

Title: New Directions Early Head Start Program Wide Self Assessment

Author: Lauren Francis

Brief Summary of Project: The New Directions Early Head Start Program Wide Self Assessment was an internal review of the six sites that comprise the Early Head Start system. The self assessment team conducted assessments through observations and interviews at each site to determine the areas of strength and areas of opportunity.

Introduction and Overview: The self assessment was a continuation of previous classroom assessments (Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scales and Family Day Care Rating Scales) that I had completed during my internship. I was interested in taking the lead role on the self assessment because I was excited about helping to make positive changes in the child care sites. The program wide self assessment uses the Early Head Start 2007 Prism as a guide to formulate interview questions for program coordinators, center directors, and center teachers on daily practices and policies. There are three main reasons for conducting a program wide self assessment: to understand the current program situation, to find any changes within the centers/program using previous self assessments, and to identify areas of strength as well as areas for opportunity. The self assessment is a way to monitor the five child care sites and home based program from year to year. The aim of the program wide self assessment was to capture the current climate of each of the sites in order to help make improvements in the quality of care provided to families and children enrolled in New Directions Early Head Start.

Methodology Overview: The New Directions Early Head Start program wide self assessment participants consisted of the four center-based child care centers, one family child care partnership, and the home based program. Within each of these six sites, the participants include program directors, program coordinators, family service workers, site coordinators, and child care teachers. The self assessment included interviews and observations of interactions among all different levels at each different site (coordinator and teacher). This allowed team members to determine if there was continuity of policies and procedures among administration and staff.

Evaluation Tools: The New Directions Early Head Start program wide self assessment used the Early Head Start 2007 PRISM as the evaluation tool. The PRISM is the Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring for Early Head Start Programs that is used to conduct federal monitoring of Head Start Programs. The PRISM uses the Early Head Start Performance Standards as the guide in developing core questions that are used to assess the site's compliance in the Performance Standards. This year's self assessment focused on six key areas: disability services provided to children and their families, education and early childhood development, family and community services, health and safety within the centers, mental health services for families, children, and staff, and nutritional services provided for children and families. These six areas of concentration were selected by the New Directions Early Head Start policy council, which is comprised of family members, community members, and a representative from the board of directors.

Procedures: The first step in the New Directions Early Head Start Program Wide Self Assessment was to formulate a self assessment team. The team members consisted of parents, community members, faculty from the affiliated University (University of Delaware), and in-house staff. Nine individuals agreed to participate in the 2007 self assessment as observers and/or interviewers. The second step in the self assessment process was to develop the questions that the interviewers would ask the program and site coordinators and teachers. These questions were generated from the PRISM using the performance standards that focused on infant and toddler care. The third step in the self assessment was to conduct a half day training session with the self assessment team members on what to observe in the classrooms and how to interview the coordinators and teachers. Upon completion of the training session, the team members conducted a full day of assessment in each of the six different sites over the course of three weeks.

Results and Discussion: The information gathered at each of the different sites by the self assessment team, both observation and from interviews, was recorded onto questionnaire forms. A follow-up meeting was held after completion of all site self assessments to go over each of the 6 areas of concentration for each of the 6 different sites as well as the program as a whole. The team formulated a list of areas of strength and areas for opportunity for each area of concentration per site and the program as a whole. The results from the program wide self assessment indicated that the program as a whole, as well as for each individual site, has many areas of strength as well as areas for opportunity. This finding was anticipated. The self assessment process is a way to reflect what the overall program and each site is doing well as well as to highlight areas that need improvement. Areas for opportunity that seemed to exist at each sites were the increased need for communication between administration and staff, increase in trainings on mental health, disabilities, and family and community services, and improvements in health and safety domains. Areas of strength that seemed to be present at each site were strong communication between staff and families, improvements in nutritional areas, and warmth of interactions between teachers and children.

Future Directions: The program wide self assessment is a necessary part of the New Directions Early Head Start program. It allows for the program as a whole and as individual sites to see how they progress from year to year. It allows for sites to consistently evaluate and improve the quality of service that they provide to the families they serve. Future directions for self assessment may include interviews with parents on their thoughts of the services they receive from the program.

References

- Harms, T., Cryer, D., & Clifford, R. M. (1990). *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Head Start Bureau. (2007). *Head Start Program Performance Standards and Other Regulations*. Washington, D.C.
- Head Start Bureau. (2007). *Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring of Head Start Grantees*. Washington, D.C.
- New Directions Early Head Start (2007). *Self Assessment Guidebook*. Newark, DE.