Insights on the Performance of Local Family Self-Sufficiency Programs from New HUD Measures

Lesley Freiman
Jeffrey Lubell
Micah Villarreal
Judy Geyer

Abt Associates

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1. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program aims to help housing assistance recipients to increase their earnings, build savings, and achieve other personally defined goals. The ultimate aim of the program is to lift families out of poverty and reduce their need for public assistance. The program was set in motion in 1990 with the signing of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act. In a given year, over 700 PHAs receive HUD funding for FSS coordinator funds to administer FSS programs, and more than 75,000 housing assistance recipients currently participate in the program. In the ten years between 2007 and 2016 (inclusive), nearly 37,000 households successfully graduated from the FSS program.¹

The FSS program includes two main features: (1) an incentive to increase earnings in the form of an escrow savings account that grows as participants increase their earnings, in line with the increases in rent as a result of increased earnings; and (2) case management or coaching to help participants access services, overcome barriers to increasing employment, improve their financial capability and achieve their goals. FSS is a five-year program, with the option to extend up to an additional two years for a given participant.

HUD provides competitive annual grants for FSS coordinator funding to help PHAs maintain an FSS program and serve participants. Some PHAs also choose to administer the FSS program without receiving coordinator funding from HUD. While each PHA that runs an FSS program must develop an FSS action plan and follow basic requirements of the program, PHAs have latitude to vary their strategies and emphasis based on local goals, population in the program, or local economic conditions. For example, they may follow a traditional case management approach or more of a client-centered coaching approach, vary caseloads to serve more people, place a primary initial focus on education and training or immediate employment, or allow FSS participants to withdraw some of the funds in their escrow accounts before graduating from the program in order to help achieve their goals.²

While HUD has required PHAs to submit a range of data about the FSS program over the years, it has not, until now, had a formal performance measurement system for evaluating FSS programs. In the FY 2014 notice for FSS coordinator funding, HUD proposed evaluating FSS programs based on the share of FSS participants that experience an increase in earned income over a specified time period. Some commenters raised concerns that this approach did not account for differences in local economic conditions or local FSS program approaches. Given these concerns and the size and scope of the program, HUD determined there was a need to create a multi-component performance measure

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² Participants only receive the balance of their escrow accounts if and when they graduate. However, FSS programs have discretion to allow participants to make interim withdrawals prior to graduation to support their self-sufficiency goals (e.g., money to fix a car needed to get to a job or money to cover fees for an educational or training program).
INTRODUCTION

system in order to better understand changes over time and identify programs that may be underperforming or performing well. HUD contracted with Abt Associates to help inform HUD’s development of such a system. In December 2017, HUD published a public notice in the Federal Register for public comment with a preliminary methodology for an FSS performance measurement system. HUD received 68 separate public comments, primarily from PHAs and other FSS program providers. As a result of these comments and subsequent discussion, HUD revised the methodology and produced a final performance measurement methodology.

This performance measurement system is designed to help government officials identify and recognize successful FSS programs across a range of approaches and communities and identify low-performance programs in need of guidance or assistance. It may also have a bearing on future awards of FSS coordinator funding. State and local PHAs can use these data to measure their progress in developing or growing a successful FSS program, and may be able to use these data to manage performance along multiple dimensions. Finally, policymakers, researchers, and organizations operating different programs with similar goals to FSS can use this information to understand the range of experiences that PHAs and other providers have with the FSS program.

The new systems includes three measures, which are designed to measure progress on essential program goals and are balanced to form an overall score for each program in each year. The three measures are:

- **An earnings measure** – to estimate the degree to which FSS program participants increase their earnings, and, to some extent, the degree to which this earnings increase is associated with participating in the FSS program. Earnings increases is the primary goal of the FSS program as a whole.

- **A graduation measure** – to estimate the degree to which participants are successfully achieving their goals and other minimum program requirements, maintaining participation in the program, and, ultimately, receiving their full escrow savings.

- **A participation measures** – to estimate the number of households programs serve through FSS as compared to the coordinator funding resources they receive and HUD’s expectations of how many participants they should serve with these resources. While recruiting participants is not in and of itself sufficient for success, the earnings and graduation measures are only meaningful if they include a substantial number of households served with the program.

A **composite score** combines all three measures to produce an overall measure of program success across these three dimensions.

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4 Publication expended Fall 2018.
Examining these performance measures across households reveals several findings across the program as a whole. Chiefly:

- **On average, FSS participants (including both non-graduates and graduates) saw marked increases in earnings.** The average FSS program saw participants increase their annual earnings by an average of $4,539 more than their non-enrolled peers with similar characteristics. For most PHAs (89 percent), this metric showed FSS participants achieving increases in annual earnings (relative to similar non-enrolled peers) of more than $1,000. This measure focused on earnings reported to HUD’s PIC data system for the period 3.5 to 7.5 years since enrollment.

- **The graduation measure findings suggest that only a minority of participants graduate from the program.** Just over 25 percent of participants who enrolled in the FSS program 5 to 8 years previously in a given PHA had graduated by the time of the graduation rate measurement. Only 9 percent of PHAs saw at least half of their original enrollees graduate within this period. This statistic excludes from both the numerator and the denominator households that left the PHA over the period without first having graduated from FSS. Families that leave housing assistance are no longer eligible to continue participation in FSS.\(^5\)

- **On average, PHAs served nearly twice (180 percent) the minimum number of FSS enrollees that HUD expects for their FSS coordinator funding grant levels.** Ninety-seven percent of PHAs served at least the minimum levels of coordinator participants expected in a given year, and more than one quarter (27 percent) served more than double those minimum expectations.

Below, we describe how each measure was developed, what each includes and the range of outcomes PHAs participating in FSS and receiving FSS coordinator funding from HUD are seeing. While we describe primary rules and characteristics of the performance measurement system and scoring, full details of the methodology (including details on inclusions, exclusions, specific time periods and data used, and the reasoning behind each of these decisions) can be found in the response to public comment and the final methodology (publication expected Fall 2018).

\(^5\) Note that this measure counts as non-graduates a small number of households who are still enrolled in FSS and may ultimate graduate in the future. This measure should therefore not be considered a definitive assessment of the final FSS graduation rate, which may be somewhat higher than the measure used by HUD for performance measurement purposes.
2. Three Performance Measures

Under HUD’s FSS performance measurement system, the three performance measures—earnings measure, graduation measure, and participation measure—are first scored separately and then combined into a single composite score. The measures were chosen because they are important indicators of program performance, represent explicit goals and expectations of FSS, and can be measured with data that HUD already collects from local FSS programs. HUD calculates these measures for FSS programs that received FSS coordinator funding over at least one of the most recent three years for which participation data are available and there is sufficient data to calculate all measures.  

Each performance measure is standardized into a score: For the earnings and graduation rate measures, the highest performers are assigned a score of 10, the next-highest performers are assigned a score of 7.5, and the lowest performers are assigned a score of 0, with all other PHAs receiving scores of 5 for the measure. To ensure that small FSS programs, which may experience volatility in earnings scores, are not disadvantaged, PHAs are only assigned an earnings score of 0 if they both meet the low score criteria and meet a test of statistical confidence that their low scores do not occur by random chance (p<0.1 that adjusted scores are below the median).

For participation rates, after considering public comment, HUD determined it would be preferable to use a more continuous scoring system. For this measure, PHAs that enroll less than 95% of the expected minimum participants receive a score of 0 for this measure. The highest performers receive a 10 and PHAs with intermediate levels of performance receive a score of 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 depending on the graduation rate. Each of these three measure-specific scores feeds into the composite score.

2.1 Earnings Measure

The Earnings Performance Measure examines the extent to which the earnings of FSS participants in a PHA increase over time after joining the FSS program. In developing and refining this measure, HUD had to account for several differences in local goals, populations, and economic conditions.

To construct the measure, HUD first had to determine which households would be included. The measure includes FSS participants for each PHA who enrolled in FSS 3.5 to 7.5 years prior to the end of the most recent period for which PIC data are available. Excluding participants who enrolled in the program less than 3.5 years ago ensures that participants have enough time to show benefits from the program. At the same time, including participants who have enrolled in the program as recently as 3.5 years ago ensures that participants have enough time to show benefits from the program. The new performance measure system does not score them. The system is also not currently appropriate for PHAs operating FSS programs without HUD coordinator funding, or PHAs and private owners whose FSS programs are established for households benefitting from Project-based Rental Assistance.

6 Tribes/Tribally Designated Housing Entities and PHAs with a Moving to Work designation report different information into PIC. While measures appropriate for these agencies may be developed in the future, the new performance measure system does not score them. The system is also not currently appropriate for PHAs operating FSS programs without HUD coordinator funding, or PHAs and private owners whose FSS programs are established for households benefitting from Project-based Rental Assistance.

7 Some local groups of PHAs apply for FSS coordinator funding jointly. For these PHAs, all measures are calculated for the group and each group member receives the same scores.
THREE PERFORMANCE MEASURES

years ago and no longer than 7.5 years ago, is meant to ensure that the earnings performance measure and score reflects recent FSS program performance in as much as is possible and practical.

The measure excludes households whose heads are classified as elderly at enrollment or a person with disability at any point during the four-year period, in order to avoid potentially disadvantaging PHAs that serve a disproportionate share of households whose heads are elderly or who have a disability, each of which may face additional barriers to increased earnings. If properly understood, this exclusion should make PHAs more comfortable enrolling households whose head is elderly or has a disability into the program, since the PHA’s performance score will not be affected by the service of these households. FSS is open to households headed by adults of all ages and abilities.

Earnings volatility and variation in program strategy

A key component of the Earnings Performance Measure is a measure of growth in earnings. To calculate earnings growth, HUD measures the growth in annual household earnings of each household enrolled in FSS at the PHA in two ways and uses the higher of the two measures for each household: (a) Change in annual earnings from enrollment to the most recently available data, and (b) the difference between the household’s earnings at enrollment and an annualized average of the household’s quarterly earnings since enrollment.

Using this combined “best of” measure helps account for differences in FSS program approach as well as for volatility in earnings. Some FSS programs encourage participants to immediately increase their earnings while others encourage participants to first build human capital through education and training in order to increase employment and earning potential. For some successful participants, earnings could actually decrease at first, as they focus on education and training. Looking at only the change between starting and latest earnings will generally show better results for households that focus on education first but ultimately succeed in increasing earnings, whereas looking at the average earnings over the course of participation may show better results for households that focus primarily on immediately increasing earnings and employment, and make real progress in achieving higher earnings, but happen to lose their job or experience a decrease in earnings as of the most recent available data. Among other benefits, this approach helps account for the substantial income volatility experienced by low-income households.

Variations in economic conditions

Employment opportunities, wages, cost of living, and barriers to employment vary from community to community (and even time period to time period), so a straight comparison between the FSS participant earnings of different PHAs may unfairly advantage programs with low unemployment rates and/or high hourly wages and disadvantage communities with higher unemployment rates and/or lower hourly wages or a localized recession or major employer closing. The FSS performance measurement system controls for variation in local economic conditions in two ways:
THREE PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- First, HUD compares the earnings change of each FSS participant at a PHA to the average earnings change for three nonparticipants at the same PHA with similar characteristics. The average difference in performance between the FSS participants and the comparison households represents the “unadjusted” Earnings Performance Measure for that PHA. Since the earnings of non-FSS participants would be expected to grow faster at PHAs located in stronger job markets than in PHAs located in weaker job markets, this comparison helps to account for differences in local economic conditions, making a comparison of earnings growth across FSS programs more meaningful.

- While the unadjusted measure accounts for some differences in local economic conditions (e.g., likelihood of gaining or losing employment specific to the local community), it does not account for all differences (e.g., difference in wages between communities). To adjust for these remaining relative effects of local economic conditions, HUD calculates an adjustment factor for each PHA. To do this, HUD first uses a linear regression model to examine the relationship between the earnings growth of comparison households within a PHA and the average county median income of those households. On average, earnings growth of comparison households tends to be higher in counties with high median incomes, and lower in counties with low median incomes. HUD then develops an adjustment factor that eliminates this relationship and applies this adjustment factor to the unadjusted earnings performance measure for each PHA, resulting in an “adjusted” earnings performance measure that is used to determine the PHA’s score for the earnings component of the FSS performance measurement system.

Depending on the median income of the county in which a PHA is located, a PHA’s earnings performance measure could go up or down based on this adjustment. On average, this adjustment leads to increases compared to the unadjusted measure.

Earnings change experiences of funded PHAs

The data suggest that FSS participants experience broad gains in earnings that exceed the gains of households with similar characteristics. The unadjusted median PHA’s FSS performance measure is $4,170, meaning that, in a distribution of PHA-level FSS performance measures, the median PHA’s FSS participants saw an average increase in annual earnings of $4,170 above that of their non-FSS participant peers after being enrolled in FSS between 3.5 and 7.5 years. The average across PHAs was similar, at $4,539. Figure 1 shows the distribution of unadjusted earnings performance measures.

For most PHAs (89 percent), the unadjusted earnings measure shows participants achieving relative increases of more than $1,000. Almost all PHAs’ participants saw some increases in earnings under FSS as compared to similar households. Just six percent of PHAs had flat or negative unadjusted

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8 Households are matched using a statistical distance metric based on the following characteristics: earnings as of the time of the FSS household’s entry into FSS, age of head of household, length of time in the voucher or public housing program, number of adults in the household and number of children under age 18, presence of a child with a disability, and presence of a non-head of household adult with a disability.

9 HUD uses the FSS household’s enrollment date for the purposes of calculating the matched comparison households’ initial earnings.
earnings measures. Of course, the algorithm for identifying “similar” households is unable to control for unobservable factors, such as motivation, so there could and likely are important differences between the FSS participants and the comparison households. The purpose of the comparison is not to evaluate whether the earnings growth of FSS participants is attributable to FSS but rather to control for variations in economic circumstances between one PHA and another.

**Figure 1. Histogram Distribution of Unadjusted Earnings Measure ($250 increments)**

Source: Final FSS Performance Measures based on HUD PIC data through December 2017.
Note: Outliers removed to show distribution.

Figure 2 shows the adjusted earnings measure distribution. As noted above, this measure is the more appropriate of the two for comparing experiences between PHAs. However, in smoothing the earnings outcomes, the adjustment also raises earning measures on average. So to the extent one is interested in the magnitude of earnings gains for FSS participants, the unadjusted measure is superior. The median adjusted earnings measure was $6,302 (as with the unadjusted measure, this is similar to the average measure – $6,523).
### 2.2 Graduation Measure

The graduation performance measure focuses on measuring the share of FSS participants at each PHA who have graduated from the FSS program. Graduation is one measure of participant success and the graduation rate is a marker both of participant success and the PHA’s level of engagement and focus on helping participants succeed.

The graduation performance measure is calculated by measuring the share of FSS participants who entered each PHA’s FSS program 5 to 8 years before the end of the most recent period for which PIC data are available who successfully graduated from the FSS program. Average time to graduation varies between PHAs, but most participants who will graduate do so within the standard five years following enrollment. Participants have up to two additional years to complete their FSS contracts, if permitted by PHAs, so all remaining participants who ultimately graduate will have done so within 8 years of enrollment. HUD considered focusing on an older cohort for the measurement of graduation rates to ensure that none of the households in the cohort were still enrolled in FSS with the potential to graduate in the future as of the time of measurement. However, most participants who graduate do so within 5 years, and pushing the measure further into the past would make the measure reflect PHA actions and experiences that were too far in the past. The 5 to 8 year period provides a balance between capturing relatively recent performance and minimizing the number of households still enrolled in FSS as of the time of measurement.

**Controlling for turnover rates**

The turnover rates of housing assistance recipients at PHAs can vary substantially for reasons that are not related to FSS. All household that leave housing assistance must also leave the FSS program. To avoid penalizing programs with high rates of housing assistance recipient turnover, HUD excludes...
non-graduating FSS participants who exited a housing assistance program before the end of the data period from both the numerator and denominator of the graduation rate calculation.\(^{10}\)

**Graduation rate experiences of funded PHAs**

The graduation measure findings suggest that only a minority of FSS participants graduate successfully. The median graduation rate for PHAs was just 24 percent (average of 26 percent) for participants who joined between 5 and 8 years prior. As discussed earlier, this is not a final measure of all who graduate from FS as a small number of FSS participants who joined during that window may still be in the FSS program and could ultimately graduate subsequently. However, it does suggest that there is likely room for improvement in boosting graduation rates.

There could be many reasons why, in the majority of PHAs, more than three quarters of FSS participants have not yet graduated by the time this graduation rate measurement is taken. Five years is a long time for a program to last – far longer than most other programs aimed at increasing household earnings. Some participants may simply lose interest or their circumstances may change so that they no longer need the program or no longer have an interest in participating. Other participants may have experienced a setback affecting their participation in FSS. Still others may be households who had only a light attachment to the program and plan to leave housing assistance shortly, so simply disengage. The performance measurement data do not provide enough information to assess the dominant reasons (though this may serve as an opportunity for future research).

The 75\(^{th}\) percentile for FSS program graduation rate was just over one third – 35.5 percent of participants eligible for inclusion in the graduation rate graduated. Only 61 PHAs (less than 9 percent of those scored) saw more than half of their participants graduate. These tended to be smaller programs, with an average of 22 participants eligible for the graduate rate calculation, compared to an average of 57 eligible participants across all PHAs scored. The only PHAs that saw perfect graduation rates (i.e., 100 percent) were a couple of programs with only 1 participants eligible for the graduation rate. On the lower scoring end, programs in the bottom 10\(^{th}\) percentile of graduation rate (3.9 percent or below) also tend to be smaller programs (average of 18 participants eligible for the graduation rate measure), with one or two notable exceptions. Figure 3 shows the distribution of graduation rates across PHAs.

\(^{10}\) Participants who graduate but leave housing assistance before the end of the data period are counted as graduates.
Figure 3. Histogram Distribution of Graduation Measure

Source: Final FSS Performance Measures based on HUD PIC data through December 2017.
Note: Outliers removed to show distribution.

2.3 Participation Measure

The Participation Measure is based on the number of FSS participants enrolled in the PHA’s program in a given year compared to the minimum number of FSS participants that HUD expects a PHA to serve given the coordinator funding amount they receive. PHAs that exactly meet the standard will have a ratio of 1.0. Those that serve more than the required number will have a ratio above 1.0. Those that serve fewer than the required number will have a ratio below 1.0. HUD expects FSS programs with FSS coordinator funding for one full time staff member to serve at least 25 FSS participants. Every full-time FSS coordinator funded beyond this initial one is expected to serve at least 50 participants. For example, if a PHA receiving funding for 1 full-time coordinator has 30 participants enrolled in that year, they will have a participation ratio of 1.2, because $30 \div 25 = 1.2$.

Accounting for annual variation and reporting errors

While it would be possible to use a single year of data for the participation measure, this would put undue weight on an individual year’s enrollment. There may be many reasons why an individual year is not typical. At the same time, a participation measure that looks only at the most recent year of data would allow PHAs the best opportunity to improve their performance quickly from one year to the next and to fix any errors in reporting that may have had an impact on numbers served recorded in the past. Balancing these considerations, HUD calculates and averages the participation rate for the three most recent fiscal years but also calculates the rate for the most recent fiscal year alone. Whichever of the two metrics is higher for a given PHA is set as its participation rate. This approach means that PHAs get credit for immediate improvements and improved data recording, where applicable, but that PHAs experiencing an unusual setback in a given year are not penalized if their prior performance was strong.
Participation rate experiences of funded PHAs

On average, PHAs served nearly twice (180 percent) the minimum number of FSS enrollees that HUD expects for their FSS coordinator funding grant levels. Almost all (97 percent) served at least the minimum levels of participants per coordinator expected in a given year, and more than a quarter (27 percent) served more than double those minimum expectations. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the participation measure.

**Figure 4. Histogram Distribution of Participation Measure**

![Histogram Distribution of Participation Measure](image)

Source: Final FSS Performance Measures based on FY 2015-2017 funding data and “number served” in the previous year for the FY 2016-2018 HUD notices of funding availability, Appendix D.

Note: Outliers removed to show distribution.

On the whole, the “best of”-based performance measure did not vary substantially from the single-year FY 2017 rates. There are 24 PHAs included in the “best of” statistic but which have no recorded FSS funding for FY 2017, suggesting that these PHAs were funded in prior years, but no longer received coordinator funding in FY 2017. Primarily, these are PHAs that had small FSS programs and low participation ratios, but there were a few exceptions.

The median PHA had funding for one coordinator and was expected to serve at least 25 participants. This remained constant between the three years, as did the seventy-fifth percentile (2 coordinators and expectation to serve at least 75 participants). The averages varied somewhat from year-to-year, skewed by outliers with very large programs.
3. Building the Composite Score

To develop a PHA’s final FSS performance score, HUD calculates a composite score that uses the three separate measures to build a single score for each FSS program for which HUD providers coordinator funding. The composite score is a combination of the earnings, graduation, and participation score, balanced together to provide a fuller metric of FSS program performance than each single component score and to avoid creating perverse incentives for programs.

The earnings measure estimates progress toward one of the central goals of the program: to increase participant earnings. Because of the importance of this goal, the earnings score counts toward 50 percent of the overall score for a program.

Graduation from the FSS program is also an important metric of program success. While some FSS programs allow participants to make interim withdrawals from their FSS escrow accounts if needed to achieve their goals, for the most part, FSS participants can also receive their final escrow balances once they graduate from the program. Graduation is dependent on meeting individually identified goals as well as the minimum graduation requirements of the program (notably, being employed and no reliance on cash welfare payments). While participant graduation is important, there are many reasons why households may not persist in the program until graduation, and many who leave the program before then nevertheless benefit. So the graduation rate does not receive as much weight as the earnings measure, constituting 30 percent of the overall composite score. Assigning too high a value to the graduation rate could also create incentives to water down the program in order to make it easier to graduate. A PHA who did this might find they increase their graduation rate but reduce their earnings performance score, which would not be advantageous.

The participation measure captures the insight that, all else being equal, an FSS program that serves more families will have a larger impact. FSS coordinator funding comes with the expectation that recipient PHAs serve at least a minimum number of participants per coordinator. The participation measure creates an incentive for PHAs to exceed the minimum number, so long as they can do so without diluting their performance on the earnings and graduation measures. Because HUD wishes PHAs to prioritize program quality over program size, the participation score makes up the smallest portion of the overall composite score: 20 percent.

As noted above, PHAs receive a score between 0 and 10 for each of the three main measurement components. Since the composite score is a weighted average of these components, it too is a number between 0 and 10. Within the range of scores across PHAs, HUD set the performance category for the composite scores to denote the PHAs in the top 20 percent of performance (Score of 1), the lowest decile of performance (Score of 4), the second lowest decile of performance (Score of 3), and the bulk of programs, which fit into none of these categories (Score of 2). Implicit in the FSS performance measurement system’s decision to award the bulk of PHAs the same performance score is recognition that the system is better able to distinguish very high and very lower performers than to render more subtle judgments about the differences between two more closely ranked programs.

The specific numeric thresholds used to convert each component’s measurement into a score from 0 to 10 and to convert composite scores into final category rankings are fixed rather than relative in the sense that HUD does not plan to re-calculate them from year to year. These fixed thresholds will allow individual PHAs to track their FSS program’s progress over time rather than their progress.
relative to other FSS programs. It also has the potential to help policymakers and researchers track the changes in performance of the FSS program as a whole.

### 3.1 Composite scores across PHAs

In the most recent composite scores (based on HUD PIC data through December 2017 and participation measure data through FY2017), the median and mean scores were both just above 6. The majority had scores between 5 and 7.6 (the 25th and 75th percentile, respectively).

Figure 5 shows the distribution of composite scores. Very low composite scores (scores below 2) were uncommon, reflecting that PHAs receiving the lowest scores for some measures typically received somewhat higher scores in at least one other measure. Table 1 shows composite scores by quintile.

In interpreting these figures, it is important to bear in mind that it reflects the aggregation of individual component scores for each of the three measures, weighted using the weights noted above. Different weights or different methods for converting the earnings, graduation and participation measures into scores on the 10 point scale would likely have affected the composite scores and their distribution. Nevertheless, final composite scores vary substantially across a wide range, suggesting that FSS performance varies substantially across PHAs.

**Figure 5. Histogram Distribution of Composite Scores**

![Histogram Distribution of Composite Scores](source)

**Table 1. Composite Scores by Quintile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>Composite Score Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>0.0 to 4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>4.3 to 5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>5.8 to 6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>6.75 to 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>8.0 to 10.0</td>
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Source: Final FSS Performance Measures composite scores, calculated August 2018 using PIC data through December 2017 and participation measure data through FY 2017.
4. Conclusions

While the driving goal for creating the new FSS performance measurement system has been to help HUD and PHAs running FSS programs track and manage performance, the system presents several potential uses for researchers in understanding FSS performance. Updated performance measure data will be publicly available at least annually and pose no risk to individual households' confidentiality. The data will include, for each PHA receiving FSS coordinator funding in the past three years, their earnings, graduation and participation scores, including some of the underlying data used to compute the scores, together with the PHA’s composite score and ranking.

One straightforward use of the data is to understand the range of variation in FSS program performance. A related use would be to provide context for the evaluation of a specific local FSS program, allowing for a comparison of the studied PHA with other PHAs across the country.

Where researchers have or can gather additional information on PHA-level communities and characteristics of FSS programs, the ability to compare performance along each measure and the composite score could help increase understanding of what features of an FSS program are likely to be most effective, and what types of local conditions or events can help or hinder FSS program success.

As discussed above, the earnings measure provides information on change in annual earnings for households that enroll in FSS compared to households within the same PHA who have characteristics in common but who have not joined FSS. While this measure does not provide a complete picture of the program’s impact on participant earnings, it allows observers to understand FSS programs’ progress in helping participants increase their earnings with some control for differences in local economic conditions and opportunities.

Similarly, the graduation measure and participation measure include some carefully considered time periods and controls to balance the need to allow for factors that PHAs cannot predict or control with the need to provide the most up-to-date data practical. These measures may help researchers and other observers better assess graduation rates, the degree to which PHAs are able to use and extend FSS program resources compared to what they receive from HUD, and the changes in both of these measures across the FSS program over time.

Because the thresholds used to calculate the measures are now fixed, one should be able to use the performance scores to track progress over time in each of the measures. Of course, some PHAs may make adjustments to their programs to improve their scores, but to the extent those adjustments lead to greater earnings gains, more households served, or higher rates of graduation, they are likely to benefit participants and represent real program improvements.