

**SWEETWATER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER ONE**  
**HEAD START**  
**ELIGIBILITY/SELECTION/ENROLLMENT**  
**PRACTICE & PROCEDURE**

**Eligibility**

To be eligible for Head Start, a child must meet the age requirement, and families must meet income requirements or be categorically eligible.

**AGE**

Eligible children are 3 or 4 years of age on or before September 15.

**INCOME**

To ensure the accuracy of income eligibility, the following practices will be employed:

- For purposes of eligibility verification, staff will utilize the following forms:
  - Family Income Worksheet
  - Verification of Employment
  - Unofficial Child Support/Assistance Declaration
  - Self-Declaration of Income Eligibility
  - Verification of Financial Assistance
  - Homeless Self-Declaration and Verification
  - Third-Party Contact Consent
- Family, for a child is defined to mean *all persons that live with the child, who are financially supported by the child's parents or guardians and who are related to the child by blood, marriage or adoption, or the child's authorized caregiver or legally responsible party*. Authorized caregiver means a person (family member) who the parent gives permission to make decisions regarding the child. Any (authorized) family member may apply for Head Start services on a child's behalf.
- To determine a family's annual income for eligibility verification, staff consider a family's income for the 12 months preceding the month in which the application is submitted or during the preceding calendar year, whichever more accurately reflects the needs of the family at the time of application.
  - If families are missing any W-2 forms, pay stubs, or other documentation to prove income, staff use the information provided to calculate annual income by using appropriate multipliers, including the number of weeks or months worked in the time period being considered.
- If a family can demonstrate a significant change in income, such as job loss, the family's current income situation may be considered.
- A family or child that is verified homeless by any definition in the McKinney-Vento Act is categorically eligible for Head Start. Income is not verified.
- Children in foster care are categorically eligible.

- Families receiving SSI or TANF public assistance are income eligible due to the financial requirements of such assistance.
  - Income and assistance is verified using the above methods.
  - If a family does not have proof of income, the program can accept a family member's written declaration that states the family is potentially eligible for public assistance. Head Start staff are required to verify the family's eligibility.
- Staff use and sign the Family Income Worksheet and calculator tape to record and document their methods for determining eligibility.
- Staff verify the accuracy of income calculations at least twice. The staff member assisting with completing the family application makes the initial calculation of income at the time of application. This calculation is double-checked by a different staff person (using the same documents) at some time between the time of application and the time of selection. This person recalculates income using a calculator with printed tape. Using the current Federal Poverty Guidelines, each staff member calculating the income verifies the family's status of eligibility on the Application Checklist by recording their name and the date of their verification. Both staff sign and date the Family Income Worksheet as they calculate and recalculate the income.

At least 90% of the children selected/enrolled are from low-income families. Ten percent of the enrollment opportunities are filled with children with a diagnosed disability. Up to 10% of the children selected/enrolled may be children from families that exceed the income guidelines, but meet other selection priority criteria.

Applications are completed through in-person interviews at the Head Start office, the family's home, or some other agreeable location. Staff who assist families to complete applications are trained to determine eligibility and are required to verify all eligibility information. They are aware that intentionally falsifying information regarding a family's eligibility constitutes fraud. Consequences may include disciplinary action up to and including termination. Such action is reported to appropriate authorities.

Families applying for Head Start are notified, and sign a statement declaring understanding, that falsifying eligibility information is fraud. They are notified of the consequences such as termination of services and reporting to appropriate authorities.

### **Selection**

Applications for any program option may be considered for enrollment only after they are complete. A complete application includes all of the following:

- Verification of family income
- Child's birth certificate or other verification of birth, unless doing so will create a barrier for the family to enroll their child
- Official Record of Immunization from the State of Wyoming

To help insure the safety and well being of all enrolled children information must be up-to-date, therefore a new application must be completed if the family situation has changed, the child has been on the Wait List one year or longer, or if the program application has been revised.

Children who are categorically eligible are given first priority for available enrollment opportunities. All completed applications are reviewed for selection in the months of May and August by a team of Head Start management staff. Completed applications are reviewed as vacancies occur throughout the program year, until 60 calendar days or less remain in the enrollment year, at which time we cease enrollment activities. To determine those children and families with the greatest need, applications are assessed using the Priority Points tool in ChildPlus (Attachment 1) based on the following criteria:

- Age
- Income Level
- Categorically Eligible
- Individual Education Plans
- Family concerns including family composition, education, and exposure to risk factors.

Priority of Selection:

- Categorically eligible children
- Children with the highest priority points

Three attempts are made to contact families for selection using known addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses. If the family has not responded within three days of our last attempt, the child is again placed on the Wait List.

Applications not selected for enrollment, due to limited program capacity, are retained on an electronic Wait List. As vacancies occur in the program, children are selected from the list for placement based on their priority points. To insure adequate services are in place, children selected to fill vacancies during the year are enrolled one week after selection.

Those who are not selected due to ineligibility (did not meet the criteria above or application is incomplete) are notified of their status. If they choose, their application may remain on the electronic New Application list until the file is completed.

Selection for the following school year begins May 5<sup>th</sup>. Up to 90% of the available enrollment opportunities may be filled by June 5<sup>th</sup>. Remaining vacancies are filled in August, thus ensuring that last minute applicants with very high needs have an opportunity to be selected.

- Families selected prior to September are notified by letter that their child and family have been selected to participate in our program.
- Families selected during the school year are first notified by phone, then by selection letter.
- A copy of the letter is placed in the child's file.
- If a family does not respond to our letter or cannot be reached by phone and they do not confirm acceptance of their selection within 10 calendar days, the child is again placed on the Wait List.

Official classroom assignments are made after final selection in August. Parents of children selected in May, are contacted by phone, prior to classroom assignment to re-verify their address, as well as their continued interest in the program. Parents are notified of their child's classroom assignment at Parent Orientation.

## **Enrollment**

Enrollment is effective the first day the child attends a Head Start classroom.

- Child developmental screenings must be completed within **45 calendar days** of that date
- Specific health requirements must be met within **90 calendar days** of that date

## **Record Retention**

Files of enrolled children and families are retained for three years.