



Health and Safety Report

Introduction

The Office of Head Start requires grantees to conduct a health and safety screening of every classroom within the first 45 days of a new five-year grant period, which runs from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2029. The screening results are due to the Office of Head Start within 75 days of the start of the program year.

Purpose

The screener serves as a vital resource for grantees, guiding them in pinpointing specific areas that require improvement while simultaneously strengthening their capacity to ensure the health and safety of children in the classroom. This tool emphasizes best practices and key requirements drawn from the Head Start Program Performance Standards, ensuring a comprehensive approach to child well-being.

Initially, the report was scheduled for submission to the Office of Head Start by the 75th day of the new grant period. However, in light of unexpected challenges, a request was made for a 30-day extension, which has been granted. This report, now with an extended deadline, will be thoughtfully prepared and submitted no later than November 18, 2024, reflecting a commitment to excellence and accountability in early childhood education.

Observations and Timeline

The Head Start Birth to Five Program encompasses 142 center-based classrooms dedicated to fostering early childhood development. Twenty-five of these are part of the Early Head Start initiative, catering to infants and toddlers, while 117 belong to the Head Start Preschool program, designed for preschool-age children.

Unfortunately, seven of these classrooms were unable to open due to challenges related to staffing or licensing requirements. As a result, observations were conducted in 135 classrooms from August through September 2024, providing valuable insights into the program's effectiveness. These observations captured the dynamic interactions and learning environments that define the Head Start experience.

Competencies of the Screener

The Health and Safety screener focuses on five components: 1) facilities, 2) equipment and materials, 3) policies and procedures, 4) active supervision, and 5) human resources.

1. Facilities

The facilities section of the screening tool encompasses 21 carefully crafted questions that delve into the physical environment. These questions ensure that the settings where young children learn and play are not only safe but also clean and nurturing. These questions address critical safety features, such as the presence of functional fire extinguishers and smoke detectors strategically placed in every classroom.

Additionally, the screener specifies the ideal amount of space allocated per child, both indoors and outdoors, to promote comfortable movement and exploration. Staff are tasked with a vital responsibility: to vigilantly safeguard children from potential dangers lurking within their environment. This includes monitoring heating and cooling units that could pose a burn risk, identifying areas that might lead to falls, and eliminating any hazards associated with strangulation, pets, and electrical equipment. By meticulously assessing these elements, the facilities screening tool aims to create a safe haven where young children can thrive and develop to their fullest potential.

Results

The learning environments were remarkably clean, safe, and tailored to meet the developmental needs of children. Classroom staff diligently perform daily inspections to ensure that both the indoor and outdoor spaces are free from potential hazards, creating an inviting atmosphere where children can thrive and learn.

During the inspections, it was observed that one of the most common compliance issues involved the storage of brooms. In several classrooms, the bristles of the brooms were within reach of curious children. To ensure safety, brooms should be hung securely on the wall with the bristles facing upward, rendering them out of

reach. In response to this finding, staff members have been instructed to adjust their storage practices accordingly.

Another frequent issue identified was the presence of loose laminate on countertops in handwashing areas, particularly in older school buildings. This not only poses a safety risk but may also hinder proper hygiene. The classrooms with these countertop issues have been prioritized for refurbishing, and plans are in place for their replacement.

Overall, the facilities demonstrated a commendable proficiency rating of 92 percent, reflecting the commitment to maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment for children.

2. Equipment and Materials

This section features five thoughtfully crafted questions aimed at evaluating the cleanliness, condition, and age appropriateness of various elements within the learning environment. The assessment delves into a range of items, such as the sturdy classroom furniture that shapes the learning space, the engaging educational materials that stimulate curiosity, and the outdoor play equipment that encourages physical activity and social interaction among children.

The focus especially lies on ensuring that the toys and learning aids are not only safe but also tailored to the developmental stages of the children. This means that every item should foster growth, both intellectually and physically. Furthermore, this section underscores the vital importance of implementing proper storage practices for potentially hazardous cleaning supplies and medications. These items must be securely stored, entirely out of the children's reach, to create a safe and nurturing learning atmosphere where children can explore, learn, and play with confidence.

Results

The classroom equipment and materials were thoroughly inspected and found to be in excellent working condition, creating an engaging and productive learning environment for students. Bright, well-maintained learning areas and interactive materials contribute to a space where curiosity can thrive.

Cleaning supplies are neatly organized and securely stored in child-proof containers, ensuring that hazardous materials are safely out of reach and promoting the well-being of the children. Additionally, medications are arranged in a designated, easily accessible location, demonstrating responsible management of health concerns.

Upon evaluating the outdoor environments, it was observed that compliance stands at only 85%. This shortfall is primarily due to weeds sprouting in cracks in the concrete, unsanitary bird droppings on walkways and play structures, and peeling paint on furniture. While removing the weeds and cleaning the area can be accomplished relatively swiftly, restoring the outdoor furniture with a fresh coat of paint will require more time and dedicated effort.

In response to these findings, a comprehensive action list has been assembled, detailing specific tasks to address each issue. Follow-up procedures have been established to monitor progress closely and ensure that necessary corrections are implemented promptly. This proactive approach aims to revitalize outdoor spaces, transforming them into safe, inviting, and vibrant areas where children can explore and thrive.

3. Policies and Procedures

The policies and procedures section comprises 13 detailed questions that delve into the essential rules, guidelines, and standard practices that Head Start programs must implement to safeguard the health and safety of the children enrolled. This section serves as a critical assessment tool, evaluating whether programs have established clear and comprehensive procedures that comply with the intricate health and safety requirements dictated by federal, state, and local regulations.

For instance, among the items outlined in this section are robust sign-in and sign-out systems designed to ensure that children are only released to authorized individuals, thereby enhancing security and peace of mind. Furthermore, it includes procedures to control and prevent the spread of infectious diseases, ensuring a healthy environment for all children. Emergency preparedness plans

are also emphasized, equipping programs to respond effectively and swiftly in crises. Lastly, rigorous systems are in place to uphold the confidentiality of children's and families' personally identifiable information, fostering a trustful atmosphere where privacy is respected and protected.

Results

Education Service Providers were found to have all of the appropriate policies and procedures in place, aligning with the Head Start Program Performance Standards and Arizona Child Care Bureau of Licensing. However, the few non-compliant findings in this section were parents not using their full names to sign children in and out of class, updates to children's emergency cards, and parent handbooks that need more information regarding the prevention of contagious diseases.

The classrooms requiring correction have been listed, and follow-up will be conducted to ensure timely compliance.

4. Active Supervision

The active supervision section is composed of six thoughtfully crafted questions that delve into various strategies and practices intended to safeguard the well-being of children enrolled in a Head Start program. This section seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of staff in actively monitoring and engaging with children, ensuring that safety is prioritized and accidents are avoided.

The questions explore several critical areas. First, they address the importance of maintaining appropriate staff-to-child ratios, which play a vital role in ensuring that each child receives adequate attention. Additionally, they examine the strategic positioning of staff, ensuring that children remain both visible and audible at all times, thus fostering security.

Engagement is another key focus, as staff are encouraged to interact meaningfully with children, promoting a nurturing atmosphere. Continuous scanning and monitoring of the learning environment is also emphasized, ensuring that any potential hazards are swiftly identified and addressed. Moreover, the section underscores the importance of maintaining safety during transitions, such as

moving from one activity to another, and highlights the necessity of a prompt and effective response to emergencies.

By implementing these comprehensive strategies, the program cultivates a safe and responsive environment. This proactive approach minimizes risks and ensures that children feel protected and secure at all times, allowing them to thrive in their learning experiences.

Results

Staff are diligently applying a range of active supervision strategies and techniques, creating a nurturing environment that prioritizes the safety and well-being of the children in their care. They adhere to clearly posted procedures for positioning, ensuring that each child is closely monitored in both indoor and outdoor settings. As they guide the children from one area to another, staff meticulously count each child, guaranteeing that none are left unaccompanied or unsupervised—a crucial measure in maintaining a secure atmosphere.

The children themselves display an awareness of safety, following classroom rules, and engaging in play with a sense of responsibility for their own wellbeing. Their behavior reflects a learned understanding of safe practices, contributing to a positive and secure learning environment.

This section received an impressive overall proficiency rating of 95 percent, highlighting the effectiveness of the strategies employed. However, a couple of non-compliant areas were noted. One concern involved the redundant system of audible alerts on classroom doors, designed to notify staff when someone enters or exits. While this system plays an essential role in enhancing safety, some classrooms had disconnected alerts due to the disruptive nature of the sounds.

Another area needing attention was the staff positioning maps; several of these vital documents required updates to accurately reflect changes such as the number of staff present, furniture arrangements, or shifts in location within the classroom. The Head Start directors for these specific classrooms have been notified to ensure the reconnection of the alert systems and the timely updating of the positioning maps. To maintain accountability, follow-up monitoring will be

conducted to verify that these systems are operational and that the maps have been thoroughly revised.

5. Human Resources

The human resources section of the screener comprises seven questions designed to ensure that the program cultivates a safe and nurturing environment for children. This section delves into the multifaceted processes involved in recruiting, training, and effectively managing personnel, while also assessing adherence to relevant regulations and best practices.

Included are specific questions aimed at verifying that every staff member possesses the proper qualifications for their role, along with assurance that exhaustive background checks are conducted prior to hiring. Ongoing professional development opportunities are essential for staff to remain informed about the latest educational trends and methodologies. Additionally, it is crucial that all mandatory training activities be completed on an annual basis. This vital training encompasses a range of important topics, including the mandated reporting of child abuse, proper hygiene practices within the classroom setting, as well as essential first aid and CPR techniques. Each of these elements plays a significant role in fostering a secure atmosphere where children can thrive.

This section emphasizes the Standards of Conduct, which serve as essential guidelines for fostering respectful and positive interactions with children. These standards are particularly important for individuals who frequently engage with Head Start children, ensuring that every interaction is safe, nurturing, and supportive. By adhering to these principles, caregivers, and educators can create an environment that promotes healthy development and enriches the learning experience for young children.

Results

A thorough examination of the staff files revealed a remarkable level of professionalism among the Education Service Provider's staff. Each member is not only highly qualified for their respective roles but also possesses the necessary background screening completed before their position. This ensures that the

children in their care are surrounded by individuals who are both capable and trustworthy.

Additionally, the staff is committed to maintaining a safe environment; they are well-versed in mandatory training and certifications designed to promote the well-being of the children. Their participation in ongoing professional development courses demonstrates an eagerness to stay abreast of the latest educational trends and best practices.

Every staff member has actively participated in the Standards of Conduct training and has signed documents affirming their understanding of the established guidelines and the serious implications of any violations. Overall, this section stands out with an impressive proficiency rating of 98 percent, reflecting a strong commitment to excellence within the organization.

Action Plan

The Quality Assurance Monitoring team has documented all items identified as non-compliant. The monitoring and follow-up efforts have already begun and will persist until every outstanding issue is thoroughly addressed and meets the requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards. The Head Start Birth to Five Program is committed to ensuring that each item is resolved to the highest standard, fostering a compliant and supportive environment for children.