Head Start Program Performance Standards:
Education and Child Development Program Services

Amanda Bryans: Sharon, I'm really excited to be with you here this morning to talk about education and child development in the new Head Start Performance Standards. I wondered if you could get us started by talking about the Birth-to-Five approach in these regulations.

Sharon Yandian: Excellent, excellent. I'm really excited to, Amanda. I think honestly one of the best changes I think is the Birth-to-Five approach. The standards have been reorganized to integrate the requirements for children from birth to age five. The previous standards had applicability for infants, and toddlers, and preschoolers, but it was a little spotty and unclear, so what we've done is we've pulled it all together and this new approach reflects how children develop and makes it easier for teachers to plan and implement education services based on children's needs.

Within the regulations, most are written Birth-to-Five. Now, the only time you'll find separate standards for infants and toddlers versus preschoolers is when the developmental differences make it appropriate. For example, one requirement that sticks out is that programs implement snacks and meals to support development and learning. Programs will find in there that it talks about holding bottle-fed children and that when we think about that, we think of social, emotional development, attachment and those types of things. Overall, teaching staff will need to have a good understanding of child development and know what is appropriate for an infant versus a four year old, for example.

I know a little bit later you're going to talk about the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and how that is a tool that shows the developmental progressions for children to see where they need to go next in terms of learning and development. I think the Birth-to-Five approach is really one of the hallmarks of the standards.

Amanda, I wonder if you might tell us a little bit about the curriculum, some of the changes to curriculum assessment and those intentional effective teaching practices?

Amanda: Well, I would be happy to talk about that, and I am really also very glad for the Birth-to-Five approach that we've now taken. I remember with the former regulations, sometimes we have to make assumptions about applicability. It wasn't always clear what was for infants and toddlers or whether something was applicable for all children or just preschool children, so I think that's terrific. You know that 2007 Head Start Act, which we call often the statute, had some really specific provisions related to curriculum and assessment and the Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Those things are now implemented through these regulations.

We want to make sure that people are selecting curricula that cover all the domains in our Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. We talk about those domains being content rich, which means that they are full of opportunities for children to really progress in meaningful ways in those areas. The act also talked about making sure that curricula are comprehensive, covering all the areas of the domain, and linguistically and culturally responsive, as well as developmentally appropriate for children, so I think that's really important. We also talk about making sure that the assessment instrument that a program uses is collecting information about

the areas under the framework and that information can be used both to individualize for children and to help with ongoing program improvements for children.

Finally, I think we've used the word, Sharon, "intentional" for at least a decade. I think that these regulations can really help people think about what intentional means. Again, that should support the really enriching learning opportunities that are happening for children that people are thoughtful about what they're doing, and why they do it, and how it is supporting individual children as they progress throughout their time in Head Start and Early Head Start.

You mentioned the Birth-to-Five approach and, again, the framework is now Birth-to-Five. It offers goals for children and developmental progressions that help people know how to plan the experiences children need to help them keep making that progress. I think one of the beauties of the Birth-to-Five approach is that we know that children develop at different speeds across different areas. By having the full Birth-to-Five span, it really increases the ability of teachers to individualize appropriate for all children that they're working with.

I wanted to talk for a minute about parent and family engagement because I think one of the most important elements, components of Head Start since its beginning has been one of the most unique attributes has been the recognition of parents as partners in their children's development and is the best experts and teachers of their own children. I think that continues to be articulated through this body of regulations, and that we're very clear that what parents know about their child's interests, strengths and needs is included in the planning for the child, and that their role as teachers of their children continues to be recognized and supported throughout their time in Head Start and Early Head Start.

I was wondering if you also might be able to talk about the approach to dual language learners in these new regulations.

Sharon: Definitely. That was a really great summary. You really packed a lot in, and I know that we're going to have more time in the future with our audience to talk more in detail. The same would be true for this really exciting area. The standards require programs to implement, as you already said, specific strength-based intentional teaching practices for all children. That includes specific requirements for children who are dual language learners.

The new standards fall into four areas, I would say. One is a coordinated management approach to ensure the integrated quality services for dual language learners. The language they use around that is systematically and comprehensively looking at the needs of children and families. Unfortunately, we're not going to talk about that today. That's in program management section, but it really does undergird what we're talking about in terms of the approach for children who are dual language learners.

The second is, which you already alluded to, which is the cultural, linguistically responsive teaching practices [inaudible 00: 07: 08] in the education section and that, of course, support for families who have children who are dual language learners. In this section, the standards differentiate teaching practices that are developmentally appropriate and based on a child's age. We talked before about the Birth-to-Five approach, this is a good example. What we say is for infants and toddlers, programs are required to ensure teaching practices and teacher-child interactions focused on home language while also providing experiences in English. For

preschoolers, the requirement is to focus on English language acquisition and, at the same time, continued development of the home language. There's a good example of differentiation we've made based on the age and what we know.

In terms of the screening and assessment, assessment specifically, we have a new requirement for programs to assess children who are dual language learners in the language or languages that best captures their skill level and to assess their language development in both their home language and in English. In this case, we've put requirements in there on utilizing an interpreter as needed. Again, this reflects the best practices already used by many Head Start programs and the research that demonstrates that children who are dual language learners may be developing at different rates of learning across their two languages. We really want to stress that it's critical that screening and assessments be conducted in both languages in order to gain a whole picture of the child to really understand what that child knows, their skills and abilities, not just in understanding that through one of their languages.

The common thread, I would say, in these standards is that home language is an asset and viewed as a strength, and it needs to be leveraged in the teaching and learning environment.

Amanda: That's really great to hear. I want to echo your comment that this has been an important strength of Head Start over the years, that we early on recognize the cognitive value and the social and emotional value of learning more than one language. I was wondering though. I think we have in the neighborhood of 150 different languages spoken in Head Start. Is there any flexibility if a program has a child who speaks a language and there is no one who's bilingual and qualified to either administer or interpret for an assessment or a screening? What would programs do in that situations? I know there's some languages that are quite unusual that may be spoken by one or just a few people in the community.

Sharon: Absolutely. We could have a whole session on this. I'm going to be short and answer your question because it's true. There are times where programs won't have a qualified bilingual staff or access to interpreter. We know, especially in programs where there are many languages spoken that you just described within one classroom or learning environment. The standards, they do address this. What we say in the standard is, in some cases, the screening assessment, it can be conducted in English, but that the program must gather and use other information to round out that picture of the child, including structured observations of the child over time and information from family. While we know that's important for all children, it's extremely important, particularly if the program does not have access to someone who speaks the language of that child. I hope that gives some comfort. We are being responsive because we realize the diversity we have in Head Start programs, while it is amazingly rich, the field is not where it needs to be in terms of tools needed.

Amanda: You're not relieved of learning everything you can about a child's status because you don't have a speaker of the child's language.

Sharon: Exactly. I guess the other one I would want to mention is the long standing requirement that still remains, which is that when a majority of the children speak the same language other than English, a teacher or staff member must speak that language.

Amanda: Great. I think what you're describing is one of the ways that we do the best job we possibly can to ensure that children are ready for school. That this responsiveness that we provide helps children grow in their self-confidence and the skills that they need for being successful in school and life.

Sharon: Absolutely. I wonder. Can we turn a little bit ... Could you talk about what the standards say about inclusion and support for children with disabilities and delays?

Amanda: Yeah, I sure will. I would also remind people that we have an introduction for children with disabilities, a similar video, and they can get even more information there. It's really important that people know that services to children with disabilities are woven throughout these regulations based on the expectation that children who have a delay or a identified disability are full participants in all program services and that programs make necessary accommodations so that those children can benefit maximally and participate fully. It has always been Head Start's practice. It continues to be a requirement under this set of regulations.

I think that there are many changes within this area when you think about the old set of regulations, but the principles about inclusion remain strong. We even have some more explicit language about things like, as much as possible, providing services within the context of the regular classroom or environment where the child is, not pulling kids out for services, and the importance of serving children as is required under this education act, the least restrictive possible environment so trying to reduce the transitions, for example, either between settings or to and from classrooms in order to deliver services that children need.

We also have more language in these regulations about children who may need an accommodation or a service, but aren't eligible under [IDA 00: 13: 31] and what you should do in those circumstances. I think what you should do may vary but what should come through is, again, the obligation to enroll eligible children with disabilities, delays or who need accommodations and to make sure that those things are in place, so we're fully supporting the needs of every child. I will just say, as I said, in the other video that there's an incredible opportunity to provide early intervention and support during the early childhood years that can significantly lessen the need for later special education or support as children get older. We cannot miss this opportunity that we have in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Sharon: That's so great. I think that the standards are really clear in this area in the way that you've articulated it. I also think people should take advantage of that other short video that really gives a wholistic look across the standards around how children with disabilities should be included and supported.

Amanda: Thanks, Sharon. I was wondering if you might also be able to talk a little bit about home-based under these regulations.

Sharon: Sure. Well, I think with the home-based option, what we have at the regulation, it really codifies the best practices that many programs have already been implementing many may have thought they were required or not. They're new. They're clear and they're all in one place. I think that in and of itself is a great beginning. I think the home-based approach equally is critical as the center-based family childcare but necessitates a different approach. Obviously, the curriculum is working with parents and the regulations are more focused on structured child-

focused approach and the role of the home visitor in promoting parent's ability to support the cognitive, social, emotional, physical development.

I think, again, one of the things that, if we haven't said it already, we should just reiterate it, is we have the same high expectations for children regardless of the program option. I think this is a good example. We also have the same requirements for screening and assessment. We have the number of socializations. I think we have 22 socializations and 46 visits. For those who will tune in to another overview likely when we find and when we learn about some things that we have a little longer to implement, this is one where programs have a year to be able to make sure they have the right number of socializations and home visits.

Also, as with all curriculum Head Start, the home-based curriculum must be developmentally, linguistically and culturally appropriate. There's also language supports for home language but also exposing children to English and parents also being exposed to English through that process.

Amanda: That's terrific. It's a little different, the curriculum and home-based, right?

Sharon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Amanda: It's more geared at supporting the parent as the teacher of the child as opposed to the direct teaching of the child. That, I think, comes through more clearly in these regulations than we've had before.

Sharon: Definitely. It does.

Amanda: That's terrific. I might mention, too, that the overall curriculum requirement also has and the assessment requirement also we provide a year. We know many programs have been working on curriculum and assessment since the 2007 act. We want to make sure that people understand these are not things we think can happen immediately. That it's an opportunity for them to really take a thoughtful approach at what they're doing, what their curriculum looks like, what its efficacy is and whether or not they need to consider changing the curriculum or adding the curriculum supplement.

Sharon: Exactly. I think that's really important that programs have the time to do that. That's what that delayed compliance really means.