

Curriculum Alignment with the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF)*

Head Start Program Performance Standards §1302.32(a)(1)(ii) and §1302.35(d)(1)(ii): Center-based, family child care, and home-based programs must use curricula that “are aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five and, as appropriate, state early learning and development standards.”



What does “aligned with the ELOF” mean?

Practically speaking, **aligning a curriculum with the ELOF** is a process that allows you to see which and to what extent the ELOF domains and sub-domains are addressed in the curriculum. Curricula that are fully aligned with the ELOF are comprehensive and address all areas of children’s learning and development described in the ELOF. The curriculum should also be aligned, as appropriate, with the domains of your state’s early learning and development standards (ELDS).

The curriculum may not be organized in the same way as the ELOF. For example, a curriculum might not list Approaches to Learning as a domain. Instead, a curriculum might list the sub-domain Emotional and Behavioral Self-Regulation under Social and Emotional Development or the sub-domain Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning) under Cognition. You might also find that a curriculum addresses areas that are not found in the ELOF, such as social studies or the arts. The curriculum also might use different terms, such as strand or content area, than the ELOF or ELDS do.

Why is aligning a curriculum with the ELOF important?

To be effective, curricula must provide content that is rich with meaningful and interesting learning experiences that are comprehensive in supporting children’s learning and development. This means all domains are addressed: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Language and Literacy; Cognition; and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development. A curriculum aligned with the ELOF and a state’s ELDS is designed to promote children’s development and learning in areas that research shows are important for children’s success in school. Curriculum content should specify supports for all children, including dual or tribal language learners and children with disabilities (or those suspected of having delays) and other special needs.

Even if a curriculum developer has already published a curriculum alignment with the ELOF, it is still important for your program to do its own alignment. The process will help you understand whether and how your program’s curriculum supports children’s development and learning described in the ELOF.

What does aligning a curriculum with the ELOF look like?

Read the following vignette to learn about how El Bosque Early Head Start reviews how well its curriculum aligns with the ELOF.

El Bosque Early Head Start uses the *Implementation Guide: Using the ELOF to Inform Curriculum Planning and Implementation* to review how its curriculum aligns with the ELOF. The program establishes an implementation team made up of the program director, education manager, education staff from each center, and interested parents and family members.

The implementation team finds that the curriculum addresses most of the skills, behaviors, and concepts in four domains of the ELOF (Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Cognition; and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development). It provides materials, teaching practices, and learning experiences to support children's development and learning in these domains. However, the curriculum does not adequately cover the Vocabulary and Emergent Literacy sub-domains in the Language and Literacy domain.

The *Implementation Guide* provides the process and tools they can use to strengthen their curriculum in the Language and Literacy domain. Education staff plan how to increase and strengthen their interactions with children during routine care. Program leaders consider planning professional development that focuses on expanding conversations with infants and toddlers and reading books with rich vocabulary.

What do you learn about a research-based curriculum from this vignette?

- El Bosque Early Head Start's implementation team used the *Implementation Guide: Using the ELOF to Inform Curriculum Planning and Implementation* to align their curriculum with the ELOF. They found that their curriculum covers all five domains of the ELOF. However, they discovered they could provide additional supports for children's development in the Vocabulary and Emergent Literacy sub-domains.
- The *Implementation Guide* helps education staff and program leaders plan how to strengthen teaching practices that ensure they fully support all ELOF sub-domains.

Resources to Support Your Work

Implementation Guide: Using the ELOF to Inform Curriculum Planning and Implementation. This resource provides the process and tools for aligning a curriculum with the ELOF and for strengthening teaching practices.

[https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/elof-03-inform-curriculum-planning-
implement.pdf](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/elof-03-inform-curriculum-planning-implement.pdf)

Early Essentials Webisode 9: Language Development. In this resource Linda Espinosa and others from the field share their tips on how to support language development with all children including those who are dual language learners.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/early-essentials-webisode-9-language-development>

Making It Work! This planning resource supports American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start programs teach their language and culture while meeting Head Start requirements.

[https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/making-it-work-connecting-cultural-learning-
experiences-american-indian](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/making-it-work-connecting-cultural-learning-experiences-american-indian)