

# THE HEAD START PATH TO POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES



## *The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework*



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Head Start Bureau

Updated Summer 2003

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# THE HEAD START PATH TO POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES

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Head Start Program Performance Standards provide a sound foundation for achieving positive child outcomes. Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that encompasses all aspects of a child's development and learning.

Upon entry to the program, each child receives required screenings to confirm that he or she is in good health and is developing well. This is the initial determination of a child's overall health status, developmental strengths, needs, and areas of identified concern, such as a possible serious delay or disability that may lead to a referral.

After screening, the requirements for child observation and ongoing assessment continue throughout the child's enrollment in Head Start. Using appropriate observation and assessment procedures, staff and parents follow each child's progress and experiences from his arrival in the program to the time he leaves. Through this process, they come to know each child's strengths, interests, needs, and learning styles in order to individualize the curriculum, to build on each child's prior knowledge and experiences, and to provide meaningful curriculum experiences that support learning and development. In these ways, staff, parents, and programs support each child in making progress toward stated goals.

Head Start's concern with the whole child includes social competence as part of school readiness. Head Start grantees and delegate agencies gather information to document their process for assuring positive child outcomes. This information addresses all aspects of development and learning, including physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and language, in order to provide an overall picture of the child from program entry to the culmination of the child's Head Start experience.

This information gathered from observations and ongoing assessment also helps grantees respond to the need to address child outcomes: How has each child benefited from time in Head Start? In addition, child outcome information for groups of children becomes part of the data considered by grantees and delegate agencies as they engage in self-assessment to determine how the program is doing in meeting its goals and objectives, and in implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other regulations. The results of the self-assessment contribute to continuous program planning and program improvement.

The Head Start National Reporting System (NRS) adds one more component to local child assessment and program self-assessment. Starting in Fall 2003, Head Start programs will implement a brief procedure at the beginning and end of the program year to assess all 4- and 5-year olds on a limited set of language, literacy, and numeracy outcomes that have been legislatively mandated. The NRS will provide comparable data about the progress that children are making in Head Start programs across the country. This information about groups of children, not individuals, will be reported back to programs to supplement their local assessments and used by the Federal and Regional Offices to guide training and technical assistance.

# A Context for Head Start Child, Family, and Program

## HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND OTHER REGULATIONS

45 CFR Parts 1301, 1302, 1303, 1304 and Guidance, 1305, 1306, and 1308 and Guidance

### HEAD START PROGRAM

#### PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

"What are the minimum standards for the quality of Head Start services, staffing, and management systems?"

### SCREENING AND ONGOING

#### CHILD ASSESSMENT

"How do programs use information they gather on children?"

### LOCAL PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

#### AND ONGOING MONITORING

"How is the local program doing?"

- Head Start Program Performance Standards provide quality standards for all aspects of early childhood development and health services, family and community partnerships, and program design and management.
- Qualified staff, in partnership with parents, select and adapt or develop a curriculum for each Head Start program. The curriculum is a written plan that addresses the goals for children and includes their experiences, appropriate materials, and the roles of staff and parents. Staff implement and individualize the curriculum to support each child's learning and developmental progress.
- Each program is required to implement a curriculum that promotes children's cognitive development and language skills, social and emotional development, and physical development.
- All programs must adhere to specific Program Performance Standards in the areas of groups size, adult:child ratios, and staff qualifications, including ensuring that each classroom has a teacher with a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or its equivalent. The 1998 Head Start Act requires that by September 30, 2003, at least 50% of all Head Start teachers nationally in center-based programs have an associate, baccalaureate or advanced degree in early education or in a related field with preschool teaching experience. Classroom teachers who do not meet this requirement must have a CDA or an equivalent State-issued certificate or be in the process of completing a CDA or degree within 180 days of hire.
- Families are to be involved through the family partnership agreement process in their children's development and learning, in increasing their own literacy and child observation skills, and in the governance process of the Head Start program.

- Upon entry to Head Start, each child receives required screenings to determine the child's overall health status, developmental strengths, and needs. If a concern is identified, such as a possible serious delay or disability, a formal evaluation is conducted and a determination of eligibility for disability services is made. If the disability criteria are met, a plan for special education and/or related services is made.
- Staff and parents gather ongoing information to document children's progress toward positive child outcomes in language, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical development, including the 13 mandated learning indicators (as described in the Child Outcomes Framework). Programs select, develop, or adapt an instrument or set of tools for ongoing assessment of children's progress that aligns with their curriculum.
- Child observation and ongoing assessment continue throughout the child's enrollment in Head Start. Staff and parents follow each child's progress, coming to know the child's strengths, interests, needs, and learning styles in order to individualize the curriculum, to build on each child's prior knowledge and experiences, and to provide meaningful curriculum experiences that support learning and development. In these ways, staff, parents, and programs support each child's progress toward stated goals.
- Child outcome information from groups of children becomes part of the data considered by agencies as they engage in self-assessment to determine how the program is meeting its goals and objectives and how it is implementing the Program Performance Standards and other regulations. The results of the self-assessment contribute to continuous program planning and program improvement.

- Grantees establish procedures for the ongoing monitoring of their own operations, as well as those of their delegate agencies, to ensure effective implementation of all Federal regulations.
- At least once a year, Early Head Start and Head Start agencies conduct a self-assessment to check how they are doing in meeting their goals and objectives and in implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other regulations.
- The process involves the policy group, governing body, parents, staff, and the community.
- Grantees should ensure that their system for ongoing assessment of children includes collection of some data in each of the 8 Domains of children's learning and development. In addition, because they are legislatively mandated, programs must gather and analyze data on certain specific Domain Elements or Indicators or progress in language, literacy, and numeracy skills.
- Grantees must develop a system to analyze data on child outcomes that centers on patterns of progress for groups of children over time as they receive services through the program year. At a minimum, data analysis should compare progress beginning when children enter Head Start, at a mid-point in the program year, and when they complete the program year.
- The results of the self-assessment process, including the analysis of child outcomes, influence the agency's program planning and the continuous improvement process.

# Accomplishments and Outcomes

## SYSTEMS AND OUTCOME MEASURES FOR HEAD START NATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Head Start Act, ACYF-IM-HS-00-03, ACYF-IM-HS-00-18, ACYF-IM-HS-03-07, PRISM, FACES

### FEDERAL ON-SITE

#### SYSTEMS MONITORING

"How is our compliance with Head Start regulations and program implementation?"

- After the first full year of operation, grantees are monitored at least once every three years.
- A review of effective management systems supports the implementation of a comprehensive child development program leading to positive child outcomes.
- A partnership between Federal and grantee staff monitors the progress of Early Head Start and Head Start grantees in implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other Federal regulations.
- Using the PRISM (Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring), a team of Federal staff and other experts conducts an on-site PRISM review of grantee management systems and program quality through a combination of focus groups and individual interviews; observations; discussions with parents, staff, and policy groups; and review of written program documents. Grantees must correct all identified areas of noncompliance.
- Information from the PRISM, including compliance with the child outcomes requirements of the 1998 Head Start Act and ACYF-IM-HS-00-18, is to be used by grantees for continuous program improvement.

### NATIONAL REPORTING SYSTEM

"How are 4- and 5-year-old Head Start children progressing on a common national assessment of key indicators of literacy, language, and numeracy learning?"

- In April 2002, President Bush launched the Early Childhood Initiative—*Good Start, Grow Smart*—that included strengthening Head Start by developing a new accountability system to ensure that every Head Start program assesses child outcomes. This new accountability system is referred to as the National Reporting System (NRS).
- Starting in Fall 2003, all 4- and 5-year-olds in Head Start, including children with disabilities and English Language Learners, will be assessed through the NRS. They will be assessed again in the spring before they go to kindergarten.
- All Head Start programs will use a brief, common set of valid, reliable, age-appropriate assessment tools on specific language, literacy, and numeracy outcomes. The assessments will take approximately 15 minutes per child. They will be conducted in English or Spanish by trained program staff.
- The NRS will provide comparable data about the progress that children are making in each Head Start program. NRS information will be reported back to programs to supplement the ongoing child assessment and continuous program self-assessment that each program undertakes. The Head Start Bureau and the Regional Offices will use the NRS information to guide training and technical assistance and to develop new ways of incorporating outcomes into future PRISM reviews. Data on individual children will not be reported by the NRS.

### RESEARCH

"What are some key outcomes and indicators of national program quality, effectiveness, and outcomes?"

- The Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) is a national, longitudinal study to examine the quality and outcomes of Head Start. In 1997 and 2000, data were collected from a nationally representative sample of several thousand children in about 40 Head Start programs who were followed up in kindergarten. Teachers, staff, and parents were interviewed; observations of classroom quality were made. Results indicate that Head Start children's social skills improve and that they make more progress than the typical child their age on vocabulary and early writing measures, but still fall short of national averages. Classroom quality is linked to child outcomes. A new national sample is being launched in Fall 2003.
- The Head Start Impact Study is a Congressionally mandated longitudinal study of nearly 5,000 3- and 4-year-olds from a nationally representative sample of agencies. Children have been randomly assigned to Head Start or to a comparison group which does not receive Head Start services. Data collection includes direct child assessments through first grade, parent interviews, surveys with staff, observations of the quality of care settings, and teacher ratings. The study is designed to answer the mandated questions and benefit program quality.
- The Quality Research Centers (QRC) Consortium I (1995-2000) created partnerships among ACYF, Head Start grantees, and the academic research community to enhance quality program practices and outcomes. In 2001, a second cohort of QRCs was funded for five years to improve child outcomes in literacy, social and emotional development, and other domains of school readiness, through enhancements to curriculum, teacher training, parent involvement, and assessment practices. Research teams implement and evaluate their projects with their Head Start partners, then replicate them. Measures from FACES are used across sites.

# THE HEAD START CHILD OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

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**R**eleased in 2000, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework is intended to guide Head Start programs in their curriculum planning and ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children. The Framework also is helpful to programs in their efforts to analyze and use data on child outcomes in program self-assessment and continuous improvement. The Framework is composed of 8 general Domains, 27 Domain Elements, and numerous examples of specific Indicators of children's skills, abilities, knowledge, and behaviors. The Framework is based on the Head Start Program Performance Standards, the Head Start Program Performance Measures, provisions of the Head Start Act as amended in 1998, advice of the Head Start Bureau Technical Work Group on Child Outcomes, and a review of documents on assessment of young children and early childhood program accountability from a variety of state agencies and professional organizations.

- The Domains, Elements, and Indicators are presented as a framework of building blocks that are important for school success. The Framework is not an exhaustive list of everything a child should know or be able to do by the end of Head Start or entry into Kindergarten. The Framework is intended to guide assessment of three- to five-year-old children—not infants or toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start and not infants or toddlers in Migrant Head Start programs.
- The Framework guides agencies in selecting, developing, or adapting an instrument or set of tools for ongoing assessment of children's progress. It is inappropriate to use the Framework as a checklist for assessing children. It also is inappropriate to use items in the Framework in place of thoughtful curriculum planning and individualization.
- Every Head Start program implements an appropriate child assessment system that aligns with their curriculum and gathers data on children's progress in each of the 8 Domains of learning and development. At a minimum, because they are legislatively mandated, programs analyze data on 4 specific Domain Elements and 9 Indicators in various language, literacy, and numeracy skills, as indicated with a star ★ in the chart. Local program child assessment occurs at least three times a year. The National Reporting System (NRS) child assessment includes measures of the mandated child outcomes.
- Information on children's progress on the Domains, Domain Elements, and Indicators is obtained from multiple sources, such as teacher and home visitor observations, analysis of samples of children's work and performance, parent reports, or direct assessment of children. Head Start assessment practices should reflect the assumption that children demonstrate progress over time in development and learning on a developmental continuum, in forms such as increasing frequency of a behavior or ability, increasing breadth or depth of knowledge and understanding, or increasing proficiency or independence in exercising a skill or ability.

*The English version of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework was translated into Spanish by the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Quality Improvement Center. The Spanish version of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework can be accessed at [www.mhsqic.org/spandocs/spandocs.htm](http://www.mhsqic.org/spandocs/spandocs.htm).*



## THE HEAD START CHILD OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

DOMAIN	DOMAIN ELEMENT	INDICATORS
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT	Listening & Understanding	◆ Demonstrates increasing ability to attend to and understand conversations, stories, songs, and poems.
		◆ Shows progress in understanding and following simple and multiple-step directions.
		★ Understands an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
		★ For non-English-speaking children, progresses in listening to and understanding English.
	Speaking & Communicating	★ Develops increasing abilities to understand and use language to communicate information, experiences, ideas, feelings, opinions, needs, questions; and for other varied purposes.
		◆ Progresses in abilities to initiate and respond appropriately in conversation and discussions with peers and adults.
		★ Uses an increasingly complex and varied spoken vocabulary.
		◆ Progresses in clarity of pronunciation and towards speaking in sentences of increasing length and grammatical complexity.
		★ For non-English-speaking children, progresses in speaking English.
LITERACY	★ Phonological Awareness	◆ Shows increasing ability to discriminate and identify sounds in spoken language.
		◆ Shows growing awareness of beginning and ending sounds of words.
		◆ Progresses in recognizing matching sounds and rhymes in familiar words, games, songs, stories, and poems.
		◆ Shows growing ability to hear and discriminate separate syllables in words.
		★ Associates sounds with written words, such as awareness that different words begin with the same sound.
	★ Book Knowledge & Appreciation	◆ Shows growing interest and involvement in listening to and discussing a variety of fiction and non-fiction books and poetry.
		◆ Shows growing interest in reading-related activities, such as asking to have a favorite book read; choosing to look at books; drawing pictures based on stories; asking to take books home; going to the library; and engaging in pretend-reading with other children.
		◆ Demonstrates progress in abilities to retell and dictate stories from books and experiences; to act out stories in dramatic play; and to predict what will happen next in a story.
		◆ Progresses in learning how to handle and care for books; knowing to view one page at a time in sequence from front to back; and understanding that a book has a title, author, and illustrator.
	★ Print Awareness & Concepts	◆ Shows increasing awareness of print in classroom, home, and community settings.
		◆ Develops growing understanding of the different functions of forms of print such as signs, letters, newspapers, lists, messages, and menus.
		◆ Demonstrates increasing awareness of concepts of print, such as that reading in English moves from top to bottom and from left to right, that speech can be written down, and that print conveys a message.
		◆ Shows progress in recognizing the association between spoken and written words by following print as it is read aloud.
		★ Recognizes a word as a unit of print, or awareness that letters are grouped to form words, and that words are separated by spaces.

★ Indicates the 4 specific Domain Elements and 9 Indicators that are legislatively mandated.



DOMAIN	DOMAIN ELEMENT	INDICATORS
LITERACY (CONT.)	Early Writing	◆ Develops understanding that writing is a way of communicating for a variety of purposes.
		◆ Begins to represent stories and experiences through pictures, dictation, and in play.
		◆ Experiments with a growing variety of writing tools and materials, such as pencils, crayons, and computers.
		◆ Progresses from using scribbles, shapes, or pictures to represent ideas, to using letter-like symbols, to copying or writing familiar words such as their own name.
	Alphabet Knowledge	◆ Shows progress in associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds.
		◆ Increases in ability to notice the beginning letters in familiar words.
		★ Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name.
		★ Knows that letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named.
MATHEMATICS	☆ Number & Operations	◆ Demonstrates increasing interest and awareness of numbers and counting as a means for solving problems and determining quantity.
		◆ Begins to associate number concepts, vocabulary, quantities, and written numerals in meaningful ways.
		◆ Develops increasing ability to count in sequence to 10 and beyond.
		◆ Begins to make use of one-to-one correspondence in counting objects and matching groups of objects.
		◆ Begins to use language to compare numbers of objects with terms such as more, less, greater than, fewer, equal to.
		◆ Develops increased abilities to combine, separate and name “how many” concrete objects.
	Geometry & Spatial Sense	◆ Begins to recognize, describe, compare, and name common shapes, their parts and attributes.
		◆ Progresses in ability to put together and take apart shapes.
		◆ Begins to be able to determine whether or not two shapes are the same size and shape.
		◆ Shows growth in matching, sorting, putting in a series, and regrouping objects according to one or two attributes such as color, shape, or size.
	Patterns & Measurement	◆ Builds an increasing understanding of directionality, order, and positions of objects, and words such as up, down, over, under, top, bottom, inside, outside, in front, and behind.
		◆ Enhances abilities to recognize, duplicate, and extend simple patterns using a variety of materials.
		◆ Shows increasing abilities to match, sort, put in a series, and regroup objects according to one or two attributes such as shape or size.
		◆ Begins to make comparisons between several objects based on a single attribute.
		◆ Shows progress in using standard and non-standard measures for length and area of objects.
SCIENCE	Scientific Skills & Methods	◆ Begins to use senses and a variety of tools and simple measuring devices to gather information, investigate materials, and observe processes and relationships.
		◆ Develops increased ability to observe and discuss common properties, differences and comparisons among objects and materials.
		◆ Begins to participate in simple investigations to test observations, discuss and draw conclusions, and form generalizations.
		◆ Develops growing abilities to collect, describe, and record information through a variety of means, including discussion, drawings, maps, and charts.
		◆ Begins to describe and discuss predictions, explanations, and generalizations based on past experiences.

★ Indicates the 4 specific Domain Elements and 9 Indicators that are legislatively mandated.

DOMAIN	DOMAIN ELEMENT	INDICATORS
SCIENCE (CONT.)	Scientific Knowledge	◆ Expands knowledge of and abilities to observe, describe, and discuss the natural world, materials, living things, and natural processes.
		◆ Expands knowledge of and respect for their bodies and the environment.
		◆ Develops growing awareness of ideas and language related to attributes of time and temperature.
		◆ Shows increased awareness and beginning understanding of changes in materials and cause-effect relationships.
CREATIVE ARTS	Music	◆ Participates with increasing interest and enjoyment in a variety of music activities, including listening, singing, finger plays, games, and performances.
		◆ Experiments with a variety of musical instruments.
	Art	◆ Gains ability in using different art media and materials in a variety of ways for creative expression and representation.
		◆ Progresses in abilities to create drawings, paintings, models, and other art creations that are more detailed, creative, or realistic.
		◆ Develops growing abilities to plan, work independently, and demonstrate care and persistence in a variety of art projects.
		◆ Begins to understand and share opinions about artistic products and experiences.
	Movement	◆ Expresses through movement and dancing what is felt and heard in various musical tempos and styles.
		◆ Shows growth in moving in time to different patterns of beat and rhythm in music.
	Dramatic Play	◆ Participates in a variety of dramatic play activities that become more extended and complex.
		◆ Shows growing creativity and imagination in using materials and in assuming different roles in dramatic play situations.
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Self-Concept	◆ Begins to develop and express awareness of self in terms of specific abilities, characteristics, and preferences.
		◆ Develops growing capacity for independence in a range of activities, routines, and tasks.
		◆ Demonstrates growing confidence in a range of abilities and expresses pride in accomplishments.
	Self-Control	◆ Shows progress in expressing feelings, needs, and opinions in difficult situations and conflicts without harming themselves, others, or property.
		◆ Develops growing understanding of how their actions affect others and begins to accept the consequences of their actions.
		◆ Demonstrates increasing capacity to follow rules and routines and use materials purposefully, safely, and respectfully.
	Cooperation	◆ Increases abilities to sustain interactions with peers by helping, sharing, and discussion.
		◆ Shows increasing abilities to use compromise and discussion in working, playing, and resolving conflicts with peers.
		◆ Develops increasing abilities to give and take in interactions; to take turns in games or using materials; and to interact without being overly submissive or directive.

★ Indicates the 4 specific Domain Elements and 9 Indicators that are legislatively mandated.

DOMAIN	DOMAIN ELEMENT	INDICATORS
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CONT.)	Social Relationships	◆ Demonstrates increasing comfort in talking with and accepting guidance and directions from a range of familiar adults.
		◆ Shows progress in developing friendships with peers.
		◆ Progresses in responding sympathetically to peers who are in need, upset, hurt, or angry; and in expressing empathy or caring for others.
	Knowledge of Families & Communities	◆ Develops ability to identify personal characteristics including gender and family composition.
		◆ Progresses in understanding similarities and respecting differences among people, such as genders, race, special needs, culture, language, and family structures.
		◆ Develops growing awareness of jobs and what is required to perform them.
APPROACHES TO LEARNING	Initiative & Curiosity	◆ Begins to express and understand concepts and language of geography in the contexts of their classroom, home, and community.
		◆ Chooses to participate in an increasing variety of tasks and activities.
		◆ Develops increased ability to make independent choices.
		◆ Approaches tasks and activities with increased flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness.
	Engagement & Persistence	◆ Grows in eagerness to learn about and discuss a growing range of topics, ideas, and tasks.
		◆ Grows in abilities to persist in and complete a variety of tasks, activities, projects, and experiences.
		◆ Demonstrates increasing ability to set goals and develop and follow through on plans.
	Reasoning & Problem Solving	◆ Shows growing capacity to maintain concentration over time on a task, question, set of directions or interactions, despite distractions and interruptions.
		◆ Develops increasing ability to find more than one solution to a question, task, or problem.
		◆ Grows in recognizing and solving problems through active exploration, including trial and error, and interactions and discussions with peers and adults.
PHYSICAL HEALTH & DEVELOPMENT	Gross Motor Skills	◆ Develops increasing abilities to classify, compare and contrast objects, events, and experiences.
		◆ Shows increasing levels of proficiency, control, and balance in walking, climbing, running, jumping, hopping, skipping, marching, and galloping.
	Fine Motor Skills	◆ Demonstrates increasing abilities to coordinate movements in throwing, catching, kicking, bouncing balls, and using the slide and swing.
		◆ Develops growing strength, dexterity, and control needed to use tools such as scissors, paper punch, stapler, and hammer.
		◆ Grows in hand-eye coordination in building with blocks, putting together puzzles, reproducing shapes and patterns, stringing beads, and using scissors.
	Health Status & Practices	◆ Progresses in abilities to use writing, drawing, and art tools including pencils, markers, chalk, paint brushes, and various types of technology.
		◆ Progresses in physical growth, strength, stamina, and flexibility.
		◆ Participates actively in games, outdoor play, and other forms of exercise that enhance physical fitness.

★ Indicates the 4 specific Domain Elements and 9 Indicators that are legislatively mandated.

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## INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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

**SUBJECT:** Using Child Outcomes in Program Self-Assessment

**INFORMATION:** The purpose of this Memorandum is to inform Head Start grantees and delegate agencies about:

- Steps for incorporating data on child outcomes in their program's self-assessment.
- Recommendations for local grantee planning to implement these steps.
- Forthcoming resources on outcomes-based program self-assessment.

This Memorandum builds on the initial guidance we provided earlier this year (ACYF-IM-00-03, January 31, 2000) on legislative changes concerning program outcomes. These changes include the establishment of additional results-based education performance standards and performance measures and the requirements that the standards and measures be adaptable for use by programs in their self-assessments and reviewed when programs are monitored.

In our earlier guidance, we explained that the requirements for incorporating data on child outcomes in program self-assessment apply to Head Start services to three- to five-year-old children and not to children birth to three served in Early Head Start or Migrant Head Start programs. Of course, Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start programs are responsible for implementing Program Performance Standards, including initial screening and ongoing assessment of all children as well as annual program self-assessment.

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## Steps for Incorporating Child Outcome Data in Program Self-Assessment

### Goals and Objectives

1. Grantees should focus on the goal of enhancing program self-assessment and continuous program improvement by incorporating data on child outcomes. Programs should center planning on improving and connecting current systems, tools, and procedures for (a) ongoing assessment of children and (b) annual program self-assessment.
2. The objectives of this initiative are to:
  - Improve the content, quality, consistency and credibility of ongoing assessment of children.
  - Design an approach to analyze data on children's progress and accomplishments.
  - Incorporate child outcome data into program self-assessment and continuous program improvement.

### Improve the Content, Quality, Consistency and Credibility of Ongoing Assessment of Children

3. Attached, as Attachment A, is The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. Grantees should ensure that their system for ongoing assessment of children includes collection of some data in each of the eight Domains of children's learning and development. The Domain areas, based on the Head Start Program Performance Standards, are:
  - Language Development
  - Literacy
  - Mathematics
  - Science
  - Creative Arts
  - Social & Emotional Development
  - Approaches Toward Learning
  - Physical Health and Development

In addition, because they are legislatively mandated, programs must gather and analyze data on certain specific Domain Elements or Indicators of progress in language, literacy and numeracy skills. These required elements are shown in bold print in the Domain Elements or Indicator columns.

Grantees may also choose to track progress in additional areas of child, family and program outcomes, as defined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards or based on local program goals and priorities. They may also review other state or community initiatives on early childhood program outcomes, so that planning addresses the implications of these efforts for partnerships with other funding sources and agencies.

4. Grantees should review their system for ongoing child assessment and consider improvements to ensure that it provides objective, accurate, consistent and credible information on children's progress over the course of their participation in Head Start, including:
  - Ensuring that assessment tools are appropriate for Head Start children in terms of age-appropriateness, language and culture.
  - Providing adequate oversight and supervision to ensure the quality, accuracy, consistency and credibility of child outcome data.
  - Improving initial and ongoing training for personnel who administer assessments, record and analyze data on children's performance and progress.
5. Grantees should fully include children with identified disabilities in the child outcome assessment system, with appropriate accommodation of the assessment tool and process to their special needs. Programs may elect to incorporate in their child outcomes system additional information on the progress of children with disabilities, based on goals and measures of progress in children's Individual Education Plans (IEP).

### Design an Approach to Analyze Data on Children's Progress and Accomplishments

6. Grantees must develop a system to analyze data on child outcomes that centers on patterns of progress for groups of children over time as they receive services through the program year. At a minimum, data analysis should compare progress beginning when children enter Head Start, at a mid-point in the program year, and when they complete the program year. Data analysis could also be designed to answer questions such as the following:
  - What are the patterns of progress and accomplishments for groups of children in different Domains and indicators of learning and development?
  - What are the patterns of outcomes for children in different program options, forms of service, and service areas?
  - What are the patterns of outcome data for different groups of children, such as (a) those that begin Head Start at different levels of functioning and (b) children that receive one or two years of Head Start services?
  - What are the trends in outcome data from year to year, in terms of stability and change in patterns of progress and levels of accomplishment?

In most programs, analysis of child outcomes should be based on data from all children enrolled. Grantees that serve very large numbers of children may consider, with the assistance of appropriate research or evaluation experts, approaches to analyzing outcome data from a sample of children selected to be representative of the full population of children served.

### Incorporate Child Outcome Data in Program Self-Assessment and Continuous Program Improvement

7. Data analysis on patterns of child outcomes should be incorporated into the overall program self-assessment system and in reporting to agency management teams, Policy Committees and Policy Councils and governing bodies. Data on outcomes should be considered in conjunction with overall program self-assessment findings in planning for program improvements, such as enhanced staff

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training, mentoring and supervision; improvements in curriculum; reallocation of program resources; involvement of volunteers and community partners; or new efforts to support families in enhancing children's learning and development. Agencies may also consider other opportunities to use data on child outcomes in working with community partners, such as planning for transitions of children from Head Start into elementary schools.

### Recommendations for Program Planning

Our planned timelines for programs to include child outcome data in their self-assessments and for monitoring these activities are explained in Attachment B. In developing plans, grantees are encouraged to consider the following recommendations:

- Assess implications of this new effort for management and staff responsibilities, workload and capabilities.
- Develop and implement plans to enhance the skills and knowledge of staff members and managers through Head Start Training & Technical Assistance providers, consultants, higher education institutions or research organizations.
- In conjunction with reviewing the content areas of ongoing child assessment, carry out a similar review of program curriculum, materials, and learning environments to ensure that they provide suitably, well-balanced and engaging opportunities to foster children's learning and development in each of the Domain areas of the Outcomes Framework.
- Develop appropriate amendments to existing written plans for implementing services in Early Childhood Development and Health Services, Family and Community Partnerships, and Program Design and Management to reflect this initiative and its connections with existing program systems.

We look forward to working with you in this important effort to improve services for Head Start children.



Helen H. Taylor  
Associate Commissioner  
Head Start Bureau



## ***TIMELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRAM MONITORING***

**September 2000–  
August 2001** Grantees begin planning, capacity-building, and implementing the inclusion of child outcome data in program self-assessment. At a minimum, each grantee should carry out a pilot effort to analyze data on patterns of progress for a group of children, and consider child outcome data in program self-assessment and continuous program improvement. In addition, agencies should review and implement improvements in their ongoing child assessment system in the areas of content, quality, consistency, and credibility.

ACF develops and field tests procedures for monitoring outcomes-based program self-assessment in a limited set of programs.

**Program Year  
2001–2002** Grantees fully implement child outcomes-based program self-assessment system and create baseline information on patterns of children's progress and accomplishments during the program year.

ACF carries out first full cycle of program monitoring on grantee systems and implementation efforts. Monitoring teams will review outcome data to establish a baseline of expectations on patterns and forms of evidence of children's progress and accomplishments.

**Program Year  
2002–2003** Grantees continue and improve implementation efforts, including comparison of patterns of data on children's progress and accomplishments from program years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003.

ACF conducts second full cycle of program monitoring to examine grantee implementation efforts and review of evidence of program effectiveness via data on patterns of children's progress and accomplishments.

<p><b>ACF</b></p> <p><b>Administration For Children And Families</b></p>	<p><b>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES</b></p> <p><b>Administration on Children, Youth and Families</b></p>	
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	<p><b>3. Originating Office: Head Start Bureau</b></p>	
	<p><b>4. Key Word: Head Start National Reporting System on Child Outcomes</b></p>	

## INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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

**SUBJECT:** Implementation of the Head Start National Reporting System on Child Outcomes

**INFORMATION:**

This Information Memorandum (IM) provides information and directions to Head Start agencies preparing for the national reporting system for all 4- and 5-year-old children in 2003-4. The IM includes the following sections:

- Overview of the National Reporting System (NRS)
- Selecting Participants for NRS Training-of-Trainers
- Selecting Staff Members to Implement the NRS
- Training Staff at the Program Level
- Implementing NRS Child Assessment
- Financial Support for NRS Activities

This IM is being sent now to give programs information needed to plan and prepare for important implementation steps within the context of local timelines, budgets, staff assignments and management systems.

We are currently completing the final steps in developing the National Reporting System. With the assistance of the NRS Technical Work Group we are reviewing data from the NRS field test in 36 local Head Start programs. On April 11, 2003, we published an announcement in the Federal Register to request public comments on the proposed NRS information collection plan. The public comment period closed on June 10, 2003. We are currently considering the comments and making appropriate changes before seeking final approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to proceed with the NRS.

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It is important to note that, in accordance with the Paperwork Reduction of 1995 (Public Law 104-13), our agency may not conduct or sponsor a collection of information until we obtain OMB approval. Therefore, you may not begin to assess children until you receive assessment instruments from us with a currently valid OMB control number. After obtaining OMB approval, we will send you an official notification of the specific expectations and requirements for the first year of this important work.

## Overview of the National Reporting System (NRS)

The National Reporting System is designed on the basis of President Bush's Good Start, Grow Smart, Early Childhood Initiative and provisions of the Head Start Act (Sections 641A.(a)(1)(B), 641A.(b)(4), 641A.(c)(2)(D), 648.(c)(1)(B), 649.(b)(4)) to create a new national data base on the progress and accomplishments of 4- and 5-year-old Head Start children on specific child outcomes. Programs will administer a common NRS assessment to all 4- and 5-year-old children at the beginning and end of the program year in order to determine some of the skills with which they enter Head Start, their levels of achievement when they leave Head Start and the progress they make during the Head Start year.

The assessment information collected through the NRS will be used to strengthen Head Start program effectiveness in these ways:

- Each local Head Start program will receive information from the NRS to supplement and enhance their local aggregation of child outcome data and local program self-assessment efforts and results.
- The Head Start Bureau and ACF Regional Offices will incorporate NRS information to plan future training and technical assistance efforts.
- Future Head Start program monitoring reviews will incorporate consideration of child outcomes information from the NRS.

It is equally important to stress that the NRS assessment and reporting system is not intended to be used to assess the school readiness of individual children, nor to replace locally-designed ongoing child assessment efforts, carried out for the purposes of curriculum planning, individualization and communication with parents.

As outlined in Attachment A, the NRS child assessment items are from currently available instruments designed and validated for use with preschool aged children and presently in use in a variety of large-scale studies of Head Start children. Based on the field test of the NRS this spring in 36 diverse Head Start programs with more than 1400 children, we estimate the one-on-one assessment will take approximately 15 minutes per child. Children who demonstrate language proficiency in both English and Spanish will be assessed in both languages, which will take approximately 30 minutes per child, in two separate sessions.

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The NRS child assessment will provide information on the following five learning indicators as mandated by Congress in the Head Start Act in 1998:

- Understanding and using language to communicate for various purposes.
- Using increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
- In the case of children whose native language is other than English, progressing toward acquisition of the English language.
- Identifying at least 10 letters of the alphabet.
- Numeracy awareness.

The NRS child assessment instruments, training, and materials will be available in both English and Spanish language versions this year.

Programs are expected to include all 4- and 5-year old children who will be entering kindergarten following their 2003-4 Head Start year. This will include 4- and 5-year-old children with identified disabilities, 4- and 5-year olds served through all of the various Head Start program design options, and all 4- and 5-year-old children who speak either English or Spanish, or both. Children who speak other languages will only participate in two initial sections of the assessment designed to document their progress in acquiring English.

Programs will also be responsible for entering background information on children, teachers, classrooms, centers and programs in the NRS web-based computer information system, as described in Attachment B. The computer system will generate an individualized computer-scalable assessment form for each child which staff members will use to record children's responses. These forms will be mailed for scanning into the NRS database and to generate reports. The background information will also be used to analyze the NRS reports in order to understand different forms of Head Start services in promoting the progress of groups of children with a variety of characteristics. Security features will protect the confidentiality of children and all data. Programs with limited computer capability or no Internet access will be able to enter background descriptors on paper forms.

## Selecting Participants for NRS Training-of-Trainers

As described in Attachment C, each Head Start program is requested to designate one or more representatives (based upon the number of 4- and 5-five-year-olds enrolled) to participate in the NRS Training-of-Trainers this summer. American Indian and Alaska Native program representatives will attend the Training-of-Trainers session in the ACF region in which their program is geographically located. (Programs funded by the Migrant and Seasonal Programs Branch will participate in the Training-of-Trainers in early spring, 2004.) During this training participants will learn and be certified to train and certify local staff for implementing the NRS. A team that includes Head Start Bureau, ACF regional office, and contractual specialists will conduct each two and one half-day Training-of-Trainers session.

The training design includes:

- Presentations on the NRS system and materials.
- Preparation on the English and Spanish language versions of the NRS materials, and role-playing and practice with preschool children.

- Preparation and practice in observing and providing feedback to others learning about the NRS.
- Training and practice on data entry and operations of the computer-based information system.
- Sessions on training and certifying local staff.

The Training of Trainers design culminates in a certification process based on observational ratings by expert trainers of the performance of participants in administering the child assessment. Additional learning, practice and coaching is planned each evening to support all participants successfully completing certification for the NRS. Participants will also receive training materials to support local staff.

Based on the training design and capacity of the Training of Trainers training teams, each grantee and delegate agency with up to 400 children age 4 or 5 is requested to send one participant to the Training of Trainers. Programs with more than 400 children age 4 or 5 are requested to send an additional participant for each group of up to 400 children age 4 or 5.

Programs should identify their training representative(s) to participate in Training-of-Trainers based on their capacity to successfully train local staff and, in conjunction with the support of the local management team, to monitor and support high quality implementation of the NRS. Programs may consider individuals such as Education or Disabilities Coordinators, Early Literacy Mentor Coaches, Center Directors, or Managers with lead responsibilities in the areas of assessing and analyzing information on child outcomes or programs may utilize a consultant for this assignment. Prior experience, training, and demonstrated effectiveness in the areas of early childhood assessment and staff development are important criteria in selecting participants.

Programs serving children whose primary language is Spanish should strongly consider sending a trainer who is fully bilingual, so that they can become well prepared to train local staff members on both the English and Spanish language versions of the NRS child assessment. A limited number of additional Training of Trainers slots will be available for programs that serve 400 or fewer 4- and 5-year-old children and that need to send two training participants in order to assure local training in both the English and Spanish language versions.

## Selecting Staff to Implement the NRS

Programs need to carefully determine the most appropriate staff and, when necessary, consultant team to implement the NRS. Key criteria in this decision should be the skills and experience of the individuals in assessing young children and accurately documenting children's responses to questions and tasks.

Programs serving children whose primary language is Spanish and/or children who speak both Spanish and English will need to identify and train people who can effectively administer both the English and Spanish language versions of the NRS.

Several approaches to staffing for the NRS field-testing were used by local programs. Programs may consider possible implications of staffing based on some of the options:

- Classroom teachers have well-established relationships with children which will support children's cooperation and motivation during the assessment. Having teachers do the

assessments can give them additional information that will help them better understand children's characteristics, strengths and needs. Teachers also have the benefit of prior training and experience in a variety of early childhood assessments.

- Other staff, managers, specialists, or consultants may also conduct the NRS assessment. In this approach, teachers do not have to leave their classrooms and be replaced by substitutes. One version of this approach involves training a limited number of individuals who can arrange their schedules to assess children in a number of different classrooms. These individuals would gain the benefit of more practice and experience with the NRS items, perhaps leading to more consistent documentation.

## Training Staff at the Program Level

Training-of-Trainers participants will return to their programs to train and certify local staff to deliver the child assessment items in a consistent, accurate and objective manner and to enter information into the computer-based information system. Training-of-Trainers participants are encouraged to prepare and certify one or more local co-trainers to assist in implementing local staff training and certification. Local training on the NRS is estimated to require from 6-8 hours for presentations, demonstration, role-playing and dialogue to clarify and explain. In addition, time should be provided for staff to conduct practice sessions with children and for the trainers to observe and certify the staff. Planning for local training would also include recruitment of children to participate in sessions for the purposes of staff practice and certification. These should not be children who will be participating in the local NRS assessment and reporting effort in 2003-2004. Training for staff assigned to enter data in the computer-based information system is estimated at 1-2 hours per person.

To maintain a high level of consistency in implementation in NRS data quality, a follow-up, refresher training will be held in the spring of 2004, prior to data collection.

## Implementing NRS Child Assessment

Each program will need to identify space to conduct the assessments; replacements and possible substitutes for staff while they are conducting assessments; and schedule a time for the assessments. Assessments should be done in a space that is comfortable for the assessor and the child and that minimizes distractions. Children will be assessed one at a time. All NRS activities should be scheduled to minimize disruption of other program activities.

Because the purpose of the National Reporting System is to document the progress of children as they receive Head Start services, the first assessments should be scheduled soon after children begin program services, so that changes in children's performance documented from fall to spring reflect the benefits of as much program service as possible.

The local NRS team is encouraged to create an ongoing monitoring effort to track the progress of NRS implementation and to identify and respond to any problems concerning consistency and quality control in the administration of all local NRS activities.

## Financial Support for NRS Activities

As noted in the April 18, 2003 FY 2003 Funding Guidance (Program Instruction ACYF-PI-03-01), we are awarding \$16 million in quality improvement funds to support the costs of preparation and implementation of the National Reporting System. Each Head Start and Early Head Start grantee may apply for a one quarter of one percent increase (.0025) in its base funding for this purpose. We understand that your ACF Regional Office has informed you of the exact dollar amount for which you may apply.

These funds should be sufficient to cover the costs of implementing the reporting system, including the following:

- Travel expenses for one or more staff to attend Training-of-Trainers sessions.
- Staff salaries and expenses related to local staff training on the NRS assessment and computer-based management system, if the training is not within work hours that are already budgeted.
- Costs to support the fall and spring implementation, such as hiring of substitute teachers, when necessary.
- Costs related to the timely entry of information into the NRS data management computer system.

We look forward to working with you in this significant effort which will help us ensure that Head Start is successful in preparing children for school.



Windy M. Hill  
Associate Commissioner  
Head Start Bureau

**ATTACHMENT A - Description of the NRS Child Assessment**

**ATTACHMENT B - Description of the NRS Computer-Based Reporting System**

**(ATTACHMENT C - Schedule and Registration Information for NRS Training-of-Trainers is not included in *The Head Start Path to Positive Child Outcomes*)**



## ATTACHMENT A

### Description of the NRS Child Assessment Items

In the design of the NRS field test, the Head Start Bureau convened a Technical Work Group of experts to review the selection of tasks to be included in the child assessment and available early childhood assessment instruments and findings, including tools utilized in Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) 2000 and National Head Start Impact Study (NHSIS).

The selection of tasks to be included in the individual child assessment was guided by the following criteria. Tasks in the assessment are intended to appraise skills that:

- Congress and the President expect children to learn in Head Start, as indicated by their being among the mandated achievement goals contained in legislation that reauthorizes the Head Start program in 1998;
- Are critical stepping-stones on the path to achievement in elementary school, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics;
- Can be readily enhanced by activities in Head Start;
- Head Start parents want their children to learn;
- A majority of U.S. children from non-low-income families have mastered by the time they begin kindergarten; and
- Can be reliably measured in a relatively brief child assessment that is conducted by a Head Start teacher or other local staff member.

Based on the Technical Work Group's review, the Head Start Bureau approved a field test version of five components. Most of the child-items in the NRS have been used extensively in FACES, the National Head Start Impact Study, or the Head Start Quality Research Center studies, involving more than 7000 Head Start children, as well as in other major studies of low-income preschoolers. The results of these assessments in FACES research over the past seven years have proven to be highly stable from cohort to cohort, not only in terms of the levels of progress with which children enter or leave the Head Start program, but also in terms of their growth over time. Findings from these studies also demonstrate that the assessment works well with children from diverse backgrounds. The items utilized in the NRS field test includes the following components:

- **Comprehension of Spoken English** to address the Head Start goal areas of "Develops ability to understand and use language," "Uses increasingly complex and varied vocabulary," and "Progresses in understanding and speaking English (for non-English speakers)." This task is composed of the Oral Language Development Scale (OLDS) of the PreLAS 2000, asking the child to follow simple one-step commands in spoken English, as in the game "Simon Says." The second part asks the child to name or explain the function of objects in a series of ten pictures.

For children who are English-language learners, these tasks assess the child's ability to follow simple spoken instructions and give the English names of familiar objects. This serves as a screener for identifying children who should be assessed in Spanish rather than in English. For other children, this serves as a "warm-up" establishing rapport with the child and helping children feel comfortable with the one-on-one situation. The estimated time for this task is 3 minutes.

- **Vocabulary** addresses the Head Start goal area of “understands increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.” The vocabulary task has been adapted from the Third Edition of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III), which has been used successfully in two cohorts of FACES and which has shown that children in Head Start make meaningful gains toward national norms over the course of the program year and during kindergarten. For the sake of simplicity of administration, each child receives 24 items representing an appropriate range of items for the Head Start child. This task assesses understanding of words representing parts of the human body or their functions, activities of daily living, emotions and feelings, work/career-related activities, and plants, animals and their habitats. The estimated time for this is 5 minutes.
- **Letter Naming** addresses the Head Start goal area of “Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in own name.” The Letter Naming task is a test developed for use in the Head Start Quality Research Centers (QRC) curricular intervention studies. Children are shown all 26 letters of the alphabet, divided into three groups of 8, 9, and 9 letters, and arranged in approximate order of item difficulty. They are asked to identify the letters they know by name. The QRC data show that this task has excellent validity and reliability. The estimated time for this task is 3 minutes.
- **Early Math** addresses the Head Start goal area of “Numbers and operations.” The Early Math skills task is a new task adapted from the Math assessment used in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of a kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K). It is composed of items similar to but not identical with items that proved to be in the easier difficulty range in the ECLS-K data, ones that most children in that study had mastered by the beginning of kindergarten.

Items address a range of relevant mathematical skills including number recognition of one-digit numerals, basic geometric shapes, matching number names with objects, counting, simple addition and subtraction, making judgements about the relative size of objects, and interpreting simple measurements and graphic representations. The estimated time for this is 3 minutes.

(A fifth component related to the goal of improving phonological awareness was included in the NRS field test. However, based on the results of the field test and the recommendation of the NRS Technical Work Group, we have decided not to include it in the NRS this year.)

Children whose home language is Spanish and who are English-language learners will be given a Spanish version of the NRS items. The Spanish version will include Tio Simon and La Casita from the PreLAS, the Spanish version of the vocabulary task, which has been adapted from the Test de Vocabulario en Imagenes Peabody, and a Spanish translation of the Early Math tasks. The assessment will also include a Spanish version of the Letter Naming Task, containing the complete Spanish language alphabet. Spoken English will be assessed with the Pre-LAS “Simon Says” and “Art Show” tasks.

## ATTACHMENT B

### Description of the NRS Computer-Based Information System

The NRS will collect program-, center-, classroom-, teacher-, and child-level descriptive data through a computer-based reporting system. The descriptive information will facilitate tracking of assessment completion by program, a variety of analyses of the child assessment data and a variety of reports on the progress of groups of children.

**Program Information** - Information captured at the program-level includes program name, director name and email, agency description, number of delegates, number of centers, and contact information for the NRS lead contact person. Much of this data will be automatically transferred from the Program Information Report (PIR) database to reduce burden of data entry on Head Start staff.

**Center Information** - Center-level data include similar fields, such as center name and address, phone and fax numbers, email address, enrollment start and end date, and the child outcomes contact person at the center. This information is needed for data tracking, analysis and to target training and technical assistance to specific programs.

**Classroom Information** - Data to be collected include description of class (e.g., morning, afternoon, full day); teacher stability/turnover during the year; total enrollment; and number of additional staff.

**Teacher Information** - Background information on Head Start teachers, such as educational attainment and years of teaching experience, will be collected, to allow analyses of relationships between teacher characteristics and child outcomes.

**Child Information** - Child-level data include age, child entry date into the classroom, number of years in Head Start, disability, other languages spoken at home, rating of English proficiency, child ethnicity, and child race. These data will be used in analysis and as a context for interpreting the NRS child assessment information.



