



Head Start Eligibility Criteria

Tailoring Eligibility Criteria to Meet the Needs of Agricultural Workers and Ethnic Communities: Migrant and Seasonal Head Start and American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start

Overview

Head Start recognizes that there are families in specific occupations and ethnic communities that historically had extremely limited access to early childhood education (ECE). In response, the program has developed specialized programs and eligibility requirements to target these vulnerable families. For example, Head Start acknowledges that migrant farmworker families face limited access to early childhood programs due to frequent family relocation.¹ In response, the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) program prioritizes families who have had the least amount of stability in one place. Head Start also recognizes that many American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children live in remote communities, and even those from families above the federal poverty line may not have access to ECE services.² In response, the AI/AN program has expanded eligibility guidelines for over-income children. These eligibility criteria promote equity by facilitating ECE access for some of the most disadvantaged children.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start

American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start

Background:

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs are separate from other Head Start programs, and are designed for migrant and seasonal farmworker families who move too frequently to participate meaningfully in a traditional Head Start program.

American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Head Start programs are Head Start programs run by Indian tribes (or Alaskan Native villages) for American Indian and Alaskan Native children.

Similarities:

MSHS programs have the **same basic eligibility requirements** and enrollment goals for children with special needs as non-MSHS programs.

AI/AN programs have the **same basic eligibility requirements** and enrollment goals for children with special needs as non-AI/AN Head Start programs.

Differences:

MSHS eligibility requirements are unique in the following ways:

- MSHS enrolls pregnant women and children aged 0 to the age of mandatory school attendance in the same program (elsewhere these age groups are divided into separate Head Start and Early Head Start programs).
- Family income must come primarily from “agricultural work that involves the production and harvesting of tree and field crops” (typically interpreted as at least 51% of income).³
- Families must be either migrant or seasonal farm workers:⁴
 - Migrant farmworkers: “engaged in agricultural labor

AI/AN program eligibility requirements and enrollment goals are unique in the following ways:

- AI/AN programs are authorized to serve federally-recognized Indian reservations, near-reservation areas as designated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and/or nearby non-reservation areas in which “Indian children and families native to the reservation reside.”⁶
- Children must meet one of the following conditions:⁷
 - Be from an Indian or non-Indian family living on a federally-recognized Indian reservation

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and who have changed their residence from one geographic location to another in the preceding two year period” in order to engage in agricultural labor. The move may be intrastate or inter-state.

- Seasonal farmworkers: “engaged primarily in seasonal agricultural labor and who have not changed their residence to another geographic location in the preceding two year period.”
- Enrollment priority must be granted to families who have had to relocate most frequently for agricultural work in the past two years.⁵
 - Be from an Indian family native to the reservation but living in non-reservation areas.
 - If a non-reservation area is not served by any other Head Start program, children from non-Indian families living in the non-reservation area are also eligible.
 - Up to 49% of AI/AN participants may be over-income (i.e. above the federal poverty line) so long as income-eligible children are prioritized.⁸

Sources & notes:

- ¹ National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office. (2009). *The invisible children of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States: An examination of existing pre-k partnerships* (1st ed). Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development. Retrieved from http://www.ece.aed.org/publications/nms/InvisibleChildren_2.18.09.pdf.
- ² Marks, E.L., Moyer, M.K., Roche, M., & Graham, E.T. (2003). *A summary of research and publications on early childhood for American Indian and Alaska Native children*. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/aian_sum.pdf.
- ³ Eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance in Head Start, Definitions, 45 CFR § 1305.2 (2007). Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1305/1305.2%20Definitions..htm>.
- ⁴ The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, 42 U.S.C. §9801 *et. seq.* (2007).
- ⁵ Eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance in Head Start, Selection process, 45 CFR § 1305.6. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1305/1305.6%20Selection%20process..htm>
- ⁶ Eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance in Head Start, Determining community strengths and needs, 45 CFR §1305.3. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1305/1305.3%20Determining%20community%20strengths%20and%20needs..htm>.
- ⁷ Eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance in Head Start, Age of children and family income eligibility, 45 CFR §1305.4. Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1305/1305.4%20Age%20of%20children%20and%20family%20income.htm>.
- ⁸ The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, op. cit.