

## Head Start A to Z Guiding Principles

Head Start and Early Head Start directors, managers, and training and technical assistance (T/TA) staff come from all walks of life and employment experiences. However, we all share an enduring commitment to the benefits of a comprehensive early childhood education. We also recognize that to promote school readiness and be responsive to the needs of our communities, we must engage in ongoing professional development. Head Start A to Z is designed to provide that support. It offers insight and strategies into the systems that characterize effective Head Start programs. These units of study are built on the following guiding principles.

*Note:* In addition to anchoring the learning in the Head Start A to Z sessions, you will continually revisit these guiding principles in all of the trainings offered by the National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations (PMFO).



### 1. **Successful programs are learning organizations.**

Head Start is a dynamic organization with high expectations, values, and traditions. In addition, programs are constantly responding to changing community needs and evolving best practices. To cultivate a learning organization that thrives in this environment, program leaders must support all staff in becoming life-long learners who embrace challenges as opportunities for collective problem-solving and innovation.



### 2. **The effective delivery of services grows out of strong systems.**

Program leaders must regularly refine their program's management and fiscal systems. To target community needs and deliver comprehensive services, leaders need to understand systems thinking, view their program through a systems lens, and recognize the relationship between systems, services, and child and family outcomes.



### 3. **Sound decision-making is driven by quality data.**

Used in planning, evaluating, and communicating information, quality data is integral to cultivating a culture of continuous quality improvement. To this end, it is critical for leaders to establish efficient processes for collecting, aggregating, analyzing, and synthesizing data. This will involve training teachers, home visitors, family advocates, health services workers, and other staff how to integrate data management into their day-to-day work.



#### 4. Relationship-building is at the heart of transformational leadership.

Robust Head Start communities build on authentic relationships between all of their stakeholders, from children and families to staff and managers, to governing bodies, Tribal Councils, and Policy Councils. To cultivate these communities, leaders need to communicate effectively, empower others, foster team-building, and nurture collaboration.



#### 5. School readiness for all is our driving goal.

Head Start leaders play an integral role in conceiving and promoting an inclusive vision of school readiness. To support children with diverse abilities and backgrounds to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to be successful in school, effective leaders must stay informed on developments in early childhood education. They also must actively collaborate with parents, staff, governing bodies, local education agencies, and community partners in embedding these best practices into services and programming.



#### 6. Culturally and linguistically diverse organizations rely on intentional, specific, and coordinated approaches.

To ensure the full and effective participation of dual language learners and their families, Head Start leaders must coordinate program-wide plans that involve all service areas and multiple staff. This includes staying connected to the communities served, implementing targeted strategies, and articulating how programs and services address specific linguistic and cultural needs.