions (PIs) to ensure the program has the necessary and relevant data to develop and adjust selection criteria. The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center offers a lot of useful information and resources.



ENROLLMENT

Programs may want to conduct remote enrollment if they have the technological capabilities to accept applications and necessary verifications. Consider strategies for obtaining necessary enrollment documents electronically or by mail. When parent signatures cannot be obtained, be sure that staff sign a verification form indicating they have seen all required documentation.

Questions to consider:

- Are procedures in place to accept income verification and other necessary documents?
- Have staff been trained on how to conduct remote enrollment?
- Have recordkeeping and data collection systems been adapted to support procedural changes?
- Is a system of oversight in place to ensure the integrity of the process?
- Is there a process for providing emergency resources to enrolled families and pregnant women?

Programs may want to conduct enrollment on a year-round basis to ensure a constant flow of applications. Stay informed of changes to child care subsidy regulations that may impact current programming or suggest new opportunities.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance expectations may differ on a temporary basis as programs offer virtual and need-based services.

Questions to consider:

- Has the program identified service and attendance expectations for this period of time?
- How will this be communicated to staff and families?
- Have attendance policies and recordkeeping systems been modified to include virtual interactions?
- How can the program support and encourage families' participation in remote services?

Monitor changes to the enrollment reporting process. It is important to capture data regarding changes in enrollment, reasons for drops, and participation in virtual events to monitor service delivery, measure outcomes, and plan for the future.

Challenging times often provide opportunities for innovation. It is important for leadership to have access to information from OHS and other credible sources (e.g., U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state, local, and tribal governments, and health organizations) to facilitate a calm and decisive response. Consistent communications and effective use of both human and material resources will result in quality services to children and families.

RESOURCES

The program's selection criteria may need to be modified to ensure that children and families in most need are given priority.

[Full Enrollment Policy Questions and Answers \(Q&As\)](#)

ERSEA:

- [Prioritizing Eligibility and Meeting the Greatest Need](#)
- [Developing Effective Recruitment Strategies](#)
- [Thoughtful Selection Policies and Procedures](#)
- [Maintaining Full Enrollment](#)
- [Encouraging and Supporting Regular Attendance](#)

[ACF-IM-HS-19-03 Head Start and Early Head Start Eligibility for Children in Kinship Care](#)

[Community Assessment: The Foundation for Program Planning in Head Start](#)

[Child Care Aware® Coronavirus Resources](#)

[MyPeers](#) (ERSEA Managers – Coordinators Community)



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