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PROGRAM INSTRUCTION

TO: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

SUBJECT: School Readiness in Programs Serving Preschool Children

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Program Instruction (PI) is to emphasize requirements contained in the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (the Act) that agencies "... shall establish...program goals for improving school readiness of children participating in a program...including school readiness goals that are aligned with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework [recently revised as The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework], State early learning standards as appropriate, and requirements and expectations of the schools the children will be attending." (Head Start Act, section 641A(g)(2)(A))

INSTRUCTION:

The following is intended to provide recommendations about how grantees can comply with the Act's school readiness requirements. **School readiness goals** are the expectations that children's statuses and progression across domains of language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches towards learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development will improve children's readiness for kindergarten.

Section 641A(g)(2)(A) of the Act requires that each agency establish program goals for improving the school readiness of children participating in its program that align with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (formerly The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework), State early learning standards, and the requirements and expectations of the schools, to the extent that they apply to the ages of children participating in the program.

The Office of Head Start believes that it is important that the goals:

- are appropriate for the ages of children participating in the program;
- address, at a minimum, the domains of language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, and approaches toward learning; and

- are established in consultation with parents of children participating in the program. It is expected that this consultation could take a variety of forms, from surveying individual parents about goals for their own children, to talking to policy groups about child outcomes and appropriate program goals for school readiness.

Additionally, and importantly, each agency should be able to demonstrate the steps taken to achieve the school readiness goals described under Section 641A(g)(2) of the Head Start Act as demonstrated by:

- aggregating and analyzing assessment data at multiple points in a year*, and using that data in combination with other program data to determine progress toward meeting the established goals; to inform parents and the community of results; and to direct continuous program improvements related to curriculum, teaching, and instructional strategies, professional development, program design, and other program decisions; and

*The Office of Head Start recommends that agencies aggregate and analyze assessment data at least three times during the year (to provide baseline, midpoint, and year end progress); or, for programs operating 90 days or less, two times during the program.

- analyzing individual, ongoing, child-level assessment data from a variety of sources for all children birth to age 5 participating in the program, and using that data in combination with input from parents and families to determine each child's status and progress with regard to, at a minimum, language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development, and to individualize the experiences, teaching, and services to best support each child.

Attached you will find a description of four critical steps which programs can use to assess their own status with regard to school readiness goals. The Office of Head Start and its training and technical assistance partners will continue to provide direction, guidance, and resources that support fulfilling our promise to make sure our children and families are ready for school and beyond.

Please direct any questions on this Program Instruction to:

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Thank you for your work on behalf of children and families.

/ Yvette Sanchez Fuentes /

Yvette Sanchez Fuentes
Director
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Attachment:

School Readiness Action Steps

1. **Adopt and align established Office of Head Start (OHS) preschool child goals from the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, establishing clear school readiness goals across domains** (language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development):
 - Become familiar with the specific goals in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (formerly the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework), State early learning standards, and Local Education Agency (LEA) expectations;
 - Compare OHS child outcome goals with the LEA expectations, and State Early Learning Goals;
 - Communicate with relevant partners;
 - Determine if and how program curriculum-targeted skills and knowledge address (align with) established goals;
 - Determine if and how ongoing child assessment tools and procedures address (align with) established goals.

2. **Create and implement a plan of action for achieving the established school readiness goals:**
 - Improve quality of teacher-child interactions;
 - Implement evidence-based teaching practices;
 - Implement and assess your evidence-based curriculum;
 - Increase engagement, communication, and inclusion of parents and families to support children's school readiness;
 - Provide effective professional development so all staff understand how they support school readiness;
 - Implement effective transitions and increase continuity through kindergarten and the primary grades.

3. **Assess child progress on an ongoing basis and aggregate and analyze data at multiple times throughout the year:**
 - Take advantage of mid-point aggregation and analysis so that the program has opportunities to make changes that can make meaningful school readiness differences for currently enrolled children. The Office of Head Start believes it is important for programs to aggregate and analyze data at least three times per year, or two times for programs operating less than 90 days. Collect data that can be aggregated at the program level.
 - Aggregate and analyze child assessment data at multiple points across the year and demonstrate program-level child progress using norms or criterion references.
 - Maintain the use of information from ongoing child assessment to inform teachers and parents how best to individualize for each child's continued development and learning, assessing child progress on an ongoing basis across domains.

4. **Examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to revise, or develop and implement plans for program improvement:**

- Program improvements may include professional development adjustments, including specificity, intensity, frequency, and type of training; improving communication and engagement with families; intensifying curriculum supports or implementation; or other similarly responsive efforts based on the analysis of program data.
- Examine the patterns of progress and outcomes (achieved goals) for groups of children served by the program. For example, this may include:
 - by age
 - by rates of attendance
 - by program settings and/or options
 - by language groups
 - by child, family, or community risk factors