



## Program Level School Readiness Goals for Early Childhood Programs: Examples from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning (NCECDTL)

Early Head Start and Head Start programs promote the school readiness of the children we serve. The first step in guiding this work is creating program level school readiness goals as required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 and the [Head Start Program Performance Standards \(Subpart B, 1304.11\)](#). Other early childhood programs such as child care may decide to develop goals to strengthen the education services they provide.

School readiness goals are broad statements that describe the skills and knowledge children should have when they enter kindergarten. Infant/toddler goals focus on skills and knowledge to be acquired by age 3 and preschool goals focus on by age 5. A program's school readiness goals guide the selection of a curriculum, assessment tools, teacher-child interactions, and professional development. With the introduction of the [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework \(HSELOF\)](#), programs are reviewing their goals to align them with the HSELOF.

In this document, the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning offers examples of goal statements with additional descriptions of related skills and knowledge that reflect the goals in the HSELOF central domains: Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Cognition, and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development.

### Head Start grantees must articulate how their multi-step process ensures their school readiness goals

- reflect the ages of the children, birth to five, participating in the program;
- align with HSELOF and guidelines of state and local education agencies;
- include the five central domains of the HSELOF;
- encompass the range of all children served (e.g., are applicable for children who are dual language learners and children with disabilities); and
- are established in active and ongoing consultation with parents participating in the program.

### Approaches to Learning

#### Infant/Toddler

**IT-ATL Goal 1. Children will manage feelings, emotions, actions, and behavior with support of familiar adults.** This includes: uses various strategies to help manage strong emotions, such as turning head away, thumb sucking, covering eyes or ears, seeking support from a familiar adult, or removing oneself from the situation; looks to others for help in coping with strong feelings and emotions; begins to manage and adjust actions and behavior with the guidance of familiar adults using words or signs such as “Stop” or “No” during conflict with a peer instead of hitting; alerts adults when they are hungry or tired.

**IT-ATL Goal 2. Children will attend, persist, and demonstrate flexibility in learning, making discoveries, and solving problems.** This includes: chooses to join in activities or pays attention to tasks and activities that are self-initiated; continues efforts to finish a challenging activity or task with support of an adult; modifies actions or behavior in social situations, daily routines, and problem solving, such as playing quietly when asked or adjusting to changes in schedule.

**IT-ATL Goal 3. Children will demonstrate emerging initiative, interest, and curiosity in interactions with others and exploration of objects and people in the environment.** This includes: demonstrates initiative by making choices or expressing preferences; attempts challenging tasks with or without adult help; shows eagerness to try new things.

**IT-ATL Goal 4. Children will increasingly show creativity and imagination in play, learning, and interactions with others.** This includes: combines objects or materials in new and unexpected ways; shows delight in creating something new; uses imagination to explore possible uses of objects and materials; engages in pretend or make-believe play with other children.



## Preschool

### **P-ATL Goal 1. Children will manage emotions and follow classroom rules and routines with increasing independence.**

This includes: uses a range of coping strategies to manage emotions with the support of an adult, such as using words or taking deep breaths; demonstrates awareness of classroom rules when asked and is able to follow these rules most of the time; follows most classroom routines, such as putting away backpack when entering the room or sitting on the rug after outside time.

### **P-ATL Goal 2. Children will increasingly demonstrate self-control including controlling impulses, maintaining attention, persisting with activities, and using flexible thinking.**

This includes: demonstrates control over actions and words in response to a challenging situation, such as wanting to use the same materials as another child, or frustration over not being able to climb to the top of a structure (may need support from adults); refrains from responding impulsively, such as waiting to be called on during group discussion or requesting materials rather than grabbing them; engages in purposeful play for extended periods of time; applies different rules in contexts that require different behaviors, such as using indoor voices or feet instead of outdoor voices or feet.

### **P-ATL Goal 3. Children will demonstrate initiative, independence, interest, and curiosity in interactions with others and exploration of objects and people in their environment.**

This includes: independently identifies and seeks things to complete activities or tasks, such as gathering art supplies to make a mask or gathering cards to play a matching activity; seeks out new information and explores new play and tasks.

### **P-ATL Goal 4. Children will show creativity and imagination in play, learning, and interactions with others.**

This includes: asks questions related to tasks or activities that indicate thinking about new ways to accomplish the task or activity; engages in social and pretend play; uses imagination with materials to create stories or works of art.

## Social and Emotional Development

### Infant/Toddler

### **IT-SE Goal 1. Children will engage in positive interactions through secure relationships with consistent, responsive adults.**

This includes: turns to familiar adults for protection, comfort, and getting needs met; engages in and may initiate behaviors that build relationships with familiar adults.

### **IT-SE Goal 2. Children will develop personal and playful relationships with other children.**

This includes: shows increasing interest in interacting with other children; shows preference for particular playmates, such as greeting friends by name; joins in play with other children by sometimes taking turns or doing joint activities with a common goal, such as building block structures with others or pretending to eat together.

### **IT-SE Goal 3. Children will begin to manage emotions and to understand and express emotions.**

This includes: expresses a variety of emotions and modifies their expression according to the reactions of familiar adults, based on the child's cultural background; expresses a range of emotions, including surprise, guilt, embarrassment, or pride, based on increasing awareness of their effects on others; shows understanding of some emotional expressions of others by labeling the emotions, asking questions about them, or responding in appropriate non-verbal ways.

### **IT-SE Goal 4. Children will begin to develop a sense of identity and a sense of belonging to a family and a group of peers.**

This includes: shows awareness of own thoughts, feelings, and preferences as well as those of others; uses different words or signs to refer to self and others; identifies self as a member of a family; points to or names self and other familiar people, such as in photos or pictures.

## Preschool

### **P-SE Goal 1. Children will engage in and maintain positive, prosocial, and cooperative relationships and interactions with familiar adults.**

This includes: shows affection and preference for adults who interact with them on a regular basis; seeks help from adults when needed; engages in prosocial behaviors with adults, such as using respectful language or greetings; attends to an adult when asked; follows adult guidelines and expectations for appropriate behavior.



**P-SE Goal 2. Children will engage in and maintain positive peer relationships and interactions including cooperation and resolving conflicts.** This includes: uses a variety of skills for entering social situations with other children, such as suggesting something to do together, joining an existing activity, or sharing a toy; develops friendships with one or two preferred other children; demonstrates willingness to include others' ideas during interactions and play; uses basic strategies for dealing with common conflicts, such as sharing, taking turns, and compromising.

**P-SE Goal 3. Children will appropriately express and respond to a broad range of emotions, including concern for others.** This includes: expresses a broad range of emotions and begins to notice more subtle or complex emotions in self and others, such as embarrassed or worried; uses words to describe own feelings when prompted, and may at times use these words without prompting, such as saying "Don't be mad" when engaged in play with other children; offers support to adults or other children who are distressed.

**P-SE Goal 4. Children will recognize self as a unique individual with own abilities, characteristics, emotions, and interests.** This includes: describes self using several different characteristics; demonstrates knowledge of uniqueness of self, such as talents, interests, preferences, or culture.

**P-SE Goal 5. Children will express confidence and positive feelings about self and demonstrate a sense of belonging to family, community, and other groups.** This includes: has a sense of belonging to family and community and communicates details about these connections, such as sharing a story about a family gathering, both spontaneously and when prompted by an adult or other child.

## Language and Literacy Language and Communication

### Infant/Toddler

**IT-LC Goal 1. Children will attend to, understand, respond to, and learn through communication and language experiences, including communication systems such as sign language.** This includes: shows recognition of words, phrases, and simple sentences; participates in conversations in ways that show understanding by following comments or suggestions with actions or behavior.

**IT-LC Goal 2. Children will use non-verbal communication and increasingly oral language or a communication system (e.g., sign language) to express needs and wants and engage others.** This includes: combines words or signs from one or more languages into phrases and sentences to communicate needs, wants, or ideas, such as "More milk," "I want juice," "Mas leche," or "Quiero juice"; children who are dual language learners may combine their two languages or switch between them; participates in simple conversations with others that are maintained by back-and forth exchanges of ideas or information.

**IT-LC Goal 3. Children will understand and use an increasing number of words to communicate and engage in conversation with others.** This includes: shows understanding of the meaning of common words used in daily activities; attends to new words used in conversation with others; understands most positional words, such as on, under, up, or down; shows rapid growth in number of words or signs used in conversation with others; demonstrates a vocabulary of at least 300 words in home language; asks questions about the meaning of new words.

**IT-LC Goal 4. Children will attend to, repeat, and use some rhymes and refrains from stories and songs.** This includes: says or repeats culturally and linguistically familiar rhymes, phrases, or refrains from songs or stories; retells familiar stories using props.

**IT-LC Goal 5. Children will engage with books for stories and information.** This includes: asks to have several favorite books read over and over; holds book, turns pages, and pretends to read; uses pictures as a guide to talk about a story that has been read; asks or answers questions about what is happening in a book or story; identifies the feelings of characters in a book or story.

**IT-LC Goal 6. Children will make written marks and use them to represent objects or actions.** This includes: draws pictures using scribbles and talks with others about what they have made; draws straight lines or curved lines; makes letter-like marks or scribbles on paper.



## Preschool

**P-LC Goal 1. Children will attend to, understand, and respond to increasingly complex communication and language from others.** This includes: shows acknowledgment of complex comments or questions; is able to attend to longer, multi-turn conversations, either spoken or signed; shows understanding, such as nodding or gestures, in response to the content of books read aloud, stories that are told, or lengthy explanations given on a topic; children who are DLLs may demonstrate more complex communication and language in their home language than in English.

**P-LC Goal 2. Children will increasingly match the amount and use of language required for different situations and follow social and conversational rules.** This includes: usually provides sufficient detail in order to get needs met, such as explaining a point of difficulty in a task or sharing a request from home with the teacher; with increasing independence, matches the tone and volume of expression to the content and social situation, such as by using a whisper to tell a secret.

**P-LC Goal 3. Children who are dual language learners (DLLs) will demonstrate increased competency in their home language while developing proficiency in English.** This includes: demonstrates understanding and uses increasingly more complex language in both their home language and English; expressing broader content knowledge in both languages; children may also code switch, for example, beginning a sentence in one language, then switching to another, or inserting a word from one language within a sentence spoken in a different language.

**P-LC Goal 4. Children will understand and use a wide variety of words for a variety of purposes and show understandings of word categories.** This includes: with multiple exposures, uses new domain-specific vocabulary during activities, such as using the word “cocoon” when learning about the lifecycle of caterpillars, or “cylinder” when learning about 3-D shapes; with support, forms guesses about the meaning of new words from context clues.

## Language and Literacy

### Literacy

#### Preschool

**P-LIT Goal 1. Children will identify and segment the sounds within words as separate from the word itself.** This includes: provides one or more words that rhyme with a single given target, such as “What rhymes with log?”; produces the beginning sound in a spoken word, such as “Dog begins with /d/.”; provides a word that fits with a group of words sharing an initial sound, with adult support, such as “Sock, Sara, and song all start with the /s/ sound. What else starts with the /s/ sound?”

**P-LIT Goal 2. Children will demonstrate they understand how print is used and how print works.** This includes: understands that written words are made up of a group of individual letters; begins to point to single-syllable words while reading simple, memorized texts; identifies book parts and features, such as the front, back, title, and author.

**P-LIT Goal 3. Children will identify most upper and lower case letters and produce sounds that correspond to some of them.** This includes: recognizes and names at least half of the letters in the alphabet, including letters in own name (first name and last name), as well as letters encountered often in the environment; produces the sound of many recognized letters.

**P-LIT Goal 4. Children will demonstrate understanding of narrative structure and information from the content of a story.** This includes: re-tells or acts out a story that was read, putting events in the appropriate sequence, and demonstrating more sophisticated understanding of how events relate, such as cause and effect relationships; tells fictional or personal stories using a sequence of at least 2–3 connected events.

**P-LIT Goal 5. Children will write for a variety of purposes using increasingly sophisticated marks.** This includes: creates a variety of written products that may or may not phonetically relate to intended messages; shows an interest in copying simple words posted in the classroom; attempts to independently write some words using invented spelling, such as /k/ for kite; writes first name correctly or close to correctly.



## Cognition

### Infant/Toddler

**IT-C Goal 1. Children will actively explore their environment to discover what objects and people do, how things work, and how to make things happen.** This includes: learns about characteristics of people and properties and uses of objects through the senses and active exploration; makes simple predictions about what will happen next, such as in a story or in everyday routines; notices who is missing from a familiar group, such as family at dinner or children in a playgroup; looks in several different places for a toy that was played with a few days before.

**IT-C Goal 2. Children will use a variety of strategies to solve problems, including reasoning and planning ahead.** This includes: uses a variety of strategies to solve problems, such as trial and error, simple tools, or asking someone to help; uses problem-solving and experimenting to figure out solutions to everyday problems, including in social situations, such as when two children who both want to fit into a small car agree to take turns.

**IT-C Goal 3. Children will use beginning math concepts during daily routines and experiences, including sense of number and quantity, spatial awareness, and classification.** This includes: counts small number of objects (2–3), sometimes counting the same object twice or using numbers out of order; identifies “more” or “less” with a small number of items without needing to count them; uses fingers to show how old they are; predicts or anticipates how things move through space, or fit together or inside other things, such as putting smaller objects into a small box and larger objects into a large box; sorts toys or other objects by color, shape or size; orders some objects by size.

**IT-C Goal 4. Children will use imitation and symbolic thinking to increase understanding of concepts, environment, daily experiences, and home culture.** This includes: seeks to involve others in pretend or make-believe play; looks for props to use when telling or making up a story; uses pretend play to try out solutions to everyday problems, such as ways to respond to stressful situations.

## Cognition

### Mathematics Development

#### Preschool

**P-MATH Goal 1. Children will demonstrate understanding of number names and order of numerals, the order of size or measures, the number of items in a set, and use math concepts and language regularly during every day experiences.** This includes: says or signs more number words in sequence; quickly recognizes the number of objects in a small set (referred to as “subitizing”); understands that number words refer to quantity; may point to or move objects while counting objects to 10 and beyond (one-to-one correspondence); understands that the last number represents how many objects are in a group (cardinality).

**P-MATH Goal 2. Children will demonstrate understanding of mathematical operations including addition, subtraction, patterns, and measurement.** This includes: solves addition problems by joining objects together and subtraction problems by separating, using manipulatives and fingers to represent objects.

**P-MATH Goal 3. Children will measure objects by their various attributes using standard and non-standard measurement and use differences in attributes to make comparisons.** This includes: measures using the same unit, such as putting together snap cubes to see how tall a book is; compares or orders up to 5 objects based on their measurable attributes, such as height or weight; uses comparative language, such as shortest, heavier, or biggest.

**P-MATH Goal 4. Children will identify, describe, compare, and compose shapes.** This includes: names and describes shapes in terms of length of sides, number of sides, and number of angles; correctly names basic shapes regardless of size and orientation; analyzes, compares and sorts two and three-dimensional shapes and objects in different sizes; describes their similarities, differences, and other attributes, such as size and shape.



## Cognition Scientific Reasoning Preschool

**P-SCI Goal 1. Children will observe and manipulate physical materials, ask questions, make predictions, and develop hypotheses to describe and understand observable phenomena in their environment.** This includes: identifies the five senses (smell, touch, sight, sound, taste) and uses them to make observations; uses observational tools to extend the five senses, such as a magnifying glass, microscope, binoculars, or stethoscope; describes observable phenomena using adjectives and labels, such as lemons taste sour and play dough feels sticky; represents observable phenomena with pictures, diagrams, and 3-D models.

**P-SCI Goal 2. Children will use reasoning and problem-solving as they ask questions, gather information, make predictions, and conduct investigations.** This includes: gathers information about a question by looking at books or discussing prior knowledge and observations; makes predictions and brainstorms solutions based on background knowledge and experiences, such as “I think that plants need water to grow.” or “I think adding yellow paint to purple will make brown.”; articulates steps to be taken and lists materials needed for an investigation or experiment; implements steps and uses materials to explore testable questions, such as “Do plants need water to grow?” by planting seeds and giving water to some but not to others.

## Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development Infant/Toddler

**IT-PMP Goal 1. Children will use perceptual information to guide actions in exploring objects, experiences, and interactions.** This includes: combines information gained through the senses to understand objects, experiences, and interactions; adjusts ways of interacting with materials based on sensory and perceptual information, such as pressing harder on clay than on play dough to make something.

**IT-PMP Goal 2. Children will develop control of large muscles for movement, exploration, and self-help.** This includes: gains control of a variety of postures and movements including rolling, stooping, going from sitting to standing, running, and jumping; explores environments using motor skills, such as throwing, kicking, jumping, climbing, carrying, and running; experiments with different ways of moving the body, such as dancing around the room.

**IT-PMP Goal 3. Children will use sensory information and body awareness to understand and adjust their movements in the environment.** This includes: shows understanding of what size openings are needed for their body to move through; learns about body size, such as doll clothes won't fit on a child's body or a child's body won't fit on dollhouse furniture.

**IT-PMP Goal 4. Children will develop control of small muscles for exploration, play, and daily routines.** This includes: uses hands efficiently for a variety of actions or activities, such as building with blocks, wiping up a spill, or feeding self; coordinates use of both hands to put things together, such as connecting blocks or linking toys; adjusts grasp with ease to new tools and materials.

**IT-PMP Goal 5. Children will begin to demonstrate healthy and safe behaviors and to make healthy food choices with the support of an adult.** This includes: shows increasing independence in self-care routines with guidance from adults; puts on or takes off some articles of clothing, such as shoes, socks, coat, or hat; shows some understanding of safe and unsafe behaviors, such as not touching a hot stove; communicates to adults when hungry, thirsty, or has had enough to eat.

## Preschool

**P-PMP Goal 1. Children will demonstrate increasing control of large muscles for movement, navigation, and balance.** This includes: demonstrates balance in large-muscle movement, such as walking on a log without falling or balancing



on one leg; performs activities that combine and coordinate large muscle movements, including swinging on a swing, climbing a ladder, or dancing to music; demonstrates strength and stamina that allow for participation in a range of physical activities, such as running around playing tag.

**P-PMP Goal 2. Children will demonstrate use of small muscles for purposes such as using utensils, self-care, building, writing, and manipulation.** This includes: easily coordinates hand and eye movements to carry out tasks, such as working on puzzles or stringing beads together; uses a pincer grip to hold and manipulate tools for writing, drawing, and painting; uses coordinated movements to complete complex tasks, such as cutting along a line, pouring, or buttoning.

**P-PMP Goal 3. Children will identify and practice healthy and safe habits.** This includes: washes hands with soap and water (knows to do this before eating, after using the bathroom, or after blowing nose); demonstrates increasing ability to take responsibility for participating in personal self-care skills, such as brushing teeth or getting dressed; demonstrates basic understanding that eating a variety of foods helps the body grow and be healthy; moderates food consumption based on awareness of own hunger and fullness.