

Foster Care & Education Q&A

HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START FOR CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Q: What is Head Start and Early Head Start?

A: Head Start is a federally funded program for preschool children in economically disadvantaged families. This comprehensive child development program offers an array of educational, health, social, and other services, with a particular focus on early reading and math skills. Head Start also provides health screenings that include physicals, immunizations, dental examinations, vision and hearing screenings, and mental health assessments. Early Head Start provides services to children birth to three years of age and their families, as well as pregnant women.

Q: Who is eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start?

A: The following children are eligible:

- Children whose families have income below the federal poverty line;
- Children whose families receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- Children in foster care regardless of family income;
- Children who are homeless, as defined by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act);

- Children who have disabilities, and are eligible for special education and related services, or early intervention services; and
- Under certain circumstances, children with family income below 130 percent of the poverty line.

Also, programs are permitted to enroll 10 percent of their children from families who do not meet the usual requirements.

Q: Who provides Head Start and Early Head Start services and where are they found?

A: Head Start provides grants to local public and private agencies to offer Head Start and Early Head Start Programs. Head Start and Early Head Start programs are offered through community action agencies, private and public school systems, private and public nonprofit agencies, private and public for-profit agencies, government agencies, and tribal government agencies or consortiums.

Q: How does the recent Head Start reauthorization affect access to Head Start and Early Head Start programs for children in foster care?

A: In December 2007, President Bush signed the "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of



2007.” This reauthorization includes specific provisions focused on children in foster care as well as children experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act, which include “children awaiting foster care placement” (“McKinney eligible children”) Some of these provisions are as follows:

Requirements for Current Head Start Providers

- Programs must allow for application and enrollment in a Head Start program of McKinney eligible children while obtaining required documents.
- Programs must collect data on the number of McKinney eligible children participating in the program.
- Programs must communicate and collaborate with, among others, agencies that administer programs under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Titles IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act, and the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Programs must establish channels of communication between Head Start staff and McKinney-Vento liaisons to facilitate coordination of programs, including coordinating family outreach and support programs.
- Head Start State Collaborative Directors must develop a strategic plan to enhance collaboration with, and services for, homeless children, children in foster care, and children referred by child welfare agencies.

Requirements for Prospective Head Start Providers

- Applicants for new Head Start programs must have a plan to meet the needs of children in foster care and experiencing homelessness, including transportation.

Requirements for HHS Secretary

- Secretary must issue regulations to ensure that McKinney eligible children are identified and prioritized for enrollment in a Head Start program.
- Secretary must report on the status of children in Head Start programs, including those children in

foster care, referred by child welfare agencies, and experiencing homelessness.

- Secretary must provide funds to support training for personnel providing services to children who have been abused or neglected, referred by the child welfare agency, or are receiving child welfare services.
- Secretary must conduct research, evaluation, and demonstration activities to develop new components for addressing children’s needs, including those who have been abused or neglected and those in foster care.
- Secretary must ensure that review teams include individuals knowledgeable about the needs of children experiencing homelessness and in foster care.
- Secretary shall modify program standards when necessary, taking into consideration developments concerning research-based practices with respect to children in foster care and changes in population and number children in foster care or experiencing homelessness.

Funding and Training Opportunities

- Allows quality improvement funds to be used for staff training, child counseling, and other services to address the challenges of children in foster care or referred by child welfare agencies.
- Provides funds for technical assistance to Early Head Start programs to create training about serving high risk populations, such as children in the child welfare system and homeless children.

Q: Where can I find more information about Head Start and Early Head Start?

A: For more information, please visit:
Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/index.html>;
National Head Start Association <http://www.nhsa.org/>;
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth <http://www.naehcy.org/>.

