



RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

# Program Performance Measures

## FOR HEAD START PROGRAMS SERVING INFANTS AND TODDLERS

As a national laboratory for early childhood education, Head Start has long emphasized continuous program improvement and has been a leader in developing outcome-oriented accountability. Head Start began developing program performance measures in 1995, and in 1997 the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES; ACYF, 2001) was launched to collect data on the performance indicators. Following the re-authorization of Head Start in 1998, Head Start programs were required to include child outcomes in their self-assessment process by 2003. The National Reporting System began the same year.

Although Early Head Start programs have not been required to report child outcomes, many have started to define and measure outcomes. In spring 2001, the Head Start Bureau, at the urging of the Early Head Start Technical Work Group, decided to develop program performance measures for Head Start programs

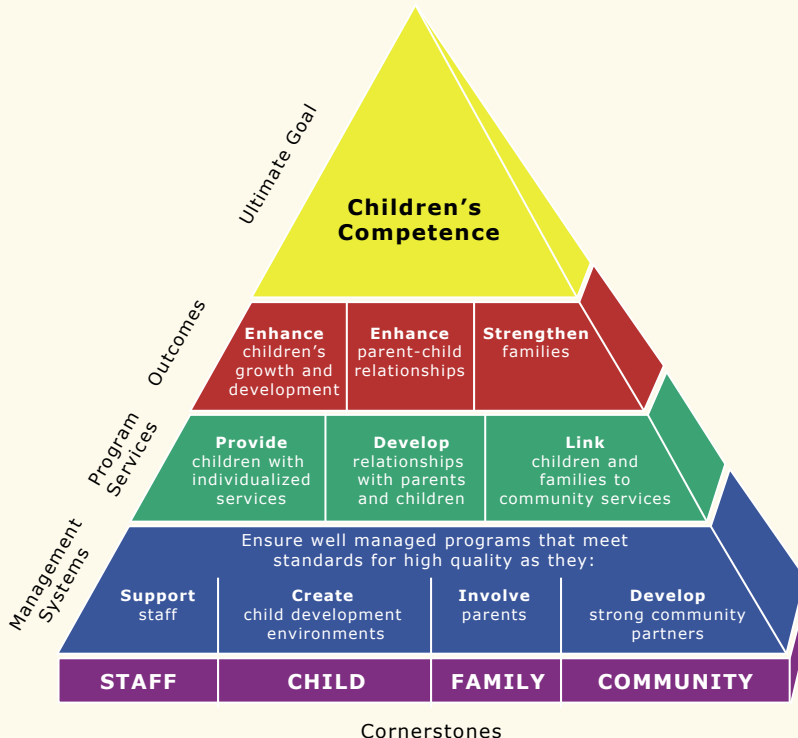
serving infants and toddlers (Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start) to support these efforts.

The recent completion of the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project also makes the time ripe for developing a new performance measures framework. The pattern of program impacts by age 3 and variations in impacts by program approach and key aspects of program implementation (ACYF, 2002) provide insights into ways that the Head Start framework must be adapted for programs serving families with infants and toddlers.

This document presents the program performance measures framework for Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers that resulted from an iterative process during which a wide range of stakeholders were consulted.

*The program performance measures framework is designed to support continuous program improvement efforts of individual programs...*

### Performance Measures Conceptual Framework





*Programs develop individualized family partnership agreements with families and link children and families to comprehensive community services in order to meet their personal goals and self-sufficiency needs.*

### **Building the Pyramid**

The conceptual model underlying performance measures for Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers is based on the Head Start model (ACYF 2001), which was modified to reflect the interest of infants and toddlers. The Statement of the Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers (ACYF, 1994) recommended four cornerstones for Early Head Start: child development, family development, staff development, and community building. Thus, the adapted pyramid rests on these cornerstones. The elements of management systems related to each cornerstone are included explicitly in the base of the pyramid. The overall goal of the base level of the pyramid is “ensuring well-managed programs that involve parents in decision making.” The services level of the pyramid has three main objectives—providing children with services, linking children and families to needed community services, and developing relationships with parents and children. Similarly, on the level of child and family outcomes, there are three main objectives—enhancing children’s growth and development, strengthening families as primary nurturers of their children, and enhancing parent-child relationships.

### **Performance Measures Underlying the Main Objectives**

Underlying the main objective in each block in the pyramid are performance measures that represent key program goals under that objective (see page 3). The program performance measures for Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers include selected performance measures from the Head Start framework, as well as new

performance measures that reflect the special features of programs serving infants and toddlers, variations in program approaches, and lessons from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project and training and technical assistance efforts. The performance measures also reflect key requirements in the Head Start Program Performance Standards, as well as elements from the Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers.

### **Using the Program Performance Measures Framework**

The program performance measures framework is designed to support continuous program improvement efforts of individual programs at the regional and national levels. At the individual program level, the framework, along with the program’s specific theory of change, can guide the development of plans for data collection to provide the program staff with important information on program strengths and weaknesses. This information can help focus program improvement efforts on areas where improvement may be needed most and in ways that may be most beneficial to the program. Information on strengths can be used to highlight program accomplishments and build support for the program among funders and key stakeholders. The ACYF publication, *Resources for Measuring Services and Outcomes in Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers* (2003) is designed to support programs in these activities by providing information on creating a performance measurement plan, including guidelines for choosing appropriate measures and detailed information on selected instruments.



*Ultimate Goal: Children’s Competence*

## Management Systems

Management systems (including program governance, planning, communication, record-keeping and reporting, ongoing monitoring, self-assessment, human resources, and fiscal management) ensure well-managed programs that meet standards for high quality as they create nurturing child development environments, enhance child outcomes, and promote positive parent-child interactions.

- Programs comply with Head Start regulations.
- Programs are well-managed operationally and financially.
- Programs design and implement services to be responsive to the needs of families.
- Programs conduct self-assessments that are used for continuous program improvement.

Management systems ensure well-managed programs with integrated systems to support staff in working effectively with parents and children.

- Programs employ qualified staff with the skills necessary to provide high-quality services.
- Programs support ongoing staff development, training, and mentoring.
- Programs support staff activities through ongoing reflective supervision.
- Programs promote staff retention and continuity.

Management systems ensure well-managed programs that meet standards for high quality as they develop collaborative relationships with community partners.

- Programs form partnerships with other community programs and organizations to support an integrated community-wide response to the needs of families with young children.
- Programs form partnerships and coordinate services with local Part C agencies.
- Programs form partnerships and coordinate services with community child care providers to meet the needs of families and enhance the quality of local child care services through the sharing of resources, training, and knowledge.
- Programs form partnerships and coordinate services with local health agencies and health care providers to meet the health-related needs of families.

Management systems ensure well-managed programs that meet standards for high quality as they involve parents.

- Parents are involved actively in program planning and decision making.
- Programs encourage and support fathers' involvement in program planning, decision making, and activities.

## Program Services

Programs develop individualized family partnership agreements with families and link children and families to comprehensive community services in order to meet their personal goals and self-sufficiency needs.

- Programs work collaboratively with families to identify their goals, strengths, and needed services, and offer them opportunities to develop and implement individualized family partnership agreements that take into account other family plans.
- Programs link parents with social service agencies to obtain needed services.
- Programs link parents with educational and employment agencies to obtain needed services.
- Programs link parents with physical and mental health care prevention and treatment services to obtain needed care.

- Programs link parents with needed prenatal care and education services.
- Programs help parents secure high-quality child care in order to work, attend school, or gain employment training.
- Programs help parents and children make a smooth transition to Head Start or other preschool programs.

Program staff develop responsive and caring relationships with parents and children.

- Staff form respectful and supportive relationships with parents through all aspects of service delivery.
- Staff form nurturing relationships with children in group-care settings or during home visits.
- Programs support and honor the home cultures and languages of families.

Programs provide children with age-appropriate curricular experiences and individualized educational, health, and nutritional services.

- Programs provide developmentally enriching educational environments in group-care settings and developmentally enriching parenting and child development services during home visits and group socializations.
- Programs link children with needed medical, dental, and mental health services.

- Programs link pregnant women with comprehensive prenatal health care and education.
- Programs provide children in group-care settings with meals and snacks that meet their daily nutritional needs, and parents receiving home-based services receive information about meeting their children's nutritional needs.
- Programs provide individualized services for parents and children, including children with disabilities.

## Expected Outcomes for Children and Families

Programs strengthen parents as the primary nurturers of their children.

- Parents demonstrate increased knowledge of child development and awareness of their children's developmental progress.
- Parents enhance their self-concept and emotional well-being and experience less parenting stress.
- Parents make progress toward their educational, literacy, and employment goals.
- Adult family members strengthen their relationships and work together in caring for children.

Programs support and enhance parent-child relationships.

- Parents demonstrate more sensitivity and responsiveness in interactions with their children.

- Parents spend more time with their children in activities that stimulate their children's development, such as reading to their children.
- Parents provide home environments and experiences that are more supportive of their children's development.

Programs enhance children's growth and development.

- Children demonstrate improved communication, language, and emergent literacy skills.
- Children demonstrate improved general cognitive skills.
- Children demonstrate improved positive approaches toward learning, including improved attention skills.
- Children demonstrate improved social behavior, emotion regulation, and emotional well-being.
- Children demonstrate improved physical health and development.

## References

Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (1994). *The Statement of the Advisory Committee on Services for Families With Infants and Toddlers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2001). *Head Start FACES: Longitudinal findings on program performance, third progress report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Administration for Children and Families. (2002). *Making a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers and their families: The impacts of Early Head Start*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Administration for Children and Families (2003). *Resources for measuring services and outcomes in Head Start programs serving infants and toddlers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.