Head Start Program Performance Standards 2017: Home Based Education

(upbeat music)

Sarah Merrill: Hello, I'm Sarah Merrill.

Sangeeta Parikshak: Hi, I'm Sangeeta Parikshak.

Sarah: And we're here today to talk about the home-based program option. So, Sangeeta, why don't you start us off and show us where they are listed in the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Sangeeta: So, the home-based program option in the Head Start Program Performance Standards can be found in a couple a different places. We have 1302.22, so that focuses on program structure. And we have 1302.35, which is where we're gonna spend the bulk of our time talking about today. And that's on education services for children within the home-based option.

Before we dive into that particular section, I just wanted to address one of the questions that we've been getting about who decides that the home-based program option is the best fit for the child and the family. And that's really, you know, Sarah, a mutual agreement between the parent and the program. At enrollment, that decision is made as to whether or not this is the best fit for the child. And what we're really looking for is that if it addresses the family's needs, where the parent feels the most comfortable being in the role of the child's teacher, because education services are such a big component of the home-based option. So Sarah, maybe you could kick us off by talking a little bit about what happens in the home visit.

Sarah: Right, I'm happy to. Well, home visitors obviously go to the families' homes. And it's important part that they develop really trusting and caring relationships with the parents. Their role is to maximize the parents' relationship with the child, as well as their role in supporting the development and learning of that child. So, they want to work with the parents to think about experiences that are age appropriate and are relevant for the child and the family and help them move along the developmental and learning sequence of their curricula, as well as their school readiness goals that are linked to the Early Learning Outcomes Frameworks.

Sangeeta: And I think another piece that we wanna make sure that everybody knows about is that during the home visit is also a time for parents to really understand what the results are from screening and assessment. So, screening and assessment is in 1302.33. And that particular piece talks about how you need to make sure that a child has up-to-date developmental screening within 45 days of enrollment in the program, and those types of results should really be shared with the parent during the home visits to make sure that everything is individualized for the child.

Sarah: Well, I'm glad you mentioned the individualization, 'cause that's an important part of Head Start services. And we really want the home visits to be, as I mentioned before, relevant to that child and the family. And more importantly, we want the experiences to be rich in content, engaging and interesting to both the child and the parent. Because it's the parent who's gonna be facilitating that experience with the child, not only during the visit, but after the home visitor leaves. And one way that the standards help ensure individualization happens is by having a case load average for home visitors. So home visitors have an average of 10 to 12 families, with no more than 12 families.

Sangeeta: In addition, I think, to make sure that home visits are individualized to the child's needs, we wanna look at a couple a different things. So, one is making sure that it's planned in partnership with the parents, that it's individualized based on ongoing assessment, so that screening and assessment piece that I talked about earlier, that it's conducted with parents with sufficient time to serve all enrolled children. Right, because it's not that, there may be more than one child that's enrolled in the home, right. So we wanna make sure that we really make enough time for the parents in those situations. And that it includes activities and strategies that really promote the home as a learning environment. So when you think about what you want the learning environment to be, it's the same as you would want in center-based: safe, nurturing, responsive, language and communication-rich. And that the parents, in supporting the child's development and learning across the domains, are able to do that in their home environment.

Sarah, you mentioned earlier, you had said something about the home-based curriculum. Can you talk a little bit more about how that appears in the standards?

Sarah: Sure. So, programs that offer the home-based program option need to find a curriculum that is based upon the principles of child development that research shows are important to children's school success, or school readiness. For home-based, we wanna make sure that the curricula promotes the parent's role in supporting the child's learning and providing these learning experiences. We want the curriculum content to align with the goals and outcomes of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. And the curricula content also has to have a developmental scope. And that really is that the content covers learning across the five domains within the Early Learning Outcome Framework.

And also, we want the content to have a developmental progression, so that there's an order in which the growth and the skills happen, that the activities link to these skills as they progress along the developmental progression. And more importantly, that there are plans and materials for home visitors and parents to use so that they really know where the children are along this developmental sequence and know how to get them to the next step, the next level.

Sangeeta: And I believe that developmental progression is really well-laid out in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. So if folks have questions about that, they look at that resource.

Sarah: It's a great resource. Yeah, yeah.

Sangeeta: And then I think, in addition, what the standards say is that programs must support and monitor curriculum implementation fidelity. So what that really means is that we want it to be implemented as the curriculum developer designed and intended. Also, the standards talk about how programs must provide parents with the opportunity to review curricula and instructional materials.

So, we really, again, do not wanna do anything in isolation of the parents. We really need to partner with them, particularly when you think about the parents as being the child's teacher in this scenario.

Sarah: Absolutely.

Sangeeta: And then I think the last thing that we still need to cover is socialization. So, Sarah, could you talk to us about that?

Sarah: Sure! And socializations are a chance for extending the curriculum into sort of a group setting and allowing some peer dynamic for both the children and the families. Here's a theme that we'll hear a lot, is that they need to be planned jointly with parents and conducted jointly with parents. And that they should be structured so that there are age-appropriate activities that align with the curriculum and the ELOF and, again, support that developmental progress for children along the developmental sequence of learning and knowledge.

And I'd mentioned about the peer learning with the parents, is it's a chance for parents to get together with other parents to talk about child development, to learn about child development, and also to use these group experiences to really engage in their parent-child relationship as well. We don't wanna lose that piece at all. The standards pick up a point for pre-school socializations and talk about that this can be an opportunity to really develop adult skills, our parenting skills related to parenting, or to goals related in their family partnership agreement process.

But we really also wanna emphasize that it's a time for pre-school children, particularly, to get together with other children, where parents can sit back and observe but also engage in these activities. So it gets back to that sorta socialization, getting peers together.

Sangeeta: Right, awesome. Well, we know we've given you guys a lot of information in a short amount of time, so please make sure to go to the ECLKC. You can learn more about the Head Start Program Performance Standards, as well as the Early Learning Outcomes Framework. And Sarah, thank you so much for being here with me today.

Sarah: Yeah, thank you Sangeeta. And thank you for joining us.

 (upbeat music)