



Fiscal Year 2026 Monitoring Process for Head Start Recipients

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Information Memorandum

To: All Head Start Grant Recipients

Subject: Fiscal Year 2026 Monitoring Process for Head Start Recipients

Information:

[Section 641A](#) of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (the Act) requires the Office of Head Start (OHS) to monitor programs to make sure they meet quality and compliance standards. This Information Memorandum (IM) explains the monitoring process for fiscal year (FY) 2026, including updates to review formats and when reviews will take place during a grant period.

OHS is committed to strong program management, protecting children's health and safety, and ensuring effective oversight. To support these priorities, OHS has refined the monitoring approach to be more focused, efficient, and responsive to program needs. This year, updates to monitoring reviews include streamlining and clarifying review questions, reducing the total number of questions from 449 in FY25 to 203 for FY26 (54.8 percent decrease overall), and shortening on-site review days from 5 days to 3 or 3.5 days. These updates focus reviews on the most critical elements for child safety and program integrity, as well as reviewing for compliance with all applicable state statutes and regulations for licensing. These updates help strengthen systems early in the grant cycle, support fiscal integrity, and allow more on-site

visits sooner in the process to ensure that there is a strong organizational foundation early in the grant cycle. Together, these updates keep our partnership with recipients strong while maintaining accountability to Head Start standards.

FY26 Monitoring Review Types starting October 2025

Review Type	FY26 Format	Start Date
Focus Area 1 (FA1): Program Systems Review	Reviews foundational systems that ensure strong operations, fiscal integrity, and child safety across all sites. Reviews happen in years 1 or 2 of the grant; using both virtual and on-site formats.	October 2025
Focus Area 2 (FA2): Comprehensive Services Review	Reviews the quality of education, health, and family services to strengthen child and family outcomes, and ensures implementation of eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA) requirements.	October 2025
Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®)	Reviews happen in years three or four of the grant; using both virtual and on-site formats. Reviews teacher-child interactions. Reviews happen in years two through four of the grant, using a self-recorded video submission. <i>On-site reviews are available upon request.</i>	October 2025
Follow-up Reviews	American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) programs have the option to conduct a self-review. Both virtual and on-site formats, aligned to the nature of the findings.	As needed
Risk Assessment Notification (RAN) Reviews	Both virtual and on-site formats, aligned to the nature of the findings	As needed
Other/Special Reviews	Conducted on-site or virtually, with or without notice.	As needed

Note: QHS has the right to conduct unannounced reviews at any time.

FA1 Program Systems Review

The FA1: Foundational Systems Review happens in the first or second year of the grant cycle and includes a mix of virtual and on-site formats. This review focuses on program systems that support high-quality services while eliminating unnecessary burden for recipients. This review helps QHS understand each recipient's foundation for program services, including governance, staffing and supervision, service design, internal monitoring, fiscal capacity, and integrity, and ERSEA processes. This review type checks if programs meet the requirements of the Uniform Guidance, and the Head Start Act. Updates to the FA1 review this year include:

- Streamlining review questions – reducing the number of items reviewed in each content area by 30–50 percent to improve efficiency while maintaining rigor.
- Focusing earlier on critical systems – incorporating fiscal, governance, and ERSEA into the FA1 review to assess these foundational areas sooner in the grant cycle.
- Adding on-site engagement – introducing an on-site component, in addition to virtual formats, to strengthen understanding of program operations and the systems in place to keep children safe.

FA2: Comprehensive Services Review

The FA2: Comprehensive Services Review happens in the third or fourth year of the grant cycle and includes a mix of virtual and on-site formats. This review gives recipients the chance to show how they deliver high-quality services to children and families that meet Head Start requirements. The review looks at the quality of education, health, and family services; checks that ERSEA requirements are met; and reviews fiscal capacity and integrity. It also helps OHS understand each recipient's performance and confirm that programs meet the requirements of the Uniform Guidance, and the Head Start Act. Updates to the FA2 review this year include:

- Streamlining questions for clarity, making the review process more efficient and focused.
- Increasing the specificity of review items to provide more actionable feedback to recipients.
- Maintaining a strong focus on child safety, program quality, and fiscal integrity throughout the review process.
- Shortening the on-site portion from 5 days to 3.5 days, reducing burden while maintaining a thorough review.

CLASS® Reviews

Section 641A(c)(2)(F) of the Act requires OHS to assess the quality of teacher–child interactions using a valid and reliable observation measure. In FY26 OHS will continue using the 2008 edition of the CLASS Pre-K tool. Scores will count toward Designation Renewal System (DRS) decisions using the competitive thresholds set in the 2020 [final rule on DRS changes](#). A 2024 rule delays the increase in the CLASS Instructional Support competitive threshold from 2.3 to 2.5 until August 1, 2027.

In FY26, programs scheduled for a CLASS review will record and submit their own classroom videos (video review). On-site reviews with certified CLASS observers are available **only** by request.

AIAN Head Start programs can choose to do a self-review for their CLASS review. All AIAN grant recipients have the option for a self-review, including those that have consolidated their Head Start program into an approved Pub. L. 102-477 Plan.

All recipients will have the opportunity to attend information sessions specifically developed to discuss FY26 CLASS options, including a group of sessions convened specifically for AIAN recipients.

RAN Reviews

OHS conducts RAN reviews when there are serious child health or safety concerns due to a reported incident. These reviews start when OHS needs more information about a significant incident that occurred within a program. They focus on issues such as abuse, neglect, inappropriate conduct, inadequate supervision, or unauthorized release of a child.

RAN reviews are designed to:

- Make sure serious incidents are reported quickly and accurately
- Identify any program or management issues that contributed to the incident
- Share the corrective actions that are needed
- Provide feedback to help programs prevent similar incidents in the future

Other Reviews

OHS may conduct special reviews when there are concerns that fall outside the regular monitoring schedule. These reviews can be done on-site or virtually and may take place with or without advance notice. OHS also has the right to conduct unannounced reviews at any time.

Tribal Programs Integrated Under Pub. L. 102-477 Plans

As required by law, OHS will continue to work with the Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to conduct monitoring and oversight. Tribal grant recipients that include their Head Start program in a Pub. L. 102-477 plan should describe their monitoring approach in that plan. Information from these reviews helps determine continued Head Start funding through DRF. Programs may receive funds without competition only if the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) determines they provide a high-quality, comprehensive program.

For Tribal programs that are integrated under a Pub. L. 102-477 plan and choose to participate in OHS monitoring, OHS will continue to conduct monitoring and a CLASS review (self-review option available) to help ACF confirm the program is delivering a high-quality, comprehensive program.

Scheduling

Each year, programs must submit a calendar showing when programs are open and when children are in session. OHS uses this calendar to schedule monitoring reviews. If the schedule changes, programs should update their calendar right away. OHS can only approve rescheduling in exceptional situations. OHS may also conduct reviews without advance notice.

Communications

Programs scheduled for a monitoring review in FY26 will receive a notification letter 45 days before the review starts. The assigned review lead will also schedule a planning call to discuss the review and learn about the program's current service delivery. After the review, OHS will issue the report within 60 days.

Questions

For questions regarding FY26 monitoring, please contact the appropriate regional office.

Thank you for the continued commitment to the success of Head Start children and families.

Sincerely,

/ Tala Q. Hooban /

Tala Q. Hooban
CAPT, U.S. Public Health Service
Acting Director
Office of Head Start