

# A Systems Approach to Language and Literacy Organizational Capacity Checklist

## A Language and Literacy Data Tool

The language and literacy skills that children develop from birth to age five are key predictors of their school readiness and later school success. Therefore language and literacy skills are critically important to the mission of every Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) program.

## A Planning Tool

As Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) programs move through each 5-year grant cycle and develop their funding applications, they align all the key program components—including language and literacy practices and goals—to their Program, School Readiness, and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement goals.

This checklist is a tool EHS/HS programs can use to track their implementation of high-quality language and literacy practices, measure progress, and continue to expand and perfect their language and literacy services.

**As part of the annual grant application process, the OCC data, in combination with other program data, helps leaders:**

- Address the five subsections of the Program Design and Approach narrative: Goals; Service Delivery; Approach to School Readiness; Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE); and Governance, Organizational, and Management Structure and Ongoing Oversight
- Identify and describe resources for the Budget and Budget Justification narrative
- Track the implementation of language and literacy efforts (including program change, teacher change, and child progress) during each year of the 5-year grant project period
- Collect and analyze data to ensure that all children are making enough progress in language and literacy skills to close any achievement gap they may have experienced when they entered EHS/HS
- Identify the steps they will take at the agency, classroom, and home-visit levels to ensure that they are continuously improving early language and literacy services and outcomes each year

**The OCC is strategically divided into two sections to ensure that:**

- All managers, board members, Policy Council members, and staff are committed to the vision of providing high-quality, research-based, language and literacy services for all children
- Program-wide systems specifically integrate strong language and literacy practices into the fabric of the program and actively seek to continually improve language and literacy services and positive outcomes for all children and families



## Section 1: Agency Commitment

### Governing Bodies

Focusing with the board and Policy Council on child progress as a measure of program success	-				+
	1	2	3	4	5
The board and Policy Council include representatives from the ethnic/cultural groups identified in the program's service area.					
The board and Policy Council members have been trained in the Head Start Act, Head Start Program Performance Standards, and the Early Learning Outcomes Framework, including those that pertain to dual language learners (DLLs).					
The board and Policy Council members receive ongoing updates regarding language and literacy practices, services, and outcomes.					
The board and Policy Council review language and literacy outcomes data for each subgroup of children and make recommendations for changes as needed.					

### Program Management Team (including the Director of Fiscal Operations)

Ensuring optimal child progress leading to school readiness and school success	
A team has been established to plan and implement language and literacy services and outcomes.	
The program's planning and self-assessment processes address the implementation of language and literacy practices.	
The program's monitoring and recordkeeping systems review and assess the program's language and literacy services and make adjustments as needed.	
The program, child, and family goals reflect the agency's commitment to the use of high-quality language and literacy practices with all children.	
The program's training and technical assistance (T/TA) plans and professional development opportunities focus on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building the capacity of staff to support language and literacy for all children,</li> <li>• engaging diverse families, and</li> <li>• providing high-quality translation and interpretation services.</li> </ul>	

**Program Management Team (including the Director of Fiscal Operations)**  
*continued*

<b>Ensuring optimal child progress leading to school readiness and school success</b>	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
The program management team selects, plans, and implements the specific Classroom Language Models (CLMs)* that match the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• skills of the teachers,</li> <li>• language(s) of the children, and</li> <li>• priorities of the program.</li> </ul>						

**All Staff**

<b>Supporting cultural and linguistic responsiveness</b>	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
All staff members throughout the agency embrace the agency’s commitment to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural diversity,</li> <li>• supporting home language, and</li> <li>• specific support for DLLs.</li> </ul>						
Community assessments explicitly seek out new groups of families.						
Each person on the staff knows his or her specific role in supporting DLLs and their families and can articulate that role and its impact on child outcomes to others.						

\* See the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center website (ECLKC) for more information on Classroom Language Models.

## Section 1 Summary

1. Review the scores in Section 1 above.
2. Consider the School Readiness Goals; Program Goals; and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Goals that are part of your grant to ensure that they address the key aspects of children's language and literacy development.
3. Identify your areas of need and areas in which you want to strive for excellence.
4. Note any areas that are of concern and that need to be addressed.
5. After a full review of the above, select the items you will begin to work on next as you infuse language and literacy services and outcomes into your reapplication and continue to enhance language and literacy services to children and families.

Notes:

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## Section 2: Systems That Integrate Language and Literacy Into the Fabric of the Program

### Responsible Staff:

HS/EHS Director, Education Manager, Human Resources Manager

Ensuring high-quality teaching practices	-					+				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
The program's hiring and interview processes include active participation by members of the Human Resources department and the Education Manager.										
Program leaders ensure that job descriptions and ads for teaching applicants clearly state the knowledge and skills that applicants must have for teaching language and literacy development to young children.										
Job descriptions clearly state the expectation that teaching staff* are high-quality language models in all their languages and that they strongly support continued home language development.										
Bilingual applicants are observed interacting with children whose language they speak by someone who knows the language well and can evaluate the quality of the interactions.										
Teaching staff applicants are observed in a classroom, or some other setting with children, so that their interactions with children can be observed, and the agency can ensure that applicants have the skills required.										
Bilingual applicants' written and spoken language skills are evaluated as part of the hiring process.										
Supervisors and coaching staff regularly conduct classroom observations and provide teaching staff with frequent feedback and information about the specific teaching skills on which staff are working to improve.										
Following targeted professional development and/or mentoring and coaching, each teacher's changes in skill level (positive and negative) are noted in his or her performance review.										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations for change in practice are clearly outlined.</li> </ul>										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive skill improvement is well documented.</li> </ul>										

\* **NOTE: "Teaching staff" refers to all staff members who work in classrooms daily—including teachers and teacher assistants.**

## Responsible Staff:

HS/EHS Director, Education Manager, Human Resources Manager, *continued*

Ensuring high-quality teaching practices	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
Staff throughout the program have a clear plan for how they will conduct developmental screenings with children for whom there are currently no valid or reliable screening instruments (i.e., virtually all children who speak a language other than English or Spanish).						
Screening procedures ensure that children who are DLLs are given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in both their home language and English and that their full body of knowledge is measured.						
There are clearly stated hiring expectations for teaching staff* which are verified prior to hiring.						
The program implements specific Classroom Language Models, as appropriate, and takes into account:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language(s) spoken by the children</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language(s) spoken by the teaching staff*</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priorities and resources of the district/agency</li> </ul>						
Because children are highly capable observers of their environments, and extremely responsive to the language models they experience, the program:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has teachers who model language well, all day and every day</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses specific, research-based language strategies that promote school readiness and success</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that teachers who speak only English and who work with DLLs know and use strategies that promote children’s continual English acquisition</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that teachers who speak only English and who work with DLLs know and use strategies that promote children’s continual English acquisition and that they change strategies as children learn and develop their language skills</li> </ul>						

\* **NOTE: “Teaching staff” refers to all staff members who work in classrooms daily—including teachers and teacher assistants.**

## Responsible Staff:

HS/EHS Director, Education Manager, Human Resources Manager, *continued*

Ensuring high-quality teaching practices	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
Because children are highly capable observers of their environments, and extremely responsive to the language models they experience, the program also:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensures that teachers who speak only English and who work with DLLs focus on the Big 5 and a documented use of good language modeling skills (see ECLKC for more information on teachers as good language models)</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides ongoing, intentional professional development that supports the implementation of high-quality language and literacy practices with children whose home language is English and those who are DLLs</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides professional development and coaching to ensure that all teaching staff* are good language models</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focuses intentional professional development on ensuring that the home language of DLLs is well supported in all classrooms and on home visits</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides training that supports family engagement staff to deepen their skills in supporting home language</li> </ul>						

\* **NOTE: "Teaching staff" refers to all staff members who work in classrooms daily—including teachers and teacher assistants.**

## Responsible Staff:

HS/EHS Director, Education Manager, Human Resources Manager

Hiring teaching staff* and ensuring high-quality teaching practices	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
Ongoing mentoring/coaching is focused on the goal of refining teaching practices so that children become more and more proficient in English and, where applicable, in their home language.						
Processes are in place to track and acknowledge teacher progress and changes in practice.						
Processes are in place to address instances of inadequate teacher progress.						
The program T/TA plan for staff and families addresses all the components of a comprehensive, research-based language and literacy model, including:						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First and second language development</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Big 5 components of language and literacy development—i.e., Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing, Background Knowledge, Book Knowledge and Print, Oral Language and Vocabulary, and Phonological Awareness</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home language support for DLLs</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies that support DLLs to master English</li> </ul>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit, written plans for how Education Managers will ensure that teaching staff intentionally promote children’s first and second language development</li> </ul>						

\* **NOTE: “Teaching staff” refers to all staff members who work in classrooms daily—including teachers and teacher assistants.**

## Responsible Staff:

### The Director and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Manager

Ensuring high-quality Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) services for all families	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
The program's hiring and interview processes include participation by members of the Human Resources department and the PFCE Manager.						
Hiring expectations for teaching staff are clearly stated and verified prior to hiring.						
Job descriptions clearly state that family engagement staff should value and strongly support continued home language development.						
Job descriptions clearly state the expectation that PFCE staff members are high-quality language models in all the languages required by their jobs.						
PFCE staff are skilled at communicating with families about the importance of using their home language at home.						
PFCE staff can describe how important home language support is to developing and learning English.						
PFCE staff are culturally competent and ready to learn about families whose cultures and lifeways are new to them.						
Newly hired PFCE staff are oriented to the program's commitment to home language support and made aware of the materials that support these efforts that are available on the ECLKC website and in other places identified by the program.						
Ongoing professional development and coaching ensure that all PFCE staff support and encourage families in teaching their children the home languages throughout their childhood.						

## Responsible Staff:

### Human Resources (HR) Staff

Ensuring high-quality policies and practices for translation/ interpretation	-					+					
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
The program's hiring and interview processes include participation by the Human Resources department and the staff managing the translation and interpretation services.											
Essential qualifications for both translators and interpreters are clearly stated prior to hiring.											
Job descriptions and consultant agreements clearly state that interpreters and translators should value and strongly support continued home language development.											
Job descriptions for translators and interpreters include clear descriptions of required skills.											
Requirements for translators and interpreters contracted from outside agencies are specified in writing.											
Translators being considered for hire are asked to translate a document for a specific set of families. The translated document is reviewed by a person who is a fluent reader and writer of that language and is familiar with the families' culture.											
Interpreters being considered for hire engage in an interview activity that requires them to interpret between two people, one of whom speaks both languages well enough to judge the level of skill of the interpreter.											
Interpreters hired to work with children have experience working with children or a basic knowledge of child development.											
Interpreters and translators are fully qualified, well trained, and conscientiously supervised.											
Interpreters and translators are informed about agency standards of confidentiality, professional ethics, and professional boundaries, and are evaluated on their adherence to those standards.											
Interpreters and translators are provided ongoing professional development to enhance their translation and/or interpretation skills.											
When contacts are made outside the agency for translators and interpreters, the program ensures that these translators and interpreters are aware of and follow the ethics of the profession.											

### Responsible Staff:

#### Human Resources (HR) Staff

Ensuring high-quality language models and services in all aspects of the program	-					+					
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Evaluations ensure that <i>all</i> staff use research-based language and literacy practices that promote children’s learning in all of their languages.											
All staff members are good language models for children.											
All staff members are skilled in connecting with and supporting families.											
HR staff members take part in planning the implementation of new Classroom Language Models (CLM).											

### Responsible Staff:

#### HS/EHS Director, Education Manager, Human Resources Manager

Ensuring complete and timely compliance with focused monitoring efforts	-					+					
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
As changes are identified, next steps are developed and clearly articulated.											
The data-collection process and rationale are clearly stated.											
Staff progress in specific skills is documented.											
What data will be collected and at what intervals are clearly articulated.											
The progress DLLs are making in each of their languages for which there are valid and reliable instruments is tracked.											
When there are no available instruments to track the progress that DLLs are making in each of their languages, alternate means of tracking children’s progress are specifically stated.											
The progress of children whose only language is English is monitored.											
Families’ efforts in supporting their children’s home language(s) are documented.											

### Responsible Staff:

#### Education Manager

Ensuring an environment that supports excellence in language and literacy services	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
Staff members are observed to ensure that they are fully adhering to the assigned CLM.						
Support is provided to all staff members for continuous improvement.						

### Responsible Staff:

#### Budget and Fiscal Staff

Ensuring that the program's budget and fiscal operations support excellence in language and literacy services	-					+
	1	2	3	4	5	
Pay is increased to compensate staff with specific skills (e.g., fluency in multiple languages, developing new skills and using them well, etc.).						
Translators and interpreters are rewarded as they improve their skills.						
Funds are budgeted for culturally appropriate books, games, posters, and other materials to support high-quality language and literacy practices.						
Funds are budgeted for professional development related to language and literacy services and outcomes, home language, and culture (for groups and individuals).						
Funds are budgeted for training the board, Policy Council, family, and community volunteers.						

## Section 2 Summary

1. Review the scores in Section 2 above.
2. Consider the School Readiness Goals; Program Goals; and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Goals that are part of your grant to ensure that they address the key aspects of children’s language and literacy development.
3. Identify your areas of need and areas in which you want to strive for excellence.
4. Note any areas that are of concern and that need to be addressed.
5. After a full review of the above, select the items you will begin to work on next as you infuse language and literacy services and outcomes into your reapplication and continue to enhance language and literacy services to children and families.

### Notes:

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