

Overview: Dual Language Learners: Introducing the New Head Start Program Performance Standards

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Jennifer Amaya-Thompson: Buenos Diaz. Let's talk about the Head Start Program Performance Standards and how this maintained existing standards, also how new requirements are integrated to ensure that culturally and linguistic diverse practices are integrated for services for all children from birth to five. We have drawn on recent research, as you know, that have really shaped the work of the standards and address explicitly the needs of dual language learners children. These children speak a language at home other than English. In this overview, in this video, what we really wanted to provide you is an update about what are the continued existing requirements are for the Head Start Performance Standards. As you know, Sharon, we continue to have the requirement in which ensure the classroom to more than 50 percent of children who speak a language other than English continue to have one teacher or one staff that reflects the language that is fluent in that classroom setting.

Sharon Yandian: Yeah, that's great. Yeah, I think its just really clear that we've carried through the standards that we had before that were very good as it relays to supporting children and families from diverse cultures and languages.

Jennifer: Can you tell us a little bit about what are some of the new requirements within the Head Start program?

Sharon: Absolutely. I would love to do that. I think the best way to think about it is the standards fall into four main buckets, and will be — We can talk about them one by one. So, the first is a coordinated management approach to ensure the integration and those quality services for children who are dual language learners. The second really relates to teaching and learning practices. What are those culturally and linguistically responsive educational child development experiences we're providing? And, because it's so important that the third one is really around screening and assessment. What is a culturally and linguistically appropriate screening assessment practices? And lastly, in terms of working with families, what does that look like through this lens? So, let me talk really, just again, very briefly about looking at that big picture, of the management systems that really undergird the high quality programs. So, we have a requirement, it's in the Program Management section, but we have a requirement that all programs develop and influent an informed and coordinated program wide management approach to support the school readiness of children who are dual language learners. The language they use in the requirement talks about systematically and comprehensively addressing children and families needs. I think that hits on what were really looking for there. This standard signals that services to children who are dual language learners, does not limit itself to the education or the family section. So, it comes with intentionality at the program level.

So, I think -- So , how are programs gonna meet this requirement? I think that the standards there's a lot of latitude. The standards state that programs must design and implement a coordinated approach that addresses at a minimum, things you might expect. Appropriate program materials, curriculum, instruction, staffing, supervision, family partnerships and all that it entails in terms of communicating with families, both verbally and in writing. It's all there and we're asking programs to take thoughtful approach on how they would do that program wide. Then, I think the second area, we can begin with thinking about the very important teaching and learning experiences for children. I think in the program,

in the education section, it might be worth just reading the overarching statement. Which is a program must deliver developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate learning experiences in all the learning domains for all children birth to five. So, I think that again that's a lot. We use those words a lot, culturally, linguistically appropriate and what we're hoping to do with these regulations is really be clear about what those expectations are.

Jennifer: So, in terms of the learning and teaching practices, I was really excited about really learning on what it really means and how the concept of culture and linguistic practices is really integrated into the work that we do. I also see how that it highlights how communication and rich language environments is very important for the work in the classroom settings.

Sharon: Absolutely.

Jennifer: So, one of the things that I wanted to ask you was a little bit about, can you talk to us a little bit more about how do we promote the home language in the classroom and the English language development in the classroom as well?

Sharon: Sure. We've got a requirement that really looks at a developmentally-differentiated research teaching approach. The new requirement requires that programs implement an approach for teacher child interactions that acknowledges bilingualism and bi literacy as strengths, it's an asset. We know its and asset for adults. We definitely wanted to be clear that there's a great deal of research in the field of first and second language development, particularly in the last ten years or so, that we drew upon to write the regulations. The best research available indicates that a strong base in the home language supports learning a second language. So, we're excited about this new requirement and know that Head Start Programs are leaders in this area and will continue to move the field forward. In the requirements we do unpack it a little bit. So, I would say that the standards in this case go a step further and differentiate teaching practices based on the age of the child. So, for example, for infants and toddlers the new standards require programs ensure teaching practices and teacher child interactions focusing on the development of the home language while also providing experiences in English. For preschool children the new standard requires a focus on English language acquisition while at the same time continuing the development of the home language.

Jennifer: I think that what you're saying right now is very important because it is really important to address the difference between the age of the children and what is appropriate to do in the classroom settings.

Sharon: Exactly and our goals for them.

Jennifer: Yes. Yes. I think it's also very important for the families to understand that concept as well.

Sharon: Yeah and we're actually gonna talk about that later so that's a great point. Now I wonder, Jennifer, might you -- We always get this question so we might as well just ask it now and get the answer. Which is, what if staff do not speak the home language of all the children in the learning environment, what can programs do? Cuz that's gonna be -- And what do our standards help us out with?

Jennifer: Thank you for asking that question. It's a very important question. We've received that a lot from the grantees and just programs in general. I think that what the new Head Start Performance

Program Standards do is that they provide us the opportunity to reflect on how do we address this specific case or scenario. It's very important to make sure that we are supporting the staff. It depends in the different type of languages that the staff speak, the different type of languages that the children speak in the classroom as well. But, what the standards really highlight is that we must include or provide culturally and linguistically appropriate materials. We also can work with volunteers who speak the language of the children in the classroom as well as training the staff in a specific strategy objectives on how to address these needs.

Sharon: Yeah, that's a good point. I think the only thing I would add is that I hope the standards... We think they provide specific strategies or approaches mentioned that really address the cases that you're talking about. Where staff do not speak the home language. So, what is that they can do to maintain the requirements and the regulations and also be realistic about how they would do that, so.

Jennifer: Yeah and if I may just highlight this too, is that we have a great opportunity to really support and meet this need from the field as well because we can continue to do training and technical assistance because we know that this is going to be one of those areas that we need to continue.

Sharon: We will have a lot of technical assistance in this area. I think the program should feel good about that. The other question that we probably will get are, do the standards apply to all program options? So, I'll answer that. Which is yes simply. I think that one of the most important things to remember, first of all, is that we have high expectations for all children regardless of the program option. So, in this case, both the center based, family child care and home based the teaching strategies and learning activities that support children who are dual language learners apply along with many of the other standards. So, I just wanted to make that clear. Let's turn to the other bucket, Jennifer. I wonder if you might talk a little bit about what the standards say about working with families.

Jennifer: Absolutely. So, I think that as I mentioned before you know families are the cornerstone of Head Start. This is what makes us different. So, I think that what the standards really highlight for us is that we must continue to engage families and primarily in their language of preference if it's possible. So that the families feel that they are integrated, that we are working with them, that we listen to the work that needs to be done to support their needs. We also know that to the performances standards we are highlighting the importance of bilingualism and bi literacy. How important it is for families to know that impact that it has on the child's development and the impact in school readiness as they continue to grow. The other piece that it really talks about in the standards is that we must make sure that in the home base curriculum, we're integrating the culture, the traditions, the values and the beliefs of the families to be very affective in reaching out to families to engage in their work as well.

Sharon: That's great. Maybe we should also mention here, you know kinda related, is thinking about the other service areas. For example, the health services also in the program operations section. They to require that programs provide the high quality health, oral health, mental health and nutrition services that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate. So, it's important to know that. Looking across all the standards related to children's educational services and family engagement the support for culturally and linguistically responsive practices is quite clear for all children and specifically for children who are dual language learners.

Jennifer: Yes, thank you for highlighting that. Now, maybe we can talk about the fourth bucket. The one that talks about developing a screening tool assessment for dual language learners and how that we are more culturally linguistic sensitive to meeting the needs of our children and families.

Sharon: Sure. I think here the research has informed the regulations around the practices associated with valid and reliable data gathering for screening and for assessing children's progress and individualizing. So, this fourth area is really an important one to highlight. So, we have a new requirement for programs to assess children who are dual language learners in the language or languages that best capture their skill level and to assess their skill language development in both the home language and in English. Utilizing interpreters as needed, again that's in the requirements cuz we know that it's not possible to have somebody who speaks the languages of all of the children, so we have that. This reflects best practice already used by many programs so that's exciting. It also reflects the research demonstrating that children who are dual language learners have different rates of learning across the dual language and that's perfectly normal. That's why we really wanna make sure that we understand what the child is learning and developing. The research also demonstrates that for dual language learners it's critical that screening and assessments be conducted in both language. Again, in order to gain a complete understanding of the children's... What they know and what are their skills and abilities. Not just an understanding through one of the child's languages. I think the common thread across the standards is that home language is an asset and viewed as a strength. When you start from it as a strength you realize how important it is to incorporate that home language into the teaching and learning experiences as well as working with families.

Jennifer: I think that, I know I just mentioned that it's very important for the families as well. So that they feel that we are integrating their world, their values, their cultures into the work that we do as well.

Sharon: So, again back to same questions that programs will have. What if a program does not have qualified bi lingual staff or access to interpreters in this area of assessment?

Jennifer: Right. So, we know that this happens in programs, right. We know that the standards also address this too by... The standards really highlight the importance of conducting the screenings and assessments that can also be done in English. However, what we need to really concentrate is to make sure that the programs gather and use all the information to really understand the whole picture of the child and holistically how is the progress of the child. So, maybe integrating the parents input into the screens and assessment, doing long term observations as well. So, the standards itself highlight very specific strategies on how to address this. But, again this is one of those areas that we will continue to do a lot of support for the programs as well.

Sharon: Exactly. So, I think people not to read the standards in concert. So, for example, if the program does, as you shared before, have a classroom where the majority of the children speak the same other language, there must be a teacher who speak this language. It wouldn't be appropriate cuz they would have a bilingual staff person. But, there are a lots of instances where that is not the case. So, we really wanna be clear that we are trying to use what we know. What is the best available research and also make it realistic for programs to be able to ready children for school. I wish we had more time to discuss more in depth. This is just the beginning and a short overview of what you can expect in the standards.

Jennifer: That's right. Once I wanna thank you for the work that you do. You've been doing this for more than over 50 years. Serving our dual language learners children and their families. We are here. Head Start is strong and remember these are the future, our children, dual language learners. So, thank you for this opportunity.

Thanks, Sharon.