School Readiness Action Steps for Infants and Toddlers

All Head Start agencies must establish program goals for improving the school readiness of participating children, birth to five; and follow steps to achieve these goals **(45 CFR XIII 1307.3 (b)(1)&(2), as amended)**.

This document will help Head Start agencies providing birth-to-three services meet the needs of infants and toddlers when using the *Four Strategic Steps* outlined in ACF-PI-HS-11-04.

## 1 Establish Goals for Improving School Readiness Across Domains;

- Set appropriate goals for infants and toddlers that address each of the five essential domains (see sidebar).

- Goals should reflect:
  - Rapid growth and development of infants and toddlers;
  - The significance of learning within trusting relationships; and
  - The importance of continuity of care.

- For programs with birth-to-five services, decide if it's best to have:
  - One set of goals for children, birth-to-five; or
  - Separate infant/toddler goals that align with preschool goals.

- Ensure goals are appropriate for infant and toddlers and provide the foundation for future learning through alignment with State's early learning guidelines, as appropriate, and requirements and expectations of schools children will be attending.

- Engage parents and community partners providing birth-to-three services in the goal setting process.

Goals are broad statements that convey the highest developmental achievement children should reach through program services.

The five essential domains are:

1. Physical development and health;
2. Social and emotional development;
3. Language and literacy development;
4. Cognition and general knowledge; and
5. Approaches to learning.

These domains are represented by the inner wheel at the center of the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (HSCDELF).
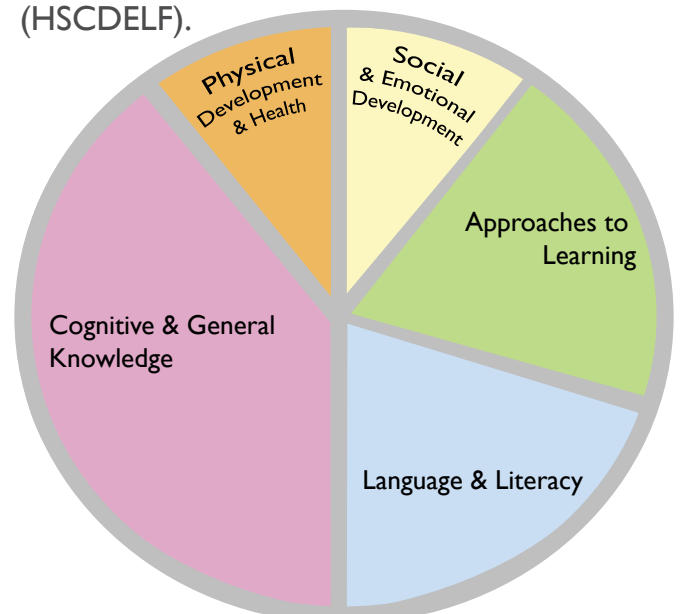
2 Create and implement an action plan for achieving the established school readiness goals;

- Use curriculum, program strategies and care practices that:
  - Reflect the varying developmental needs of infants and toddlers;
  - Support children's progress toward goals; and
- Foster family engagement, healthy parent-child relationships, and parents' efforts to support their child's ongoing growth and learning.
- Make sure teachers, home visitors, families and community partners delivering services understand the goals and know how to support children's progress.
- Provide training and professional development on implementing high quality practices that support infant and toddler development (i.e. responsive care).

3 Assess child progress on an ongoing basis and aggregate and analyze data at multiple times throughout the year; and

- Have a systematic process to collect and analyze child assessment data.
- Ensure the ongoing process and tools used for child assessment:
  - Provide information about behaviors, skills and knowledge areas for each goal; and
  - Are sensitive to the rapid development of infants and toddlers.
- Collect and study data at least three times per year, or two times for programs operating less than 90 days.

  Look at program-level progress using norms or criterion references for same-age infants and toddlers when available.
- Use the mid-point data gathering/study time as a chance to make changes, if needed.

  Identify ways to enhance the curriculum, program strategies, and/or care practices used with infants and toddlers to help them reach the goals.
- Use information learned from ongoing child assessment to create individual plans for children that include strategies for staff and parents to support each child's progress across domains.

4 Examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to revise, or develop and implement plans for program improvement.

- Look for patterns of progress and outcomes in groups of infants and toddlers served by the program.

  Decide what groupings (e.g., by ages, rates of attendance, program option or setting, language groups, or risk factors) will best inform your program assessment, quality, and improvement plans.

- Use the information learned through the child assessment data to inform program self-assessment and improve program services.

- Implement strategies to enhance program performance and design so all children succeed, such as adjusting the:
  - Focus or frequency of training and support for staff;
  - Type of strategies for engaging families; and
  - Type or intensity of services.

Assessment data for groups of infants and toddlers:

- Should be looked at separately from data on preschool-aged children.

- May have a smaller sample size than groups of preschool-aged children due to:

  » Wider range of ages;
  » Rapid growth rate;
  » Lower caregiver-child ratios;
  » Mixed-age groups and
  » Different program options and settings.