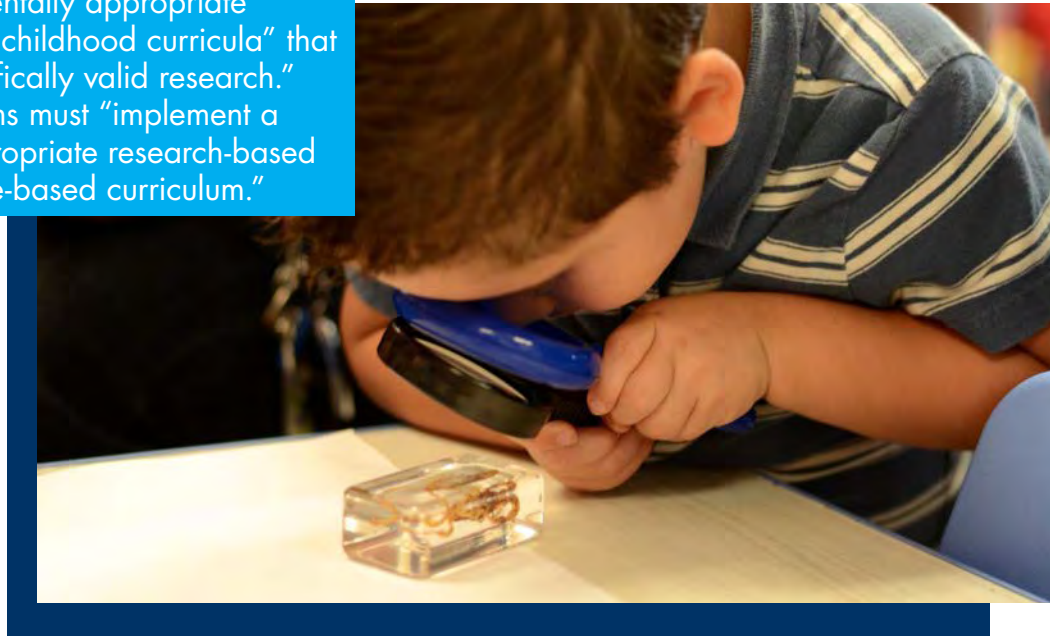


Research-Based Curriculum

Head Start Program Performance Standards §1302.32(a)(1) and §1302.35(d)(1): “Center-based and family child care programs must implement developmentally appropriate research-based early childhood curricula” that “are based on scientifically valid research.” Home-based programs must “implement a developmentally appropriate research-based early childhood home-based curriculum.”



What does “research-based” mean for early childhood curriculum?

- Is founded on solid research about child development and learning
- Promotes teaching and learning activities that are shown to have positive effects on child progress and outcomes
- Has descriptive research or evaluation reflecting child progress, but is lacking evidence from randomized control study

A research-based early childhood curriculum is consistent with research on how children develop and learn. It provides rich content and teaching practices that are shown to support children’s learning and development. A research-based curriculum focuses on **domain-specific, developmentally appropriate** content and skills that contribute to children’s later development in that domain. A research-based curriculum is also **content-rich**, meaning that it provides broad and varied experiences and activities that promote children’s learning and development. A rich curriculum **invites children to think deeply** about content that interests them and builds on their prior knowledge and experiences. Finally, a research-based curriculum offers a **sequence of learning experiences** based on children’s developmental progressions. There are both comprehensive research-based curricula that address all areas of the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* (ELOF) and domain-specific curricula that the Head Start Program Performance Standards refer to as curricular enhancements, also sometimes referred to as curriculum supplements.

Why is a research-based curriculum important?

A research-based curriculum promotes domain-specific teaching practices that are effective in supporting positive child outcomes. A research-based curriculum must be appropriate for the ages, developmental levels, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children enrolled in the program.

What does a research-based curriculum look like?

Read the following vignette to learn about how Sunny Days Early Head Start’s research-based curriculum supports infants’ and toddlers’ social and emotional development.

Sunny Days Early Head Start uses a research-based infant and toddler curriculum. For social and emotional development, the curriculum focuses on developmentally appropriate goals to support the development of infants’ and toddlers’ relationships with adults and peers, emotional functioning, and sense of identity. The curriculum reflects relevant child development theories, such as attachment theory. For example, the curriculum describes how learning happens in the context of warm, responsive relationships. When adults respond warmly and appropriately to infants’ and toddlers’ cues, they develop trusting and secure relationships with adults. Children use trusted adults as a secure base from which to explore the environment.

Sunny Days Early Head Start’s curriculum also describes children’s developmental progressions, such as developing secure relationships with familiar adults. As part of this progression, young infants rely on the efforts of familiar adults to help them cope with stressful moments. Older toddlers are able to seek out familiar adults for comfort as needed. The curriculum then provides specific research-based practices to help infants and toddlers develop secure relationships with familiar adults. It recommends consistent routines, interactions, and communication with parents to learn about children’s preferences and routines. The curriculum provides examples of how to interact positively and warmly with infants and toddlers (e.g., peek-a-boo), observe and respond to individual cues, and convey warmth and affection.

What do you learn about a research-based curriculum from this vignette?

- Sunny Days Early Head Start’s curriculum focuses on developmentally appropriate, important goals in social and emotional development. The curriculum aligns with the sub-domains of the Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) in this area.
- The curriculum is guided by robust knowledge and theory of social and emotional development (e.g., attachment theory).
- The curriculum describes children’s developmental progressions and offers concrete, research-based practices to help education staff build trusting relationships with infants and toddlers.

Resources to Support Your Work

Interactive Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five. Select a domain, and scroll to the bottom for a list of “Related Resources” to learn more about children’s learning and development described in the ELOF and how to support it.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/interactive-head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework-ages-birth-five>

Planned Language Approach (PLA). The PLA is a comprehensive, systemic, research-based way for Head Start and Early Head Start programs to ensure optimal language and literacy services for children who speak English and for those who are dual language learners.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach>

Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) Effective Practice Guides. This set of resources provides research-based teaching practices in each of the ELOF domains and sub-domains.



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