

Program Preparedness Checklist: Serving Dual Language Learners and Their Families

It is essential that all Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS) programs have systems, policies, and procedures in place to meet the needs of children and families who speak languages other than English. The Office of Head Start identifies dual language learners as children learning two or more languages at the same time, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to learn their first language.

Purpose

The intent of this checklist is to:

- Assist a program in assessing its preparedness to implement systems and to deliver quality services to children who are dual language learners and their families.
- Observe and document how the systems and services are articulated and implemented throughout the program.
- Provide useful information for program planning and professional development.

Directions for Use

This checklist is organized into broad indicators: Program Governance; Planning; Communication; Human Resources; Self-Assessment; Environments; Teacher/Child Interactions; Curriculum; Disabilities; Assessment; Health and Nutrition; Family Partnerships; and Community Partnerships.

Under each indicator, there are relevant items that refer to specific policies or practices in your program. You can check each item along a scale to indicate the degree to which it is in place in your program: Definitely – In Progress – or Not Yet. There is also space for comments/examples.

Many items are taken from the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (1998) and are based on specific regulations. Others are recommended practices, based on evidence from research and the field, but they are not mandated. Although there are a number of items that refer to teaching environments, language and literacy development, and assessment of children's progress, they do not present a comprehensive picture of all educational services for dual language learners. Head Start and EHS programs are encouraged to add other items that reflect strategies and approaches that are responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, there are many other tools developed for the early childhood field that can help Head Start and EHS programs assess their service delivery.

The *Program Preparedness Checklist* will be a useful tool for program self-assessment and strategic planning. Information from the checklist can be used to make decisions about professional development and needed services, as well as to identify the areas where your program is achieving success. You may also want to add other indicators to this checklist.

Office of Head Start

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Available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>

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Item	Definitely	In Progress	Not Yet	Comments/ Examples
1. Program Governance				
a. We promote the involvement of families who speak languages other than English in all aspects of program governance. We...				
i. provide interpretation at Parent Policy Council meetings.				
ii. have proportionate representation in the policy groups that reflect the demographics of the children in the program.				
2. Planning				
a. We have policies and procedures in place to support quality service delivery to families and children who speak languages other than English. We...				
i. implement an organizational language policy that explains how we use language in the classrooms, how we promote children's home language and support English language development.				
ii. incorporate how we will meet the needs of families and children who speak languages other than English into the work plans for each service area.				
iii. ensure that families who speak languages other than English are involved in developing policies and procedures related to dual language learners.				
3. Communication				
a. We have systems in place to support effective and ongoing communication with all families. We...				
i. provide written communications to families in their primary or preferred language.				
ii. are knowledgeable about national- and state-level interpretation and translation associations and follow recommended guidelines.				
iii. provide interpretation at meetings, trainings, and other agency events to ensure that all families can understand what is being presented.				
iv. have a process in place for two-way communication with families for us to communicate directly or indirectly, and for families to communicate with us and provide feedback in their home or preferred language.				

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4. Human Resources				
a. We strive to employ a linguistically and culturally diverse staff who are familiar with the cultural and language backgrounds of the children and families. We...				
i. actively recruit staff who are bilingual and/or bicultural.				
ii. provide additional compensation for staff who are bilingual.				
iii. include position-specific responsibilities in job descriptions for working with children and families who speak languages other than English.				
iv. assist staff in getting transcripts of coursework taken in other countries, analyzed and accepted by higher education institutions.				
v. assess the language proficiency of staff to ensure they are able to meet the requirements of the positions for which they are hired.				
b. We provide ongoing professional development opportunities to staff so that they are fully prepared to support the optimal development of children and families who speak languages other than English. We...				
i. provide training to staff about development of first and second languages including information about individual differences.				
ii. provide training to staff to promote cultural competence and to further understanding of how child-rearing and educational expectations vary across cultures.				
iii. partner with institutions of higher education to ensure that information on working with families and children who speak languages other than English is infused throughout the coursework.				
iv. provide professional development to ensure that bilingual staff understand how and when to use their language skills to meet the needs of the children and families in the program.				

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5. Self-Assessment				
a. We incorporate evaluation of our level and quality of services to families and children who speak languages other than English into the annual self-assessment. We...				
i. evaluate each service area's effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children and families who speak languages other than English.				
ii. analyze children's assessment data to determine how we are promoting positive child outcomes for dual language learners in accordance with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and other learning standards for children ages birth to five.				
iii. have family members who speak languages other than English on the self-assessment team.				
6. Environments				
a. We provide a responsive classroom environment that reflects the languages and the cultures of the children and families in the program. We...				
i. display photographs of the children and families throughout the classroom.				
ii. include materials and visuals in the classroom that reflect the cultures of the children and families.				
iii. use books that include authentic images (photographs, illustrations) that reflect the cultures of the children in the center or home-based program.				
7. Teacher/Child Interactions				
a. We promote children's home language development. We.....				
i. gather information from families regarding the language(s) that are spoken at home.				
ii. use children's home language when caring for infants and toddlers.				
iii. provide a classroom staff person who speaks the children's home language if more than half of the preschoolers share a home language that is other than English.				
iv. learn key words and phrases in each child's home language.				
v. learn how to pronounce each child's name correctly.				

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vi. have music available in the home language of the children.				
vii. utilize small group time during the day to introduce and/or reinforce concepts in the children’s home language.				
b. We provide opportunities for children’s literacy development in the home language. We...				
i. label the environment in the home language of the children as well as in English.				
ii. color-code the labels in the various languages.				
iii. display and, when possible, read books in the home language of the children.				
iv. provide opportunities for children to see and learn, when possible, the alphabet of their home language.				
c. We promote children’s acquisition of English. We...				
i. use gestures, body language, props, and other visual cues to help aid children’s comprehension when speaking to them in English.				
ii. select books in English that have easy-to-follow stories, rhymes, repetition, and simple language.				
iii. avoid simultaneous interpretation, when a staff person speaks to the children in English and then immediately repeats the same information in the home language.				
iv. utilize small group time during the day to support children learning English and facilitate conversation among children and between children and adults.				
d. We promote positive social and emotional development of infants and toddlers from families who speak languages other than English. We...				
i. gather information from families about daily caregiving routines (sleeping, diapering, feeding, transitions).				
ii. replicate the familial caregiving routines in the classroom.				
iii. interact with infants and toddlers in their home language.				

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e. We promote positive social and emotional development of preschoolers who are dual language learners. We...				
i. pair up children who speak languages other than English with English-speaking children for some classroom activities to increase the comfort level of children who are dual language learners and help ease their transition.				
ii. avoid using language such as “foreign,” “funny,” or “strange” when describing the home languages and communication styles of the families and children whose home language is other than English.				
iii. provide a quiet area in the classroom where children who are dual language learners can relax and take a break from the pressure of language learning.				
8. Curriculum				
a. We implement a research-based curriculum that is inclusive of children’s language and culture. We...				
i. connect learning to children’s prior knowledge and life experiences.				
ii. provide hands-on activities to make learning interactive and concrete				
iii. use information gathered from assessing children’s progress to refine our curriculum goals and teaching strategies.				
9. Disabilities				
a. We ensure that the process through which we screen children and provide services, if necessary, is inclusive and respectful of their language and culture. We...				
i. use culturally and linguistically appropriate screening tools.				
ii. understand and can articulate how culture may influence families’ beliefs and practices about parenting children with disabilities.				
iii. ensure that parents receive materials concerning disabilities in their home or preferred language and can fully participate in the IFSP/IEP process.				

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10. Assessment				
a. We plan and individualize for children who are dual language learners, using information gained from culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment tools. We...				
i. use appropriate tools and protocols for screening in the home languages of children whenever possible.				
ii. perform authentic assessments based on ongoing observations of children in their center-based or home-based settings.				
iii. assess dual language learners' progress in all areas of development and across the child outcomes, regardless of their English language abilities, through various methods where possible.				
iv. assess children's progress in acquiring English.				
v. assess children's progress in acquiring their home language.				
vi. work with interpreters, cultural mediators, and/or other community members to assist in assessing children's progress if program staff do not speak the children's home language.				
11. Health and Nutrition				
a. We provide health and nutrition services that are responsive to families' language and culture. We...				
i. seek out information about health issues and needs relevant to the cultural groups served in the program.				
ii. solicit input from families to identify family eating patterns and cultural food preferences.				
iii. serve a variety of cultural and ethnic foods based on information received from families.				
12. Family Partnerships				
a. We actively promote families' involvement in their children's education. We...				
i. invite family members into the classroom to share special talents.				
ii. encourage parents to share ideas to include in each classroom's curricular experiences and activities.				

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iii. have formalized systems such as curriculum committees to ensure parental input.				
iv. provide trainings on developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive practices and curriculum.				
v. help families to transition children smoothly into public school and ensure that they are aware of their rights and responsibilities.				
vi. provide training to families about how to maximize their impact when volunteering in the classroom by promoting home language development through sharing songs, stories and talking with the children.				
b. We support and promote ongoing family literacy efforts. We...				
i. encourage family members to speak their home language to their children and explain why this is important.				
ii. provide trainings and information on how families can support their children's language and literacy development at home.				
iii. search for grants to be able to give books to children and families in their home language and/or we familiarize families with the local library resources.				
iv. provide information about where home language literacy classes for adults are offered or we provide those classes ourselves.				
v. provide information on English as a Second Language classes for adults or we offer those classes ourselves.				
vi. provide information to families about how children acquire a first and second language.				
13. Community Partnerships				
a. We partner with community agencies to support the children and families who speak languages other than English. We...				
i. have relationships with agencies, businesses, churches, and other organizations to assist in outreach and recruitment of families who speak languages other than English.				

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ii. provide training to our community partners on the value of bilingual development, the benefits of a diverse workforce and society, and components of cultural competence.				
iii. actively recruit members from the community who speak children's home language to volunteer in the program.				
14. Transitions				
a. We support children who are dual languages as they transition into our program - from class to class or setting to setting - and from our program to their next program or school. We...				
i. actively recruit families from different language and cultural backgrounds and use a variety of strategies to make them feel welcome.				
ii. get to know new families in order to accurately meet their language and cultural needs as they enter the program.				
iii. maintain portfolios on the children to provide information for their new teachers as they move from class to class or setting to setting within the program.				
iv. establish mutual relationships with local education agencies and schools to facilitate the sharing of information about children who are dual language learners who are transitioning out of our program.				