

Presentation Handout

Curriculum, Assessment, and Child Outcomes

This presentation addresses the interrelated issues of curriculum, assessment, and child outcomes in early childhood programs, providing an overall context for the Institute.

Major points

- The 1998 Reauthorization of Head Start calls for continuing quality improvement and increased accountability in Head Start programs.
- Quality and accountability can best be improved if administrators, teachers, and parents clearly understand the program's goals for children's learning and development (outcomes), have articulated plans for achieving those goals (curriculum), and ways of evaluating children's learning and developmental progress (assessment).
- Head Start Program Performance Standards have been revised to reflect current thinking about curriculum and assessment, and the relationship between them.

Outcomes

- The 1998 Reauthorization calls for measuring and demonstrating improved child outcomes in language, literacy, and numeracy.
- The Head Start Bureau adopted a Child Outcomes Framework that covers eight areas: language, literacy, mathematics, science, social-emotional development, approaches toward learning, creative arts, and physical health and well-being.
- Although specifying child outcomes has been controversial in the past, positive results can occur that include: providing a shared set of goals to work toward, a framework for planning curriculum, and a whole child approach (Head Start's Child Outcomes Framework addresses all areas, developmental goals as well as readiness ones, because social-emotional development and approaches to learning are critical aspects of readiness).
- Child outcomes must be developmentally appropriate, thus challenging but achievable for most of the children within a given age range.
- Head Start's Child Outcomes Framework is not exhaustive, nor is it a checklist; it is a common set of agreed upon domains and sub-domains with examples.
- Head Start's Child Outcomes Framework applies to 4-year-olds at the end of Head Start, but achieving them is the result of many cumulative experiences since birth (so Early Head Start has a critical role to play.)
- Head Start's new Child Outcomes Framework must be taken into consideration in planning and implementing curriculum and assessment.

Curriculum

- Head Start requires a written curriculum plan but not a prepackaged set of lessons that does not adapt for the local context. This standard must be implemented in relation to other standards which require responsiveness to individual and cultural variation.
- Head Start's definition of curriculum is comprehensive, including goals, materials, learning experiences, teaching strategies, and roles of staff and parents.
- Programs should use similar criteria for selecting and/or developing/adapting curriculum which include: coherence, comprehensiveness, and developmental appropriateness.