

Kids Central Inc. Head Start ERSEA Policy

Eligibility

1302.12

Policy Overview

This policy outlines the procedures for determining, verifying, and documenting the eligibility of families for Kids Central Inc.'s Head Start programs, in accordance with the Head Start Performance Standards, Section 1302 Subpart A. The aim is to ensure fair access to services for eligible children and families while maintaining compliance with federal regulations.

A. Process Overview

1. Eligibility Determination

Program staff will conduct an in-person interview with each family during the application process unless an in-person interview is not possible or convenient for the family. In this case a telephone interview may be conducted.

Staff will verify information as required, enter application data into Go Engage where an eligibility determination record for each enrolled participant will be stored electronically.

B. Age Requirements

1. Early Head Start & Head Start Preschool

Children must be infants or toddlers younger than three years, except when transitioning to Head Start Preschool.

Children must be at least three years old by the public-school eligibility date and no older than the age eligible to attend school.

Documentation for age verification will be accepted in the form of birth certificates, a hospital birth letter or a hospital footprint card. Kids Central will not require families to provide documents that confirm a child's age, if doing so creates a barrier for the family to enroll the child. However, Kids Central, Inc. will attempt to verify the child's age through a third-party agency such as the Department of Social Services while coordinating efforts with the family to obtain official age verification documentation. Copies of documentation of age verification will not be kept in the child's official record but will be confirmed and notated on the enrollment application.

C. Eligibility Requirements

1. Eligibility Criteria

Families may be eligible if:

- Income is at or below the federal poverty line.
- Family is eligible for or potentially eligible, in the absence of childcare, for public assistance, including TANF child-only payments.
- Child is homeless.
- Child is in foster care.
- Families meeting eligibility due to excessive housing costs.
- Families receive public assistance in the form of SNAP, SSI or TANF.
- Up to 35% of enrollment slots may be enrolled with families 100-130% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Verification for each of the above-mentioned eligibility criteria will be determined using the following methods:

- (i) To verify eligibility based on income, Kids Central will accept tax forms such as a 1040 or W-2, pay stubs, verification letters from employers or other proof of income to determine the family income for the relevant time period. Total gross income will be calculated using the applicable source of income. *Relevant time period means: the 12 months preceding the month in which the application is submitted; or 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.*
The following formulas will be used to calculate income based on frequency of pay:
Weekly: Amount x 4.33 x 12
Bi-Weekly: Amount x 2.17 x 12
Bi-Monthly: Amount x 2.0 x 12
Monthly: Amount x 12
- (ii) Kids Central will accept a copy of notice of approval for TANF, SSI or SNAP, other documentation of eligibility or benefits from the SNAP/TANF agency or Social Security Administration, an Electronic Benefit Transfer card with SNAP ID number or documentation of receipt of benefits from an issuing agencies online platform or app, including the name of the benefit recipient.
- (iii) Kids Central will make an adjustment to a family's gross income calculation for the purposes of determining excessive housing costs. Kids Central, Inc. will determine such costs by using mortgage, lease or rental documentation identifying the family's name and cost of housing, cancelled mortgage or rent checks, paper or electronic bank statements, electric, water, sewer, and trash up to 3 months prior to the date of application. The housing cost calculator located at <https://nhsa.org/the-hub/housing-cost-tool/> may also be utilized to determine housing costs in excess of 30% of a family's gross income.
- (iv) Kids Central, Inc. will accept documentation to verify whether a family is homeless by accepting 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.
- (v) Kids Central, Inc. will verify whether a child is in foster care by accepting 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.
 - (vi) If the family reports no income for the relevant time period, Kids Central, Inc. may accept the family's signed declaration to that effect, if program staff describes efforts made to verify the family's income and explains how the family's total income was calculated or seeks information from third parties about the family's eligibility if the family gives written consent.
 - (vii) If the family can demonstrate a significant change in income for the relevant time period, Kids Central may consider current income circumstances to update eligibility status.

(j) Eligibility duration.

- (1) If a child is determined eligible and is participating in a Kid Central, Inc., he or she will remain eligible through the end of the succeeding program year except that Kids Central may choose not to enroll a child when there are compelling reasons for the child not to remain in Head Start, such as when there is a change in the child's family income and there is a child with a greater need for Head Start services.
- (2) Children who are enrolled in a program receiving funds under the authority of section 645A of the Act remain eligible while they participate in the program.
- (3) If a child moves from an Early Head Start program to a Head Start Preschool program, program staff must verify the family's eligibility again.
- (4) Kids Central, Inc. will ensure, whenever possible, the child receives Head Start Preschool services until enrolled in school, provided the child is eligible.

2. Additional Enrollment

- Kids Central, Inc. may enroll up to 10% of children who do not meet the above criteria but would benefit from services.
- An additional 35% may be enrolled if their income is below 130% of the poverty line, provided that outreach and enrollment procedures prioritize eligible families first.

Kids Central, Inc. is committed to maintaining the integrity and accuracy of all ERSEA (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance) processes and documentation. Any employee who knowingly falsifies, alters, or misrepresents application documentation or related records will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. This policy ensures compliance with federal regulations and upholds the trust placed in our program by children, families, and the community.

Recruitment

1302.13 In order to reach those most in need of services, a program must develop and implement a recruitment process designed to actively inform all families with eligible children within the recruitment area of the availability of program services. A program must include modern technologies to encourage and assist families in applying for admission to the program, and to reduce the family's administrative and paperwork burden in the application and enrollment process. A program must include specific efforts to actively locate and recruit children with disabilities and other children in need, including children experiencing homeless and children in foster care.

Summary of the Recruitment Plan for Kids Central, Inc. Head Start Program

Year-Round Focus with Emphasis on March through July

Rationale:

The goal is to ensure all families with Head Start-age children are aware of the available services in their area and are encouraged to participate.

Resources That May Be Used:

- Local news media
- Community events and health fairs
- Distribution of information at health clinics and doctor's offices
- Community canvassing
- Family referrals
- Online preapplication submission
- Local public education agencies
- Social Media platforms

- Other agency collaborations
- Special Education Advisory Committees

Operational Procedures:

- In line with Performance Standard 1302.13, the Head Start program must actively inform all families within the recruitment area about the services and encourage program enrollment.
- The Family Services Department at Kids Central has the following responsibilities:
 1. Sending informational materials to community partners and agencies, including VDH, DSS and other human service agencies as appropriate.
 2. Posting recruitment flyers in public places like community centers, grocery stores, and malls.
 3. Presenting at interagency meetings to promote the recruitment of foster children and families meeting the criteria for McKinney-Vento.
 4. Kids Central's Assistant Director and Disabilities Specialist Assistant will work with local preschool special education departments and early intervention to ensure recruitment and appropriate services for children with disabilities.
 5. Advertising recruitment efforts via local newspapers, radio and social media platforms.
 6. Distributing Head Start literature at community events and shopping centers.
 7. Coordinating with the Virginia Pre-School Initiative to prevent duplicated services.
 8. Conducting door-to-door outreach if necessary.

Annual Update:

The recruitment plan is reviewed and updated each year by the Assistant Director of Child & Family Services to maintain compliance and effectiveness in reaching the community.

Selection

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Policy:

Kids Central Head Start Program will select children and families with the most need for Head Start Services without regard for race, gender, disability, or creed in accordance with Head Start Program Performance Standards, Head Start Act, and Kids Central, Inc. ERSEA policies.

If a child is declared eligible, their selection will be based on points received from the Prioritization Criteria Point System which is developed from Community Assessment data and approved by the Policy Council and the Board of Directors which holds responsibility of programmatic oversight.

Upon completion of each application, eligible children will be placed on a waiting list and

prioritized according to the Prioritization Criteria Point System. A waiting list must continue to be maintained throughout the program year to ensure the children with the most need are selected for the program as slots become available.

Selections must be conducted using the following waitlist priorities:

• **Income Eligible on the waitlist from 0% - 100%**

Using the waitlist developed by the point system, Kids Central, Inc. will first select children whose family income is at or below 100% of the *Federal Poverty Guideline* or those who are eligible for or, in the absence of childcare, would be potentially eligible for public assistance; or children who are experiencing homelessness or are in foster care.

• **Income Eligible on the waitlist from 101%-130%**

Kids Central, Inc. may select up to 35% of families who do not meet the Income Eligible criteria above. These selections may occur after demonstrating they have conducted outreach and exhausted all resources to enroll income eligible children, families eligible for or in the absence of childcare, would be potentially eligible for public assistance, children who are homeless, in foster care and children with disabilities.

• **Over Income on the waitlist 131% and above**

The Assistant Director of Child and Family Services must approve all application selections of families falling into the over income child eligibility category. Total participants accepted for this selection must not exceed 10% of the program funded enrollment. Excluding this priority, Kids Central may select over-income children after demonstrating they have conducted outreach and exhausted all resources to enroll income eligible children, families eligible for or in the absence of childcare, would be potentially eligible for public assistance, children who are experiencing homelessness, have excessive housing costs deeming the family eligible or are in foster care.

Selection Exceptions:

• **Children with Disabilities**

• To comply with Head Start's requirement of having 10 percent of actual enrollment be children with diagnosed disabilities, Kids Central, Inc. will give first priority to children with diagnosed disabilities during the selection process. This priority will stay in effect until 10 percent of actual enrolled children are children with disabilities and will be granted as follows:

1. Income eligible children from 0-100% Federal Poverty Guideline with diagnosed disabilities with a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
2. Income eligible children from 101-130% Federal Poverty Guideline with diagnosed disabilities with a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
3. Over income children (over 130% Federal Poverty Guideline) with diagnosed disabilities with a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
4. Income eligible children from 0-100% Federal Poverty Guideline with suspected disabilities with a current Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and/or letter from a licensed professional.
5. Over income eligible children from 101-130% Federal Poverty Guideline with suspected disabilities with a current Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and/or letter from a licensed professional.
6. Over income children (over 130% Federal Poverty Guideline) with suspected disabilities with a current Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and/or letter from a licensed professional. All IEPs, IFSPs and letters from a licensed professional must be reviewed and verified by the Assistant Director of Child & Family Services. Disabilities determination will be notated on the enrollment application.

• **Tiebreaker**

• In cases where families have the same point total for the same slot, priority will be given in order of application completion, oldest to newest.

Enrollment

A. ENROLLMENT

1. Enrollment takes place after a child is deemed eligible for either of the Head Start Preschool/Early Head Start program options at Kids Central, Inc.
2. All children must have a completed physical within 30 days.
3. Forms that must be completed before the enrollment process is final and before a child will be allowed to begin are as follows: a) Child's Application b) Child's Immunization Record. These forms will be placed in the child's permanent file. The child's application data and immunization records will also be entered and maintained on Go Engage online database.
4. A copy of the child's application packet will be scanned into a childrens file folder and maintained on the Kids Central server.
5. Family Services will be responsible for entering application data into the Go Engage online database, Health Services will enter and maintain all health information on Go Engage.
6. In order to keep our records up to date, all teachers will complete a Change of Status form when and family information has changed, such as they find out the family has moved, a work or home phone number has changed, etc. Change of status forms will be submitted to the Family Advocate responsible for the classroom or homebase program and entered into Go Engage. A copy of the change of status will be filed, both in the database and in the child's permanent record. Likewise, if Family Advocate is informed of a change before the child's teacher, the Family Advocate will complete a Change of Status form, update the database, and send a copy to the child's teacher for placement in the classroom file.
7. Once an application has been approved for enrollment the Family Advocate or Home Visitor will be responsible for putting all necessary paperwork for enrollment into the child's file.
8. Once a file has been completed, the Family Advocate will deliver the file to the appropriate teacher.
9. The classroom teacher/homevisitor will have one week to schedule and complete the first home visit necessary for the child to begin program services. Services will begin on the date of the first home visit for the home-based program option.

B. RE-ENROLLMENT

In order to provide programmatic continuity and to maintain consistency, the Family Services division at Kids Central, Inc will. utilize the following re-enrollment process for all components (Head Start Preschool, Early Head Start) of Kids Central, Inc. Head Start program: Top priority will be given to children already enrolled in the program. Go Engage will allot points for re-enrollees. Consequently, in the spring, parents of all returning children will be asked to indicate their site choices for the following year and will be asked to update their address and telephone numbers.

C. CLASS ASSIGNMENT

Prior to Classes Beginning

1. During the application process, parents will be asked their preference of sites at which they'd like their child to be placed. However, to ensure and encourage diversity in race, social economic status, skill level, and independent development, parents may not be given their first option choice.
2. When placing children in classes, keeping in mind the child's needs and the class' dynamics, the Family Services department, including the Assistant Director of Child & Family Services and at least one Family

Advocate will make classroom assignments. The team will attempt to place a child at the site indicated as the parent's choice. If a parent is unable to have their child placed at their first choice, the second choice will be assigned. Further, if the second choice is unavailable, the child will be placed at the third indicated site. If, however, none of the chosen sites are available, the child will be placed at the next available age-appropriate site/class.

3. To maintain funded enrollment, Head Start may serve families who are over-income. Consequently, a maximum of 10% will be accepted and counted in the total funded enrollment. When filling over-income spots, children will be selected based on the number of points received using the stated criteria listed previously. The child with the highest number of points or greatest need will be given a spot. This will continue until the over-income spaces are filled. If eligible applicants remain after all vacancies have been filled, the children will be placed on a waiting list.

After Classes Have Begun

If a Head Start-eligible child applies for the program after classes have begun, his/her completed application will go through the same screening process as the previous applications. However, if there are no spaces available, his/her name will be placed on the waiting list. When it is time for that particular child to be considered for a vacancy and an age-appropriate opening becomes available, Assistant Director will offer that vacancy to the family. If the parent accepts the placement, the Family Advocate will notify the teacher of the need to contact the family in order for s/he and the child to meet [the teacher] and to see the classroom setting before s/he [the child] begins class. A home visit will be completed before enrollment. The child's enrollment (starting) date will also be identified at this time.

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

1. Once children are placed in a classroom, every effort should be made to ensure continuity of care before moving the child. An exception will only be made if a parent shows proof of a hardship (i.e. parent is unable to get child to school due to loss of reliable transportation) and the Family Services and Education staff approves the move.

2. All [teachers] will serve, to the extent possible, the number of children for which his/her class is licensed.

ATTENDANCE

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Regular attendance in the Head Start program is extremely important and necessary for maintaining program funding. Consequently, careful monitoring of attendance is important.

Kids Central, Inc. Head Start Program actively tracks its children's absences in hopes to prevent monthly attendance from falling below the mandated 85% attendance rate. The process for keeping attendance is outlined below.

1. Attendance of each child is documented. a) Attendance is tracked daily using Go Engage; a code for marking attendance is used consistently throughout the program. b) Attendance is entered daily on the Go Engage program.

2. If during the first week of school a child does not attend school without an explanation, the child will be dropped from the program. The teachers will attempt to contact the parent/guardian the first three (3) days the child is absent. If after trying the first two (2) days, the third day's attempt is unsuccessful, the teacher will make a referral to the Family Advocate for further follow-up.
3. When a child has an unexplained absence, the teaching staff will contact the parent(s) to let him/her know the child was absent. The call will also be used to determine the reason for the absence and to encourage the parent to return the child to class as soon as reasonably possible.
4. When a child does not attend class for three (3) consecutive days, the teacher will notify their assigned Family Advocate, in writing, using the 3 Day Absentee form, of the days missed and if there has been any communication with the family. If the child does not return to class on the 4th day the Family Advocate will attempt to contact the family to offer assistance for resolving the absentee problem. An absence is excused only when:
 - a. the child is ill
 - b. the parent is ill
 - c. the child is quarantined
 - d. there is an emergency beyond the family's control
 - e. the child is away from home with a parent/relative as required by law

Please note: The above items are limited to 14 consecutive days unless prior arrangements have been made. Absences resulting from any reason other than those listed above, as well as any unverified absences will be considered unexcused. If a child continues to have unexcused absences after Kids Central, Inc. Head Start staff makes every effort to help the parent send the child back to class, the parent will be notified that the child is in danger of being dropped from the program. When a child is absent for a total of ten (10) days within a month's time, (four consecutive visits in the home-based program) and the necessary excuses are not provided, s/he will be placed on the program's waiting list and the parent will be sent an Excessive Absence letter. If the parent does not respond to the letter within three (3) days, the child will be officially dropped from the program.

5. At the end of each month, a program-wide Monthly Attendance Report will be reviewed by Family Services staff, policy council members and the Kids Central Board of Directors. Also, the average daily attendance for each class, as well as the average for the entire center-based component, will be calculated.
6. Family Advocates, in collaboration with classroom teachers will analyze any classroom attendance rates falling below the 85% threshold at the end of each month. Family Services will provide families with educational materials explaining the benefits of regular attendance and offering support to any families requiring additional support.
7. Within the first 60 days of program operation the Assistant Director of Child & Family Services will identify children leading to patterns of chronic absences. Family Advocates will provide families with materials to track their child's attendance at home, explain the meaning of chronic absences and the potential effects of children's learning and development. If a child is on the chronically absent list twice within the first 90 days of program operations the assigned Family Advocate will complete an attendance plan in collaboration with the child's family to identify any barriers to attendance and monitor for improvement.

THE WITHDRAWAL PROCESS

In the event a parent must withdraw a child from the program, the following will occur:

1. The parent will notify the teacher at least two (2) weeks prior to the intended withdrawal date (or ASAP if extenuating circumstances causes the decision to withdraw the child at the last minute).
2. The teacher will submit a Change of Status form to the Family Advocate on the child's last day of enrollment.
3. The Family Advocate or staff member will file the Change of Status in the child's permanent file.
4. On the child's last day in the program, the Family Advocate will input the date of withdrawal in the Go Engage database and will place the file in the "dropped file" cabinet.