

A Quick Look: Recent EHS NRC Resources to Assist You in Thinking About School Readiness for Infants and Toddlers

Jennifer Boss: Hello. I'm Jennifer Boss, Director of the Early Head Start National Resource Center. I'm pleased to have the next few minutes to share some new resources that are available to all of you as you are thinking about and planning School Readiness Goals specifically for Infants and Toddlers; and considering how they fit in to the Head Start School Readiness Framework as a whole. The ultimate goal for all programs serving infants and toddlers; in child care centers, family child care programs, or at home, is to support their overall well-being, healthy development and competence. It's to give them the foundation they need to become secure and successful preschoolers who will one day become secure and successful kindergarteners, school-agers, teens, and adults. And it takes ready and strong programs, families, and collaborative partnerships with communities to make that happen!

That's what the Revised Framework for Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families is about. The Framework is a visual and informational guide to help programs think about, develop, and put systems into place that support comprehensive child development and family support services that lead to the best outcomes possible for very young children and their families; including expectant families. It reminds programs about the importance of building trusting, respectful relationships with families that integrate their values, beliefs, and caregiving practices. It stresses the role of trust and attachment as the context for young children's learning and development in the five essential domains -- physical and health, social and emotional, approaches toward learning, language and literacy, and cognition and general knowledge. It also offers a gateway to information on providing a foundation for school readiness and considerations in implementing high quality programs for infants, toddlers, and their families and serves as a link to resources to help programs provide that strong foundation -- like: action steps programs must take to help infants and toddlers get ready for success in kindergarten and beyond, materials that help you to develop school readiness goals for infants and toddlers, and others.

All Head Start agencies are now required to establish program goals for improving the school readiness of children from birth to five in their care, and to follow certain steps to achieve those goals. What do the steps look like -- and what else should programs consider as they implement them? Another important resource: The School Readiness Action Steps for Infants and Toddlers can help you as you work through these kinds of questions in your program. There are four action steps outlined in the document: 1) To establish goals for improving school readiness across domains; 2) To create and implement an action plan for achieving the established school readiness goals; 3) To assess child progress on an ongoing basis and aggregate and analyze data at multiple times throughout the year; and 4) To examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to revise, or develop and implement plans for program improvement.

These are the same four action steps that Head Start programs serving preschool children follow. But the information included here that describes and supports each step reflects the unique characteristics of infants and toddlers and the programs that serve them. Babies are born ready to learn. Caring adults encourage this capacity by providing very young children with the experiences and nurturing

relationships they need to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are related to their later success in school and in life. This idea is at the heart of school readiness for infants and toddlers. Through school readiness goals, program staff and families can identify specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes and help infants and toddlers develop them by choosing the most effective strategies, curriculum, and assessments.

But how do the goals actually look? And what unique characteristics of infants and toddlers should programs think about as they develop their goals? Another important and helpful resource available to you is the School Readiness Goals for Infants and Toddlers in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs: Examples from the Early Head Start National Resource Center. This document provides information to help guide these decisions. In addition to identifying the Head Start regulations that require programs to develop school readiness goals, this resource describes in detail what is unique about school readiness for infants and toddlers and offers examples of school readiness goals for each of the five essential domains. And because the path of development toward any goal may look different at different times during the first three years of life, it also provides additional descriptions related to each goal for young infants, older infants and toddlers.

As you have seen, all of these resources are available to you via the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, or the ECLKC, Head Start's online portal for information and resources located at www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov where you can view them or download them to your computer. Creating school readiness goals for Infants and toddlers is foundational work that needs to be carefully tailored and individualized for the setting, families, communities and children in your local area.

Sometimes doing this work can feel like a daunting task; but we hope that the resources shared will support you as you create the framework from which you provide the caring, quality, comprehensive programming that Early Head Start is known for. You can look us up on the ECLKC at www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov or contact the Early Head Start National Resource Center at ehsnrcinfo@zerotothree.org for more resources that can assist you in your work. This is Jennifer Boss at the Early Head Start National Resource Center wishing you all the best in your work.