

Introducing the New Head Start Program Performance Standards

Overview: Education and Child Development Program Services

[Music]

Dr. Blanca Enriquez: Welcome to this overview on Education and Child Development Program Services. I want to introduce Amanda Bryans and Sharon Yandian as they walk us through this section that has combined all previous Program Standards related to education and child development services in a unifying birth to 5 approach.

Amanda Bryans: So Sharon, I'm really excited to be with you here this morning to talk about education and child development in the new Head Start Performance Standards, and I wondered if you could kind of get us started by talking about the birth to 5 approach in these regulations.

Sharon Yandian: Excellent, excellent. I'm really excited too, Amanda. And I think, honestly, one of the best changes I think is the birth to 5 approach. The Standards have been reorganized to integrate the requirements for children from birth to age 5. The previous Standards had applicability for infants and toddlers and preschoolers, but it was a little spotty and unclear. So what we've done is we've pulled it all together, and this new approach reflects how children develop and makes it easier for teachers to plan and implement education services based on children's needs.

So within the regulations, most are written birth to 5. Now the only time you'll find separate standards for infants and toddlers versus preschoolers is when the developmental differences make it appropriate. So, for example, one requirement that sticks out is that programs implement snacks and meals to support development and learning. So, you know, programs will find in there that it talks about holding bottle fed children and that, you know, when we think about that we think of social, emotional, development, attachment, and those types of things.

So overall, teaching staff will need to have a good understanding of child development and know what is appropriate for an infant versus a 4-year-old, for example. And I know a little bit later you're going to talk about the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and how that is a tool that shows the developmental progressions for children to see where they need to go next in terms of learning and development. So, I think the birth to 5 approach is really one of the hallmarks of the Standards.

But Amanda, I wonder if you might tell us a little bit about the curriculum, some of the changes to curriculum assessment, and those intentional effective teaching practices?

Amanda: Well, I would be happy to talk about that, and I am really also very glad for the birth to 5 approach that we've now taken. I remember with the former regulations, sometimes we kind of had to make assumptions about applicability. It wasn't always clear what was for infants and toddlers, or whether something was applicable for all children or just preschool children, so I think that's terrific.

You know that the 2007 Head Start Act, which we call often the Statute, had some really specific provisions related to curriculum and assessment and the Early – Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Those things are now implemented through these regulations. So we talk about requiring an evidenced-based curriculum, and we know a lot of people that – people are going to have questions about that. I'm glad to say there are already quite a few resources available on the ECLKC to help people think about curriculum.

We want to make sure that people are selecting curricula that cover all the domains in our Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, and we talk about those domains being content rich, which means that they are full of opportunities for children to really progress in meaningful ways in those areas.

You know, one of the things that really makes me the happiest of all is when I picture classrooms that are meeting these new requirements and I see places that are full of joy and excitement for teachers and for children where people are really able to pursue interests, where there are opportunities for critical thinking and curiosity, and there really are very rich possibilities for kids.

So evidence-based means the curriculum, that it's built on principles that have been shown to improve child outcomes in those areas. And, you know, the Act also talked about making sure that curricula are comprehensive, covering all the areas of the domain, and linguistically and culturally responsive, as well as developmentally appropriate for children. So I think that's really important.

We also talk about making sure that the assessment instrument that a program uses is collecting information about the areas under the Framework, and that that information can be used both to individualize for children and to help with ongoing program improvements for children.

And finally, I think we've used the word, Sharon, "intentional" for at least a decade. And I think that these regulations can really help people think about what intentional means. And again, that that should support the really enriching learning opportunities that are happening for children, that people are thoughtful about what they're doing and why they do it, and how it is supporting individual children as they progress throughout their time in Head Start and Early Head Start.

And you mention the birth to 5 approach, and again the Framework is now birth to 5. And it offers goals for children, and developmental

progressions that help people know how to plan the experiences children need to help them keep making that progress. And I think one – one of the beauties of the birth to 5 approach is that we know that children develop at different speeds across different areas. And by having the full birth to 5 span, you really – it really increases the ability of teachers to individualize appropriate for all children that they're working with.

I wanted to talk for a minute about parent and family engagement because I think one of the most important elements – components of Head Start since its beginning has been – one of the most unique attributes has been the recognition of parents as partners in their children's development and as the best experts and teachers of their own children. And I think that continues to be articulated through this body of regulations, in that we're very clear that what parents know about their child's interests, strengths, and needs is included in the planning for the child, and that their role as teachers of their children continues to be recognized and supported throughout their time in Head Start and Early Head Start.

And I was wondering, you know, if you also might be able to talk about the approach to dual language learners in these new regulations.

Sharon: Definitely, that was a really great summary. You really packed a lot in, and I know that we're going to have more time in the future with our audience to talk more in detail. The same will be true for this really exciting area. The Standards require programs to implement, as you've already said, specific, strength-based intentional teaching practices for all children, and that includes specific requirements for children who are dual language learners.

So, the new Standards fall into kind of four areas, I would say. And one is a coordinated management approach to ensure the integrated quality services for dual language learners. And the language they use around that is systematically and comprehensively looking at the needs of children and families. And unfortunately, we're not going to talk about that today – that's in the Program Management section – but it really does undergird what we're talking about in terms of the approach for children who are dual language learners.

And so, the second is, which you already alluded to – which is the culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices in the Education section, and then of course, support for families who have children who are dual language learners. And I'd like to also just, again, expand a little bit on what you talked about in terms of assessment as it relates to children who speak languages other than English.

So we've got to coordinated management approach, the teaching and learning practices, the working with families, as well as the culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment practices. So for the section on teaching practices, there's a new requirement that programs implement, an approach for teacher-child interactions that acknowledges bilingualism and bi-literacy as a strength and an asset.

And so, this – we know this is true for our global society in terms of how wonderful it is when we speak a language, more than one language. We want to start that because we know that as children ready themselves for school and in life, that utilizing the language they speak at home is very important.

So there's a lot of research in the field of first and second language development that has come into play in the last 10 years that we drew upon when we wrote the regulations. And so, the best available research indicates that a strong base in the home language supports learning a second language. And so, we're excited about this requirement and know that Head Start programs are leaders in this area, and we're going to continue to move the field forward. So, that's – that's really exciting.

And in this section, the Standards differentiate teaching practices that are developmentally appropriate and based on a child's age. So when we talked before about the birth to 5 approach, this is a good example. So what we say is for infants and toddlers, programs are required to ensure teaching practices and teacher-child interactions focused on home language while also providing experiences in English. And so for preschoolers, the requirement is to focus on English language acquisition and at the same time continue development of the home language. And so, there's a good example of differentiation we've made based on the age and what we know.

In terms of the screening and assessment, assessment specifically, we have a new requirement for programs to assess children who are dual language learners in the language or languages that best captures their skill level, and to assess their language development in both their home language and in English. And in this case, we've put requirements in there on utilizing an interpreter as needed. And again, this reflects the best practices already used by many Head Start programs and the research that demonstrates that children who are dual language learners may be developing at different rates of learning across their two languages.

And we really want to stress that it's critical that screening and assessments be conducted in both languages in order to gain a whole picture of the child to really understand what that child knows, their skills and abilities, not just an understanding that – through one of their languages. So the common thread, I would say, in the Standards is that home language is an asset and viewed as a strength, and it needs to be leveraged in the teaching and learning environment.

Amanda: That's really great to hear, and I want to echo your comment that this has been an important strength of Head Start over the years that we early on recognized the value, the cognitive value and the social and emotional value, of learning more than one language.

I was wondering, though... I know – I think we have in the neighborhood of 150 different languages spoken in Head Start. Is there any flexibility if a program has a child who speaks a language and there is no one who's bilingual and qualified to either administer or interpret for an assessment or a screening; what do programs do in that situation? I know there's some

languages that are quite unusual that may be spoken by one or just a few people in a community.

Sharon: Absolutely, and we could have a whole session on this. But, I'm going to be short and answer your question. Because it's true, there are times where programs won't have a qualified bilingual staff or access to interpreter. And so we know, especially in programs where there are many languages spoken, that you just described, within one classroom or learning environment. And the Standards, they do address this.

They're stating – what we say in the standard is, in some cases, the screening assessment it can be conducted in English, but that the program must gather and use other information to round out that picture of the child, including structured observations of the child over time, and information from families. So while we know that's important for all children, it's extremely important, particularly if the program does not have access to someone who speaks the language of that child.

So I hope that gives some comfort, and we are being responsive because we realize the diversity that we have in Head Start programs, while it is amazingly rich, the field is not where it needs to be in terms of tools needed. So...

Amanda: So, you're not relieved of learning everything you can about a child's status...

Sharon: Absolutely

Amanda: Because you don't have a speaker of the child's language.

Sharon: Exactly. And if we had more time, we'd talk a lot about what we know, what we can learn, without even verbally communicating with the child; but we don't have that time today, Amanda.

Amanda: We'll probably have that time on another occasion, yes.

Sharon: Another time. But I might want to, if I could talk just briefly also around culturally and linguistically responsive practices, because separately the standards in this section and in the body of the regulations continue to require programs to deliver developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate learning experiences in all areas. And I know that's a mouthful, and I know we've used it a lot.

What I hope we've done in these Standards is be a little clearer about what we mean by that expectation and really recognizing that diversity, again, is our strength. And in order to individualize for children, you need to know who they are. You need to know, in many cases, their family traditions, for example. And many programs do an excellent job of this. And so given its import, we continue to include that in the overall requirements.

And I guess the other one I would want to mention is the longstanding requirement that still remains, which is that when a majority of the children speak the same language other than English, a teacher or staff member must speak that language.

Amanda: Great, and I think that what you're describing is one of the ways that we do the best job we possibly can to ensure that children are ready for school. That this responsiveness that we provide helps children grow in their self-competence and in the skills that they need for being successful in school and life.

Sharon: Absolutely. I wonder, can we turn a little bit and could you talk about what the Standards say about inclusion and supports for children with disabilities and delays?

Amanda: Yeah, I sure will, and I would also remind people that we have an introduction for children with disabilities, a similar video, and they can get even more information there. But it's really important that people know that services to children with disabilities are woven throughout these regulations based on the expectation that children who have a delay or an identified disability are full participants in all program services, and that programs make necessary accommodations so that those children can benefit maximally and participate fully.

You mentioned research; there's a lot of research that reflects the benefits of children – of enrolling children with disabilities in inclusive settings. This is beneficial for children with disabilities; it's also beneficial for children who don't have disabilities. It has always been Head Start's practice, and it continues to be a requirement under this set of regulations. I think, you know, that these – there are many changes within this area when you think about the old set of regulations, but the principles about inclusion remain strong.

And we even have some more explicit language about things like, as much as possible providing services within the context of the regular classroom or environment where the child is, not pulling kids out for services, and the importance of serving children as is required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the least restrictive possible environment. So trying to reduce the transitions, for example, either between settings or to and from classrooms in order to deliver services that children need.

We also have more language in these regulations about children who may need an accommodation, or a service, but aren't eligible under IDEA, and what you should do in those circumstances. And I think what you should do may vary; but what should come through is, again, the obligation to enroll eligible children with disabilities, delays, or who need accommodations, and to make sure that those things are in place so we're fully supporting the needs of every child.

And I will just say as I said in the other video, that there's an incredible opportunity to provide early intervention and support during the early childhood years that can far – can significantly lessen the need for later special education or supports as children get older. So we cannot miss this opportunity that we have in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Sharon: That's so great. And I think that the Standards are really clearer in this area, in the way that you've articulated it. I also think people should take advantage of that other short video that really gives a holistic look across the Standards around how children with disabilities should be included and supported.

Amanda: Thanks, Sharon; and I was wondering if you might also be able to talk a little bit about home-based under these regulations.

Sharon: Sure. Well, I think with the home-based option, what we have in the regulation, it really codifies the best practices that many programs have already been implementing. Many may have thought they were required or not. They're new, they're clearer, and they're all in one place. So I think that in and of itself is a great beginning.

I think the home-based approach equally as critical as the center-based, family child care, but necessitates a different approach obviously. The curriculum is still evidenced-based. It's working with parents. And the regulations are more focused on a structured child-focused approach and the role of the home visitor in promoting parents' ability to support the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

I think, again, one of the things that if we haven't said it already, we should just reiterate it, is that we have the same high expectations for children regardless of the program option, and I think this is a good example. We also have the same requirements for screening and assessment. We have the number of socializations; I think we have 22 socializations and 46 visits. And for those who will kind of tune in to another overview likely when we find and when we learn about some things that we have a little longer to implement, this is one where programs have a year to be able to make sure they have the right number of socializations and home visits.

And also, as with all curriculum in Head Start, the home-based curriculum must be developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate. And there are also – there's also language supports for home language. But also exposing children to English and parents also being exposed to English through that process.

Amanda: That's terrific; and it's a little different, the curriculum in home-based, right?

Sharon: Mmhmm.

Amanda: Because it's more geared at supporting the parent as the teacher of the child as opposed to the direct teaching of the child, and that, I think, comes through more clearly in these regulations...

Sharon: Definitely.

Amanda: Than we've had before.

Sharon: It definitely does.

Amanda: So that's terrific. And I might mention, too, that the overall curriculum requirement also has – and the assessment requirements also, we provide a year. We know many programs have been working on curriculum and assessment since the 2007 Act. But we want to make sure that people understand these are not things we think can happen immediately. That it's an opportunity for them to really take a thoughtful approach at how they're – what they're doing, what their curriculum looks like, what its efficacy is, and whether or not they need to consider changing the curriculum or adding a curriculum supplement.

Sharon: Exactly. I think that's really important that programs have the time to do that, and that's what that delayed compliance really means.

Amanda: Yeah, absolutely. And I guess it's been really nice to talk to you. I think this is an exciting time. I mentioned at an earlier training that we believe that when a child is accepted into Head Start, we should be so confident of the quality of the educational opportunity and the family supports that it feels like winning the lottery.

Sharon: Well said.

[Music]