

Bear River Head Start
ERSEA Policy
(Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection,
Enrollment, Attendance)
2026-2027

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Recruitment and Enrollment

The following policy represents recruitment and enrollment for the legal entity of Bear River Head Start and all associated program options available within the federally funded grantee. These program options include Head Start and Early Head Start. Included within these options are home based and center based services. The following abbreviations are associated with each program option within this policy.

- Preschool Head Start- PHS
- Early Head Start- EHS
- Bear River Head Start- BRHS

Determining, Verifying, and Documenting Eligibility

An in-person interview will be conducted with each applicant in order to verify information for age eligibility, income eligibility, and eligibility based on foster care and homelessness. If an in-person interview is not possible or convenient for the family, staff may conduct an interview by phone.

Age Requirements

- Early Head Start
 - o A child must be an infant/toddler younger than 3 years old, except when the child is transitioning to Head Start. Pregnant women are eligible to apply.
- Head Start
 - o A child must be at least three years old, or turn three years old by September 1st, which is the date to determine eligibility for public school in the communities in which the grantee is located, and a child may not be older than the age required to attend school (5 years old on September 1st).

Eligibility Requirements

- A family will be considered income eligible if the family's income is equal to or below the poverty line. Families will also be considered eligible under income guidelines if they receive TANF child-only payments or SSI benefits, SNAP (as per ACF-IM-HS-22-3, issuance 4/21/2022) or would potentially be eligible to receive these benefits in the absence of child care. A child will also be considered eligible if they are homeless, as defined in the McKinney-Vento act, or in foster care.

Bear River Head Start/ Early Head Start will follow the McKinney- Vento Homeless Act in the recruitment and enrollment process. Copies of the Act will be distributed to staff members who will receive training on the Act.

Additional Allowances-Over Income Eligibility

- The Performance Standard 1302.12 Determining, verifying, and documenting eligibility (d)(1) states that *a program may enroll an additional 35% of participants whose families do not meet a criterion described in (c) eligibility requirements of this section and whose incomes are below 130% of the poverty line.* BRHS will utilize children whose family incomes are in the 100-130% above the poverty level range. The BRHS program will implement outreach and enrollment policies and procedures that ensure it is meeting the needs of eligible children or pregnant women, before serving over-income children and pregnant women.
 - ⇒ See the Enrollment 100-130% Over-Income Procedure
- Performance Standard 1302.12 (c)(2) If the family does not meet a criterion under paragraph (c)(1), a program may enroll a child who would benefit from services, provided that these participants only make up to 10 % of a program's enrollment in accordance with paragraph (d) additional allowances for programs.
- Performance Standard 1302.12 (i) Verifying eligibility. (1) To verify eligibility based on income, program staff must use tax forms, pay stubs, or other proof of income to determine the family income for the relevant time period. (i) The program must calculate total gross income using applicable sources of income (ii) A program may make an adjustment to a family's gross income calculation for the purposes of determining eligibility to account for excessive housing costs. A program may use available bills, bank statements, and other relevant documentation provided by the family to calculate total annual housing costs with appropriate multipliers
 - ⇒ See Procedure for Housing Cost Adjustment based on Performance Standard 1302.12

Additional Allowances- Eligibility Requirements for Communities with 1,000 or Fewer Individuals

- BRHS uses the same eligibility requirements for all service areas, including communities with 1,000 or fewer individuals.

Verifying Age

- The following documents are accepted to verify a child's date of birth:
 - ⇒ Birth certificate, immunization record, insurance letter/cards, passport, hospital or medical birth/hospital record, baptismal or other religious records (indicating the date of birth), or other legal documents verifying the age of the child.
 - ⇒ 1302.12 (h) *Verifying age. Program staff must verify a child's age according to program policies and procedures. A program's policies and procedures cannot require families to provide documents that confirm a child's age, if doing so creates a barrier for the family to enroll the child.*

Verifying Eligibility

Bear River Head Start (BRHS) will verify eligibility in accordance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §1302.12(k)). Verification will include a review of allowable

documentation to determine family income and eligibility status.

1. Acceptable Documentation

BRHS will verify income using one or more of the following: an Individual Income Tax Form 1040, W-2 forms, pay stubs or pay envelopes, written statements from employers, or documentation showing current status and receipt of public assistance (such as SSI, TANF child-only payments, or SNAP). These documents will be used to calculate annual income for the relevant time period.

2. Alternative Documentation

When families cannot provide standard proof of income, BRHS may accept written statements from employers, including self-employment statements, to verify income and calculate annual earnings using appropriate multipliers.

3. Families with No Income

If a family reports no income, BRHS may accept a signed self-declaration form. The program will document efforts made to verify the family's income status and will explain how the determination was made. With written consent, BRHS may contact a third party to verify the family's circumstances. All eligibility records will be maintained in accordance with program confidentiality and recordkeeping policies.

4. Change in Income or Circumstances

When a family demonstrates a significant change in income or circumstances, BRHS may consider current income in determining eligibility. Families must complete a signed "Change in Income/Circumstance" form to support this determination.

Process:

- Family income will be verified by the ERSEA staff before determining that the child is eligible to participate in services. Federal Poverty Guidelines will be used to determine qualification. The agency verification form will be signed by ERSEA staff and Manager, and identifying which of these documents was examined and stating that the child is eligible to participate in the program based upon family income.
- Use of the income verification form will be used in the second step of income verification. This form was created by OHS to assist programs in completing income verification.
- Completion of a signed income verification form is required before a child is accepted and must be retained as part of the child's official record.
- A child will be considered eligible if they receive TANF child-only payments, SSI, or SNAP (as per ACF-IM-HS-22-3, issuance 4/21/2022).
 - BRHS will obtain documentation from either state or local agencies that shows the family is eligible or is potentially eligible to receive public assistance (SSI, TANF child-only payments, SNAP).
- A child will be considered eligible if the child meets one of the following requirements:
 - The child is homeless as defined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. If a family disclosed they are homeless on the application, ERSEA staff will complete the MCV Verification form. To verify whether a family is homeless, a program may accept a written statement from a homeless services provider, school personnel, or other service agency attesting that the child is homeless or any other documentation that indicates homelessness, including documentation

from a public or private agency, a declaration, information gathered on enrollment or application forms, or notes from an interview with staff to establish the child is homeless; or any other document that establishes homelessness. If a family cannot provide one of these documents, the program may accept the families signed declaration describing the living situation that meets the homeless definition. Program staff may seek information from third parties who have firsthand knowledge about a family's living situation, if the family gives written consent. If the family gives consent to contact third parties, program staff must adhere to program privacy policies and procedures and ensure the eligibility determination record adheres to paragraph 1302.12(k) of HSPS.

- o The child has been placed in foster care by the state agency that has placement and care responsibility. A written statement from a government child welfare official, court ordered or foster care placement documents must be provided. To verify whether a child is in foster care, program staff must accept either a court order or other legal or government-issued document, a written statement from a government child welfare official that demonstrates the child is in foster care, or proof of a foster care payment.

Other Considerations-Kinship Care

Kinship Care is a child who is living with non-parent relatives due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. Examples of circumstances leading a child to kinship care may include substance misuse, incarceration, mental illness and economic difficulties. Children in kinship care may be eligible for Head Start services by being considered homeless under certain circumstances of their placement in kinship care, being in foster care if the child is placed away from parents or guardians and in the care of relatives by a child welfare agency, or if the relative caregivers are eligible or receive public assistance (SSI, TANF child-only payments, SNAP) or the child living with relatives receives or is eligible to receive public assistance (SSI, TANF child-only payments, SNAP).

If OHS or the program determines that a grantee has contributed to the misrepresentation or falsification of family income, OHS will issue a notice of deficiency and take other adverse actions. All employees of Bear River Head Start who knowingly misrepresent or falsify family income or any other documentation included in the application and enrollment process will be terminated.

Eligibility Duration

- Children who are enrolled in any Early Head Start program at BRHS will remain eligible while they participate in the program.
- When a child moves from Early Head Start to Head Start, the family's eligibility must be re-verified.
- When a child is determined eligible and is participating in the Head Start program, he/she will remain eligible through the end of the succeeding program year.
 - o If children are eligible to participate for a third year at Head Start, then then family's eligibility must be re-verified.

Training on Eligibility

- Policy council and Board will receive training within 180 days of a new term
- All staff and management will receive training on eligibility annually.
- Staff who determine eligibility will receive training on eligibility within 90 days of hire.
- Training topics will include:
 - o Methods on how to collect complete and accurate information from families and third party sources;
 - o Strategies for treating families with dignity and respect and for dealing with possible issues of domestic violence, stigma, and privacy; and
 - o Explain program policies and procedures for falsifying any information included in the enrollment process

Submission of Applications

Upon receiving applications for enrollment, staff will document the date the completed application was received. If the parent delivered the application to a center, or to a staff member, staff will review the application. If the application is not complete, staff will return the application to recruiting staff supervisors and provide guidance on the missing information. The ERSEA offices will also contact parents regarding incomplete applications received, and document efforts and progress. ***Incomplete applications will not be considered for enrollment until complete unless they fall under the McKinney-Vento Act guidelines.***

- Applicants on the waitlist for a year or longer will need to re-submit income verification information and update any changes on the application to be waitlisted again.

Recruitment

Recruitment is a responsibility of all staff and job descriptions. All staff will be trained on recruitment annually. Staff will document their recruitment efforts. Supervisors will monitor recruitment efforts of their assigned staff.

Recruitment Activities

Recruitment strategies will include a variety of approaches, materials, and events. Recruitment activities will occur within all program service areas. All BRHS program options including: Head Start home based and center based services, Early Head Start home based and center based services will be promoted for recruitment and enrollment. Strategies for recruitment include:

- Currently enrolled parents and families informing friends, family, community etc.
- Media including TV, radio, and newspapers within all service areas and for all program options.
- Posters, flyers, bulletins, placed throughout recruitment areas.
- Community partners and agencies, including those working with disability services.
- Referrals through Child Care Resource and Referral agencies.

Recruitment Code of Conduct

All staff, within each program option signs an ERSEA Code of Conduct annually. The ERSEA Code of Conduct states: "I understand that in processing applications for the legal entity of Bear River Head Start and all program options included in the grantee that all program services are paid for with federal funds. Intentionally providing misleading, inaccurate, or untruthful information of any material nature could result in serious legal consequences for the grantee

and for me as a representative of the agency. Appropriate disciplinary actions will occur with staff that does not follow this Code of Conduct.”

Record Keeping

Information from completed applications will be placed in the data base and assigned waiting list status and ranking. The data base is constructed so that only people with the right security clearance can access the Enrollment section of the child plus system. Child plus is also set up so that the user is logged out of the program and must re-enter their password after 30 minutes of no activity.

BRHS will keep eligibility determination records for each participant and ongoing training records for program staff. Each eligibility determination must include: copies of any documents or statements, including declarations that are deemed necessary to verify eligibility, and a statement that program staff have made reasonable efforts to verify information. Staff should verify information by conducting either an in-person or telephone interview with the family and describe efforts to verify a child’s eligibility through family income, being homeless, or placed foster care.

BRHS completes a form that identifies whether:

- The family’s income is below income guidelines for its size, and lists the family’s size;
- The family is eligible for or, in the absence of child care, potentially eligible for public assistance (SSI, TANF child-only payments, SNAP);
- The child is a homeless child or the child is in foster care;
- The family was determined eligible under the criterion in HSPS 1302.12(c)(2); or
- The family was determined eligible under the criterion in HSPS 1302.12(d)(1).

The file for each child will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, and accessed on a need to know basis. Changes to this procedure will only be changed upon written certification from OHS.

Records shall be maintained to indicate that verification has been made. Eligibility determination records must be kept for as long as the child and their family is enrolled in the program, and for at least one year after they are no longer receiving services. Bear River Head Start as a legal entity will keep records for 3 years for all children and 5 years for children receiving services under IDEA after they finish receiving services from BRHS.

The grantee and its program options will provide annual training to Board and Policy Council members and employees responsible for determining and verifying income eligibility and to ensure that those employees are fully aware of the consequences established by the grantee for employees who knowingly sign a verification form that contains false information.

Selection Process

A program must annually establish selection criteria that weigh the prioritization of selection of participants, based on community needs identified in the community needs assessment as described in HSPS 1302.11(b), and including family income, whether the child is homeless, whether the child is in foster care, the child’s age, whether the child is eligible for special education and related services, or early intervention services, as appropriate, as determined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.) and, other

relevant family or child risk factors.

- If a program operates in a service area where Head Start eligible children can enroll in high-quality publicly funded pre-kindergarten for a full school day, the program must prioritize younger children as part of the selection criteria in HSPS 1302.14(a)(1). If this priority would disrupt partnerships with local education agencies, then it is not required.
- A program must not deny enrollment based on a disability or chronic health condition or its severity.

Selection Criteria

Children and families with greatest need will receive priority in the enrollment process. All applicants for all program options will receive prioritization based on annual income to determine if earnings exceed Federal Income Guidelines. Federal Income Guidelines for income eligibility are followed, and updated through the Office of Head Start. Families that earn less in comparison to Federal Income Guidelines will be given higher priority. The closer a family's earnings are in comparison to the guidelines the higher the priority will be given to the family.

Other factors taken into consideration include; the child's age, identified child disabilities, recommendations from state child protective services, referrals from community agencies, enrollment in the EHS program or another Head Start agency, and parental education.

Children will also receive prioritization according to risk factors including: Foster and homeless children, children on TANF child-only payments or SSI, single parents, other family members raising the child, children that are victims of abuse, parental substance abuse, parents with diagnosed disabilities (including physical and mental disabilities).

*Although children who are homeless or in foster care will be enrolled solely on the status as being categorically eligible, other risk factors may be identified to gain additional information to provide quality services.

*See attached Selection Criteria.

Children Eligible for Services under IDEA

The program will ensure that at least 10 percent of its total actual enrollment are filled by children eligible for services under IDEA. Children eligible for services under IDEA may be prioritized for available slots in accordance with BRHS selection criteria.

Waiting Lists

BRHS will establish and maintain a waitlist throughout each enrollment year to be able to fill any and all vacancies within 30 days. The waitlist will prioritize all children according to BRHS selection criteria, ensuring that children with the highest need appear at the top of the waitlist and then move downward accordingly.

Enrollment

Bear River Head Start will maintain its funded enrollment level and fill any vacancy as soon as possible.

The program will fill any vacancy within 30 days.

If a child is homeless or in foster care the program will make efforts to maintain the child's enrollment regardless of whether the family or child moves to a different service area, or transition the child to a program in a different service area, according to the family needs.

BRHS may reserve one or more enrollment slots for pregnant women and children experiencing homelessness and children in foster care, when a vacancy occurs. No more than three percent of a program's funded enrollment slots may be reserved. If the reserved enrollment slot is not filled within 30 days, the enrollment slot becomes vacant and then must be filled within 30 days.

Children from diverse economic backgrounds who are funded with other sources, including private pay, are not considered part of a program's eligible funded enrollment.

- BRHS does not accept private pay enrollment at this time.

BRHS will comply with state immunization enrollment and attendance requirements, with the exception of homeless children as described in HSPS 1302.16(c)(1).

Parent participation in any program activity is voluntary, including consent for data sharing, and is not required as a condition of the child's enrollment.

Dual Option Criteria

A family can have one or more children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Part Year Programs

Preschool Head Start will make a first enrollment selection consisting of applications completed and submitted to the ERSEA offices by April 30th of each year. Enrollment will continue through August up to the first day of program services. Full enrollment will be achieved by the first day of scheduled program services and maintain its funded enrollment level and fill any vacancy within 30 days. Waiting lists will be maintained on an ongoing basis.

Full Year Programs

Enrollment occurs as enrollment opportunities become available. This is done on a continuous and ongoing basis. Waiting lists will be maintained for all full year program service options.

Transition Services

BRHS will ensure every child and family experiences a smooth transition between EHS and PHS and from PHS to public school. Transition planning will take into account each child and family's individual need and support parent's in their role as their child's primary teacher.

If transition paperwork is approved, BRHS will transition children to Head Start as soon as possible after the child's third birthday but will permit children to remain in Early Head Start for a limited number of additional months following the child's third birthday if necessary for an appropriate transition as per HSPS 1302 Subpart G.

If there are reasons to not transition a child who has been approved for Head Start once they turn three, BRHS will take into consideration those reasons.

When a child qualifies to be in Early Head Start, whether they are enrolled either as income eligible, or over income, they will be enrolled for the whole amount of time of their enrollment term as Performance Standards allow.

See attached procedure.

Attendance

BRHS tracks attendance for each child and implements the process to ensure children are safe when they do not arrive at school. If a child is unexpectedly absent and the parent has not contacted the program within one hour of program start time the program will attempt to contact the parent to ensure the safety of the child.

In order to maintain at least 85% attendance, when a child has multiple unexplained absences (2 consecutive unexplained), BRHS will implement strategies to promote attendance including: providing information on the benefits of regular attendance, support families to promote regular attendance, conduct a home visit or make other direct contact with the child's parents. If a child ceases to attend, BRHS must make appropriate efforts to re-engage the family to resume attendance. Other options will be presented to the parents such as switching to another center or home based services, if available.

Within the first 60 days of program operation, and on an ongoing basis thereafter, use individual child attendance data to identify children with patterns of absence that put them at risk of missing ten percent of program days per year and develop appropriate strategies to improve individual attendance among identified children, such as direct contact with parents or intensive case management, as necessary.

After reasonable attempts have been exhausted, a certified letter will be sent to the parents to determine if they are withdrawing the child from the program. If there is no contact with the parents after the certified letter and the child's attendance does not resume, then BRHS must consider that slot vacant.

If a BRHS's monthly average daily attendance rate falls below 85 percent, the program must analyze the causes of absenteeism to identify any systematic issues that contribute to the program's absentee rate. The program must use this data to make necessary changes in a timely manner as part of ongoing oversight and correction as described in HSPS 1302.102(b) and inform its continuous improvement efforts as described in HSPS 1302.102(c).

Supporting Attendance of Homeless Children

BRHS will allow homeless children to attend for up to 90 days, or as long as allowed under state licensing requirements, without immunization and other records. This will allow the family reasonable time to gather additional documentation if needed. The program will work with families to get children immunized as soon as possible in order to comply with state licensing requirements. Teachers and Advocate will work with parents to support children's regular attendance including encouraging families to utilize community resources, including the use of public transportation, if possible, to provide transportation for the child. They will provide families with maps, where the nearest stops are located, bus routes and times of arrival.

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3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start
4. Key Words: Vacant Slots; Absenteeism; Enrollment Reporting; Attendance

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: All Head Start recipients, including Head Start Preschool, Early Head Start, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, Collaboration Offices, and National Centers

SUBJECT: Addressing Vacant Slots Due to Chronic Absenteeism

INFORMATION:

This Information Memorandum (IM) clarifies policy guidance on vacant slots in Head Start programs, with a focus on vacant slots due to chronic absenteeism.

Vacancies occur when a child who is enrolled in the program (and has attended previously) no longer attends for an extended period of time. This empty slot constitutes a missed opportunity for the child who is not attending a program and a missed opportunity for an eligible child who is waiting for Head Start services. Programs should work with the family to reinstate attendance or consider the slot vacant and fill it so the maximum number of eligible children can receive Head Start services.

This IM clarifies when Head Start programs should consider a child's slot vacant after long-term absences, underscores the importance of regular attendance, and offers strategies programs can use to enhance access and participation for children and families.

Clarifying Vacant Slot Requirements

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (Performance Standards), specify that a Head Start program must maintain its funded enrollment level and fill any open slots as soon as possible and within 30 days ([45 CFR §1302.15\(a\)](#)). This does not supersede any requirements set by a state on the timely enrollment of children in state funded programs.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) requires a program to report a slot as vacant as soon as the family or guardian communicates that the child is not returning to the program. The program must consider a slot vacant after a child has not attended for a **maximum** of 30 days (which should be counted as 30 consecutive calendar days) and a minimum of three attempts have been made to re-engage the family. Considering the slot vacant means the child will be unenrolled. This action is not considered expulsion as described in [§1302.17](#).

If a program has reserved one or more enrollment slots for children and pregnant women experiencing homelessness or children in foster care, it can hold that slot for 30 days (§1302.15(c)). If a reserved slot is not filled after 30 days, it becomes vacant and must be filled within 30 days. When filling vacant slots, programs are expected to refer to their waiting list, which ranks children according to the program's selection criteria as outlined in [§1302.14\(c\)](#).

The Performance Standards are also clear that programs must implement strategies to promote attendance, including using individual child attendance data to identify children with patterns of absence that put them at risk of missing 10 percent of program days per year. If a child ceases to attend, the program must make appropriate efforts to reengage the family to resume attendance ([§1302.16\(a\)\(3\)](#)). Efforts to reengage the family, at a minimum, include either directly contacting the parent or guardian or conducting a home visit. Each contact or attempted contact with the family must be documented in the child's file or in the program's record keeping system.

Considerations for Exceptions

The Performance Standards outline an expectation of filling any vacancies as soon as possible and within 30 days (§1302.15(a)), and OHS generally considers a slot to be vacant as soon as a family has confirmed the child is not returning to the program (or when a child has not attended for a maximum of 30 days), as described above. However, Head Start programs may develop policies and procedures that allow for limited exceptions to when a slot is considered to be vacant, as there are some unique circumstances that may factor into a child's attendance. Some examples may include: extenuating family circumstances that require a family to travel out of the service area for more than 30 days, a child with an extended illness or requiring hospitalization, a family recovering from a disaster, or a family emergency that might hinder a family's ability to ensure their child is able to get to the program. Programs must document the rationale for allowing the exception either in the child's file or in their record keeping systems.

In extraordinary circumstances, a child may be temporarily suspended from a Head Start program (§1302.17(a)). A temporary suspension may be used only as a last resort when there is a serious safety threat that has not been reduced or eliminated by the provision of interventions and supports recommended by the mental health consultant, and the program needs time to put appropriate services in place. In these instances, a temporary suspension would not count toward the maximum of 30 days before a slot is considered vacant. If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, a program must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety. A program must explore and document all steps taken to address the behavior(s) and supports needed to facilitate the child's safe reentry and continued participation in the program as outlined in §1302.17(a)(4).

If a program unenrolls a child due to chronic absenteeism, OHS encourages programs to allow the family to re-enroll upon return if there is a vacancy to accommodate them. If a program can no longer accommodate the family, it should place the child to the waitlist and help them identify an alternative care arrangement.

Enrollment Reporting Reminders

All Head Start programs must report their monthly enrollment in the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES) by Head Start Preschool and/or Early Head Start program within each grant ([641A\(h\)\(2\)](#)). Together, the following categories make up the total enrolled slots for the month: filled slots, reserved slots, and slots vacant for less than 30 days. Programs can make edits to reported monthly enrollment until a new reporting period opens.

For the purposes of enrollment reporting, a slot that is vacant for less than 30 days is counted toward a program's enrolled slots. Programs may report any slots that were vacant for less than 30 days as enrolled for the month. This allows the programs an opportunity to enroll another family. After 30 days, the slots can no longer be counted as enrolled slots (§1302.15(a)). At the beginning of the program year, all unfilled slots are considered vacant, unless they are reserved, and must be filled as soon as possible.

Importance of Attendance and Preventing Chronic Absenteeism

In Head Start programs, chronic absenteeism means missing 10 percent of program days per year. Chronic absenteeism, even among children in preschool and kindergarten, has been shown to be related to future chronic absenteeism, grade retention, and poor academic achievement.¹

Children living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be chronically absent from school. Chronic absenteeism can have disproportionately negative impacts on children living in poverty because their families often lack access to resources needed to make up for the lost learning.²

Establishing a pattern of consistent attendance enhances children's cognitive development, social skills, and long-term educational success.

Strategies to Enhance Program Access and Participation for Children and Families

Head Start programs are required to implement strategies to promote attendance (§1302.16(a)(2)). Here are a few strategies programs can use to address chronic absenteeism and boost regular attendance:

- Building relationships with families to improve communication.
 - Program leadership should promote regular attendance by consistently sending the message that regular attendance is important for children's success. Child and family services staff should reinforce this message by highlighting attendance during parent-teacher conferences and other engagement opportunities, and discussing the benefits of regular attendance with families.
 - Programs should ensure that all staff can build trusting relationships with families. These relationships are the foundation for understanding any challenges a family and child may be facing. As part of these ongoing relationships, staff can have regular conversations with families about the value and benefits of attendance as well as problem solve about specific family circumstances that may be adversely affecting child attendance.
- Programs can engage in community partnerships that support child and family wellbeing and promote child attendance. Health and mental health providers, family support services, housing organizations, and child care providers with extended days supports can all help programs to promote family and child wellness, stability, and child attendance.
- Programs must track attendance for every child. Programs must also examine barriers to regular attendance, such as access to safe and reliable transportation, and where possible, provide or facilitate transportation for the child if needed (§1302.16(a)(2)(v)).
- Programs must regularly review and analyze individual child-attendance data to identify trends and patterns in absences and develop targeted supports for families. If a program's monthly average daily attendance rate falls below 85 percent, the program must analyze the causes of absenteeism to identify any systematic issues that contribute to the program's absentee rate (§1302.16(b)).
- Programs should use health data to identify trends in children's absences that are related to health and implement strategies that improve attendance. They can help improve attendance using policies and procedures that promote health, reduce the spread of illness, and prevent injury. Programs should individualize supports for each family when absences are related to health, and provide education and resources for family members to prevent illness and injury and identify when a child is sick and needs treatment.
- Programs must use a multidisciplinary approach that facilitates coordination and collaboration between mental health and other relevant program services, including as education, disability, family engagement, and health services. A multidisciplinary approach, including mental health consultants, can help programs identify why there may be chronic absenteeism and support children and families to attain regular attendance.

Bussing

Bear River Head Start/Early Head Start does not provide bussing in any of its program options. The grantee does not transport children to or from school. If families do not have transportation to transport their child to and from centers, then home based service options are discussed with the parent to identify the best program option to meet their needs. Home Based families may enroll in the Center Based program option, to meet their identified needs, when enrollment slots are available in a nearby center.

Suspension and Expulsion

Bear River Head Start follow HSPS recommendations on suspension and expulsion.

Limitations on suspension

- A program must prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior. Such suspensions may only be temporary in nature.
- A temporary suspension must be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications.
- Before a program determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, a program must engage with a mental health consultant, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources – such as behavior coaches, psychologists, other appropriate specialists, or other resources – as needed, to determine no other reasonable option is appropriate.
- If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, a program must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by:
 - Continuing to engage with the parents and a mental health consultant, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources;
 - Developing a written plan to document the action and supports needed;
 - Providing services that include home visits; and,
 - Determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate.

Prohibition on Expulsion

- A program cannot expel or un-enroll a child from Head Start because of a child's behavior.
- When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems, and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. Such steps must include, at a minimum, engaging a mental health consultant, considering the appropriateness of providing appropriate services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability, and consulting with the parents and the child's teacher, and:
 - If the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency responsible for the IFSP or IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services; or,

- o If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child’s eligibility for services.
- If, after a program has explored all possible steps and documented all steps taken as described in HSPS 1302.17(b)(2) of this section, a program, in consultation with the parents, the child’s teacher, the agency responsible for implementing IDEA (if applicable), and the mental health consultant, determines that the child’s continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.
- See Suspension and Expulsion Procedure.

Selection Criteria for Bear River Head Start/Early Head Start

Age Eligibility PHS	Eligibility Priority
3 years – 3 years, 5 months	95
3 years, 6 months – 3 years, 11 months	85
4 years – 4 years, 5 months	75
4 years, 6 months – compulsory school age	65
Eligibility EHS	
Pregnant Woman	100
Age Eligibility EHS	
Birth to 6 months	95
7 months – 1 year	85
1 year, 1 month – 1 year, 6 months	75
1 year, 7 months – 1 year, 11 months	65
2 years – 2 years, 5 months	55
2 years, 6 months – under 3 years	45
Environmental Risk 1	
Homeless	500
Foster Child	500
TANF Child-Only	250
SSI	250
SNAP	250
Environmental Risk 2	
Single Parent	50
Other family member raising child	50
Environmental Risk 3	
Child is victim of abuse	85
Parent or primary caregiver has a diagnosed mental health condition/in process of diagnosis	55
Parent has diagnosed disability	55
Home Environment/Safety Concerns	
Child lives in an environment with safety concerns (e.g., domestic violence, substance abuse, unsafe living conditions) verified through self-report, DCFS involvement or home visit observation	85
Family experiencing frequent crisis or instability that impacts child’s safety or attendance- includes eviction, family conflict, or unsafe caregivers.	85
Attendance/Participation Barriers	
Parent employment conflicts or shift work	25

Community/Geographic Factors	
Resides in area with limited access to early childhood programs	25
Family lives in rural area with limited services	25
ESL	
English as a second language	25
Disability	
Identified Disability with IEP/IFSP	95
Age of Primary Adult	
Primary adult less than 14	45
Primary adult 14-17	35
Primary adult 18-21	20
Education of Adult	
No schooling	95
Less than 5 th grade	85
5 th -8 th grade	75
9 th grade	65
10 th grade	55
11 th grade	45
12 th grade, no diploma	35
Income	
0-25% of poverty level	95
26-50% of poverty level	85
51-75% of poverty level	75
76-100% of poverty level	65
101-125% of poverty level	25
126-150% of poverty level	15
151-200% of poverty level	5
Referral (family is working with)	
DCFS	95
School District	85
Part C (Up to 3, Idaho Infants and Toddlers)	85
CAPSA	75
WIC	50
Doctor	50
Other	25
Head Start	
EHS participant	50
Previously enrolled in another Head Start agency	50
Previously enrolled in BRHS (and demonstrated active attendance)	50
EHS	
Previously enrolled in another Early Head Start agency	50
Child of BRHS Staff Member	45
Previously enrolled in BRHS (and demonstrated active attendance)	50

Bear River Head Start/Early Head Start follows Performance Standard 1302.14 Selection Process

Transition Procedure

Based on Performance Standard 1302.70 Transition from Early Head Start. An Early Head Start program must implement strategies and practices to support successful transitions for

children and their families transitioning out of Early Head Start. To ensure the most appropriate placement and service following EHS, families work on a transition plan that takes into account child's development, health and disability status, child and family progress and income verification.

To ensure the most appropriate placement and service following participation in Early Head Start, BRHS will at least six months prior to each child's third birthday, implement transition planning for each child and family, under the direction of the EHS Family Development Manager.

- (a) At the beginning of each service year start a tracking record of all children turning 3 and calculate when they turn 2.5 and what documentation will need to be gathered.
- (b) Three months prior to the child turning 2.5 years, advocates or educators start speaking with parents about the transition process and documentation needed.
- (c) EHS staff will have the family complete the Intent to Transition Form indicating whether they want to continue services into PHS.
 - a. As per Performance Standards, if a child is approved to transition to Head Start, BRHS will transition the child into Head Start or another program as soon as possible after the child's third birthday but permits the child to remain in Early Head Start for a limited number of additional months following the child's third birthday if necessary for an appropriate transition.
- (d) At 2.5 years, a transition packet will be completed. Included is an application for the current year, income verification for the previous 12 months or prior year W2 or 1040 and birth verification.

BRHS must take into account the child's development, health, disability status, progress made by the child and family while in EHS, current and changing family circumstances and, the availability of Head Start, or other early education services in the community that will meet the needs of the child and family.

- (e) Completed transition packets are turned into the ERSEA office where staff will verify eligibility as income eligible, categorically eligible or over income.
- (f) The ERSEA coordinator re-verifies eligibility and if the child is found to be income or categorically eligible, the child will continue current services and transition to PHS once the transition is deemed appropriate.
- (g) If the child is found to be over income, program area staff are asked to provide information/concerns that should be considered to determine if the child should be transitioned to PHS as OI (health, mental health, family, disability and education)
- (h) Once all information has been received, program area coordinators are asked to make a decision based on the information provided. Once a unanimous decision is reached, the ERSEA Manager will send out an OI decision notice to program staff and coordinators will sign the OI decision form.
- (i) If the decision is made to transition the child as over income, the same procedure will be followed for income eligible children.
- (j) If the decision is reached to not transition the child as OI, the same OI notice and letter will be sent and signed. A letter from the ERSEA Manager will be sent to the parent/

guardian informing them of the decision not to transition. The child will continue to receive EHS services through the program term to provide continuity of care as the family prepares to find services elsewhere.

- (k) If they wish to be put on the wait list as OI, income documentation from the year prior to the upcoming service year would be needed. If family circumstances change, the family is encouraged to let their family advocate know so that the information can be presented to the ERSEA staff. The child will continue with EHS services through the current service year.
- (l) 50 eligibility points will be awarded to OI children who will not transition to Head start to give them consideration to participate in Head Start and to give continuity of care whenever possible.

For all children not transitioning to preschool head start whether based on OI or parental decision, the educator or teacher will continue with formulating a transition plan with the parents. They will discuss the child's progress while in EHS and community resources available for preschool. Early Head Start and Preschool Head Start will work together to maximize enrollment transitions from EHS to PHS and promote successful transitions through collaboration and communication.

Enrollment 100-130% Over-Income Procedure

If a program chooses to enroll participants who do not meet a criterion according to eligibility requirements, and whose family incomes are between 100 and 130 percent of the poverty line, it must be able to report to the Head Start regional program office:

- How it is meeting the needs of low-income families or families potentially eligible for public assistance (SSI, TANF child-only payments, SNAP), homeless children, and children in foster care, and include local demographic data on these populations;
- Outreach and enrollment policies and procedures that ensure it is meeting the needs of eligible children or pregnant women, before serving over-income children or pregnant women;
- Efforts, including outreach, to be fully enrolled with eligible pregnant women or children;
- Policies, procedures, and selection criteria it uses to serve eligible children;
- Its current enrollment and its enrollment for the previous year;
- The number of pregnant women and children served, disaggregated by the eligibility criteria in HSPS 1302.12(c) and 1302.12(d)(1); and,
- The eligibility criteria category of each child on the program's waiting list.

Procedure for housing cost adjustments based on performance standard 1302.12

In accordance with the updated Performance standards 1302.12 Determining, Verifying, and documenting eligibility.

(i) *Verifying eligibility.*

(1) To verify eligibility based on income, program staff must use tax forms, pay stubs, or other proof of income to determine the family income for the [relevant time period](#).

(i) The program must calculate total gross income using applicable sources of income.

(ii) A program may make an adjustment to a family's gross income calculation for the purposes of determining eligibility to account for excessive [housing costs](#). A program may use available bills, bank statements, and other relevant documentation provided by the family to calculate total annual housing costs with appropriate multipliers to:

(A) Determine if a family spends more than 30 percent of their total gross income on housing costs, as defined in part [1305](#) of this chapter; and

(B) If applicable, reduce the total gross income by the amount spent on housing costs that exceed more than 30 percent.

BRHS Procedure

Step 1: Gather Documentation

- Staff will collect the application and all necessary documentation to calculate gross annual income. This includes:
- Tax Forms
- Pay Stubs for 12 months, and
- Other forms of income as applicable

Step 2: Notify Family of Adjustment Possibility

If the family's gross annual income exceeds the eligibility income guidelines, staff will:

- Inform the family of the possibility to adjust their housing costs, and
- Provide a clear deadline for submitting required documentation.

Step 3: Collect Housing Documentation

Staff will explain to the family the types of documents they can submit, including:

- Mortgage statement or rental lease,
- Utility bills (gas, water, trash, sewer, and electricity),
- Homeowners insurance payments (if not included in mortgage), and
- Property taxes.

All documents must be securely stored and kept confidential.

Step 4: Calculate Adjusted Income

ERSEA Staff will:

- Calculate the family's gross annual income using all applicable sources of income.
- Use the housing cost tool to determine if the family is paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs.
<https://headstart.gov/housing-cost-adjustment-calculator>

Step 5: Determine Eligibility Based on Housing Costs

- If a family is paying more than 30% of their gross annual income on housing costs, ERSEA will:
 - Deduct the amount exceeding 30% from the gross annual income.
 - Use the adjusted income to determine eligibility.
- If the family is not paying more than 30%, no adjustments will be made, and eligibility will be determined based on gross annual income.

Step 6: Communicate Outcome to Families

ERSEA will send a letter or email to families explaining the outcome:

- If adjustments were made, the letter will outline the changes.
- If no adjustments were made, the letter will explain why.

Families can contact the ERSEA office if they have questions about their adjustments or ask questions if they feel there's an error.

Suspension and Expulsion Procedure

PS 1302.17

Limitations on suspension

- A program must prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior. Such suspensions may only be temporary in nature.
- A temporary suspension must be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications.
- Before a program determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, a program must engage with a mental health consultant, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources - such as behavior coaches, psychologists, other appropriate specialists, or other resources - as needed, to determine no other reasonable option is appropriate.
- If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, a program must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by:
 - o Continuing to engage with the parents and a mental health consultant, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources;
 - o Developing a safety plan to document the action and supports needed; ** See Safety Plan for more information.**
 - o Providing services that include home visits; and,
 - o Determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate.

Prohibition on Expulsion

- A program cannot expel or un-enroll a child from Head Start because of a child's behavior.
- When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems, and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. Such steps must include, at a minimum, engaging a mental health consultant, considering the appropriateness of providing appropriate services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability, and consulting with the parents and the child's teacher, and:
 - o If the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency responsible for the IFSP or IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services; or,
 - o If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child's eligibility for services.
- If, after a program has explored all possible steps and documented all steps taken as described in HSPS 1302.17(b)(2) of this section, a program, in consultation with the parents, the child's teacher, the agency responsible for implementing IDEA (if applicable), and the mental health consultant, determines that the child's continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.

Definitions

Continuity of Care: Head Start or Early Head Start services provided to children in a manner that promotes primary caregiving and minimizes the number of transitions in teachers and teacher assistants that children experience over the course of the day, week, program year, and to the extent possible, during the course of their participation from birth to age three in Early Head Start and in Head Start.

Enrollment: The number of participants in an Early Head Start and/or Head Start program

Family: (For a child) All persons living in the same household who are: (1) supported by the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) income; and (2) related to the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) by blood marriage, or adoption; or (3) the child's authorized caregiver or legally responsible party

(Family, for a pregnant woman, means all persons who financially support the pregnant woman)

Foster Care: 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the state agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes. A child is in foster care in accordance with this definition

Homeless: Same definition used in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Income: Gross cash income and includes earned income, military income (including pay and allowances), veteran's benefits, Social Security benefits, unemployment compensation, and public assistance benefits (SSI, TANF child-only payments, SNAP)

Parent: A Head Start child's mother or father, other family member who is a primary caregiver, foster parent or authorized caregiver, guardian or the person with whom the child has been placed for purposes of adoption pending a final adoption decree.

Participant: A pregnant woman or child who is enrolled in and receives services from a Head Start, an Early Head Start, a Migrant or Seasonal Head Start, or an American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start program.

Recruitment: The systematic ways in which a Head Start program identifies families whose children are eligible for Head Start services, informs them of the services available, and encourages them to apply for enrollment in the program.

Relevant Time Period: (1) The 12 months preceding the month in which the application is submitted; or (2) During the calendar year preceding the calendar year in which the application is submitted, whichever more accurately reflects the needs of the family at the time of application.

Service Area: The geographic area identified in an approved grant application within which a grantee may provide Head Start services.

Vacancy: An unfilled enrollment opportunity for a child and family in the Head Start program.

Verify: or any variance of the word, means to check or determine the correctness or truth by investigation or by reference.