

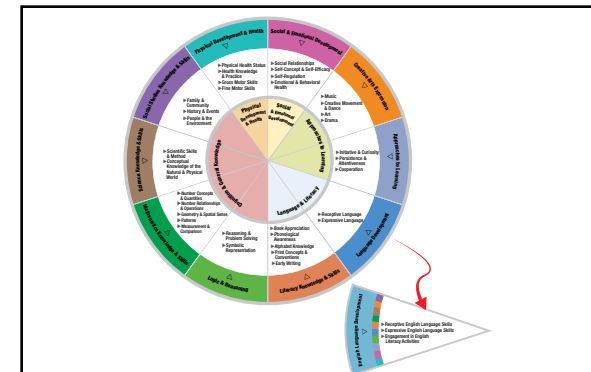
Head Start Approach to School Readiness

Overview

The Head Start Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children’s learning, and schools are ready for children. Historically, Head Start often has led the early childhood field with a strong, clear, and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, all of which are essential to children getting ready for school. All agencies are required to establish school readiness goals which are defined as “the expectations of children’s status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical health and well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve readiness for kindergarten goals” and that “appropriately reflect the ages of children, birth to five, participating in the program” (45 CFR Chapter XIII Head Start Regulation Part 1307.2 and 1307.3 (b)(1)(i), as amended). Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.

For parents and families, school readiness means they are engaged in the long-term, lifelong success of their child. Head Start recognizes that parents are their children’s primary teachers and advocates. Programs are required to consult with parents in establishing school readiness goals (45 CFR 1307.3 (b) (1) (iii), as amended). As Head Start programs and schools work together to promote school readiness and to engage families as their children make the transition to kindergarten, schools will be ready for children.

The Head Start Approach to School Readiness encompasses three major frameworks that promote an understanding of school readiness for parents and families, infants/toddlers, and preschoolers. The three frameworks and their accompanying graphics provide the foundation for implementing systemic and integrated comprehensive child development services and family engagement efforts that lead to school readiness for young children and families.



Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework



- Parent and family engagement in Head Start and Early Head Start is about building relationships with families that support family well-being; supporting strong relationships between parents and their children; and nurturing ongoing learning and development for both parents and children. *The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework* is a roadmap for progress in achieving the types of outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families.
- The PFCE Framework was developed in partnership with programs, families, experts, and the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. It is a research-based approach to program change that shows how an agency can work together as a whole—across systems and service areas— to promote parent and family engagement and children’s learning and development.
- The PFCE Framework graphic demonstrates that when parent and family engagement activities are systemic and integrated across program foundations and program impact areas, family engagement outcomes are achieved. This results in children who are healthy and ready for school. Parent and family engagement activities succeed when they are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with families.

Head Start and Early Head Start Parent and Family Engagement

As research suggests, parents and family members are more likely to become engaged in their young child's development and learning when they have positive and trusting relationships with those who support them.¹ In Head Start and Early Head Start, these relationships focus on goals that families develop with the support of program leadership, staff, and engaged community partners. These goal-directed relationships are part of the two-generational approach of working with children and adult family members and distinguish Head Start and Early Head Start from other early childhood initiatives. They are most likely to take root within programs that take intentional steps to promote parent and family engagement.

Families play a critical role in helping their children to prepare for school and a lifetime of academic success. Agencies are required to consult with parents in establishing school readiness goals (45 CFR 1307.3 (b) (1) (iii), as amended). It matters when programs engage parents and families in their children's development and learning. In fact, research indicates that:

- Children with supportive home learning environments show increased literacy development, better peer interactions, fewer behavior problems, and more motivation and persistence during learning activities.²
- Among the youngest children, daily parent-child reading from infancy prompts cognitive skills as well as early vocabulary gains that lead to more reading and vocabulary growth³, a pattern of growth that has been compared to a snowball.
- Continued family engagement is important through the school years. Longitudinal studies of low-income children show that high family involvement offsets the risks of children growing up in low-income households and in households with low parent education.⁴

The launch of the PFCE Framework marks the beginning of a new wave of technical assistance resources that will be made available to programs in the coming year through the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. The PFCE Framework can be used in program-wide strategic planning, program design and management, systems of continuous improvement, professional development for staff, and with governing bodies and parent groups. It can be used to help improve program services or to inform community partners about Head Start parent and family engagement goals and the importance of those goals for school readiness. The PFCE Framework is intended to inspire a renewed spirit of collaboration with families and community partners as programs identify and take next steps to engage parents, families, and the community to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

1 Bryk, A.S. & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: a core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6).

Lopez, M.E., Dorros, S., & Weiss, H. (1999). *Family-centered child care*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

2 Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., & Perry, M. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *The School Psychology Review*, 33(4), 467–480.

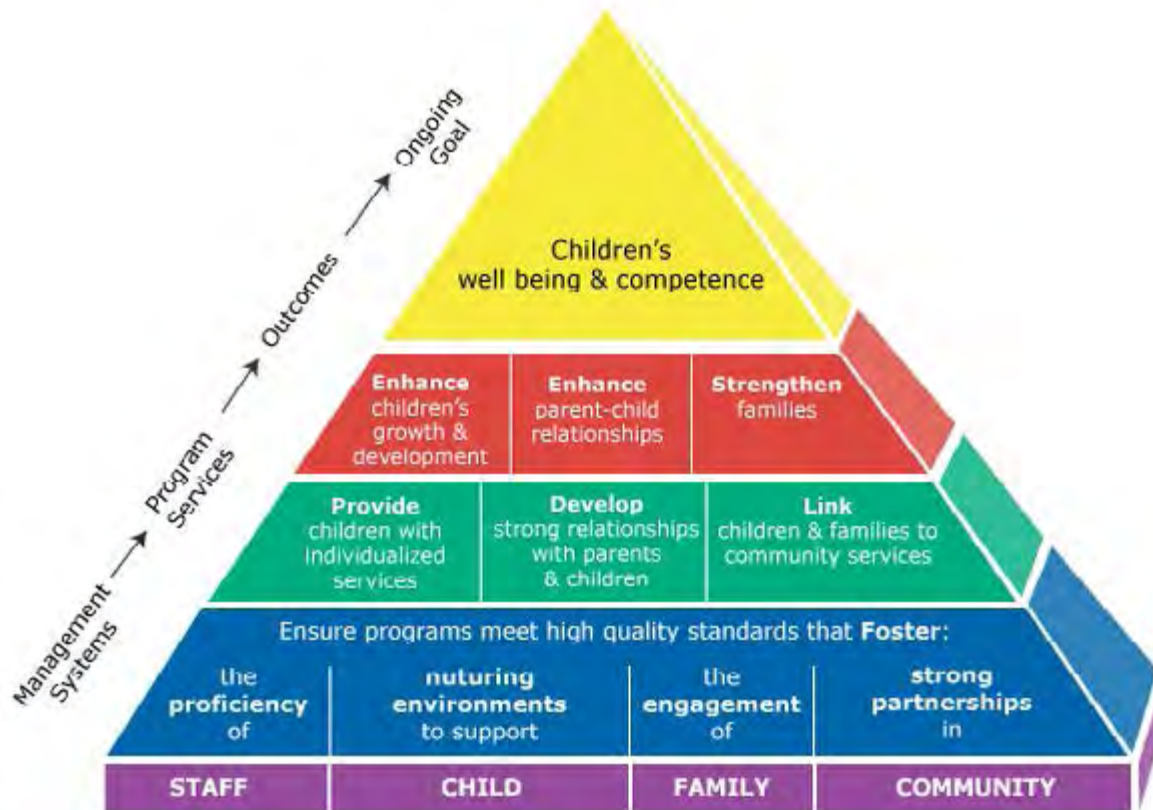
Weiss, H., Caspe, M., Lopez, M. E. (2006). *Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education. Family Involvement Makes a Difference*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

3 Raikes, H., Luze, G., Brooks-Gunn, J., Raikes, H.A., Pan, B.A., Tamis-LeMonda, C.S., et al. (2006). Mother-child book reading in low-income families: Correlates and outcomes during the first three years of life. *Child Development* 77(4), 924–953.

4 Dearing, E., Kreider, H., Simpkins, S., & Weiss, H. B. (2006). Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy performance: Longitudinal associations between and within families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 653–664.

Barnard, W.M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 26(1), 39-62.

REVISED Framework for Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families*



- The text in the Revised Early Head Start Program Performance Measures Conceptual Framework has been modified to represent current Office of Head Start language related to ongoing quality improvement, qualified staff, and family engagement. NOTE: The concepts behind the Framework have not changed.
- This Conceptual Framework provides a guide for programs to develop and implement supports for the healthy growth and development of expectant families, babies, and toddlers. Strong management systems provide the foundation for implementing comprehensive child development and family support services that lead to positive outcomes for very young children and their families.
- Through the implementation of continuous and comprehensive child development and family support services, program staff builds trusting and respectful relationships with families that integrate their values, beliefs, and caregiving practices. Trust and attachment are the context for learning and development in the five essential domains – physical and health, social and emotional, approaches to learning, language and literacy, and cognition and general knowledge.
- Fostering healthy development and secure attachment begins prenatally and continues to influence the developmental competence of very young children throughout their first years. Infants' and toddlers' well-being and competence in the five essential domains are developed in the context of trusting relationships. Ensuring positive relationships through nurturing experiences during the earliest years supports children's developmental competence throughout their preschool and school years.
- For more information, go to [Research to Practice: Program Performance Measures for Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers](#) and [The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework: Promoting Family Engagement and School Readiness, from Prenatal to Age 8](#).

*Source: [Research to Practice: The Program Performance Measures for Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers](#). HHS/ACF/OPRE. April 2006.

How Do Infant/Toddler Programs Support School Readiness?

All Head Start agencies serving infants and toddlers must establish program goals for improving the school readiness of participating children and take steps to achieve these goals (45 CFR XIII 1307.3 (b)(1),(2) as amended). The Office of Head Start is developing resources and materials to support programs in developing and implementing school readiness goals for infants and toddlers based on the following foundations and principles.

SCHOOL READINESS GOALS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Agencies need to consider infant and toddler developmental needs when implementing the [Four Action Steps](#) to set and achieve appropriate school readiness goals for this age group:

1. Establish goals for improving school readiness across the five essential domains: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical development and health, and social and emotional development;
2. Create and implement an action plan for achieving the established school readiness goals;
3. Assess child progress on an ongoing basis and aggregate and analyze data at multiple times throughout the year; and
4. Examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to revise, or develop and implement, plans for program improvement.

PROVIDING A FOUNDATION FOR SCHOOL READINESS

The Head Start Act of 2007 requires that programs serve infants, toddlers, and their families by providing ... “early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services that will enhance the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of participating children” (Sec.645A (b)(1)). How does this relate to improving school readiness for infants and toddlers?

Improving school readiness for infants and toddlers means providing a secure foundation for child development and early learning across domains that ensures children enter preschool, and eventually school, ready to succeed. The large body of research on brain development and how babies learn clearly demonstrates the importance of secure attachments with adults as critical to babies’ overall development.

Below are considerations for a program structure and design to support the delivery of child-focused, family-centered services that promote infant /toddler development and early learning.

IMPLEMENTING HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS, AND FAMILIES

When implementing appropriate services across program options and settings that support achievement toward school readiness goals for infants and toddlers, consider:

- Is one primary caregiver assigned to each child in center-based Early Head Start programs? Is there one home visitor assigned long term in the home-based program option? Are there limited transitions within the day/week/month/year to ensure continuity of care?
- Do infants and toddlers and their families feel safe and secure within their program setting? Do staff use responsive caregiving practices to engage them? How are staff supported in an ongoing way to develop and foster close and trusting relationships among families, children, and colleagues?

- What curriculum is used? Is it rooted in the concept of learning through relationships and routines? Does it support developmental progress in school readiness goals across the five essential domains? What do group and individualized routines look like? Are routines based upon individual needs and preferences? How are staff supported to implement nurturing care routines and play experiences to intentionally support development and learning? How are families engaged “as the child’s first and primary teacher?”
- Are there written plans for individual children as well as for groups of children? Do the plans reflect developmental milestones for each child and progress in reaching them? How are families involved in determining developmental goals? Do plans and daily care practices include family care practices and routines, as best as possible, to implement continuity of care?
- Is the environment rich with language so that babies hear words and language describing the array of experiences throughout the day? Do developing toddlers find adults who listen and understand their own budding expressions? How are staff and families supported in using a variety of conversational styles to foster emerging concepts and cognitive learning?
- Is there a process of ongoing assessment that includes a valid and reliable instrument, observations of staff and family, and anecdotal records? How does planning include all staff and family members caring for the child? How does it document the adaptation of curricular goals based on baby/toddler progress across all domains?
- Is there a systematic process to look for patterns of progress and outcomes in groups of infants and toddlers? How is this information used to enhance program performance and design so all children succeed?

RESOURCES ON SCHOOL READINESS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

[Early Head Start Research to Practice](#). HHS/ACF/OPRE. 2003 – Current.

[Family Engagement and Ongoing Child Assessment](#). HHS/ACF/OHS. 2011.

[A Guide to Resources for Developing School Readiness Goals](#). HHS/ACF/OHS. 2011.

[Head Start Act, as amended December 12, 2007, Sec. 645A](#) describes Early Head Start Programs as providing:

- “Family-centered services for low-income families with very young children designed to promote the development of the children, and to enable their parents to fulfill their roles as parents and to move toward self-sufficiency” [Sec. 645A (a)].
- “Either directly or through referral, early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services that will enhance the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of participating children” [Sec.645A (b)(1)].

[Head Start and Early Head Start School Readiness Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). HHS/ACF/OHS. March 2012.

[Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework: Promoting Family Engagement and School Readiness, from Prenatal to Age 8](#). HHS/ACF/OHS. 2011.

[Healthy Start, Grow Smart Series: Prepare My Child for School](#). DOA/ED/DHHS. 2002.

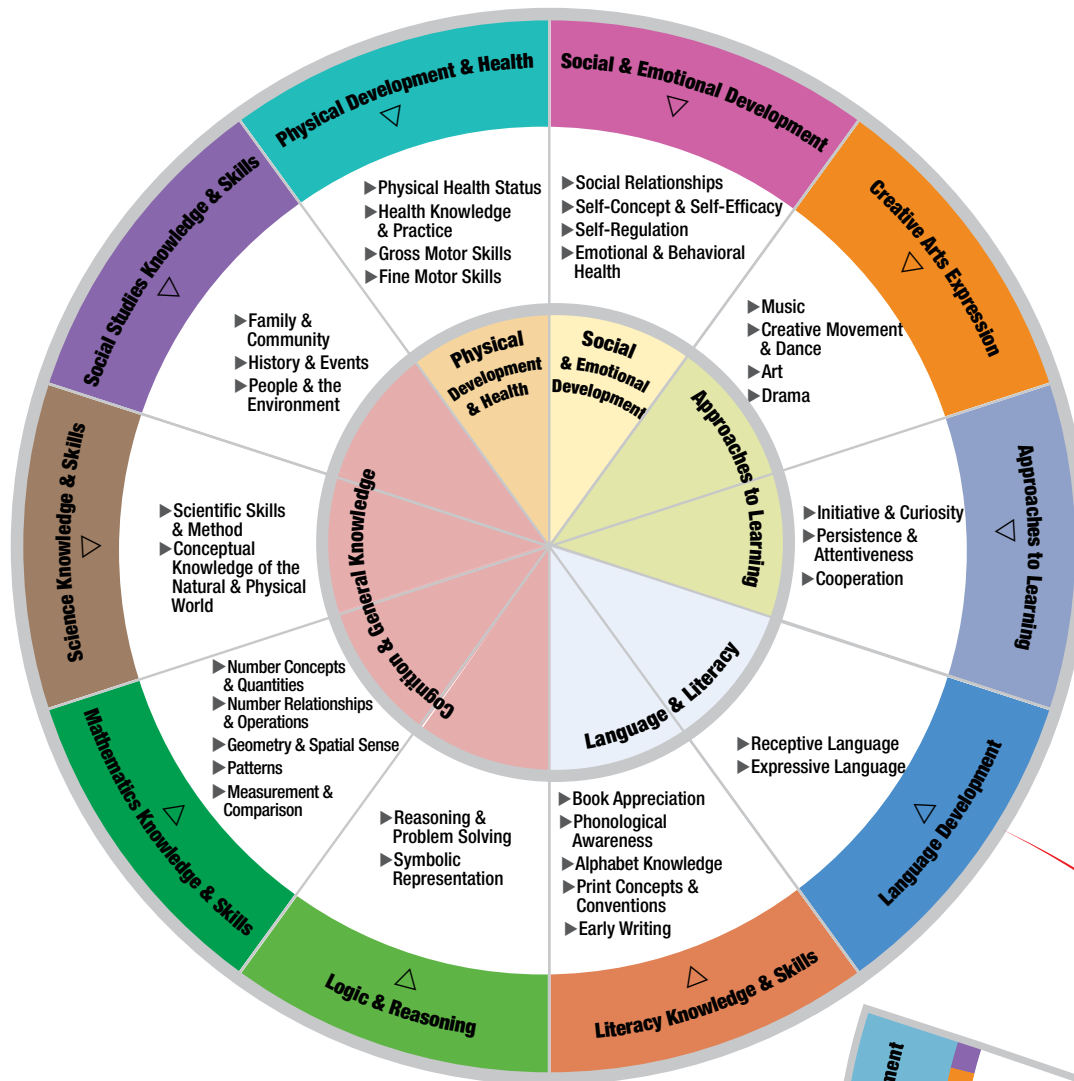
[Research to Practice: Program Performance Measures for Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers](#). HHS/ACF/OPRE. April 2006.

[Resources for Measuring Services & Outcomes in Head Start Programs Serving Infants & Toddlers](#). HHS/ACF/OPRE. Revised 2011.

[School Readiness Action Steps for Infants and Toddlers](#). HHS/ACF/OHS. 2012.

[Technical Assistance Paper No. 6: The Foundations for School Readiness: Fostering Developmental Competence in the Earliest Years](#). HHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2003.

The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework



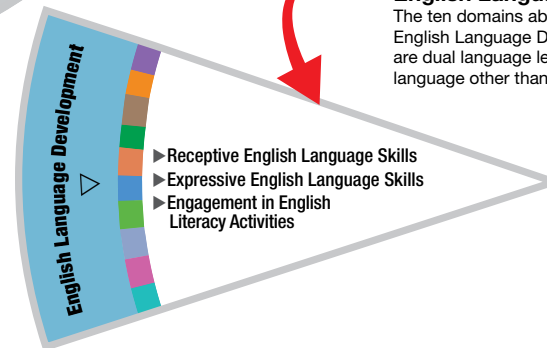
△ Domain
▶ Domain Element

The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework Promoting Positive Outcomes in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children 3-5 Years Old

The *Framework* represents the foundation of the Head Start Approach to School Readiness. It aligns with and builds from the five essential domains of school readiness identified by the National Education Goals Panel (see inner circle) and lays out essential areas of learning and development. The *Framework* can be used to guide curriculum, implementation, and assessment to plan teaching and learning experiences that align to school readiness goals and track children's progress across developmental domains. The domains △ and domain elements ▶ apply to all 3 to 5 year olds in Head Start and other early childhood programs, including dual language learners and children with disabilities.

English Language Development

The ten domains above apply to all children. One domain, English Language Development, applies only to children who are dual language learners (DLLs). These children speak a language other than English at home.



How Do Preschool Programs Support School Readiness?

In 2000, the Office of Head Start expanded the understanding of school readiness for preschool children, 3 to 5 years old, by delineating domains of learning and development in the Child Outcomes Framework. In 2010, the revised Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework was released. It reflects changes in the field of early childhood, new research findings, and legislation that expand our understanding of school readiness. Regulation 45 CFR Chapter XIII Part 1307, as amended, requires all agencies to establish school readiness goals, defined as “the expectations of children’s status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical health and well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve readiness for kindergarten goals” (Part 1307.2).

The regulations require that agencies establish school readiness goals that “align with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, State early learning guidelines, and the requirements and expectations of the schools, to the extent that they apply to the ages of children, birth to five, participating in the program and at a minimum address the domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development” (45 CFR XIII 1307.3 (b)(1)(ii), as amended).

In order to help prepare children to be successful when they enter school, Head Start programs implement core strategies including:

- An integrated curriculum that addresses the essential domains of school readiness in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework.
- “Aggregate and analyze aggregated child-level assessment data at least three times per year (except for programs operating less than 90 days, which will be required to do so at least twice within the operating program period) and use that data in combination with other program data to determine grantees progress toward meeting its goals, to inform parents and the community of results, and to direct continuous improvement related to curriculum, instruction, professional development, program design and other program decisions (45 CFR Chapter XIII 1307.3 (2)(i), as amended).
- Early learning coaching available to staff across program options and settings.
- An individualized Wellness Plan that promotes healthy development for every child.
- A parent partnership process that promotes an understanding of their child’s progress, provides support, and encourages learning and leadership.
- Ongoing communication with local schools to exchange information about children and programs and to align services for early learning, health, and family engagement.
- A learning community among staff to promote innovation, continuous improvement, and integrated services across education, family services, and health.

Each agency needs to utilize the five domains, represented by the inner wheel of the Framework as the basis for agency preschool school readiness goals. Agencies will indicate how the curriculum and child assessment(s) address or align with the established goals, and how parents are involved in this process. Head Start programs are expected to (ACF-PI-HS-11-04):

1. Adopt and align established OHS goals from the revised Framework.
2. Create and implement a plan of action for achieving the goals.
3. Assess child progress on an ongoing basis and aggregate and analyze data three times per year.
4. Examine data for patterns of progress for groups of children in order to develop and implement a plan for program improvement.

In order to help address school readiness requirements, the Office of Head Start will continue to communicate and support local programs, and will guide the efforts of the Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Network. Communications will support programs’ continued efforts to build their systems and to deliver quality services to children, families, and communities.