

Report in Brief

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Why OIG Did This Review

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 required the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start (OHS), to develop a Designation Renewal System in which a grantee determined not to be providing a high-quality and comprehensive Head Start program would not be automatically renewed, but instead subject to an open competition for a new Head Start grant. In 2013, OHS notified Pathways for Children (Pathways) that it would be required to compete for Head Start funding. Pathways applied to compete for the Head Start funding and was awarded the grant again as the sole applicant. We selected Pathways for this review on the basis of its prior noncompliance.

Our objective was to determine whether Pathways complied with Federal and State requirements for ensuring the health and safety of the children in its care.

How OIG Did This Review

We conducted unannounced walk-throughs at the two Pathways facilities to make observations of Pathways safety practices for classrooms, common areas, outdoor space, and the maintenance of equipment and materials. We also reviewed background check records for 165 active employees and child health screenings for 45 judgmentally selected children.

Pathways for Children Generally Complied With Health and Safety Requirements

What OIG Found

Pathways generally complied with Federal and State requirements for ensuring the health and safety of children in its Head Start program. While we observed instances of noncompliance with select Federal and State health and safety requirements, we did not observe a systemic problem throughout Pathways. Pathways could improve its systems of health and safety practices and management to ensure children are kept safe at all times. Specifically, we found that Pathways did not always ensure its (1) buildings and physical premises were in compliance with Federal Head Start safety practices and State licensing standards, (2) employees received background checks as frequently as required, and (3) children received lead screening at the appropriate age.

These deficiencies occurred because Pathways did not provide training on the identification of hazards within a building or around the facility premises; did not have a reliable system to track when employees were due for renewed background checks; and did not adequately communicate with physicians' offices on children age appropriate lead screening. Without adequate safety procedures, Pathways potentially placed the children's health and safety at risk.

What OIG Recommends and Pathways Comments

We recommend that Pathways (1) correct all instances of noncompliance that we observed, (2) strengthen its systems of health and safety practices and management, (3) utilize the output from a reliable system to ensure all employees complete background checks in the timing and frequency required by Federal regulations and State licensing standards, (4) conduct a review of the remaining child health records to verify that there is documentation from a healthcare professional showing that screening for lead poisoning was conducted annually as prescribed by State licensing standards, and (5) follow up during a child's enrollment process with the physician's office when evidence demonstrates the child had not received an age appropriate lead screening and, if necessary, help parents schedule age-appropriate lead screening for their child.

In written comments on our draft report, Pathways concurred with our findings and recommendations and provided information on actions that it had taken to address our recommendations.