

How the Performance Standards Support New Early Head Start Programs

Lessons Learned from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (the Performance Standards) were established to implement all requirements of program administration and grants management contained in the Head Start Act. All programs must focus on fully implementing the comprehensive Performance Standards focusing on both child and family functioning, as quickly as possible in order to achieve broad and strong pattern of impacts for children and families.

In looking at implementation of the Performance Standards, the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSREP) found that the pattern of impacts across Child Development and Health, Family Development, and Community Building, and Management Systems and Procedures was stronger for those programs that fully implemented them early.

The study found:

- All programs had positive impacts; however, those providing diverse program options had the broadest and strongest pattern of impacts. Those programs that fully implemented the Performance Standards had the broadest pattern of impacts for children and families.
- Those programs with the home-based option tended to have impact on parenting and parent self-sufficiency outcomes.
- Center-based programs, and home-based programs that fully implemented the Performance Standards with a strong focus on child development, had impacts on child outcomes at age 3.

Strategies for successful implementation included:

- Increasing emphasis on child development through curriculum selection
- Expanding child development services through partnership with quality child care
- Working with community child care to improve quality in both Early Head Start programs and child care
- Establishing and maintaining community partnerships to support families' ability to access services
- Developing management information systems to facilitate information on families' access to services, especially health services

The EHSREP found that overall, children and families benefitted from Early Head Start.

Methods: The EHSREP included three rounds of week-long site visits to each of the 17 programs in the study during the period of 1996 to 1999. In order to achieve full implementation, a program scored at least 4 on a 5-point scale for all domains assessed: Child Development and Health, Family Development, and Community Building, and Management Systems and Procedures.

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/resource/how-the-performance-standards-support-new-early-head-start-programs>