School Readiness Goals and Head Start Program Functioning

Site Visit Protocol

Interview Guide for Local Education Agency Representative

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us today. I'm [INTERVIEWER NAME] and this is my colleague [ASSISTANT NAME], and we're researchers from the Urban Institute, a non-profit policy research organization in Washington, DC. We are leading a research study called "School Readiness Goals and Head Start Program Functioning," funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As part of this study, we are visiting 12 Head Start and Early Head Start grantees from across the country. [NAME OF HEAD START PROGRAM] has been invited to participate in the study which involves a site visit to the program during which we're meeting with program leaders, staff, parents, and other key stakeholders to get different perspectives on the program and its goals.

Our goal is to learn about grantees' experiences with setting school readiness goals and their opinions towards the school readiness goals requirement, but we are <u>not</u> evaluating whether programs are meeting the requirement or not. The purpose of the study is to inform the Office of Head Start about how Head Start programs are implementing this requirement and what their strengths and needs are.

Our meeting with you today will last about an hour. The structure will be rather open-ended, meaning we have a list of specific questions to cover but we welcome any responses you may have.

INFORMED CONSENT

Before I begin my questions, I'd like to give you a copy of a consent form that describes our study procedures and your rights as a participant. If you agree to the study procedures, I'll ask you to sign and date your copy.

[N0TE TO FACILITATORS: Give copy of consent form to participant to read. Participant must sign and return one copy and may keep the second copy.

- I'll point out that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question and may stop the interview at any time.
- Everyone who works on this study has signed a *Staff Confidentiality Pledge* prohibiting disclosure of anything you say during the interview that would allow someone outside the research team, including government staff and officials, to identify you. The only exception is a researcher may be required by law to report suspicion of immediate harm to yourself, to children, or to others.
- Your name and other identifying information, such as the program's name and specific location, will be removed from the data to protect your privacy.
- We value the information you will share with us today and want to make sure we accurately capture all the details. With your permission, we will audio record the session and take notes (written and/or on a laptop computer). Those notes will not include your name. The recording will serve as a back-up tool to ensure we capture all your comments in as close to your words as possible. Once the project is complete, all recordings will be destroyed. During the discussion, if you would like to stop the recording while you make a particular comment, please let us know and we will do so.

Do you have any questions about the study procedures?

[If anyone objects to recording the discussion, the researcher who is not leading the interview will need to take thorough notes.]

PROTOCOL

1. To begin, would you please tell us your job title and give a brief description of your job responsibilities?

[CONSTRUCT: Community context: Local school readiness needs and standards]

2. We'd like to hear your thoughts on the school readiness of children in this community.

   a) First, does your school district have a kindergarten readiness assessment or screener, or specific standards for what children should know when they enter kindergarten? Would you please describe what those are?

      a. Are these assessments/standards used state-wide or only in your district? Were the district's standards influenced by standards and policies at the state level?

   b) About what percent of children entering kindergarten in your district would you say arrive ready for school?

   c) In what ways are children not ready for school? Why do you think that is?

   d) What challenges does the district face in working with children who are not ready?

[CONSTRUCT: Nature of relationship between program and LEA]

3. What can you tell me about [NAME OF HEAD START PROGRAM]?
   (Probe for whether there is a defined partnership and for how long they have had a partnership.)

4. Do you or someone else in your agency regularly collaborate with [NAME OF HEAD START PROGRAM] or have you done so in the past?
   a) If yes, tell me about that effort? *(Probe for purpose, who was involved, and when or if ongoing.)*

[CONSTRUCT: Perspectives towards school readiness goals mandate]

5. Under new Head Start standards, programs are now required to establish school readiness goals and measure children's progress towards goals. Are you familiar with this new requirement about establishing school readiness goals?

a) (if yes) How did you first learn about this requirement? *(Probe whether program ever communicated directly about need to establish goals.)*

6. What do you think about the school readiness goals requirement?
   a) How does the goals requirement align with education initiatives already in place? How does it conflict with them? *(Probe for early learning guidelines; efforts to align standards, curriculum and assessments; kindergarten school readiness assessment; state QRIS; public pre-k-Head Start collaborations; Birth through Three initiatives)*

[CONSTRUCT: Usefulness of school readiness goals requirement]

7. Overall, do you think that the school readiness goals requirement will be useful for your work and for the Head Start program?
   a) If so, how? If not, what would make it useful?

[CONSTRUCT: Challenges to meeting mandate]

8. What, if any, parts of the requirement do you think will be challenging for [NAME HEAD START PROGRAM]?
   (Probe capacity to collect valid and reliable data and use data for planning.)

[CONSTRUCT: Supports needed to use goals]

9. What, if any, supports do you think will be necessary to help Head Start programs use their goals and data to improve their practice?

[CONSTRUCT: LEA T/TA and communication regarding expectations for school readiness]

10. What information or guidance do [you/the local school system] provide to early education programs in the community about school readiness and expectations for kindergarten?

    a) What, if any, training, technical assistance, or other supports are offered to programs and providers to help meet expectations?

     i. Do you know if [NAME OF HEAD START PROGRAM] has participated in any training or used these resources?

[CONSTRUCT: Familiarity with program's own school readiness goals]

11. I'd like to talk about the specific school readiness goals [NAME OF HEAD START PROGRAM] has established. Are you familiar with the actual school readiness goals the program has set?
(Probe how they learned about the program's goals, if director shared a copy or presented at a meeting, if LEA was involved in decision-making, etc.)

   (Provide copy of goals if not familiar.)

12. <u>If separate EHS goals</u>: How familiar are you with [NAME OF HEAD START PROGRAM]'s school readiness goals for infants and toddlers?

[CONSTRUCT: Involvement in goal-setting process]

13. Were you or others from the local school system involved in setting the program's school readiness goals?
    a) (If yes) What role did you have?
    b) (If no) Were you or others you know ever asked to review the goals and provide input?

[CONSTRUCT: Opinion of program's school readiness goals]

14. What do you think of the program's school readiness goals? How do they align with the goals of the LEA?

[CONSTRUCT: Communication regarding progress towards goals]

15. Does [PROGRAM NAME] ever communicate with you about children's progress towards school readiness goals?
    a) What information does the program share with you?
    b) How is information shared with you? In what format? How frequently?
    c) Is the information you have been receiving useful? Is there other information that you wish you had that you have not received? Why or why not?

16. Those are all of our questions. Is there anything else you would like to tell us or that you think we should have asked?