Introducing the New Head Start Program Performance Standards

Overview: Program Management

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Dr. Blanca Enriquez: Welcome to this overview on how the new Performance Standards address Program Management. I want to introduce Ann Linehan and David Jones to discuss how the new Standards establish the roles and responsibilities for a program's management system and set requirements for data driven management system for continuous improvement toward high quality service delivery.

David Jones: Hello everyone. Ann, it's good to be with you again. We are going to sort of talk about Program Management Subpart J, and quality improvement, and some important changes in this approach.

Ann Linehan: Correct, well let me start. I am glad to be with you also. And I think we could say this for all sections of the Head Start Performance Standards, but these are really grounded in research, which really is going to inform effective practices.

I think our colleagues remind us that this section really is a sister section to Subpart B, which really talks about the structure. And I think I just want to draw the comparison because Subpart B is sort of very prescriptive. You know what the ratios are. You know what the options are. You know when you have to apply for a waiver.

And then, you morph over to Subpart J and it feels very different. It feels less prescriptive, and I think we really are looking at this section to really think about how programs are going to implement their services, how they are going to monitor their services, and we can't tell them how to do that, because we don't know what their structure of services are. So this is really an area, section, where there is a lot of critical thinking. I like to call it, the hot section, because it's a high order thinking skills. You are going to need a lot of communication, a lot of deliberate, intentional planning. You know what your structure is, now what systems do you have to put in place to really manage that.

And I think one of the elements that are throughout this section is the use of data, ongoing data. Again, to inform the governing body, management, and staff, about how effectively services are being implemented. And I think when it comes to the timeliness and the flexibility, we are also saying that your systems should be such that they are adjusting continually so there is no lapse in services, or there is no displacement of children if you are changing an option, or you are not running out of money because you didn't anticipate that you would need additional dollars for new playground equipment, so kids have adequate outdoor space to play in.

I think, and again it gets back to this section also, establishing the goals. One key feature is again, there is a much stronger emphasis on using program data for ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement. Again, I think it is less about the how and more about focusing on really what the intended outcomes are.

David: I really like the flexibility piece. I think that there are four sections in this Subpart, Subpart J. 1302.100 really focuses on management, the ongoing monitoring, as you said, and also continuous improvement. So it really highlights the importance of ensuring child safety and delivery of effective, high quality program services. I think 1302.101 speaks to implementation of the management systems and the coordinated approaches.

The management systems are not broken out as they were in the previous Performance Standards, but the emphasis is really on these coordinated approaches in four key areas. It's training and professional development, servicing dual language learners and their families, ensuring the inclusion and appropriate support for children with disabilities, which is not really new, and management of program data. And really what we are looking for here is full integration. Programs may develop and implement coordinated approaches in additional areas, but these four are required.

Ann: When you think about the coordinated approach, I mean really if you take the example of dual language learners, the coordination is not just about what happens in the classroom, you have got to think about your family service workers. You have got to think about budgetary implications. You have got to think about bus drivers. It really is, if you are going to fully serve a dual language learner, then it cuts across all service areas and multiple staff.

Let's go into a brief overview of 1302.102, and that broadly addresses the achievement of program goals. Again, we are talking about establishing program goals, including, again, the strategic long-term goals for comprehensive services, school readiness goals, and health and safety goals. That's a lot of goals to be establishing. When you think about the effort, the deliberateness, the conversations that have to go on before you even get to that point where you are really understanding the goals. And again, a heavy emphasis on asking programs to demonstrate how they are going to monitor program performance, and be held accountable. I think that that's really important. It's not just that you have got goals, it's now being held accountable to showing what progress you are making in those goals.

And I think the other thing that is interesting here is, they really have to have now, not just the goals, but the measurable, the objectives that accompany the goals that can measure the progress. So I think that that really is a key step in helping programs better articulate and understand how, across many, many service areas, how progress is being made. And again, we talk here about in establishing program goals, we are not overly prescriptive. Again, there is flexibility. Certainly, there are requirements around school readiness, that those goals be aligned with the Framework as well as the Early Learning Standards within the states.

Again, this is not — When you read these, it doesn't mean you got to do away with all your goals. It's just to reevaluate where you are, and are you meeting these new requirements? And I think in many programs they are going to say: we are already there. We are already doing it. And for many programs it will be validation of what they are doing. And again, I just want to mention the importance of using now the requirement of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, which I think, when it was published, we got such positive response. So again, to have it codified in the regulations I think it's really important. And again, just end with the using data for quality improvement throughout the year on a continuum basis.

David: So, 1302.103 essentially addresses requirements for the implementation of the actual Performance Standards. Current programs at the time of publication of the new regs. will implement a program-wide approach for effective and timely implementation of the changes to the Standards. That's including things like purchasing materials, allocation of staff time, as appropriate.

Areas of emphasis here also include assessment of the necessary changes to the program, approaches as described in 1302.101, and the development of appropriate protections with data sharing. There is also a prohibition on displacing currently enrolled children in order to implement the new Standards. This is a really important cross reference back to 1302.21 Subpart B, which allows for a one year extension of service duration if it's necessary to prevent displacement. Just a few final thoughts in areas that we would like for you to focus on.

Just ensure that the goals are not only strong, but they are measurable and they have great objectives. That you remember the key areas for the coordinated approaches, the ongoing analysis and action, and finally, the creation of thoughtful systems supporting intentional implementation of structure.

Ann: And again, this section is what is going to allow you to fill what you have developed, what grantees have developed in this Subpart B, their structure.

David: That's correct.

Ann: Thanks.

David: Thank you.

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