



Planning in Head Start

TA Planning Paper # 3: Program Goals and School Readiness Goals—Understanding the Relationship

The Head Start Planning system and its related activities are a major part of program operations. While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programing, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers have developed a series of Technical Assistance Papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system. This paper clarifies the relationship between program goals and school readiness goals.

Program Goals

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR Part 1304.51(a)(1)(ii)) require programs to develop long-range program goals and short-term program and financial objectives. Program goals are broad statements that support the program's mission to serve its children, families, and community. They ensure the program's commitment to establishing strong management, fiscal and service delivery systems. Programs set long-range goals to be accomplished by the end of their five-year project period. These long-range goals are reviewed as part of the annual planning process. Most continue as goals throughout the five-year period, while a few may be met in a shorter time frame or revised. Having stable goals over five years enables programs to measure progress along the way as well as the effect of the program's activities over the five-year period.

Programs also develop short-term objectives. Objectives support the attainment of a goal by breaking the goal down into **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely** elements, often represented by the mnemonic **SMART**.

Program goals are derived from the annual Self-Assessment (SA), community assessment (CA), an analysis of other key data sources, and related research. Goals that relate to family engagement/family services, health services, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness may be represented as program goals in different ways. For example, program goals that are developed based on these data. That is, program goals may emerge from SA and CA results in any service area or one single goal may encompass multiple service areas.

School Readiness Goals

Section 641 A(g)(2) of the Head Start Act requires that programs establish program goals for improving the school readiness of children participating in its program. School readiness goals are a subset of overall program goals and focus on child development and early learning outcomes in the five essential or core domains of birth to five school readiness, (language and literacy, cognition and general

knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development.)¹ School readiness goals have two key features. They are broad statements that articulate high expectations for the progress children served in Head Start and Early Head Start will make to be ready to succeed in kindergarten. They also focus on children's progress in developing skills and knowledge and how this progress will be measured. Examples of school readiness goals for preschool children can be found on the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning page on the ECKLC (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/sr-goals.pdf>.) Examples of school readiness goals for infants and toddlers can be found at the Early Head Start National Resource Center page (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/Early%20Head%20Start/early-learning/curriculum/school-readiness-goals-infants-toddlers.pdf>.)

Program and school readiness goals work together to ensure high quality comprehensive services to children and families. Section 1307.3 of the Head Start Program Performance Standards requires that "programs establish program goals for improving the school readiness of children participating in its program in accordance with the requirements of section 641 A (g)(2) of the Head Start Act." The majority of program goals support children's school readiness either directly or indirectly.

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Section 1307 also requires programs to establish school readiness goals in consultation with families whose children are participating in the program. Multiple avenues exist for programs to include family input in decisions about school readiness goals and plans. Many programs form a school readiness committee that includes staff and parents. Programs can also look at data gathered in parent interest surveys, home visiting conversations, and family input on lesson plans among other ways to gather parents' input. For information on monitoring children's progress on school readiness goals, refer to the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning Ongoing Child Assessment in-service suites on the ECKLC (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS/ISS-library-T.html>). For information about engaging parents children's assessment go to <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/family-engagement-and-ongoing-child-assessment-081111-1.pdf>

Looking at program goals through a systems lens

One question that Head Start programs frequently ask is how many programs goals they should have. A good way to think of this is to see if your goals meet the juggling test. How many balls, AKA goals, can your program keep in the air? Consider these questions when you develop your goals and objectives:

- What is your data telling you and what is the urgency of family, child and community needs?

¹ My Leadership Planner: A Professional Journal and Action Plan. In Office of Head Start (Ed.), (pp. 17). 2nd National Birth to Five Leadership Institute, 2013.

- How will you develop and communicate your goals both internally (e.g., staff, families, governing body and Policy Council members) and externally (e.g., community partners and funders)?
- How would each of these stakeholder groups embrace and articulate these goals?
- How are you going to track, monitor and evaluate activities and progress? How much data will you need to collect to be able to do this?

These questions may lead you to conclude that you are more likely to achieve your program goals if you, your staff, your governing body and Policy Council members, and your stakeholders are able to remember and speak to them regularly, and ultimately show progress and strong results on them during your Self-Assessment. When you decide your program's direction, you can prioritize your goals so that you have a small, manageable number and a clear method for achieving your expected outcomes. Remember, though, that the decision on the number of goals is guided by your data.

The chart that follows compares program goals and school readiness goals.

Program Goals and School Readiness Goals

Program Goals Characteristics	School Readiness Goals Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are broad statements of strategic direction that are compelling and that engage everyone in the program. • Answer two questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is to be accomplished? ○ Why is it important? • Describe the program’s focus and priorities. • Support the attainment of school readiness goals (many but not all program goals do this). • Include goals that support parent, family, and community engagement. • Are phrased as statements and begin with words similar to: “ Program will . . . ” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are broad, measurable statements of expectations of children’s status and progress across the five essential domains of the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Frameworks (HSCDELFL). • Reflect the age of the children being served². • Answer two questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is to be accomplished for all children? ○ Why is it important for kindergarten entry? • Describe what we want children to know and be able to do. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encompass the range of children served (e.g., are applicable for children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities.) • Are phrased as statements and begin with the words: “Children will . . . ”
Program Goals Process for Development	School Readiness Goals Process for Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are typically developed for the baseline application of the HS/EHS five-year project period as a result of the organization’s strategic planning and the Head Start planning process. • Are developed during the Head Start planning process using the annual Self-Assessment, updated community assessment and analysis of other key data including aggregated parent, family, and community engagement data.(e.g., summaries of conversations and observations, family strengths and needs, surveys of family satisfaction with services and referrals, and family partnership agreements.) • Are developed with input from and approved by the governing body and Policy Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Frameworks (HSCDELFL), State early learning guidelines, and the requirements and expectations of schools. • Are developed in consultation with the parents of the children participating in the program. • Are developed in consultation with and approved by the governing body and Policy Council. • Are mapped to align with indicators of child outcomes from the child assessment system.

Program Goals Revisions	School Readiness Goals Revisions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are reviewed annually. • Are revised or new goals are created as necessary (e.g., in response to program data and/or changes in identified community need). • Are revised as previous goals are accomplished and program priorities are modified. • Can also be revised based on change in context (e.g., national or state priorities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are reviewed annually. • Are revised or new goals are created as necessary (e.g., in response to program data and/or changes in identified community need). • Are revised as previous goals are accomplished and program priorities are modified. • Can also be revised based on change in context (e.g., national or state priorities).

²Head Start Program Instruction ACF-PI-HS-11-04: School Readiness in Programs Serving Preschool Children provides recommendations on how Head Start grantees can comply with the Head Start Act’s School Readiness requirements.

Program Goals Measuring Progress	School Readiness Goals Measuring Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are measured to enable programs to understand and report on progress towards their goals and objectives. • Are measured at the objective level. • Are measured—and progress toward them is determined—through program-wide data that is gathered during on-going monitoring and Self-Assessment and at other times during the year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are measured 2 or 3 times per year (depending on length of program) through an aggregation and analysis of child assessment and related data (e.g., teacher-child interaction, professional development, environment, curriculum fidelity).