

STANDARDS IN ACTION

COORDINATED APPROACH TO SUPPORTING DUAL-LANGUAGE LEARNERS – 1302.101(b)(2)



THE CURRENT SITUATION

Nancy, Director of Rocky Hills Early Head Start/Head Start, has noticed some changing demographics of children and families in the communities served by the program. Since it is time in the program's planning process to conduct a community needs assessment, Nancy decides this is a good opportunity to identify new or underserved children and families, assess their needs, and identify programmatic and existing community resources to meet the needs. Nancy knows this is critical for supporting the delivery and continuous improvement of high-quality program services.

Through the yearly community assessment update process, Nancy learned that one community opened a new large distribution center. A substantial number of employees at the new distribution center came from another center in a different state. Some of these workers were immigrants who brought their families with them and settled in the nearest community served by Rocky Hills. Nancy also learned that the families speak Spanish as their primary language, with many being first or second generation immigrants.

Data from the community needs assessment also indicated that the influx of new employees at the distribution center prompted social service agencies to add additional services and staff to assist families as they apply for services. Nancy and her community assessment team members found many community partners are now providing services that could also assist the Head Start program in meeting the needs of the families now enrolled, especially referral and translation services. Nancy and some team members have started talking with the community partners to explore options for working together on behalf of the children and families. It is clear in speaking with them that each partner has a sincere desire to help the new families adjust to new surrounding and to find care and education for their children.

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THE SOLUTION: FIRST THINGS FIRST

With more Spanish speaking children enrolling in the infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms and home-based program, English-speaking staff began to express concern about not being able to communicate with families or educate the children effectively. Nancy and the education manager decided it was time to investigate the research behind serving children and families whose primary language is not the same as what the staff speak and to begin addressing the needs of the children and families in a systemic way; this would include research to inform programmatic decisions, classroom and home visiting strategies, and engaging families.

Nancy and the education manager formed a workgroup comprised of selected infant, toddler, and preschool teachers, home visitors, interested parents, policy council representative, and community representatives to review the research they had gathered and plan an approach to ensure all aspects of a comprehensive, systemic approach were considered. Interpreters were also included in the workgroup to provide translation for the Spanish-speaking participants. To start, the group decided to adopt a set of principles based on the findings that bilingualism enhances thinking and language abilities, dual language learners make good progress in both English and Spanish, and their growth in both languages predicts their early reading abilities in English and Spanish. Additionally, a set of core values would be incorporated throughout the program to include

- home language is important;
- all families bring a unique set of cultural perspectives;
- embrace multicultural competencies in a changing world; and
- children and families will have an environment in which to flourish that honors their background and culture.

THE SOLUTION: NEXT STEPS

At follow-up meetings, the workgroup began reviewing the Planned Language Approach (PLA). They saw that PLA aligned to the values and principles they planned to roll out to program staff and community partners. They also learned that PLA provides a comprehensive, systematic, research-based way to manage and implement high-quality language and literacy practices for ALL children—those who are dual language learners and those who are English speaking.

Knowing that putting a comprehensive process in place would be a complex endeavor with many moving parts, the workgroup decided to develop a list of questions and topics to consider. For example:

- What systems do we already have in place that we could build on? Could we use the Program Preparedness Checklist (in the Policies, Practices, and Systems section of the PLA) to get a sense of what we have and what we need?
- How well are we supporting all children's language and literacy development? How might the resources under The Big 5 support language and literacy practices? What other kinds of support do teachers and home visitors need to strengthen their language and literacy practices?

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- What kinds of support do teachers who have Spanish-speaking children in their classrooms need? What do home visitors who have Spanish-speaking families and children in their caseloads need? There are great resources under Strategies That Support DLLs. If the classroom language model we would use is English with Home Language Support, what else might teachers need to meet the language and literacy needs of the Spanish-speaking children? How can home visitors use the resources for families during their visits?
- How will we screen and assess Spanish-speaking children? What tools are available? Will we need to use different tools to ensure children are not over or under-identified as needing additional services? How might our screening and ongoing child assessment processes need to change?
- How do we support families whose home language is Spanish given the lack of Spanish-speaking staff? What assistance might be available from our community partners? How might we access it?
- Looking ahead, what are our staffing needs for bilingual Spanish/English-speaking teachers, home visitors, family service workers, and other staff who interact with families? How will this affect our job descriptions, recruitment, and hiring practices?

Nancy told the workgroup that she and the education manager would share the list with their program's early childhood specialist (ECS) the next time they met to strategize the best approach for putting a comprehensive system in place (e.g., brainstorming what to focus on first, year 1, year 2, etc. as it relates to their 5-year grant cycle and ongoing improvement). Nancy knows there are issues that need to be addressed now even as they plan for the future. But, she and the workgroup feel they have a shared understanding of what they want to accomplish and some good places to start.

SELECTED RESOURCES:

- Developing Culturally Responsive Approaches to Serving Diverse Populations: A Resource Guide for Community-Based Organizations – <http://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Cultural-Competence-Guide.pdf>
- Dual Language Learners Toolkit – <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/dual-language-learners-toolkit>
- Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders – <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/multicultural-principles-early-childhood-leaders>
- Planned Language Approach – <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach> (Policies, Practices, and Systems; Research Base; The Big 5 for All; Strategies to Support DLLs, Home Language Support)



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