

Passaic Family Head Start, Inc.

68-72 Third Street, Passaic, NJ 07055
(973) 365-5808 FAX (973) 458-9380



Policy and Procedure: Managing Vacant Slots and Chronic Absenteeism

Effective Date: October 1, 2025

Policy Statement

PFHS is committed to ensuring that every eligible child has access to Head Start services and that funded enrollment levels are consistently maintained. In alignment with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR §§1302.14–1302.17) and OHS guidance (ACF-OHS-IM-25-06), PFHS will promptly address vacant slots due to chronic absenteeism, implement proactive attendance strategies, and support families in overcoming barriers to consistent attendance.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of program days per year. Maintaining high attendance is essential for children's school readiness, family engagement, and long-term academic success.

Procedures

1. Attendance Monitoring

- Classroom staff must record attendance **daily** in ChildPlus Online.
- Attendance reports will be **reviewed weekly** by the Education Manager and Program Director.
- The Program Director will conduct **monthly Data Dives** to analyze attendance trends, identify children at risk, and coordinate intervention strategies.

2. Family Workers and Re-engagement Efforts

- PFHS staff will initiate **at least three documented attempts** (phone calls, in-person meetings, or home visits) to re-engage families when absences become concerning.
- All contact attempts and family responses will be documented in ChildPlus and the child's file.
- Monthly monitoring of chronic absenteeism is done by the Family Worker and manager.
- Staff will communicate the importance of consistent attendance during **parent orientations, conferences, and ongoing engagement opportunities**.
- Family Worker checks attendance daily and contacts parents to document absence reasoning

3. Vacant Slot Determination

- A slot will be considered **vacant** if:
 - The family communicates that the child will not return; OR
 - The child has not attended for **30 consecutive calendar days** despite three documented re-engagement attempts.
- Declaring a slot vacant is an **unenrollment action** and is not considered expulsion (§1302.17).

4. Reserved Slots

- PFHS may reserve slots for children in foster care or experiencing homelessness.
- Reserved slots may be held for **up to 30 days** (§1302.15(c)).
- If unfilled after 30 days, the slot will be considered vacant and must be filled within 30 days.

5. Exceptions

- Exceptions to the 30-day rule may be approved for:
 - Extended illness or hospitalization
 - Family emergencies or displacement (e.g., disaster recovery)
 - Extenuating family circumstances requiring extended travel
- Any exception must be **approved by the Program Director** and **documented in ChildPlus** with clear rationale.

6. Filling Vacant Slots

- Once a slot is declared vacant, the **Health and Social Services team** must:
 - Refer to the **waiting list** (maintained per §1302.14(c)) to identify the next eligible child.
 - Fill the slot within **30 days of vacancy**.
- Enrollment updates will be reported in the **Head Start Enterprise System (HSES)** monthly.

7. Strategies to Prevent Chronic Absenteeism

- Build strong **relationships with families** to identify attendance barriers early.
- Monitor **health-related absences** and provide family education on prevention and wellness.
- Use a **multidisciplinary team** approach (Education, Health, Disabilities, Mental Health, Social Services dept) to address patterns of absenteeism.

- If monthly **average daily attendance falls below 85%**, PFHS leadership will conduct a **root cause analysis** and implement corrective strategies.

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Executive Director:** Ensures Board and Policy Council oversight of enrollment and attendance.
- **Program Director:** Oversees attendance monitoring, exceptions, and PSR/IM compliance.
- **Education & Family Engagement Managers:** Lead re-engagement strategies and documentation.
- **Health and Social Services Managers:** Manages waiting list and ensures timely filling of vacancies.
- **Classroom Staff:** Take daily attendance and communicate absences promptly.

References

- Head Start Act, Section 641A
- 45 CFR §1302.14 (Selection Process)
- 45 CFR §1302.15 (Enrollment & Vacancies)
- 45 CFR §1302.16 (Attendance)
- 45 CFR §1302.17 (Suspension & Expulsion) (N/A)
- ACF-OHS-IM-25-XX: Addressing Vacant Slots Due to Chronic Absenteeism