

Head Start is a government initiative through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that provides comprehensive early childhood education programs for children 0-5 and their families living at or below the poverty line. HHS provides funding to locally based agencies to do this work in communities across the country. Head Start makes culturally responsive efforts to support mental, physical, and cognitive development while promoting family engagement to prepare disadvantaged children for elementary school.¹ In the fall of 2016, Head Start adopted a new set of standards, the Early Learning Outcomes Framework

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/pdf/ohs-framework.pdf>, that align central domains of learning from infancy through preschool-aged children. These standards specifically support science learning by highlighting the connection between cognitive development and scientific reasoning and math skills. The Early Learning Outcomes Framework points out that, “Young children’s inclination to be curious, explore, experiment, ask questions and develop their own theories of the world makes science an important domain for enhancing learning and school success.”²

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework isn’t the only support for science learning in Head Start early childhood program. Head Start conducts assessments of both their teachers and children multiple times each year to ensure that programs are meeting goals and standards for school readiness. The tools that are used for these assessments, like CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System), Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment, or Child Observation Record Assessment Program from HighScope, are all based on current child development research that highlights and supports the importance of children engaging in the scientific inquiry.

Between the foundation in standards for science learning, the commitment to teacher professional development, and the involvement of caregivers in their children’s education, Head Start programs are well positioned for successful science programs. In the first national data produced about museum experiences and opportunities, the data revealed that expanded staff to staff and staff to parent activities between Head Start and museums could net significant benefits for children³.

References:

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3. Wiener, Louise W. "Head Start and Museums: Status and Opportunity. A Report on a National Survey to Investigate a New Role for Museums in School Readiness". *N H S A Research Quarterly* 1.1 (1997): 187-203. Web.

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Developed by the Sciencenter for the Collaborative for Early Science Learning.

Connected Science Learning, NSTA and ASTC, in review

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This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services