

Using Data to Tell a Story: Tailoring a Data Story for Different Audiences

Head Start Program Performance Standard §1302.101 (b)(4): At the beginning of each program year, and on an ongoing basis throughout the year, a program must design and implement program-wide coordinated approaches that ensure: the management of program data to effectively support the availability, usability, integrity, and security of data. A program must establish procedures on data management, and have them approved by the governing body and policy council, in areas such as quality of data and effective use and sharing of data, while protecting the privacy of child records in accordance with subpart C of part 1303 of this chapter and applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws.

The purpose of this tip sheet is to help programs effectively share data by tailoring data to specific audiences. Use this tip sheet to learn more about the importance of determining an audience’s knowledge level and the depth of information that they need to listen, understand, and act based on your data.

Data reveal the unique story of your program, your staff, and the children and families that you serve. You have a responsibility to provide them with data about your program. You determine how to tell that story so others will listen, understand, and act. You might tell your data story by giving a presentation to families, providing a written report to staff, or developing an interactive module on a web page. Tailoring your story for each audience will make sure that your data have the greatest impact.

Why tell your data story?

Ask yourself what you want the audience to feel, think, or do after hearing your data story.

- Are you trying to inform your audience? Perhaps you are trying to draw attention to a success, a concern, or share a special feature of your program? For example, data shown in Figure 1 feature your entire program, while the data in Figure 2 focus on a specific age group—highlighting a potential problem (i.e., 47% of the children in this age group are performing below expectations).

Figure 1. Social and Emotional Development Birth to 5

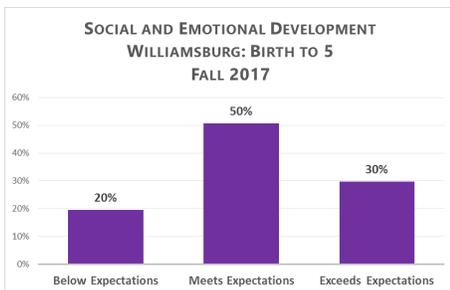


Figure 2. Social and Emotional Development Birth to 12 Months

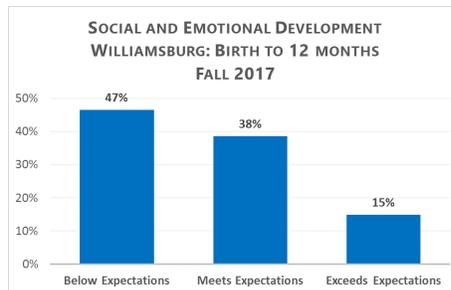
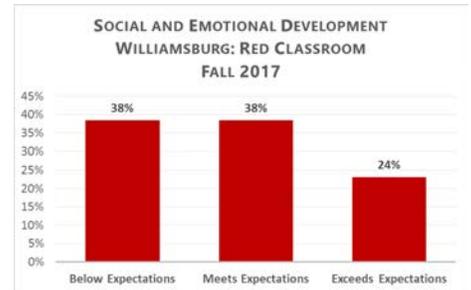


Figure 3. Social and Emotional Development Red Classroom



- Will the presentation of these data serve as the basis for discussion? Presenting the data in Figure 2 to infant teachers can serve as a discussion starter. These data may prompt teachers to want to dig a little deeper. In Figure 3, for example, a specific infant classroom is examined and might provide further discussion points for the teachers in the Red Classroom.
- Are you presenting these data to help the audience make a decision? Presenting Figure 3 to the infant teachers in the Red Classroom may help them decide whether they need individualized plans for specific children, professional development, or parent-child activities.

Who is your audience?

You will also need to define the audience who you will share your data story with.

- What do they already know about the topic(s)?
- Categorize your audience based on their knowledge of the topic—not just their knowledge of data. For example, what do they know about the social and emotional development of young children?
- Ask your audience the following questions when you are determining how to present your data:

Are they novices, experts, or generalists?

- Novice—has no or very little knowledge about this topic.
- Generalist—has some general knowledge about this topic.
- Expert—has an abundance of knowledge about this topic.

Knowing the audience’s familiarity with assessment tool(s) and experience reviewing data will help you tailor your data presentation. For example, if you are reporting on child assessment data from TS Gold or COR and your audience is familiar with these tools, you won't need to spend as much time describing them. Likewise, if your audience is familiar with reading and understanding data charts and displays, you'll be able to spend more time discussing your data and less time explaining how to interpret your data displays.

Listed below are some of the audiences you might share data with. Are they novices? Generalists? Experts? Is it possible for a potential audience to fit into more than one category? For example, teachers in one program may be novices while they might be experts in another.

- Parents
- Child and family service staff (e.g., teachers, home visitors, family child care providers, family service workers)
- Coordinators/mid-management
- Governing body or policy council
- Community partners

What does your audience need?

Figure 1. Social and Emotional Development Birth to 5

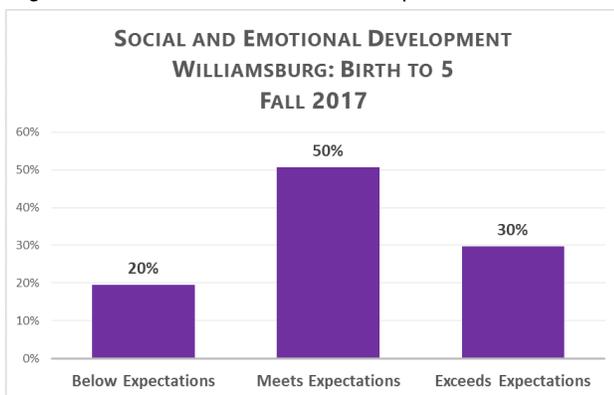
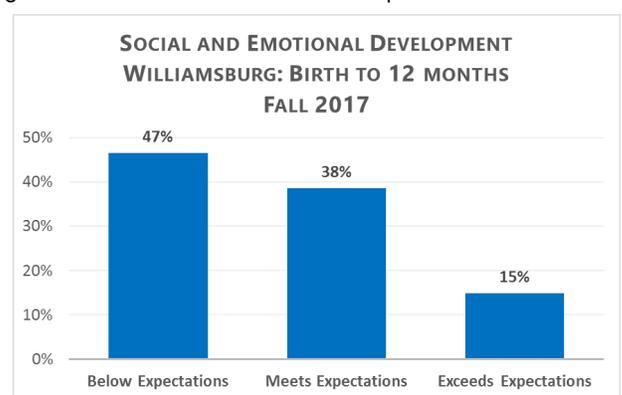


Figure 2. Social and Emotional Development Birth to 12 Months



Think about whether your audience needs big picture data or more detailed data (i.e., macro vs. micro). Figure 1 depicts big picture data. This chart shows the social and emotional development data for all children, ages birth to five, in the Williamsburg Program. This provides your audience with information about all children’s social and emotional developmental status. Figure 2, on the other hand, provides more details—depicting the social and emotional development data for children birth to 12 months in the Williamsburg Program.

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These data would be more appropriate for the home visitor manager or coordinator for the infant and toddler program, since it provides decision-making information about the children ages birth to 12 months. These data tell the audience that there may be a problem in infants' social and emotional development in the Williamsburg Program, since almost half of the children are performing below expectations.

Classroom level data, as shown in Figure 3, show the front line staff, such as teachers, family child care providers, or home visitors, how the children they serve are doing. Front line staff may then use these data to plan and instruct. They may incorporate new routines or activities into daily practice to address the needs of the children who are not meeting expectations.

Figure 4 provides even more detailed information for the teachers, family child care providers, or home visitors. It shows how each individual child is progressing socially and emotionally. With these data, front line staff may develop individualized activities or plans to meet the developmental needs of each child.

Figure 3. Social and Emotional Development: Red Classroom

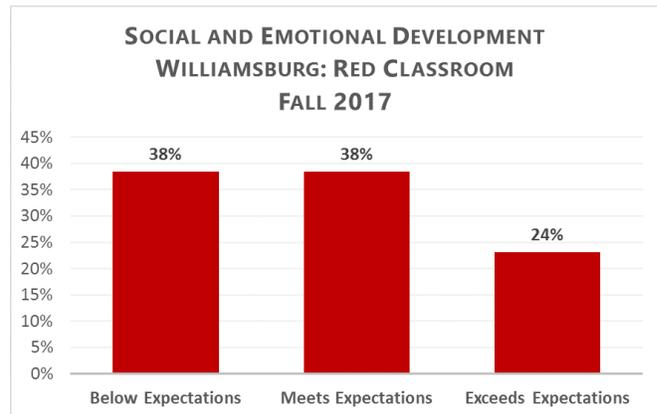
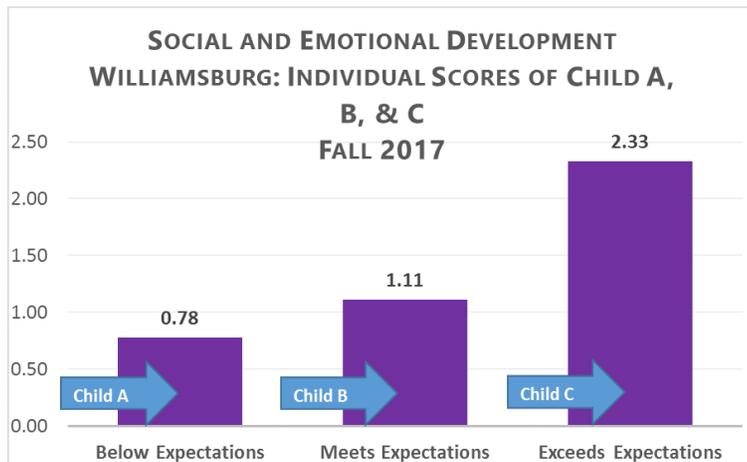


Figure 4. Social and Emotional Development: Individual Scores



Conclusion

In order to help your audience listen, understand, and act based on your data, you must tailor the way you present it to specific audiences. Data-informed decision making relies on data that are accurate, audience-specific, appealing, and accessible. As you use this tip sheet, take steps to ensure that your data are audience-specific, appealing, and accessible. Suggested resources from the National Center on Early Childhood

Development, Teaching, and Learning,

the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, and the National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations can help you ensure you are planning and implementing an effective use of data to inform a coordinated approach to continuous quality improvement.

Resources:

- Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Support Family Progress <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/measuring-what-matters-using-data-support-family-progress>
- Ongoing Monitoring: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/organizational-leadership/article/ongoing-monitoring>
- Using data to inform teaching: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/using-data-inform-teaching>

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