ERSEA – Eligibility **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Eligibility **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**

Policy: The age of children and eligibility criteria of the family is verified. The program establishes and implements these eligibility criteria in accordance with the Head Start Performance Standards. Age, income (homeless, foster care, public assistance), and disability are the standard eligibility requirements, along with other factors as determined by the Community Assessment.

Related Regulations: 1302.10, 1302.12

Operational Procedures:

1. Program staff must conduct an in-person interview with each family. Program staff may interview the family over the telephone, if an in-person interview is not possible (last resort). The face to face portion of the interview may occur at enrollment, when finalizing all eligibility criteria and documentation.
2. The child's age is verified. To be eligible for Head Start services, a child must be at least three or four years old by September 1st, the date used to determine eligibility for public school in Texas. The child's birth certificate is the recommended documentation for age verification; if this creates a barrier for enrollment the ERSEA Manager must be consulted. In situations where retainment is considered and or requested, the child must be transitioned to the local ISD pre-kindergarten class in accordance with ISD policy. Head Start eligibility is only for two years (ages three & four).
3. Family income must be verified for the relevant time period or reflection of most current income status for the family. At least 90 percent of the children who are enrolled in each Head Start program must be from low income families. Up to 10 percent of the children enrolled may exceed the low-income guidelines, but must meet other criteria the program has established for selection of the children. The ERSEA Manager must be consulted before enrolling a child that has been determined to be over income.
4. For eligibility purposes, family/household is defined as:
   Family: all persons living in the same household who are:
   (1) supported by the child's parent(s)' or guardian(s)' income (meaning they have no 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.
   ***everyone in the Family number (eligibility-Number in Family) must be listed in Child Plus**
   ****In the event that the number of family needs to be explained, staff will obtain proper written documentation from the family OR will make an appropriate note in the Child Plus Family Information Notes section documenting who makes up the number for the number in the family.**
   *****Two Parent Family must have a Primary and a Secondary person listed**
   ******One Parent Family must only have a Primary person listed**
   Household: all persons living under the same roof
   ****not all household members have to be in Child Plus**
5. Verification of income must include examining any of the following documents: Income Tax Form 1040, W-2 forms, pay stubs, pay envelopes, written statements from employers, or other proof of income. If income has recently changed, and the family only has one pay stub (employer letter) to reflect current income, staff may take one pay stub (letter) and average it for the year to determine current income. Income is only changed to benefit the current status and eligibility of the family. Staff must use the "What Is Income" document/tool for guidance.

6. If a family is verified for eligibility as recipients of public assistance (SSI/TANF/SNAP), documentation must be on file that shows they are receiving/eligible for public assistance. This documentation will show current eligibility dates and names of the applying family in order to be taken. In the situation, no income is to be taken. The documentation will be uploaded into Child Plus under the Enrollment Tab as an attachment.
7. If a family is verified as homeless, under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the Self-Declaration: Homeless/No-Income Form will be completed and signed/verified by Head Start Staff. The family will be documented as eligible, and no income will be taken. Income Status in Child Plus will be Homeless. The form will be uploaded into Child Plus under the Enrollment Tab as an attachment.
8. A child is eligible if the child is in foster care. Legal documentation of this status must be submitted, and no income will be taken. Program staff must accept either a court order or other legal/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. The proof must be uploaded into Child Plus under the Enrollment Tab as an attachment.
9. If the family reports no income (meaning they have no reportable income), the program staff will complete the Self-Declaration: Homeless/No-Income Form upon the completion of the interview with the family. The interview will clarify the circumstances behind the family reporting no income. Staff will put a clarifying note in Child Plus (or on the form itself) for explanation/justification. Staff will make sure that points given are reflective of the family having no income. This will document efforts made/justification of the income of the family. The form will be uploaded into Child Plus under the Enrollment Tab as an attachment.
10. If a family meets eligibility criteria in more than one category, choose the category with the most points that will most positively benefit the family's situation. Staff will be diligent to choose the category with proper supporting documentation.
11. The Head Start Eligibility Verification form will be completed and signed by a Head Start staff member in Child Plus upon the completion and signing of the application. Staff must make sure the signed electronic form is correct and matches their determination.
12. Income guidelines are based on the Poverty Guidelines set by the Federal Government. To calculate income: paid twice monthly – pay x 24, bi-weekly – pay x 26, weekly – pay x 52.
13. When a child is determined to be over income, the family will be offered the Housing Cost Adjustment Calculator. This will be documented on the Application Checklist & Individual Systematic Selection Criteria form. If applicable, the supporting documentation will be approved by the Head Start Coordinator and uploaded into Child Plus. The child will also be flagged in Child Plus to assist the grantee staff in ERSEA monitoring.
14. Income is not re-evaluated after the first year. When a child is accepted into Head Start, they are eligible for that year and the following year. Eligibility is only for two years.
15. In the event of funding changes or changes in slot allotments to the sites or the grantee (due to community assessment, self-assessment, or continuation grant) income and points would be re-evaluated for the second year of enrollment. This will ensure that families with greatest need are being served.
16. Proof of residency is required (ex: current utility bill or lease agreement). Child must live in the identified service area (Clay, Cooke, Montague, or Wichita Counties).
17. Head Start will never refuse to accept an application. Applications must be taken year-round.

18. Region 9 staff will take all applications for Head Start staff children. In the event that other district staff want to apply for their children, the application may be taken by district staff or grantee staff depending on the possibility that there may be a conflict of interest.
19. Eligibility determination records must be kept for those currently enrolled, as long as they are enrolled, and for a minimum of one year after they have either stopped receiving services or are no longer enrolled. Records should be retained according to local school district policy.
20. Program staff completes a review of eligibility records upon the receipt of the Head Start Eligibility Verification/Internal Monitoring Form on children upon their enrollment/eligibility determination (submitted to Head Start Coordinator within 90-days of the child's enrollment). Staff will track completion of this monitoring form on their Enrollment Checklist in Child Plus. Head Start Coordinator will monitor the submitted form, document the completion of the form, and upload to Child Plus.
21. ERSEA manager completes ongoing monitoring throughout the year using random sampling of the child file and electronic documents (Child Plus reports).
22. Program staff must train all members of the governing body, policy council, management, and staff who determine eligibility on applicable federal regulations and program policies and procedures. Training must include:
    a. methods on how to collect complete and accurate eligibility information from families and third-party sources
    b. incorporate strategies for treating families with dignity and respect and for dealing with possible issues of domestic violence, stigma, and privacy
    c. explain program policies and procedures that describe actions taken against staff, families, or participants who attempt to provide or intentionally provide false information
23. The program must train all governing body and policy council members annually or within 180 days of the beginning of the term of a new governing body or policy council member.
24. The program must train management and staff members who make eligibility determinations annually or within 90 days of hire date. Training will deter fraudulent or erroneous enrollment for those who are not eligible for services.
25. Staff who intentionally violate federal and program eligibility determination regulations and who enroll children that are not eligible to receive Head Start services will be reported to their supervisor for an appropriate course of action, according to their local school district policy.

ERSEA –Recruitment **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Recruitment **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**

Policy: Recruitment is a systematic approach intended to identify and engage those children whose families are eligible for the Head Start program. This process is designed to actively inform all families with Head Start eligible children of the program and its services, and to encourage and assist eligible families in applying.

Related Regulations: 1302.13

Operational Procedures:

1. Head Start staff will canvas the local community utilizing a variety of efforts to reach the families. Efforts may include, but are not limited to: radio (both English and Spanish), flyers, presentations at local agencies, recruitment carnivals/events, news releases, social media, and advertising.
2. Head Start staff will collaborate with agencies serving children with disabilities including the Early Childhood Intervention Program and local school districts. All potentially eligible children will receive a Head Start application and have the opportunity to tour the facility.
3. Head Start staff will collaborate with agencies serving foster care children, homeless children, children with special needs, and other vulnerable children throughout the year to obtain appropriate referrals.
4. For districts served by Early Head Start (EHS), Head Start staff will work with Early Head Start staff to assist in the transition process from EHS to Head Start. This may include attending the EHS parent meetings, providing EHS with applications, attending eligible children's transition meetings, and providing a tour to EHS families of Head Start facilities.
5. The program will work to solicit as many applications from eligible families as possible, and will ensure a site waitlist is maintained. Training upon hire prevents enrollment of families in a fraudulent or erroneous manner.
6. Each year the information gathered from the self-assessment and the community assessment will be analyzed and utilized in determining most effective recruitment efforts.
7. Each site will be responsible for recruitment efforts and maintaining a recruitment log to document efforts.

ERSEA – Selection **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Selection **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**

Policy: Selection reflects a formal process for reviewing all eligible applicants for the program and ranking them according to need. 10% percent of the actual slots must be filled by children eligible for services under IDEA. A wait list will be maintained with the children rank ordered according to the program's selection criteria and will be utilized as vacancies occur.

Regulations: 1302.14

Operational Procedures:

1. Each individual application is reviewed and points are assigned based on needs of the family and established selection criteria from the Head Start Performance Standards.
2. The selection system will ensure that foster children and homeless children are given priority.
3. Head Start staff will complete an individual systematic selection form in Child Plus for all completed applications which will be compiled onto the group selection form in Child Plus.
4. The group selection form is presented to the screening committee, composed of at least 3 Head Start staff, along with the applications for verification of information.
5. The screening committee may include: administrative Head Start staff, teacher, Family Service Worker, paraprofessional, mental health coordinator, nurse, speech therapist, and secretary.
6. The children are selected for enrollment by the selection committee, rank ordered by points, and on an anonymous basis.
7. In the event of funding changes or changes in slot allotments to the sites or the grantee (due to community assessment, self-assessment, or continuation grant) income and points would be re-evaluated for the second year of enrollment. This will ensure that families with greatest need are being served.
8. At least 10% of the funded enrollment slots will be filled with children eligible for services under IDEA by the established mid-year date or a waiver will be sought.
9. No more than 10% of the slots will be filled by over income applicants. If all income eligible children are enrolled according to the systematic selection point process, the site selection committee will meet with the ERSEA Manager to make the decision to enroll an over-income child. The family situation and needs will be assessed. At this time, the committee will examine recruitment efforts and ensure children with disabilities will take priority. They will also confirm that the waitlist is exhausted of income eligible children.
10. Families will be provided with communication regarding their qualification/application status for the program. Communication may be provided in a variety of ways: face to face, phone call, text message, or email. This is in reference to all families that have applied regardless of eligibility.
11. Head Start will develop a waitlist which will rank order children according to selection criteria. The waitlist will include child's demographic information and will be maintained in Child Plus.
12. The wait list will be updated as applications are screened.
13. When a vacancy occurs during the school year, the top child (meeting the specific classroom criteria) on the waitlist will be enrolled in that slot.
14. If there is a question about filling the vacancy in regards to age, residency, or wait list status that needs further guidance or approval, staff must consult the ERSEA manager. To the extent possible, 4-year olds will be given priority. Situations will be carefully considered and staffed when families are relocating or transferring within our service area in an attempt to prevent a disruption in services.

ERSEA – Enrollment **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Enrollment **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**

Policy: The enrollment process is the official acceptance of a family into the Head Start program and completion of all necessary procedures to begin receiving services. Enrolled is when the enrollment process is completed and the child has attended school for one day of class.

Regulations: 1302.15

Operational Procedures:

1. The program will strive to maintain the funded enrollment level by utilizing the rank ordered wait list.
2. The program will communicate to each site how many slots to reserve at the beginning of the school year to be able to accommodate last minute applications from homeless and foster children.
3. Communication is provided to the family scheduling an enrollment appointment to meet and complete required paperwork.
4. The site may make a request for any additional information needed such as: special diet information, physician orders for health conditions, immunization information, and physical/dental information.
5. Homelessness will not be a barrier to enrollment procedures or paperwork required. Staff will utilize all resources to ensure the child is able and ready to start school.
6. The site that the child will attend will be communicated at enrollment.
7. The child will be considered eligible and will remain eligible through the end of the succeeding program year.
8. In the event of funding changes or changes in slot allotments to the sites or the grantee (due to community assessment, self-assessment, or continuation grant) income and points would be re-evaluated for the second year of enrollment. This will ensure that families with greatest need are being served.
9. A site must maintain its funded enrollment level and fill any vacancy as soon as possible, by the end of the current month.
10. When a child is transferring from one site/district in Region 9 ESC Head Start to another:
    -Contact ERSEA Manager
    -Child will be added to transfer spreadsheet for staffing and re-verification of points (crisis/emergency (ex: CPS, shelter, or domestic violence) transfer = 100 points and non-emergency transfer = 80 points)
    -Plan to transfer child's blue folder to the next setting, with filing up to date
    -Communicate to the new site regarding the status of 45-day and 90-day requirements.
11. When a child is transferring in from a Head Start Program outside of the Region 9 ESC Head Start service area, the child will apply for the program as any new child would. The previous program will be contacted for any records that would be beneficial for program planning or service delivery.
12. 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.

ERSEA –Attendance **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Attendance **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**

Policy: Attendance is the actual presence and participation in the program of a child currently enrolled in the Head Start program.

Regulations: 1302.16

Operational Procedures:

1. Child Plus reports will be run monthly to alert staff/primary teacher when a child is exhibiting chronic absenteeism at any time throughout the year. This will establish formal monthly monitoring of attendance and analyze/identify patterns of absences within the first 90 days of enrollment.
2. When the monthly Child Plus report (#2306) documents cumulative attendance that is below 85% (after 90 days of enrollment), the teacher will make a referral (attendance follow-up) in Child Plus to alert the FSW.
3. Upon receipt of the attendance referral, the FSW will complete an Attendance Success Plan with the family/guardian. The child will be flagged in Child Plus to assist with ongoing monitoring.
4. Each month when the report documents a child having a cumulative attendance below 85%, an attendance referral will be submitted, an attendance success plan will be created or updated.
5. For months, where the child is documented as having a cumulative attendance above 85% no action will be taken.
6. Alternative attendance plans may be developed for children who have a diagnosed disability and/or severe health conditions that will impact their ability to participate in the classroom.
7. A child is counted present if they are not in school due to a dental exam, well child exam, or other Head Start related business.
8. Child Plus will be set up to alert the primary teacher for attendance alerts (a child reaches 15% absentee rate or has 2 or more consecutive absences) at any time throughout the year.
9. The teacher will enter a referral (attendance follow up in Child Plus) for the following situations:
    - Percentage of Attendance: Child has been absent for more than 15% (total absences for the year) of the time after 90 days of enrollment
    - 2 or more consecutive, unexplained absences and no contact has been made with the family
    - Multiple/Excessive tardies (unexcused)
10. Staff will follow-up to attendance referrals within 7 days of receiving the referral on their To-Do List in Child Plus.
11. Follow-up is monitored on the 5th of the month for the previous month.

Follow-Up:

1. Staff must ensure children are safe when they do not arrive at school. If a child is unexpectedly absent and a parent has not contacted the program within one hour of program start time, the program must document their attempt to contact the parent to ensure the child's well-being.
2. Site level staff will conduct a home visit or make other direct contact with a child's parents if a child has multiple unexplained absences (two consecutive unexplained absences).
3. Absences that are the result of illness or another well-documented reason require a text, phone call, or child plus message to the parent notifying them of the number of absences and ensuring there are no family services needs affecting attendance, including reviewing the attendance policy and offering family support.

4. Unexpected and repeated absences require a referral for follow up in Child Plus on the part of the Head Start teacher in order to offer support or assistance to parents. This includes absences that are the result of temporary family problems (transportation, homeless) or other factors that affect regular attendance. FSW will assess family needs, discuss the benefits of program participation on the child's development and develop strategies with the parents to improve attendance. Reasonable efforts to work with the parents may include such things as home visits, social service interventions, parenting classes, or referrals, and/or offering available services and/or resources to the family. By assisting parents in becoming their child's advocate, the staff will help them understand the importance of the child regularly attending school.
5. If a child is unable to attend classes regularly because the family does not have transportation to and from the program facility, the program must utilize community resources, where possible, to provide transportation for the child.
6. ERSEA Manager will monitor the site monthly average daily attendance to ensure it remains above 85%. If a program's monthly average daily attendance rate falls below 85 %, the ERSEA Manager must analyze the causes of absenteeism to identify any systematic issues that contribute to the program's absentee rate.
7. The Region 9 ESC Head Start Program is in operation with local Independent School Districts; therefore, the local School District's attendance policy will also apply.
8. If reasonable efforts have been made and the child does not return to school, the staff will utilize ongoing documentation and consult with ERSEA Manager to consider the slot a vacancy.
9. All attendance documentation for the child will be entered into Child Plus under the Attendance Tab.

Attendance Success Plan – completed when cumulative attendance is reported on the monthly report to be below 85% (after 90 days of school)

1. The Attendance Success Plan in Child Plus will be completed via face to face visit (school or home visit). In the event that the family is unable to meet face to face, meet with the family over the telephone and have the family member sign the Attendance Success Plan at the next parent conference or home visit. Document in attendance follow up in Child Plus. Follow up with the plan each month if the attendance falls below 85%.
2. If the chronic absenteeism persists despite having a written attendance plan, discuss with the campus administrator additional action steps that can be taken to remedy the attendance concerns and/or if the child will be dropped from the program. If the consensus is that attendance will not improve in spite of our interventions, the child's slot will be considered an enrollment vacancy and will be filled from the waitlist. Termination occurs only after documentation in the file shows repeated efforts from staff to work with the family to resolve attendance barriers.
3. If reasonable efforts have been made and the child does not return to school (when the child has multiple consecutive absences), the staff will utilize ongoing documentation and consult with ERSEA Manager to consider the slot a vacancy.

ERSEA –Suspension and Expulsion **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Suspension and Expulsion **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**

Policy: Suspension and expulsion is in relation to a child missing time at school at the request of the school personnel. Suspension is the act of prohibiting a child from participating in the program for any length of time. Expulsion is the act of removing a child from participating in the program, unenrolling the child.

Regulations: 1302.17

Operational Procedures:

1. Staff must prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior. Suspensions may only be temporary in nature.
2. 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.
3. Before a staff determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, they must engage with their mental health consultant, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources (behavior coaches, psychologists, other appropriate specialists) to determine no other reasonable option is appropriate.
4. If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, staff must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by:
    a. Continuing to engage with the parents and a mental health consultant, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources
    b. Developing an Individual Positive Guidance Plan to document the action/supports needed
    c. Providing services that include home visits
    d. Determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate
5. The program cannot expel or unenroll a child from Head Start because of a child's behavior.
6. When a child exhibits persistent and seriously challenging behaviors, a staff must explore possible steps, document steps taken to address stated problems, and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. Steps must include, engaging the mental health consultant, considering the appropriateness of providing disability services and supports. Staff must consult with the parents and teacher to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability:
    a. If the child has an individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency responsible for the IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services
    b. If the child does not have an IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child's eligibility for services
7. If staff have explored all possibilities and documented all efforts, the staff must consult with the parents, teacher, mental health consultant, and personnel responsible for IDEA. It is determined that the child's continued enrollment presents a serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with outside entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.

ERSEA –Fees **Policy Council Approval: 4/23/26**
Subject: Fees **ESC Board Approval: 4/29/26**
Policy: Fees is in reference to a payment being made to a professional in exchange for services.

Regulations: 1302.18, 1302.42
Operational Procedures:

1. The program must not charge families a fee to participate in Head Start, including special events/field trips.
2. The program cannot in any way condition a child's enrollment or participation in the program upon the payment of a fee.
3. The program must use program funds for the provision of diapers and formula for enrolled children during the school day, and may not ask for families to provide them or pay a fee
4. The program may use program funds for professional medical and oral health services when no other source of funding is available. When program funds are used for such services, Region 9 must have written documentation of their efforts to access other available sources of funding.