



Policy Advisory

The Law Governing Family-Professional Partnerships

Both the Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have significant emphasis on families being equal partners with professionals in making educational decisions about their children. The Head Start Program Performance Standards have been designed to provide Head Start programs with expectations, guidance and support related to the quality of services they provide. IDEA is the federal law that governs the education of children with disabilities, including developmental delays. Part C of IDEA authorizes the federal government and state governments to act on behalf of infants and toddlers (birth to three) (20 U.S.C. Part C). Part B authorizes them to act on behalf of young children (three to six) with disabilities (20 U.S.C. Part B).

Considerations for compliance with family-professional partnership policies

Family-professional partnerships are central components of the Head Start Program Performance Standards and IDEA. The policies make it clear that professionals must engage in joint decision-making with families in the delivery of services. To ensure the partnership is strong and effective, it is important to do the following:

- (1) Individualize interactions and approaches to address each family's unique needs, priorities, and concerns.
- (2) Actively engage families in planning and decision-making regarding priorities, services, and concerns.

What policies on family-professional partnerships exist for those within Early Head Start and Head Start?

The Head Start Program Performance Standards emphasize the need for programs receiving Head Start and Early Head Start funds to collaborate with families. These standards include requirements for collaborative partnerships when addressing goals, services, health and developmental concerns, and children's educational experiences.

Family Partnerships

Section 1302.52 of the Head Start Program Performance Standards outlines the importance of family-professional collaboration.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs must implement a family partnership process that promotes family well-being, safety, health, and economic well-being to support child learning and development. Families'

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strengths, needs, and aspirations as related to family engagement outcomes in the *Head Start Parent Family and Community Engagement Framework* must be identified and goals must be developed. An individualized family-partnership service must be offered, and programs must assign staff and the necessary resources as needed by the family.

Health and Developmental Services

Programs receiving Head Start and Early Head Start funds are responsible for collaborating with parents when it comes to the health and well-being of their children, in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner. In terms of screening and assessment, programs must collaborate with parents to make sure this is completed upon enrollment in a Head Start classroom (§1302.33(a)). Communication regarding the child's health needs and development concerns must be delivered in a timely and effective manner, and must be ongoing throughout the year (§1302.41).

Education

A program must have opportunities for parents to participate in the program's education services and policies throughout the year ((§1302.34)(b)). Programs are required to do the following to encourage parental involvement:

- Programs are open to parents at all times during program hours;
- Teachers regularly communicate with parents so they are informed of their child's routines, activities, and behaviors;
- Teachers hold parent conferences at least two times per year so they are up to date on their child's developmental progress and behaviors in the classroom;
- Parents are given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the selected curricula and instructional materials;
- Parents have the opportunity to volunteer in the classroom, including during group activities;
- Teachers keep parents up to date on the results of screenings and assessments regarding their child's progress;
- Teachers conduct at least two home visits per program year for each family; and
- Teachers serving migrant and seasonal families make every effort to have home visits and engage with the family on their child's learning and development.

Additional Services to Parents

Head Start programs must collaborate with parents of children with disabilities to ensure the needs of their children are being met. Supports must be provided for parents who want to become advocates for their child's disability and how best to support their development (§1302.62(a)). Furthermore, programs must assist parents in accessing necessary resources and supports (such as assistive technology) through the child's insurance or other entities and help to establish eligibility for additional support programs.

For parents of children eligible for services under IDEA, programs are required to help the parents understand the referral, evaluation, and service process and timelines required by IDEA. Parents need to be able to participate in the development of their child's IFSP or IEP and have a full understanding of their rights. Lastly, programs must provide the necessary information and accurate identification of needs to support the IFSP or IEP process (§1302.62(b)).

For children with identified disabilities, what does IDEA require with respect to family-professional partnerships?

In many ways, Parts B and C have strong similarities when it comes to family-professional partnerships, but there are also some differences. The chart below highlights similarities and differences related to the role of families in educational decision-making.

	Early Intervention Program – Part C (ages birth-3)	Special Education Program – Part B (ages 3-21)
Purposes	Statute includes families in terms of stating that one purpose of early intervention is to enhance the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their infants and toddlers with disabilities	Statute does not specifically address families in purpose statements
Unit of Focus	The term family is used throughout the statute and regulations, indicating that all family members are part of the unit of attention	The term <i>parent</i> is used throughout the statute and regulations, indicating the focus on parents as distinguished from other family members
Individualized Plans	Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)	Individualized Education Program (IEP)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are members of multidisciplinary team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-directed assessment of resources, priorities, and concerns and identification of supports and services necessary to enhance the family’s capacity to meet the developmental needs of the infant or toddler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>No</u> requirement for a family-directed assessment, or for the identification of supports and services for the family
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A statement of the family’s resources, priorities, and concerns relating to enhancing the development of their child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>No</u> requirement of a statement of the family’s resources, priorities, and concerns relating to enhancing the development of their child
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFSP content must be explained to parents, and informed written consent must be obtained from parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFSP meetings should be conducted in the mode of communication (language) that the family uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same 	

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	Early Intervention Program – Part C (ages birth-3)	Special Education Program – Part B (ages 3-21)
Costs for Services	States <u>may</u> charge for some services (e.g., on a sliding scale), but must ensure no one is denied services because of inability to pay. May also bill public insurance or family’s private insurance under a state system of payment.	All services must be provided for free
Procedural Safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely administrative resolution of parental complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to confidentiality of personally identifiable information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to determine whether the family and their child will accept or decline any services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to examine records related to assessment, screening, eligibility determinations, and the IFSP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protections for the rights of children whose parents cannot be located or who are wards of the state by having a person with no conflict of interest with state employment to act as a surrogate for the parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior written notice to the parents whenever the agency proposes to initiate or change, or refuses to initiate or change, the identification, evaluation, or placement of the infant or toddler or the provision of appropriate early intervention services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assurance that the notice will be written in the parents’ native language (defined as “language normally used”), unless it clearly is not feasible to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right of parents to use mediation to resolve conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same
Family Violence	Children who experience substantiated trauma due to exposure to family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not required

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	Early Intervention Program – Part C (ages birth-3)	Special Education Program – Part B (ages 3-21)
	violence will be referred for evaluation for early intervention services	
Services (There are 17 total services. These 4 are related to families.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family training, counseling, and home visits by qualified personnel (including family therapists) to assist the child’s family to understand the child’s special needs and to enhance the child’s development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counseling services provided by qualified personnel Parent counseling and training to assist parents in understanding their child’s special needs, to provide child development information, and to help parents acquire skills to support the implementation of their child’s IEP
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service coordination which includes assistance and services to the child and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service coordination <u>not</u> required
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social work services including home visits to evaluate living conditions and patterns of parent-child interaction, administration of social or emotional developmental assessments of the child within the family context, providing individual and family-group counseling and skill-building with parents and other family members and appropriate social skill-building activities with child and parents, working with problems in the child’s and family’s living situation that impact early intervention service utilization, and navigating community resources and services to enable the child and family to receive maximum benefit from early intervention services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social work services including preparing a social or developmental history on a child, group and individual counseling with child and family, and working with problems in the child’s home, school, and community that impact the child’s school adjustment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special instruction includes providing families with information, skills, and support related to enhancing the child’s skill development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service of special instruction is <u>not</u> required
Service Coordination Services	Provides for a single point of contact for families in gaining access to, coordinating, and monitoring services across agencies	<u>No</u> requirement for families to receive service coordination

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	Early Intervention Program – Part C (ages birth-3)	Special Education Program – Part B (ages 3-21)
Transition Planning Conferences	Families are required members of transition planning conferences for transitions from Part C to Part B programs	Families are required members of transition planning conferences for transitions from school to adulthood

In reviewing the Parts C and B requirements, it is obvious that IDEA focused on *what* practitioners must do in order to engage in joint decision-making with families. Partnership-oriented practices focus on *how* practitioners might develop a trusting partnership with families as they share information and provide the services and supports that are legally required.

References

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), Pub. L. No. 108-446. For complete source of information, go to <http://idea.ed.gov/>

Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities. 76 Fed. Reg. 60140 (2011). For complete source of information, go to <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-09-28/pdf/2011-22783.pdf>

Head Start Program Performance Standards. 2016. English. 45 CFR 1301-1305. For complete source of information, go to <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii>

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