

English Language Learners Position Statement

Stanislaus County Regional Head Start and Early Head Start Central California Migrant/Seasonal Head Start

Introduction

In order to design programs that support optimal development, we must choose strategies and practices that linguistically and developmentally support individual children. These strategies and practices will vary depending upon the type of educational setting (preschool, infant/toddler, family childcare home) and the particular language compositions of the children and staff.

The many varieties of settings that currently exist in our agency create a challenge for the implementation of best language practices. This document attempts to identify the essential principles and strategies to be adopted by staff and supported by management in order to ensure that Head Start children enter Kindergarten ready to learn.

We have identified four overarching strategies to support both English Language Learners and bilingual children that apply to all educational settings:

1. Support the home language of each child.
2. Introduce the second language through a responsive learning environment.
3. Encourage teachers and providers to learn a second language.
4. Orient parents on second language acquisition and the importance of home language.

Caregivers and families must mutually respect and reinforce each other to achieve the greatest benefit for all children. Before implementing changes, staff should first orient parents on second language acquisition and the importance of ongoing support for the home language. The topic of second language acquisition is of great interest and concern to parents and much confusing information on this topic is publicly debated. Therefore, it is important that practices are based on the latest research and that parents are invited to give their input and support.

All agencies should prioritize the hiring of bilingual staff and support the learning of a second language for current teachers and providers. Management needs to consider including language composition as a factor when placing teaching staff. This is particularly important in choosing the primary caregivers in the infant and toddler classrooms. Speaking the home language is essential to the development of a child's sense of identity and encourages parent/child communication during their early years.

In all settings, teachers and providers should support the child's home language and introduce English. The following principles and strategies are based on Head Start Performance Standards and the latest research. They are divided by the age of the child, as both standards and principles differ depending upon child's development.

Principles and Strategies for English Language Learners

Infants and Toddlers (children under 3 years old)

Principle:

For infants and toddlers (children under 3 years old), well trained, sensitive caregivers who speak the same language as the baby, best support a child's home language and provide a foundation to learn a second language.

Strategies:

Agencies prioritize the hiring and placement of primary caregivers who speak the home language of the infants and toddlers.

Caregivers attend and respond to all the infants' communicative signals and attempt authentic communication with infants & toddlers even if caregiver doesn't speak the home language of the child.

If caregivers who speak the home language are unavailable, volunteers and relatives are systematically recruited who can speak the child's home language.

Play tapes, rhymes, songs, in the child's native language and add photos, pictures and books that show the child's home culture to give the child familiar things to point out and name.

Refer to Performance Standard 1304.21(b)(f)

Preschool Children

Principle:

Successful language practices promote shared experiences in which language is used as a meaningful tool to communicate interests, ideas, and emotions.

Strategies:

Teachers engage in genuine conversations about children's interests, community events, study topics/themes, rather than exchanges about basic concepts.

Teachers use small groups during circle time to increase the amount of conversational exchanges and to involve the second language learners with their bilingual companions.

Teachers support children's use of the home language while they acquire English in order to strengthen their ability to relate to classroom learning.

Preschool Children

Principle:

Language development and learning are promoted when preschool teachers and children creatively and interactively use language.

Strategies:

Teachers should design and implement activities that promote language use as children engage in individual and group activities.

Teachers encourage bilingual children to translate for other children by modeling how to support English language learner's understanding with gestures, props and repetition.

When possible, teachers create a mix of first and second language children into organized, small groups to encourage contact and conversations.

Children's exposure to a second language is documented with parent input, in order to include language as a factor in placing children in groups that support interactions with bilingual children.

Refer to Performance Standard 1304.21 (a)(4)(iii)

All Children

Principle:

Continued use and development of the child's home language will benefit the child as he or she acquires English.

The primary focus should be on age appropriate language development rather than solely on the acquisition of English. If exclusive attention is given to English, the child may risk losing competence in the home language, which often leads to negative academic and social consequences. Teachers who speak a child's home language provide reassurance to the child and support the child's development of a strong sense of identity.

Strategies:

Teachers proactively support children's primary language, while supporting the development of English.

When a majority of children speak the same language, at least one teacher/provider interacting regularly with the children must speak their language.

Parents are encouraged to share their language and family culture through a range of activities in their homes, centers and family childcare homes.

Parents are trained annually on the process of second language acquisition and the importance of maintaining the home language.

Refer to Performance Standard 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(E)

Principle:

Children benefit when teachers understand and incorporate cultural differences into language use within their daily routine.

Culturally responsive teaching practices in the preschool classroom create a positive learning environment. Practices that incorporate the linguistic and cultural resources that children bring, promote their learning and overall growth.

Strategies:

Environments in both centers and childcare homes regularly include books, art, and decorations that reflect the families' cultures and languages.

Teachers and providers seek out and use songs, rhymes, riddles, tongue twisters and other language practices that reflect the home culture.

Teachers and providers eliminate activities and materials that stereotype children.

Teachers, providers and parents are trained on cultural differences in language use in order to deepen their understanding of cultures and improve cross-cultural communication.

Refer to Performance Standard 1304.21(a)(1)(iii)

Principle:

Education for English learners is enhanced when programs and families partner in children's education.

Family involvement is improved when families are valued contributors as planners, trainers and evaluators of their children's educational programs. It is important for teachers to recognize and respect families' language beliefs and practices in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the language development of English learners.

Strategies:

Implement "Creative Curriculum" a research based curriculum that addresses the needs of individual children and provides training materials in English and Spanish to facilitate parent's involvement in the children's learning.

Supplement our adopted curriculum "Creative Curriculum" with the WestEd's Program for Infant and Toddler Caregivers, a program for children under three years old that focuses on the particular needs of the younger child.

Orient parents annually on the basics of our adopted curricula and train parents on the process of second language acquisition.

Refer to Performance Standard 1304.21(a)(1)(i)

Principle:

Coordination and collaboration among families, teachers and providers are crucial in supporting the language and literacy development of children with disabilities and other special needs.

Communication between teachers and families becomes more critical in situations where children have unique needs. In these cases, collaboration and coordination between teachers and families are a necessary support for the child.

Strategies:

Screening assessments are conducted in child's home language whenever possible and results are shared in parent's language.

Children's exposure to a second language is documented with parent input at start of program.

If bilingual staff is unavailable, volunteers and consultants are recruited so that meaningful collaboration between staff and families can take place.

Recommendations from IEP's and IFSP's are translated, if necessary to implement in the childcare setting and in the home.

Refer to Performance Standard 1304.20(b)(1)

Teaching Practices to Support English Language Learners

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Simplify language when speaking English.
- Speak within context of activity – talk about what’s happening now.
- Describe what the child is doing or seeing in English.
- Point, act out, repeat, use gestures to help children understand English.
- Motivate volunteers and relatives that speak home languages to participate in program.
- Reinforce children’s home language via:
 - Songs in home language,
 - Games in home language,
 - Finger plays in home language,
 - Books in home language.
- Support home language by learning words, phrases in children’s home language.
- Reduce stress by learning words and phrases in children’s home language.

Teaching Practices Specifically for Bilingual Staff

Use basic strategies listed above and add the following strategies:

- Avoid immediate translation – use props and gestures to encourage children to guess at meaning.
- Occasionally recap briefly in home language so child understands the context.
- Speak home language whenever there are safety or discipline issues.
- Introduce new concepts in home language when possible.
- Organize separate use of both languages by schedule if possible (for example am/pm or by day of the week).
- Use schedule & routines to help children connect events and language.

Teaching Practices for Teachers and Providers that are English Learners

- Strengthen children’s home language.
- Invite English speaking volunteers and relatives to participate in program.
- Introduce children to English speaking children (field trips, community events, neighborhood).
- Encourage and support English speaking children to use English with peers.
- Introduce English via:
 - Songs in English,
 - Games in English,
 - Finger plays in English,
 - Concept books in English.
- Introduce English with concrete vocabulary – names of objects, simple verbs.
- Introduce English with common social phrases, greetings, etc.
- Encourage staff to study English.

References for Second Language Position Statement

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