

Montana Preschool Program Guidelines:
A Resource for Teaching Children
Ages 3 through 5



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Preschoolers are unique, competent learners who need individualized approaches that support their curiosity and initiative as well as methods of teaching that respect the unique ways in which young children learn.

Introduction



Introduction

Learning starts early. This is one of four vital ideas about high quality early childhood education that principals identified in the 2014 edition of *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice* by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The others are: 2) supporting children to be prepared when they start school is essential to helping them get on the right track; 3) developing appropriate skills, knowledge, and dispositions is fundamental to children’s future success; and 4) getting children on grade level by the time they leave third grade, particularly in reading and math, is essential to ensuring they graduate from high school ready for college, careers, and life.

NAESP, in *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice*, also describes key competencies for leaders who are implementing early learning programs. They include: 1) embrace the pre-K-3 early learning continuum; 2) ensure developmentally-appropriate teaching; 3) provide personalized, blended learning environments; 4) use multiple measures to guide student learning growth; 5) build professional capacity across the learning community; and 6) make schools the hub.

In order to provide the type of effective, high-quality care and education for young children described in the guide, it is critical that educators recognize that preschool is not kindergarten for 4-year old children. Preschoolers are unique, competent learners who need individualized approaches that support their curiosity and initiative as well as methods of teaching that respect the unique ways in which young children learn.

Leaders can build on the ten standards that The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) publishes in their NAEYC Accreditation Framework. These program standards define best practices in the field and high quality early learning strategies that set children on the road to positive and stimulating learning experiences. They are: 1) relationships between adults and children foster their feelings of individual worth and belonging; 2) comprehensive curriculum that promotes the program’s goals will positively impact children’s learning and development; 3) programs must use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching approaches; 4) assessment of child progress informs learning and development; 5) programs promote nutrition and health; 6) teachers are qualified, knowledgeable, and demonstrate a personal commitment to children and their families; 7) programs maintain collaborative relationships with families; 8) resources and relationships within the community support program goals; 9) the indoor and outdoor physical environment are safe and well-maintained and facilitate learning and development; and 10) the program’s leadership and management effectively implement policies to assure children, families, and staff have high quality experiences.

Learning in effective preschool programs happens in the context of relationships. A teacher’s actions and interactions with children are the most powerful determinant of learning outcomes. While social factors strongly influence cognitive development and academic competence, teachers must foster learning and development in all domains of well-being because learning and development are complexly interrelated.

The above key ideas, coupled with educators’ sound understanding of best practices, provide the expertise needed for teachers to adapt and individualize the curriculum and create environments that set up a successful transition to kindergarten.

Document Structure and Purpose

The *Preschool Program Guidelines* document is organized by three guiding questions (what, why, and how) to explain and provide specific best-practice examples for each of six components of program quality. The “what” addresses a thorough but concise explanation of research-based content and best practices related to the targeted component of program quality. Using scientifically-based research as the driving force, the “why” offers a rationale for the importance of the described practices. Finally, the “how” provides clear, real-world examples of

how practices should be implemented in the classroom. Below, you will find the “what, why, how” structure used to provide an overview of the purpose of the *Preschool Program Guidelines* document.

What:

The *Preschool Program Guidelines* document provides information and tools to support programs in providing high-quality experiences for young children. It is important to understand that the preschool experience may occur in a variety of settings suited to young learners. These might include a home child care, a center for preschool-aged children, a public school, or a Head Start agency. This document will explore the interconnected elements of an effective preschool program, one that understands and honors young children and their families, and guides them to skills and competencies that lead to school readiness.

Why:

The *Preschool Program Guidelines* document was written as a resource for those providing care and education to children ages 3-5 years old.

How:

Effective, high-quality care, and education of young children is achieved when programs engage in systemic processes focused on continuous improvement. By completing the High-Quality Preschool Program Self-Assessment included in this guide, programs will be able to carefully evaluate specific components of program quality. Once areas of strength and areas for growth are determined, programs can use the results, coupled with the systemic approach found in this document, to develop detailed plans for quality improvement. Within the High-Quality Preschool Program Self-Assessment, there is valuable guidance provided to better understand the quality indicators, in addition to resources to help programs plan for specific action.

Systemic Processes for Improving Early Learning Outcomes

A comprehensive preschool plan should outline systemic processes for improving early learning outcomes. The plan must include a comprehensive assessment system to informed decision-making and action goal setting. It’s important to understand that continuous school improvement is multifaceted; combining infrastructure with intentionality. It promotes responsibility and commitment for supporting early learning outcomes.

Paul Schlechty (2001) states, “Two things sustain change: one is a leader or leadership group that acts as a change agent; the other is a system or group of systems that supports change. This explains why, when the school culture does not have the capacity to sustain a change effort, the change rarely outlasts the tenure of the change agent.”

Therefore, a key leadership task is to study and create system conditions that will support and sustain change. The suggestions within the *Preschool Program Guidelines* document are meant to provide assistance to leadership teams in the development or continued implementation of a comprehensive preschool plan. However, each educational setting is unique, so working through this process is a starting point for important conversations that capitalize on the distinct resources of each educational setting.

Utilizing the High-Quality Preschool Program Self-Assessment and the Continuous Improvement Cycle will aid programs in identifying and implementing important program goals.

High-Quality Preschool Program Self-Assessment

The High-Quality Preschool Program Self-Assessment should be used by preschool programs to assess the early childhood processes used for supporting children’s development.

The self-assessment outlines eight components of program quality and related subcomponents proven to be effective indicators for supporting children’s development. Within each subcomponent, there are indicators of quality for programs to evaluate. The components are:

1. Leadership and Administration
2. Early Learning Content Standards
3. Curriculum
4. Instruction
5. Assessment
6. Physical and Learning Environment
7. Child Guidance
8. Family and Community Engagement

To use the self-assessment, programs must carefully rate the level of implementation of the indicators of quality within the subcomponents using a rating scale of 1 to 5. A rating of 1 demonstrates the indicator of quality is *not* being implemented at the time, and a rating of 5 indicates sustained, consistent implementation.

After rating the indicators of quality, early childhood programs should examine the three phases of implementing high-quality early childhood programs shown in the self-assessment: exploring, implementing, and sustaining. Programs should strive to meet the sustaining phase, demonstrating the subcomponent is firmly embedded into daily practice.

Definitions:

Exploring: An early childhood program that is in the exploring stage is still in the planning stages of execution. Personnel are investigating the subcomponents of quality, and further action is needed. A rating of 1 demonstrates the indicator of quality is not being implemented, but might possibly be explored at the time.

Implementing: An early childhood program that is in the implementing stage may be introducing and utilizing some indicators of quality. The indicators of quality are occasionally being implemented by some staff, but not all staff; and further action is needed. A rating of 2-4 demonstrates the indicator of quality is being implemented at various levels, but is not yet being sustained in a consistent manner.

Sustaining: An early childhood program that is in the sustaining stage has incorporated the indicators of quality as a part of the regular routine, and protocols have been embraced by all educational stakeholders involved within the educational system. A rating of 5 indicates sustained, consistent implementation of the indicators of quality.

Ratings from the self-assessment will help leadership teams determine the current phase of implementation for each of the six components of quality and related subcomponents: *exploring, implementing, or sustaining*. Completing the self-assessment will help programs celebrate strengths and determine areas of growth. It is recommended that early childhood programs follow these steps:

- 1) Complete the self-assessment.
- 2) Identify goals and action steps.
- 3) Share the results with the staff and community.
- 4) Use the self-assessment as a framework for developing a learning plan.

This systemic process will be valuable for early childhood programs because the self-assessment will provide a clear description of differences between existing practices and the evidence-based exemplars identified by the indicators of quality.

Using the self-assessment as a screening instrument will allow schools and early childhood programs to more effectively write an action plan to determine the exact support needed. It is recommended that the self-assessment be administered during three benchmark periods (fall, winter, spring) to determine how much progress each school and early childhood program is making in reaching the sustaining phase.

Developing an Action Plan

Once leadership teams determine the current phase for each of the six components and decide which indicators of quality within the subcomponents are in further need of action, the Action Plan Template (Appendix) should be utilized to create a learning plan.

Consider the following questions:

- What current practices or processes will be adjusted and how?
- What new practices, processes, or strategies will strengthen our current implementation?

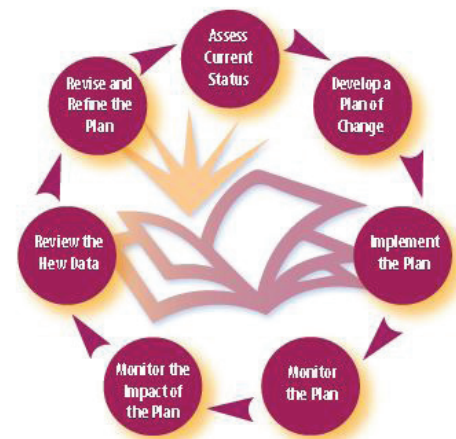
Leadership teams should identify three to five action goals, decide on specific action steps, determine who will be responsible for each action step, and delineate a timeframe for completion of each goal. Action plans should serve as a progress monitoring tool for preschool programs.

Continuous Improvement Cycle

A high-quality preschool program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children’s learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.

Preschool program staff use data to make informed decisions about individual children’s progress, class progress, and program progress toward identified goals. The Continuous Improvement Cycle is a problem-solving model that translates decisions into data-informed action steps. The cyclical pattern begins with the development of a decisions strategy, which includes deliberate, purposeful action goals, and moves through implementation and ongoing monitoring of results (Litchfield, 1956). Observation, documentation, and assessment are carefully aligned with the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS), which is the curriculum framework for Montana Early Childhood Programs.

As seen in the diagram, engaging in the work of the self-assessment and developing an action plan are the first steps in the continuous improvement cycle and will support programs in the development of high-quality preschool environments that support all children in becoming kindergarten ready.



Additional Resources

In addition to this document, there are a number of helpful resources produced and published by the state that will offer information and insight as preschool teachers and administrators strive for greater effectiveness. Below is a list, each of which is explained in greater detail in the Appendix section.

- High-Quality Preschool Programs Self-Assessment
- Action Plan Template
- Continuous Improvement Cycle Graphic
- Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS)
- Montana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (MLP)
- The Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base
- Montana Guiding Principles of the Early Childhood Education Model Curriculum
- Graduation Matters Montana (GMM)
- Indian Education for All (IEFA)

*Quality program leadership is multifaceted.
It encompasses a number of important behaviors, skills,
and competencies.*

Leadership and Administration



Leadership and Administration

What:

Program leadership and administration include requirements necessary to ensure that the preschool program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems to support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management, so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

A strong and responsive administrator is one who builds systems that promote continuous quality improvement and creates an environment that conveys trust and collaboration with families, teachers, and children. Early childhood administrators are flexible, able to handle change, and have put policies in place that inform and ensure a smoothly operating program. A program's leadership should be familiar with the agency's mission and vision and be able to convey that mission to staff as well as model the key ideas within.

The careful administration of an early learning program requires consideration for the regulations and requirements that guide the program's operation. Administrators who put monitoring strategies and feedback loops in place ensure that children's safety and classroom instruction is occurring within the prescribed framework.

Why:

Research from a variety of sources on school improvement indicates that high-quality leadership is instrumental in driving school transformation and improvement.

"Excellent programming requires effective governance structures, competent and knowledgeable leadership, as well as comprehensive and well-functioning administrative policies, procedures, and systems. Effective leadership and management create the environment for high-quality care and education by:

- ensuring compliance with relevant regulations and guidelines;
- promoting fiscal soundness, program accountability, effective communication, helpful consultative services, positive community relations, and comfortable and supportive workplaces;
- maintaining stable staff; and
- instituting ongoing program planning and career development opportunities for staff as well as continuous program improvement." (NAEYC Overview of Program Standards, 2008)

How:

Quality program leadership is multifaceted. It encompasses a number of important behaviors, skills, and competencies. It requires continual evaluation of work performance that further drives the setting and monitoring of improvement goals.

Leadership

In 2005, the National Association of Elementary School Principals published the guide, "Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities – What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do," which identified indicators of quality preschool programs. This guide defined six standards:

- Embrace and advocate for high-quality, universal early childhood education that is vertically aligned throughout the grade levels.
- Provide program structures and assure school-wide quality learning environments.

- Establish a positive school climate and appropriate classroom management to promote optimal student learning.
- Ensure quality instruction is happening daily.
- Use comprehensive curriculum and multiple assessments to strengthen student learning.
- Engage parents, families, and communities.

Analysis of Program and Child Data

The report, “Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making,” (Hamilton et al., 2009) recommends establishing a clear vision for program-wide data use. There are four steps for effectively carrying out this recommendation.

1. Establish a program-wide data team that sets the tone for ongoing data use. Team members should clarify the program’s data vision and model the use of data to make instructional decisions and encourage other staff to do the same.
2. Define critical teaching and learning concepts. Team members need to identify and define a common vocabulary related to data use, in particular, to minimize conflicted assumptions and misunderstandings. Focus on world-like achievement, collaboration, data, evidence, progress, and benchmarks.
3. Develop a written plan that articulates activities, roles, and responsibilities. Team members should create a written plan that clearly articulates the use of data in achieving goals and ensures that they are attainable, measurable, and relevant.
4. Provide ongoing data leadership. Team members should provide support for all staff on how the plan of using data supports the school’s vision. Team members can educate staff by having individual or small group meetings to provide resources and support for data analysis and interpretation.

Establishment of a Leadership Team

The development of a leadership team is an important step in the overall improvement of program quality and requires careful selection of team members who have knowledge about best practices for early childhood development; are highly competent and recognized by peers for their knowledge and skills; are willing to share resources and guide other staff members; possess good communication skills, are flexible, and respectful of the opinions of others; and maintain a positive attitude and can inspire others to do the same.

Characteristics of Quality Leaders

Characteristics shared by successful school leaders:

- They have consistent, high expectations and are very ambitious for the success of their students.
- They constantly demonstrate that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement.
- They focus relentlessly on improving teaching and learning with very effective professional development of all staff.
- They are experts at assessment and the tracking of student progress with appropriate support and intervention based upon a detailed knowledge of individual students.
- They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the progress and personal development of every student.

- They develop individual students through promoting rich opportunities for learning both within and outside of the classroom.
- They cultivate partnerships with parents, businesses, and the community to support student learning and progress.
- They are robust and rigorous in terms of self-evaluation and data analysis with clear strategies for improvement.

Teacher Assignments and Qualifications

Teachers must be assigned at the levels for which they are licensed and endorsed in accordance with statutes and the Montana Board of Public Education rules.

Teachers with an elementary education K-8 endorsement and Early Childhood Education Special Permissive Competency are considered to be appropriately licensed and endorsed and can teach in an accredited preschool program until July 1, 2018, at which time, those teachers will need to be appropriately licensed with the Early Childhood Education P-3 endorsement.

All other teachers or individuals with background, training, or experience in early childhood education who are interested in teaching in a public school preschool program may apply for a Class 5 provisional license, which is valid for up to three years, if they do not have the proper endorsement to be eligible to teach in an accredited preschool while they work toward getting the necessary license and endorsement.

Early Childhood Paraprofessional Qualifications

Early childhood paraprofessionals must:

- have completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; or
- have obtained an associate (or higher) degree; or
- have met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in the delivery of the curriculum, instruction, and program delivery standards to support children's development of the knowledge and skills outlined in the Early Learning Content Standards;
- be able to demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist in the delivery of the curriculum through instruction aligned to the Montana Early Learning Content Standards.

Early Childhood Paraprofessional Supervision

Early childhood paraprofessionals must be under the direct supervision of a licensed teacher who is responsible for instruction and assessment of students. Early childhood paraprofessionals assigned to assist students with special education needs must be under the supervision of the teacher. A supervising teacher must be available while an early childhood paraprofessional is fulfilling his or her responsibilities and should not be simultaneously assigned to another teaching duty or preparation time.

Class Size

There must be one appropriately licensed and endorsed teacher for 10 students, with an early childhood paraprofessional for any additional students over 10 students, and no more than 18 total students in a classroom with two adults. The table below shows recommended student ratios from the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria 10.B.12. Group sizes are stated as ceilings, regardless of the number of staff. Every attempt should be made to maintain continuity of relationships between teaching staff and children and among groups of children.

	Class Size 12	14	16	18	20
Age Range					
36-48 Months	Adult to Child Ratio 1:6	1:7	1:8	1:9	
48-60 Months			1:8	1:9	1:10
60 Months-K Enrollment			1:8	1:9	1:10

Aggregate Hours

Half Day Program - Four hours per day

Full Day Program - Six or more hours per day

Enrollment

A child must have reached 3 years of age before the district’s official start date of the preschool program or have been enrolled by special permission by the board of trustees.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Leadership subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

LEADERSHIP					
1. The program has developed effective procedures to continually utilize data to set goals and monitor progress for the program, staff, and children.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A program leadership team is established and meets regularly to focus on continuous improvement of the program.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Program leadership regularly meets to analyze program and child-level data to inform decisions about professional development, instruction, individualization, and family engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Program leadership intentionally monitors progress toward goals and makes adjustments as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Program leadership is involved in setting measurable goals for the growth and development of children.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Professional development for staff supports teachers’ individual needs and aligns with the goals and expectations of the program.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Program leadership models and communicates collaboration and shared responsibility for program and child outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Instructional leaders support and monitor instructional experiences and interactions with children through regular observations.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Instructional leaders support and monitor family engagement experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Adequate professional development and curricular resources are given to meet program expectations and support growth and development in the 4 domains of learning outlined in the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS).	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Program Leadership and Administration

The Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base is a guide to early care and education professional practice; what early childhood practitioners who work with young children and families need to know, understand, and be able to do. This document is an excellent resource for educator professional learning. Link: <http://www.mtecp.org/pdfs/Knowledge%20Base%20Assessments/Knowledge%20Base%20Rev%2002%202013.pdf>

Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training (2011). *ACT School Improvement Framework*. East Perth, WA.

Klein, L. & Knitzer, J. (2007). *Promoting Effective Early Learning. What Every Policymaker and Educator Should Know*. National Center for Children in Poverty. New York, NY.

(NAESP) National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005). *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities-What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*.

(NAESP) National Association of Elementary School Principals (2014). *Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principals Practice*.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (2008). *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: 2008 As Adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration*.

Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision-Making <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506645.pdf>

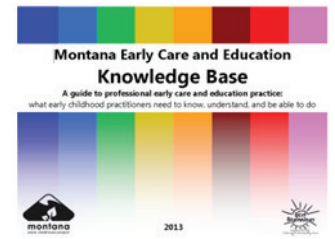


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Early Learning Content Standards



Early Learning Content Standards



What:

The Montana Early Learning Content Standards (MELS) are designed to guide the work of early childhood professionals in a variety of early childhood settings. Professionals who implement the MELS help ensure that children from birth to age 5 develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning and reach their full potential in life.

The MELS is a tool for every early childhood and related service professional working with young children and their families, including early care and education practitioners, elementary school teachers, early interventionists, pre-service teachers, parent/family educators, family support specialists, home visitors, mental health providers, and child/family health practitioners. The MELS is also a tool for those who plan and provide early childhood professional and career development, including college instructors, high school teachers, professional development specialists, and Early Head Start/Head Start training and technical assistance personnel.

The following principles, known as the Early Learning Principles, reflect the essential understandings and fundamental early childhood concepts that strengthen both development and implementation of the MELS. It is well documented that growth and development in the early years is essential to children’s success in school and in life. There is also ample evidence linking high-quality early care and education programs with future achievement and lifelong learning. The Early Learning Principles include the roles and relationships of a number of critical issues, including assessment, brain research, and developmentally appropriate practice, to children’s growth and development.

Alignment across Early Childhood Settings	Assessment
Brain Development and Research	Child Development Expertise
Connections among Domains	Culture
Curriculum	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
Dual Language Learners	Emotional and Social Development
Environments	Ethics and Professionalism
Family Engagement	Health and Well-Being
Inclusion	Indian Education for All
Individuality	Lifelong Learning
Modeling	Open-Ended Materials and Open-ended Questions
Play	Policy-Making
Primary Caregiver	Quality
Relationships	Research and Best Practice
Responsive Routines	School Readiness
Screen Time	Use of Technology

Why:

The MELS provide a structure that frames the developmental process from birth to age 5 as the foundation for children’s success in life and learning. They are meant to:

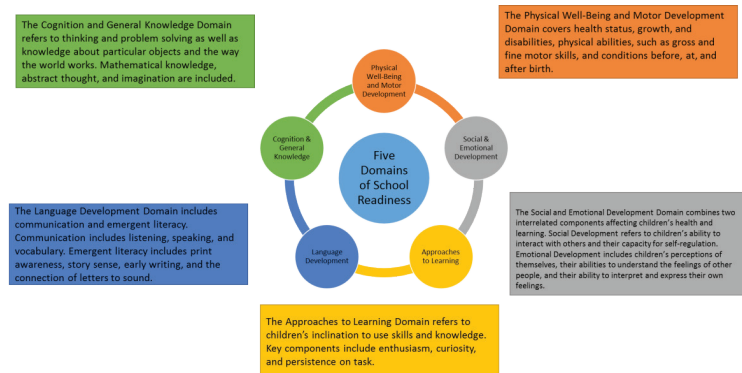
- provide a common language and improve communication among the professionals who impact and provide services to young children and their families;

- build upon early childhood professionals' understanding of the continuum of children's growth and development;
- serve as a resource for ways to enhance children's early learning experiences;
- describe the expectations for what young children should know and be able to do across different domains of learning;
- support the transfer of child development knowledge to improve teaching and caregiving practices and encourage individualization; and
- provide information and context for the range of skills children develop from birth to age 5.

The MELS are organized within core domains. Each core domain is related to and influences the others. Children's growth and development occur, not as a series of isolated events throughout the first years of life, but through ebb and flow in a unique way for each child.

How:

The MELS are arranged in multiple layers, reflecting the complexity of young children's development. Children's development is organized within four Core Domains, which can be defined as broad categories or dimensions of development reflective of children's learning and growth. The four Core Domains are further expanded into 13 Subdomains that are described in more detail in 47 Standards. The Standards are statements reflecting young children's growth and development. For each of the 47 Standards, Benchmarks, Indicators, and Learning Opportunities are provided.



- Benchmarks: What we want the child to be able to do.
- Indicators: Behaviors we might see.
- Learning Opportunities: Experiences we might provide to support development.

The MELS should be used to:

- Acknowledge the diverse value systems in which children learn and grow.
- Assist early childhood professionals in communication/collaboration with policy makers, community members, and key stakeholders.
- Develop training and education programs for adults working with children and their families.
- Emphasize the importance of early care and education to the community.
- Help teachers focus on what children can do and reinforce the idea that children are capable learners.
- Help teachers meet children's developmental needs, including those of children with disabilities, at the level they require and in an individual capacity.
- Help teachers recognize the critical need to meet children's emotional/social needs and that meeting those needs serves as the basis for a child's future learning.
- Help teachers recognize their own value and abilities.

- Improve quality in early care and education programs, and serve as a model for teaching and building secure relationships with young children.
- Increase the flow of information among early childhood teachers, professionals, and policy makers.
- Support teachers in learning more about child development.

Alignment to the Standards

In order to understand which developmental concepts and skills children need to acquire, it will be important that curriculum is aligned to the MELS. The MELS will guide choosing, aligning, planning, and implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum across all domains of development. Furthermore, the MELS provide clarity about what children should know and be able to do in all domains of development before entrance into kindergarten. Ultimately, the MELS provide a framework to guide the work of teachers and ensure that children have the skills and knowledge they need to achieve success in learning and reach their full potential in life.

P-3 Vertical Alignment: In a position statement published by NAEYC (2009), Copple and Bredekamp stress that children’s learning experiences across the early childhood years, birth to age 8, need to be far better integrated and aligned. In 2010, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) published a similar position statement urging states to “lead a careful, well-balanced effort to align K-3 standards to pre-K standards and vice versa.” NAESP suggested alignment work would require states to expand their K-3 standards to include a focus on social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and creative learning, as well as school-related skills across the continuum.

The group went on to say, “states should also promote balanced teaching strategies, a variety of types of learning opportunities, and multiple ways for children to demonstrate progress in learning in conjunction with the implementation of their standards.” They further encouraged states to look at the full range of Common Core State Standards for all grades and expand them to include additional child development domains that focus on social, emotional, and physical learning. The MELS incorporates current research, particularly in the areas of brain development and cultural/linguistic diversity, including significant and meaningful integration of the Montana Indian Education for All Act. In addition, a crosswalk analysis of the MELS was conducted to highlight connections with other professional standards, including the Montana Common Core Kindergarten Standards for Language Arts and Math and the Next Generation Science Standards as well as the Head Start Framework.

Copple and Bredekamp (2009) stressed that education quality and student outcomes would improve substantially if elementary teachers incorporated the early childhood practices of attention to the whole child, integrated and meaningful learning, and parent engagement. Early childhood teachers, on the other hand, would improve their work if they made use of the elementary-grade practices of robust content and attention to learning progressions in curriculum and teaching.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Early Learning Content Standards subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

EARLY LEARNING CONTENT STANDARDS					
11. Teachers know and understand the MELS and can speak to how their current curriculum and instructional strategies support the growth and development of the standards.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The program supports growth and development in the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS through the use of quality curriculum and effective instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Early Learning Content Standards, Curriculum, and Instruction

Lieberman-Betz, R.G., Wail, C.O., & Chai, Z. (2013). *Examining Response to Intervention Using a Framework for Best Practice from Early Childhood Special Education*. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 21(1), 51-67. DOI: 10.1080/09362835.2013.750122

Perry, G., & Duru, M.S. (Eds.). (2000). *Resources for Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Recommendations from the Profession, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children*. Washington, D.C.

Whitehurst, G.J. & Lonigan, D.J. (2002). *Emergent literacy: Development from Prereaders to Readers*. In S.B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of Early Literacy Research* (pp. 11-29). New York: Guildford Press.

Websites

The Myth of Average - <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/The-Myth-of-Average-Todd-Rose-a>

There is ample evidence linking high-quality early care and education programs with future achievement and lifelong learning.

Curriculum



Curriculum

What:

High-quality early childhood education programs have a defined set of expectations for teaching and learning. In many ways, these expectations revolve around the domains of curriculum and instruction. While clearly related, the domains of curriculum and instruction have some distinct differences. To begin, curriculum is the 'what' of education. Education is based upon the curriculum or what is going to be taught. Instruction, on the other hand, is the 'how' of education. Instruction refers to teaching methods and styles. Curriculum, however good, is ultimately dependent upon how it is delivered to children (instruction).

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to *quality of content* rather than to any specific publisher's materials. The curriculum contains a written philosophy and framework, grounded in research-based understanding of child development, to provide a clear, coherent focus for planning children's experiences. Quality programs have a defined set of expectations for teaching and learning.

An early childhood curriculum is a sequence of integrated experiences, interactions, and activities that help children reach specific learning goals. A quality curriculum should provide children learning opportunities that are attuned to their developing abilities and connect with their experiences at home and in their communities. It should be responsive to the unique competencies, experiences, interests, and needs of each child.

A curriculum must be intentionally planned to guide the learning process, including the selection of materials and equipment, to enhance development and learning in each core domain: social, emotional, physical, communication, and cognition. The curriculum should also encourage integration of early childhood content areas, including social, emotional, physical, health, safety, language, literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, creative expression and the arts, and technology.

Effective instruction for young children encompasses a number of specific behaviors and skills, many of which are highlighted in the instruction section of the self-assessment.

An intentional curriculum is one that:

- is content driven;
- is research-based;
- emphasizes active engagement with children;
- includes attention to social and regulatory skills;
- is responsive to cultural diversity and children learning English;
- is directive without using drill and kill strategies;
- is fun for young children;
- promotes positive peer and teacher interactions;
- is developmentally appropriate;
- consistent with district-wide kindergarten through third grade curriculum; and
- aligned with early learning standards.

Why:

The National Center for Children in Poverty (2007) reports on emerging evidence that suggests an intentional curriculum must be used if we are to close the achievement gap that exists for many children. Furthermore, a well-planned, evidence-based curriculum, implemented by qualified teachers who promote learning in appropriate ways, can contribute significantly to positive outcomes for all children. To increase the achievement for all children, it is important to remember that all domains of children's development and learning are important and closely interrelated.

How:

There are many dimensions to consider when choosing a preschool curriculum. As a result of the varied theories of development, preschool curriculum models vary widely. In order to determine which curriculum is best, schools must be thoughtful about the population of children they are serving, including age, cultural background, and economic status, as well as be thorough in their analysis of the evidence base of the curriculum and how it connects to the identified educational domains. A quality curriculum should also include ways to adapt and modify an activity or approach for children with diverse learning needs. It is important to remember the family as a valuable source of guidance and information when selecting a curriculum and supporting children's individual needs. Most importantly, the curriculum should be aligned with developmentally appropriate assessment. According to Gusky, "When teachers' classroom assessments become an integral part of the instructional process and a central ingredient in their efforts to help students learn, the benefits of assessment for both students and teachers will be boundless" (2003, p. 11). Both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Council for Exceptional Children—Division of Early Childhood recognize assessment as a central component of early childhood programs.

The NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in the State Departments of Education published a position statement in 2003 and made several recommendations concerning curriculum. They suggest that it is important for curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation to be guided by:

- sound early childhood practices;
- effective learning and program standards;
- a set of core principles and values;
- a commitment to ethical behavior on behalf of children;
- coordinated systems that support children as individuals and members of families, cultures, and communities;
- partnerships with families; and
- respect for evidence.

In order to implement *high-quality* curriculum and connect those practices with well-defined early learning and program standards, it is important to provide *all* staff with the support, professional development, and resources needed in order to implement effectively.

Curricular Resources across the Domains

Because learning is so interrelated in the preschool years, teachers must foster learning in all developmental areas. Most preschool curricula integrate content knowledge holistically throughout the day. For example, rarely will a curriculum have a set time for social studies, but it may have books and activities integrated throughout the day that support important social studies concepts. Furthermore, many curricular experiences are represented as center activities.

The adopted curriculum must not only be strong in all domain areas, but it also must be robust enough in the areas of language, literacy, mathematics, and technology in order to close the achievement gap for the most disadvantaged students.

Culturally Sensitive

When planning a curriculum for individual children, it is important to be responsive to the competencies, experiences, interests, and needs that each child brings to the classroom. Communities are becoming more diverse and, as such, more children are culturally diverse, speak a language other than English, possess different abilities and disabilities, and come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The curriculum must be flexible enough to meet the needs of *all* children.

First, a curriculum needs to be reflective of students' family and community lives while being responsive to diversity, including gender, age, language, culture, and ability, as well as opportunities for students and families to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians, particularly Montana Indian tribes, in a culturally responsive manner. In addition, children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from a curriculum that is attuned to their learning strengths and needs.

Teaching staff must be proactively antibiased in their relationships with children and families. Culturally sensitive care should be evidenced in the classroom, including attention to materials, books, music, or artifacts that reflect the diversity of children and families who make up the classroom population. Books and posters in the classroom should depict persons of varied races, ages, abilities, and of both genders in a variety of roles and careers. Parents should be included in the selection of multicultural materials, photographs, books, songs, and stories for the classroom to ensure that the materials are authentic and that there are no offensive stereotypes presented to the children. Members of the performing and visual arts community, such as musical performers, coordinators of traveling museum exhibits, local artists, and community residents should be invited to share their interests and talents with the children.

Curriculum Statement

A curriculum statement that defines the program's philosophy and goals for children's learning is the first step in delivering a responsive curriculum. Programs should outline their perspective on key elements that, when combined, provide a plan for instruction. Curriculum statements should include a discussion on: 1) the program's philosophy on how children learn and how the program will support children's learning; 2) the way in which goals for children are determined and used to guide instruction; 3) enrollment or the cultural make-up of the program that impacts the content and the way in which instruction may be delivered; 4) content that describes the types of key activities and experiences children will be given, including references to the early learning standards; 5) the types of teaching strategies that will be emphasized; 6) the design of the learning environment and the types of materials and resources that will be utilized; 7) the way in which assessment will be combined with curriculum and instruction to make decisions about children's learning; 8) how families will be involved in supporting children's learning; 9) the professional development teachers need to competently deliver instruction to children; and 10) the way the curriculum allows for adaptations to promote inclusivity.

Philosophy

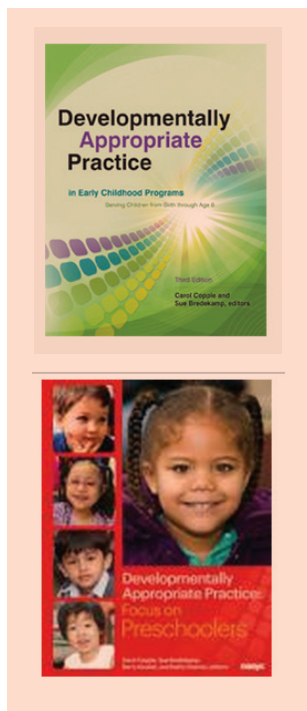
There are many early childhood philosophies that utilize basic understandings of the way in which young children develop and learn to support their high quality, stimulating school experiences. Approaches such as Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, or Montessori have based their delivery on key methods that specifically spell out the way in which instruction should be delivered. Other philosophies such as play-based learning or the cognitive-based approaches utilize active-learning experiences for children in various learning centers that are facilitated by intentional and purposeful teacher interactions.

Programs' philosophies may utilize components of more than one approach. For example, a cognitive-based learning program may incorporate the Reggio Emilia project idea within its schedule or utilize Montessori materials. Ultimately, programs must determine the best way to meet the needs of its children and families.

Balanced Approach

Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is explained thoroughly in the documents, "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" (Bredekamp & Copple, NAEYC, 2009). In summary, the authors suggest that in order to provide DAP, teachers in high-quality early childhood classrooms should:

- Allow children uninterrupted blocks of time to promote deep engagement in play and other child-selected activities.
- Recognize that physical activity and outdoor play are integral to the curriculum.
- Work to ensure children spend at least a quarter of their day moving in physically active learning, both teacher-directed and child-directed.
- Plan large group activities that are short in duration.
- Engage children in learning activities during transition times.
- Use a variety of teaching strategies that include a broad range of approaches and responses.
- Organize space and select materials in all content and developmental areas to stimulate exploration, experimentation, discovery, and conceptual learning.
- Understand that each major learning format or context (e.g., large group, small group, individual, learning center, or routine based) has its own characteristics, functions, and value.
- Be intentional in choosing the best format for helping children achieve a desired goal given the children's ages, development, abilities, temperaments, etc.
- Establish a positive climate where children are motivated to persist and willing to take risks to be both successful and challenged.



Exploration

Children possess an amazing capacity to organize vast amounts of information. They build knowledge in an integrated manner and are constantly gathering information and striving to make sense of it. Effective curriculum for young children engages their active minds and nurtures their enthusiastic search for meaning and understanding.

Children follow different pathways to learning and they demonstrate their developmental progress in diverse ways. In order to meet the needs of a diverse population, it is important to incorporate the concept of universal design for learning. Universal design provides for multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of expression (CAST, 2007).

- Multiple means of representation refers to providing information in a variety of ways so the learning needs of all children are met. An example of this would be presenting materials verbally, with sign language, and with objects and pictures.

- Multiple means of expression refer to allowing children alternative ways to demonstrate what they know and how they are feeling. An example of this would be allowing children to respond with words, pictures, pointing, or an alternative communication system.
- Multiple means of engagement refer to providing choices in the environment that facilitate learning by building on children’s interests. An example of this is the setting up a variety of centers in the classroom that provide children access to the curriculum thematic content through areas of interest.

At an early age, all children have the capacity and propensity to observe, explore, and discover the world around them (NRC, 2012). These are basic abilities for science learning that can and should be encouraged and supported among children in the earliest years of their lives. The National Science Teachers Association affirms that learning science and engineering practices in the early years can foster children’s curiosity and enjoyment in exploring the world around them and lay the foundation for a progression of science learning in K–12 settings and throughout their entire lives.

Current research indicates that young children have the capacity for constructing conceptual learning and the ability to use the practices of reasoning and inquiry (NRC 2007, 2012). Many adults, including educators, tend to underestimate children’s capacity to learn science core ideas and practices in the early years and fail to provide the opportunities and experiences for them to foster science skills and build conceptual understanding (NRC, 2007). Also underestimated is the length of time that young children are able to focus on science explorations. Effective science investigations can deeply engage young children for extended periods of time, beyond a single activity or session.

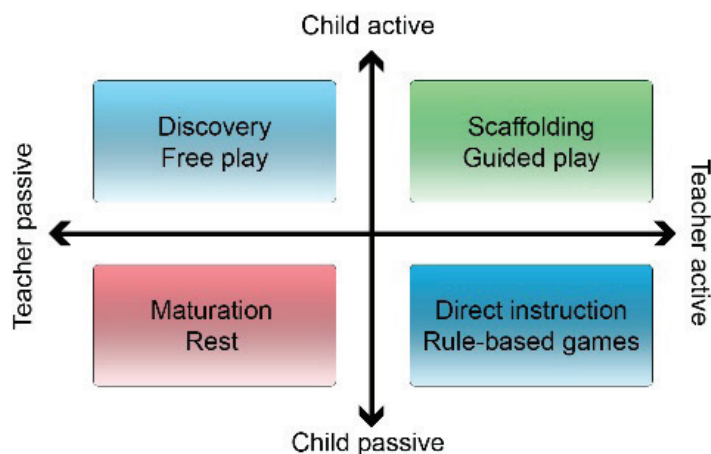
Purposeful Play

Learning for young children happens naturally through play. In fact, play and work involve similar actions as children interact with people and materials and make discoveries to understand their world. Teachers design play experiences with intention, facilitating exploration, asking questions, and presenting materials and ideas to support children’s understanding and skill development.

From Debunking the Play vs. Learning Dichotomy, Kyle Snow, PhD

Children of all ages love to play and it gives them opportunities to develop physical competence and enjoyment of the outdoors, understand and make sense of their world, interact with others, express and control emotions, develop their symbolic and problem-solving abilities, and practice emerging skills. Research shows the link between play and foundational capacities, such as memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, social skills, and success in school.

Children may engage in various kinds of play, such as physical play, object play, pretend or dramatic play, constructive play, and games with rules. From infancy, children act on the world around them for the pleasure of seeing what happens, such as repeatedly dropping a spoon on the floor or pulling a cat’s tail. At around age 2, children begin to demonstrate symbolic use of objects, such as picking up a shell and pretending to drink from a cup, especially if they have had opportunities to observe others engaging in such make-believe behavior.



With these strong beginnings in place, children are then able to advance to more mature forms of dramatic play. For example, by the ages of 3-5, they may act out specific roles, interact with one another in their roles, and plan how the play will unfold. High-level dramatic play produces documented cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. In addition, such play is influential in developing self-regulation, as children are highly motivated to stick to the roles and rules of the play and, thus, grow in the ability to inhibit their impulses, act in coordination with others, and make plans. Ultimately, active scaffolding of imaginative play is needed in early childhood settings if children are to develop the sustained, mature dramatic play that contributes significantly to their self-regulation and other cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional benefits (NAEYC Position Statement on Play).

What Is Play?

Although it is simple to compile a list of play activities, it is much more difficult to define play. Garvey (1977) gave a useful description of play for teachers when she defined play as an activity which is: 1) positively valued by the player; 2) self-motivated; 3) freely chosen; and 4) engaging. These characteristics are important for teachers to remember because imposing adult values, requirements, or motivations on children’s activities may change the very nature of play. *Back-to-Basics: Play in Early Childhood*

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Curriculum subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

CURRICULUM					
13. The program implements a research-based curriculum that enhances children’s development and learning of the MELS.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Program staff utilize daily plans that guide the selection of experiences, materials, and equipment to support growth in the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Program staff utilize planned opportunities for active exploration, discovery, and social interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Children have the opportunity to self-select experiences and engage in play, which is supported by purposeful planning and adult interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Program staff implement the curriculum across the domains in a manner reflective of children’s families and communities, being responsive to diversity, including gender, age, language, culture, and ability.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Program staff provide opportunities for all children and families to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians, particularly Montana Indian tribes.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Curriculum

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An early childhood curriculum is a sequence of integrated experiences, interactions, and activities that help children reach specific learning goals.

Instruction



Instruction

What:

High-quality early childhood education programs have a defined set of expectations for teaching and learning. In many ways, these expectations revolve around the domains of curriculum and instruction. While clearly related, the domains of curriculum and instruction have some distinct differences. To begin, curriculum is the 'what' of education. Education is based upon the curriculum or what is going to be taught. Instruction, on the other hand, is the 'how' of education. Instruction refers to teaching methods and styles. Curriculum, however good, is ultimately dependent upon how it is delivered to children (instruction).

Considerable growth and change occur in children during the preschool years in all areas of development. To function most effectively, teachers need to know about the goals, sequences, and trajectories of development in all areas. In this way, teachers can avoid using a scaled-down version of curriculum intended for older children as well as better understand the importance of communicating with kindergarten and other teachers and aligning the curriculum accordingly.

Teachers should use children's interests and curiosity to determine new content and skills to address. Children's individual goals for learning and the goals of the class as a whole should be challenging yet achievable and build on previously acquired information. Intentionality in planning both activities and environment is of the utmost importance when providing time for child-directed activities.

Teachers should be prepared with daily lesson plans that include identified goals for the group and individual children and, at the same time, ensure that content learning is cross curricular and is woven throughout the day. With the help of the curriculum, teachers should be able to determine the components of any skill or task and break it into achievable parts.

Most importantly, preschool instruction should focus on the learning processes rather than learning products. The ways in which a child is allowed to use learning materials are important to each child's success. Effective early childhood teachers understand that the process of learning is much more important than any product a child produces.

Why:

Children's experiences during early childhood not only influence their later functioning in school but also have effects throughout life. For example, current research demonstrates the early and lasting effects of children's environments and experiences on brain development and cognition (Chugani, Phelps, & Mazziotta 1987; Caine & Caine 1991; Kuhl 1994). Studies show that, "from infancy through about age 10, brain cells not only form most of the connections they will maintain throughout life but, during this time, they retain their greatest malleability" (Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives, 1996, pg. 7).

How:

Intentionality

The definition of intentional is to do something purposefully. For early childhood professionals, intentional teaching involves making a plan that includes the use of observation and asking question about those observations to make instructional decisions for children.

There are three steps toward becoming intentional: 1) understanding child development in order to know the appropriate outcomes that can be expected for children; 2) selecting the desired outcomes through planning the environment and choosing materials and experiences for children's learning; 3) observing and learning from children (Schiller).

Intentional early childhood teachers formulate high expectations for themselves and the children they teach. They set appropriate, meaningful, and individualized goals for children and use the art of questioning and reflecting and providing feedback to scaffold children's learning (Epstein, *The Intentional Teacher*).

Individualization

It is critical in early childhood instruction to scaffold young children's learning of new concepts and skills. To accomplish this, teachers should be informally assessing children on an ongoing basis, actively seeking out children's ideas, and discerning how they understand things by observing, talking with, and listening to them. The assessment information should be used to adapt curriculum, foster children's curiosity, and extend children's engagement. Most importantly, teachers should create a classroom in which children see failure as an acceptable part of the learning process.

An effective teacher chooses a strategy to fit a particular situation. It's important to consider what the children already know and can do and the learning goals for the specific situation. By remaining flexible and observant, we can determine which strategy may be most effective. Often, if one strategy doesn't work, another will. For example, teachers may try one or more of the following strategies:

- Acknowledge what children do or say. Let children know that we have noticed by giving positive attention, sometimes through comments, sometimes through just sitting nearby and observing. (*"Thanks for your help, Kavi. You found another way to show five."*)
- Encourage persistence and effort rather than just praising and evaluating what the child has done. (*"You're thinking of lots of words to describe the dog in the story. Let's keep going!"*)
- Give specific feedback rather than general comments. (*"The beanbag didn't get all the way to the hoop, James, so you might try throwing it harder."*)
- Model attitudes, ways of approaching problems, and behavior toward others, showing children rather than just telling them (*"Hmm, that didn't work and I need to think about why. I'm sorry, Ben, I missed part of what you said. Please tell me again."*)
- Demonstrate the correct way to do something. This usually involves a procedure that needs to be done in a certain way, such as using a wire whisk or writing the letter P.
- Create or add challenge so that a task goes a bit beyond what the children can already do. For example, lay out a collection of chips, count them together and then ask a small group of children to tell you how many are left after they see you removing some of the chips. The children count the remaining chips to help come up with the answer. To add a challenge, hide the chips after you remove some, and the children will have to use a strategy other than counting the remaining chips to come up with the answer. To reduce challenge, simplify the task by guiding the children to touch each chip once as they count the remaining chips.
- Ask questions that provoke children's thinking. (*"If you couldn't talk to your partner, how else could you let him know what to do?"*)
- Give assistance, such as a cue or hint, to help children work on the edge of their current competence. (*"Can you think of a word that rhymes with your name, Matt? How about bat . . . Matt/bat? What else rhymes with Matt and bat?"*)
- Provide information, directly giving children facts, verbal labels, and other information. (*"This one that looks like a big mouse with a short tail is called a mole."*)

- Give directions for children’s action or behavior. (“Touch each block only once as you count them. You want to move that icon over here? Okay, click on it and hold down, then drag it to wherever you want.”)

Inclusion

Children with disabilities and other special needs benefit from learning in inclusive environments with typically developing children. When given appropriate support and assistance, children in inclusive environments achieve more than children in segregated environments (Guralnick, 2001). Inclusive environments benefit both children with disabilities or other special needs and typically developing children.

Adults should work as a team and be prepared to meet the special needs of all children, including those with disabilities and those who exhibit unusual skills. Parents or caregivers, specialists, and teachers should make decisions together to ensure that all children are included in the social relationships, play, and learning experiences of the classroom.

Specialized services or adaptations should be accessed to help all children succeed in the early childhood classroom. Teaching staff should implement daily teaching and learning activities, including Individualized Family Service Plans, Individualized Education Programs, and other individual plans as needed.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Instruction subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment.)

INSTRUCTION					
19. The program utilizes effective teaching strategies that enhance children’s development and learning of the MELS.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Program staff use a variety of effective approaches and strategies, which include opportunities for both teacher and child-initiated interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Learning experiences provided in the classroom are meaningful, planned, and purposeful. Teachers plan intentionally, keeping in mind curriculum goals, child outcomes, and content standards.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Staff use knowledge of each child’s development to enhance instruction, modify strategies and materials, and adjust supports and challenges as children gain competence, understanding, and skills.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Program staff work together to implement learning plans that support children with special needs.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Based on acquired knowledge about the culture of children and families, teachers provide supportive resources to enhance learning.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Program staff build upon children’s language and understanding of concepts while increasing children’s vocabulary through direct and indirect learning opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Instruction

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Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – <http://www.cast.org/index.html>

Teachers should use children's interests and curiosity to determine new content and skills to address.

Assessment



Assessment

What:

Assessment is a critical element in quality early childhood programs. The information obtained from child assessment and program evaluation provides important decision-making information about programmatic philosophies, policies, family relationships, and instructional supports.

There are two purposes for assessment that join together to build a comprehensive assessment strategy: 1) child-specific (or early learning) assessments that include screening, diagnostic, and formative assessments. These assessments focus on the learning and development of the individual; 2) program assessments or evaluation that focus on program-level outcomes. These assessment measures focus on groups of children and can address elements of programming such as the environment, community involvement, participation in quality rating improvement systems, etc. Program evaluations can be used locally by programs to determine professional development needs, policy decision-making, and new program strategies. Aggregate program evaluation can also be used by states or policy makers to make decisions about funding or new regulations or requirements.

Child Assessment

Assessment is the *process* of collecting artifacts, anecdotal records, and formal reports of children's growth and development. Assessment is continuous, authentic, formative, and summative. It may include observations, checklists, work sampling (portfolios and projects), and anecdotal evidence from parents, which is vital to the understanding of children, their competencies, and their potential. All early childhood assessments involve a process of gathering information about children in an attempt to better understand and support learning and development.

Program Assessment

Consistent with the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Early Childhood Program Standards, an effective preschool program is "informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement."

The National Research Council (2006) highlighted two key principles in the area of assessment in early childhood. First, the purpose of an assessment should guide assessment decisions. Second, assessment activity should be conducted within a coherent system of medical, educational, and family support services that promote optimal development for all children. Specifically, quality assessment should:

- Benefit children.
- Be collected in authentic, developmentally appropriate contexts from multiple sources.
- Involve parents and families whenever possible.
- Meet professional, legal, and ethical standards, including linguistic and cultural appropriateness.

The process of gathering information from multiple sources using a variety of measures can accurately represent the complex and dynamic nature of children's play, learning, and development. Multiple sources of assessment information, including information from families, should be used to:

- Communicate and identify children's interests, needs, and development in all domains of learning, including social, emotional, physical, communication, and cognition, as well as in the early childhood content areas (language, literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, creative expression and the arts, and technology).

- Foster children’s curiosity and extend children’s engagement.
- Guide curriculum planning and decisions about teaching and learning.
- Evaluate and improve the early childhood program.

All assessment tools should measure the program’s goals and child outcomes based on the MELS. The chosen curriculum and educational programming should carefully align with and support these goals. The MELS is a curriculum framework for Montana early childhood programs. It is not an assessment of any kind. Rather, the MELS is intended to help teachers and parents better understand child development to meet children’s developmental needs.

Assessment Properties

Standardized Assessment: Standardized assessment involves a predetermined set of assessment items that represent standards of knowledge and skills. Standardized tests may be norm or criterion-referenced.

Norm-referenced Assessment: Norm-referenced assessments compare a child’s score to the scores of a group of same-age peers (norm group). Norm-referenced tests are almost always standardized to preserve a consistent basis of comparison of scores.

Criterion-referenced Assessment: Criterion-referenced assessments measure a child’s performance against a predetermined set of general developmental criteria, tasks, or skills.

Curriculum-referenced Assessment: Curriculum-referenced assessments are criterion-referenced and aligned to curriculum goals. A carefully prescribed sequence of curricular activities is followed and children’s progress is continually monitored. An example of a curriculum-based assessment is the Teaching Strategies Gold assessment feature of Creative Curriculum.

Types of Assessments

Early Learning and Development

Screening Assessment: This assessment is a snapshot of a child’s development. It is a single measure used at a single point in time to measure a single set of characteristics. Screening can help determine when a child needs further assessment. A developmental screening is a comprehensive assessment that is usually norm-referenced; a child’s performance in all developmental domains is compared to the performance of same-age peers. Many developmental screenings are administered by teachers and provide opportunity for parent input. However, some screenings should be administered and interpreted only by licensed clinical professionals. A universal screening is when all children are screened using quick, low-cost instruments. Typically, universal screening is the first tier of a multitiered system of supports, response to intervention, or recognition and response.

A Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) is a type of assessment that is administered *right before or after* children have started kindergarten to help teachers better understand children’s learning and development. KEA should *not* be used to determine eligibility or exclude children from kindergarten enrollment. KEA assessments assess a variety of developmental areas.

Examples of Developmental Screenings include:

- Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ)
- AGS Early Screening Profiles
- Battelle Developmental Inventory Screening Test

- Denver II
- Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning 4th Edition (DIAL-4)
- Speed Dial (short-form version)
- Early Screening Inventory - Revised

Diagnostic Assessment: Diagnostic assessment is an in-depth analysis of a child’s growth and development for the purpose of identifying specific learning difficulties and delays, disabilities, and specific skill deficits, as well as evaluating eligibility for additional support services and special education. Not all children require diagnostic assessment. Data is collected over a period of days and weeks using multiple methods and data points, including observation, formal assessment, interviews, and parent reports to determine a child’s specific strengths and weaknesses. Information is also used to suggest appropriate interventions and services. Classroom teachers might refer a child for a comprehensive diagnostic assessment after screening results indicate a potential delay in development. Specialized training is required to administer and interpret comprehensive diagnostic assessments.

Examples of comprehensive diagnostic assessments include:

- Battelle Developmental Inventory 2nd Edition (BDI-2)
- Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC)
- McCarthy Scales of Children’s Abilities (MSCA)
- Merrill-Palmer-Revised Scales of Development
- Preschool Language Scale 4th Edition (PLS-4)
- Weschler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence – III (WPPSI-III)

Progress Monitoring Assessment: This assessment determines whether students are making adequate progress and if instruction should be adjusted. Progress monitoring assessments can be curriculum embedded or general. Frequency of assessment is dependent upon the needs of the student. As a general rule, the more needs the student has, the more often the progress monitoring assessment should be administered. This allows changes to be made to instruction and services provided, without too much time elapsing.

Examples of Progress Monitoring (Instructional) Assessment:

- Teaching Strategies GOLD
- High Scope COR
- Work Sampling System

Outcome Assessment:

An outcome assessment provides a big picture view of the effectiveness of a program in relation to established performance levels (e.g., end of school year).

Program Evaluation

Assessment that is used for program evaluation does not measure the development and learning of children, but rather uses an aggregated set of data to determine program effectiveness and accountability. Assessment intended to evaluate the quantity and quality of early childhood programs for accountability and program evaluation purposes is a complex process that is best directed by a neutral third-party researcher with no conflict

of interest. In Montana, program evaluation assessments are typically conducted by early childhood professionals employed by local resource and referral agencies. Head Start programs are bound by mandated guidelines for program evaluation, and the Federal Office of Special Education Programs also has stringent reporting requirements for programs serving infants, toddlers, and preschoolers under Part C and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Examples of Program Quality Assessments that focus on the classroom environment are:

- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, revised edition (ECERS-R)
- Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO)

Examples of Program Quality Assessment that focus on programming are:

- Quality Rating System reviews
- NAEYC accreditation
- Child care licensing review
- Head Start review

Why:

Assessments are used for a number of different purposes, including determining if children are making progress and showing evidence of growth and development in each area of well-being. Assessment of child progress can also indicate if instruction is appropriate. Results of assessments can be used to consider if the teaching methods need to change or if the child would benefit from further instruction or scaffolded support. Assessment data can also be used to evaluate early childhood programs.

High-quality early childhood programs are “informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children’s learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop” (Commission on NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria 2003, np). Furthermore, research demonstrates that early identification and intervention for children with or at risk for disabilities can significantly affect outcomes (Shonkoff and Meisels, 2000). Thus, early childhood programs play an important part in helping to identify concerns.

Brief screening measures have been shown to be helpful in selecting children who may need further evaluation, but only if the screening tools meet high technical standards and if they are linked to access of further professional assessment (NAEYC, 2003). Assessment is important to show whether children are making progress, as well as to show evidence of growth and development in each area of well-being. Assessment is also critical in determining if instruction that is provided is appropriate. In a recognition and response or multitier system of support, assessment is important in determining whether teaching may need to change or if perhaps the child needs further instruction or remediation.

Recognition and Response

Recognition and Response is a preventative early childhood approach to Response to Intervention (RTI) that combines screening and diagnostic assessment with ongoing support for learning. Universal screening for all children in the areas of literacy and math are used to both “recognize” children that are not making typical progress and to “respond” by modifying and individualizing instruction to prevent further delay.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

The Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is an instructional model implemented in classrooms to identify and provide intervention for students that are not making expected progress. Multiple tiers of instruction and increasingly intensive interventions are key components of the MTSS model. Each tier of support refers to the level of support a child needs to succeed in the classroom (National Research Council, 2008). Tier 1 addresses the needs of children who make adequate progress in a general program; Tier 2 refers to supports provided to children who need additional general assistance; and Tier 3 refers to more specialized assistance for children not succeeding in the previous tiers.

How:

Assessment Process

The approach for effectively using assessment to guide instruction and learning is cyclical. It begins with gathering information. Once the information is gathered, it should be analyzed, and then teachers should use the data to determine if anything should be modified to increase outcomes. Once a plan is made, the process starts again as teachers gather information on the results from the changes made, analyze the data, and respond. Methods for these three steps are outlined below.

Gather information in an ongoing manner by:

- Observing children.
- Documenting children's work, play, behaviors, and interactions.
- Collecting artifacts of children's work.
- Talking with and listening to children, actively seeking their ideas and discern how they understand things.
- Engaging with children to learn about their competencies.
- Intentionally designing experiences and situations to observe children demonstrating important skills.

Analyze information by:

- Thinking about what the information means and what implications it may have on instruction and learning.
- Having conversations to discuss the information.

Respond to data by:

- Planning to modify the curriculum and teaching.
- Considering changing schedules, routines, interactions, physical environment, individualizations, small groups, and teaching approaches in response to data.

Assessment Plan

Quality preschool programs have a written plan for assessment that describes the multiple purposes and uses of authentic, informal, and formal assessment processes. These processes are sensitive to and informed by family culture, home language, and children's abilities and disabilities.

In order to ensure effectiveness, the assessment plan should include procedures and protocols that:

- Support the well-being of children and families.
- Guide the proper allocation of resources.
- Keep individual child records confidential.
- Use methods that are meaningful and accurate, in settings familiar to the children.
- Identify children's interests and needs.
- Describe the developmental progress and learning of children.
- Determine the need for developmental screening or a referral for diagnostic assessment.
 - This occurs primarily when seeking eligibility for special services.
 - Collect information for overall program effectiveness. When formal assessments are used, they are combined with informal methods such as observation, checklists, rating scales, and work sampling.
- Address how Individualized Education Plans, and other individualized plans will be addressed for children with disabilities and other special learning needs.
- Improve curriculum implementation, adapt teaching practices, and change the learning environment.
- Plan for program growth and improvement.
- Involve families in planning, implementing, and interpreting assessments.
- Effectively communicate assessment information to families.

Valid and Reliable Assessment

Psychometric properties of assessment, including *validity and reliability*, must be considered when choosing assessment instruments and methodologies.

Validity is measured in three ways: content, construct, concurrent. Content, or face validity, means the instrument is relevant to and representative of the construct under study. In other words, *the assessment instrument measures what it intends to measure*.

Reliability is also measured three ways: internal, test-retest, and inter-rater. Reliability refers to consistency of items within the assessment as well as consistency of scores across multiple assessment administration. Any change to the assessment instrument, including modifications to presentation, response format, timing, and setting, changes the validity and reliability and therefore skews the data, results, and usability.

These changes are more likely to be present with formal, standardized assessment instruments that have strict administration procedures.

Linking Data and Instruction

Data Interpretation

Interpreting data involves asking questions. Often the questions we need to ask are in relationship to identified child and program goals. Analyzing data is a thoughtful process that is often more effectively done in small groups. Through these conversations, group members are able to review the data more holistically, considering the perspectives of different stakeholders.

Below are some questions to guide the reflection of data adapted from the “Early Childhood Outcome Center, Analyzing Child Outcome Data for Program Improvement: A Guidance Table,” September 2013:

- What are the central questions that we want to answer when looking at our data? Are we asking the right questions? Do we understand the rationale behind the questions we’re asking?
- Do we already have information to answer these questions, or do we need to collect data?
- Will the information we are currently planning to gather give us the desired information?
- What factors may affect the results of our data?
- What results do we expect to see in the data?
- Are we compiling and formatting data so that it is readily understood by our intended audience?
- What stands out?
- What differences do you see between groups? Are the differences real, or are they likely to reflect a problem with the quality of your data? What could explain them? What might cause them? These are inferences about which stakeholders may disagree. Do you have additional information to rule out some inferences?
- What else do you want to know?
- What follow-up analysis is needed?
- Do we have a plan for collecting, analyzing, and sharing information in timely ways to meet our identified goals?

Family Involvement

Consistent with the NAEYC’s Early Childhood Program Standards, assessment should occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop.

Understanding family expectations and experience is a critical first step to understanding a child’s development and learning.

Key considerations include:

- What language is spoken at home?
- What is the child’s culture?
- What are the parent’s perceptions of assessment?

If a child’s language and culture are not considered, then the results of the assessment are invalid and, therefore, useless. When formal assessments are used, the scores obtained should be richly contextualized. For example, the National Research Council (2008) explains, “A child’s score on a vocabulary test reflects not just the child’s capacity to learn words, but also the language environment in which the child has lived since birth, the child’s ease with the testing procedure, and the child’s relationship with the tester. The younger the child, the more important are these considerations” (p. 17).

To ensure the participation of families in the assessment of their children, there are several beliefs to guide and inform the assessment process, as recommended by the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning.

- Parents know more than anyone else about their children and can provide meaningful and reliable information. Families’ observations, ideas, and concerns must be central to planning and performing assessments and screenings.
- Parents benefit from taking part in evaluations of their children. During the screenings or assessments, when parents focus on their child and get support and information, they increase their understanding of their child’s development, strengths, and needs.
- Parents should choose how they will participate in the assessment process. The more actively involved parents are, the better their experience will be.
- Including families in the process, in ways that they want to participate, sends the message that they are an important part of the assessment and, more importantly, of their child’s life. If we exclude parents from the process, we risk not only losing important information about the child, but parents may not fully engage in goal setting, planning, or the program itself, resulting in fewer benefits for the child and the family.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Assessment subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

ASSESSMENT					
26. The program has established a written systematic plan for gathering and utilizing data that outlines the assessment tools that will be utilized, how often assessments will be administered, who will administer assessments, and how often the data will be reviewed.	1	2	3	4	5
27. The program uses evidence-based screening tools to assess children’s progress toward achieving identified learning standards across the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS.	1	2	3	4	5
28. The program regularly monitors children’s progress toward achieving identified learning standards across the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS using formative and summative approaches, including universal screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessments.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Instructional staff clearly understand assessment goals and are administering assessments for their intended purposes.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Instructional staff understand how to interpret assessment results and use the information to guide instructional decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Instructional staff have timely access to disaggregated data to inform instructional planning and decision making.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Families are involved as partners in linguistically and culturally responsive ways to inform decisions about children’s needs.	1	2	3	4	5
33. The program’s assessment data is used to determine the effectiveness of the program and guide plans for improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Program staff inform instruction through observation and documentation of children’s strengths, interests, and needs in their play, work, and behavior.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Assessment

Meisels, S.J. & Atkins-Burnett, S. (2005). *Developmental Screening in Early Childhood*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2011). *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment: A Position Statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

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National Education Goals Panel. (1998). *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments*. (L. Shepard, S. L. Kagan, & E. Wurtz, Eds.). Washington, DC: Author.

National Research Council. (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*. Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children, C.E. Snow and S.B. Van Hemel, Editors. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Board on Testing and Assessment, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

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All early childhood assessments involve a process of gathering information about children in an attempt to better understand and support learning and development.

Physical and Learning Environment



Physical and Learning Environment

What:

A learning environment is a combination of social and physical qualities that help to create the classroom experience. It includes classroom schedules, routines, and management procedures. The physical space is set up in an organized way and is well maintained. It is thoughtfully furnished in ways that are inviting to children and families and promote growth and development in the domain areas.

The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development. Children need access to appropriate and safe space inside and outside for play. The material should support growth in experiential learning that stimulates exploration, experimentation, discovery, and conceptual learning.

Teaching staff should:

- Scaffold children’s learning through modifying the environment by intentionally arranging and rotating materials to facilitate ongoing learning.
- Provide a written, predictable but flexible schedule that provides intentionally planned routines and transitions, daily indoor and outdoor activities, and daily opportunities to work or play individually, in small groups, and in a whole group.
- Design an environment that protects children’s health and safety, including supervising children primarily by sight, regular sanitization of materials, and age appropriate meal and snack routines.

Why:

The physical and learning environment is so important to a high-quality preschool experience that it is believed if the environment is set up well with health, safety, and learning in mind, it’s as if there is an additional teacher. The environment is a foundational element to a successful preschool program and should not be overlooked. The following points illustrate clearly the need and value of high-quality learning environments.

- A large study found that environmental design explained 51 percent of the variability in children’s learning. The study also found that 73 percent of this was at the class level, much of which is in the teacher’s control (Barrett, Zhang, Moffat, & Kobbacy, 2013).
- Children, especially those with emotional or behavioral difficulties, are more self-directed, have less disruptive behavior, and are more engaged in tasks when using learning centers (Dunlap et al., 1994).
- Well-designed learning centers allow children choices, thereby fostering their self-esteem and decision-making abilities (Rushton, 2001).
- Research indicates that children in well-defined, separated learning centers are more task-oriented and engage in more positive interaction, cooperation, and spend more time in active involvement with other children (Moore, 1986).
- Enclosed alone or retreat spaces are critical. When there are no places to retreat, research indicates that children interact less with peers, engage in more wandering behavior, and are more hostile and aggressive (Sheehan & Day, 1975). Research also indicates that having places to be alone or to retreat from the group are linked to later enhanced cognitive development (Moore, 2002).

- Each center needs to be well-stocked with materials and activities. In resource-rich environments, children are more engaged in independent learning activities (Moore, 2002).

How:

There are many things to consider when thinking about how to pull together an effective learning environment. The following information is organized so you can move directly to the needed support and guidance.

Health and Safety

To help all staff in putting health and safety first, consider the following:

- Wash hands -- children and adults need to wash hands for at least 20 seconds when arriving, before and after eating, before and after playing in water, after playing in sand, after blowing the nose, and after touching bodily fluids or using the bathroom. It is critical to teach children how to properly wash hands.
- Conduct daily health checks.
- Ensure that snacks and meals meet the guidelines set by the Child and Adult Care Food Program.
- Sanitize any tables used for snacks or meals before and after eating and at the end of the day.
- Wash toys and dress-up clothes weekly and whenever soiled.
- Clean and sanitize any surface that has been exposed to bodily fluids immediately. It is essential to wear gloves when cleaning bodily fluids that contain or may contain blood to prevent the possibility of spreading AIDS or other blood-borne diseases. Having gloves conveniently located throughout the classroom and any other area used by children is necessary.
- Ensure that toys, materials, and equipment are lead free, nontoxic, free from strangulation risks.
- Create a clear exit path from any area of the room with clearly labelled exit signs and a posted exit plan.
- Protect children from falls by eliminating tripping hazards and by providing safe fall zones under equipment.
- Place any hazardous materials in a locked cupboard, including cleaning supplies, dishwasher detergent, and medicines. Keep hand sanitizer out of the reach of children. Make sure children don't have access to adult coats or purses that might contain medicines.
- Cover electrical outlets when they are not in use.
- Ensure that no matches or lighters are left in reach of children.
- Ensure that no extension cords are used.
- Teach children the skills needed to be safe and healthy, such as how to exit a building safely during a fire and how to use equipment safely.
- Be prepared for emergencies by having a first aid kit, accurate attendance records posted by the door, readily available emergency contacts, and working smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.
- Design a S.A.F.E. outdoor environment by carefully supervising children, providing age appropriate equipment, creating fall zones with appropriate shock absorbing ground cover, and maintaining equipment.

- Ensure that the playground is fenced.
- Conduct a daily indoor and outdoor safety check to keep equipment and the child's environment safe.

Supervision

While it is crucial to ensure that the environment is safe and healthy, supervision is also critical. Teachers can help to prevent many accidents by:

- Ensuring that there is an adequate ratio of adults to children both indoors and outdoors.
- Avoiding distractions, such as phone calls or preparation of materials and activities, while the children are present.
- Using effective supervision skills, such as scanning the area even when working with individual or small groups of children.
- Moving throughout the area in unpredictable ways.
- Interacting with children, helping them to solve conflicts, and reminding them of appropriate behavior and rules.
- Supervising children primarily by sight.

Daily Schedule

When developing an effective daily schedule, there are many things to consider. An investigation of the research on the importance of routines and schedules demonstrates:

- Predictable schedules and routines help children to feel more competent, to build self-control, and to learn emotional and behavioral regulation (Butterfield, 2002).
- Frequent scheduling changes decrease children's internal motivation, reduce attention spans, and increase dependency on teachers (Gareau & Kennedy, 1991).
- Large blocks of time for using centers allow children to plan and implement in-depth activities and learn to manage their own time. Time on task is enhanced because transitions are reduced (Bullard, 2014).
- Learning center time should be a minimum of one hour to allow for deep involvement in play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 153).

Sample Half-Day Schedule

Time	Scheduled activity	Explanation
8:30-8:50	Arrival—Morning meeting	As soon as children have taken off their coats, they go to the library area and read a book until morning meeting begins. During morning meeting, the teacher leads a music or physical activity and introduces special activities and any changes to learning centers.
8:50-9:00	Transition to breakfast	Children are released from morning meeting using a concept they are working on, such as name recognition. They wash their hands and go to the table. As soon as one of the tables is full, that group begins to eat.
9:00-9:30	Breakfast	Meals are served family style. Children practice social skills and participate in discussions about the food they are eating and events in their lives. As soon as each child is done eating breakfast, s/he goes to center time.
9:30-10:45	Center time	Children choose from a variety of learning centers and special daily planned activities.
10:45-11:00	Clean up and transition to small groups	Children write or draw in journals until all children arrive at the small group.
11:00-11:20	Small groups	Story and related activity, concept development.
11:20-11:30	Transition to lunch	Children wash hands and eat with the children in their small group. The groups have staggered ending times to avoid congestion as children are washing their hands.
11:30-12:00	Lunch	Children practice social and communication skills. They discuss the food they are eating and activities they participated in and what they learned and accomplished that day. As children finish eating lunch, they clear their places and prepare to go outside. As soon as a few children are ready, they go outside with one of the teachers.
12:00-12:30	Outdoors	Children choose from playground activities plus special planned daily outdoor activities. Children leave from the playground to go home.

Sample Full Day Schedule

Time	Scheduled activity	Explanation
8:30-8:50	Arrival— Morning meeting	As soon as children have taken off their coats, they go the library area and read a book until morning meeting begins. During morning meeting, the teacher leads a music or physical activity and introduces special activities and any changes to learning centers.
8:50-9:00	Transition to breakfast	Children are released from morning meeting using a concept they are working on, such as name recognition. They wash their hands and go to the table. As soon as one of the tables is full, that group begins to eat.
9:00-9:30	Breakfast	Meals are served family style. Children practice social skills and participate in discussions about the food they are eating and events in their lives. As soon as each child is done eating breakfast, s/he goes to center time.
9:30-10:45	Center time	Children choose from a variety of learning centers and special daily planned activities.
10:45-11:00	Clean up and transition to small groups	Children write or draw in journals until all children arrive at the small group.
11:00-11:20	Small groups	Story and related activity, concept development.
11:20-11:30	Transition to lunch	Children wash hands and eat with the children in their small group. The groups have staggered ending times to avoid congestion as children are washing their hands.
11:30-12:00	Lunch	Children practice social and communication skills. They discuss the food they are eating and activities they participated in and what they learned and accomplished that day. As children finish eating lunch, they clear their places and prepare to go outside. As soon as a few children are ready, they go outside with one of the teachers.
12:00-12:45	Outdoors	Children choose from playground activities plus special planned daily outdoor activities.
12:45-1:00	Transition to indoors	Children go inside—individual mats and individual place mats are set up at tables.
1:00-2:30	Quiet time- naps	Children who nap lie on mats and look at books until falling asleep; non-nappers engage in individual math and literacy work jobs at the table for half an hour and then use the quiet learning centers in the classroom.
2:30-2:40	Transition	Children clean centers and join the circle.
2:40-3:00	Whole or small group	Children participate in music and movement circle.

Transitions

Transition times (when children change from one activity to another) can be difficult for adults and children, especially for children who have special needs. Children are expected to listen to the teacher's directions, end one activity, begin another, and often follow multiple-step directions. Teachers can assist in making transitions run more smoothly and make transitions more educational through the following:

- Examine the schedule to limit the number of transitions.
- Plan transitions to provide educational value and limit chaos.
- Provide a warning to let children know what's coming.
- Avoid wait time whenever possible. Rather than having all the children wait until everyone has their coats on to go outside, have the children who are ready go outside with the other teacher.
- Use time wisely. Sing songs, play games such as "I spy", recite fingerplays, or clap rhythms while waiting. If children are cleaning up and then going to circle time, have a variety of books for children to look at while they wait for the rest of the group to join them.
- Make transitions predictable; sing a cleanup song or use another signal to identify the beginning of cleanup.
- Make transition times educational by releasing children from circle time using a concept they are currently working on, such as colors, patterns, letter sounds, or recognizing children's names

Learning Centers

A learning center is a self-contained area of the classroom featuring a wide variety of hands-on materials that children can choose and use independently. They are organized around a curriculum area (science, math, art, music, dramatic play, literacy) or a specific kind of play material (blocks, sensory, manipulative). Each learning center helps students develop unique content knowledge, skills, and dispositions while promoting social skills and work habits. A high-quality learning center is planned with a purpose in mind. It is inviting and aesthetically pleasing, containing an abundance of developmentally appropriate, relevant, interesting, and interactive materials. Learning centers that are high quality are planned to encourage independent use by children.

To provide for optimal learning, the environment must accommodate a variety of learning styles. This includes having an array of seating and learning arrangements. There should be places for children to sit alone, to sit with peers, and to share with a teacher. Providing comfortable stuffed chairs, beanbag chairs, hammocks, rocking chairs, wooden chairs and tables, and stadium chairs allow children and teachers to find areas that are conducive to their current activity and comfortable for them.

Learning centers need to be in a well-defined area with boundaries. Boundaries provide both physical and emotional security for children. Boundaries should be low enough that teachers can easily supervise and so that children can see the options that are available to them. Teachers can create boundaries by using the shelves, and other materials as dividers. Strategically placed furniture can also divide the room, as can sheer curtains.

Grouping centers by how quiet or active they are allow children to concentrate and engage in conversation in the quieter areas. The literacy, art, science, math, manipulative, and sensory centers are typically considered quiet areas. The music, block, dramatic play, gross motor, and woodworking centers are considered active or noisier centers and can be grouped near each other. It is also helpful to place the dramatic play center and the block center adjacent to each other since children will often use these centers in a reciprocal way to

enhance their play. Also, consider the physical aspects of the room as you design. For example, you will want to make sure that your music center is in an area that has outlets and that your art area is near a sink.

Learning Center Areas might include:

Dramatic play

Dramatic play areas allow children to re-enact reality, experiment with new roles, and to create new imaginary worlds. In addition to many other social and cognitive benefits, dramatic play is ideal for developing self-regulation because it is a highly motivating activity to practice rule-bound behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). The imaginary situation also helps children to separate their thoughts and behaviors from what is going on around them and to use their internal ideas to guide their behavior. Children use self-regulation to keep the play script going, to be flexible with others, and to control themselves. At the beginning of the year, the dramatic play may be a home living center. As the year progresses, the center can be changed to support children's interests and the curriculum. For example, the center may become a hospital or veterinary clinic.

Creative art

When teachers use art as an inquiry approach, children engage in active investigation and deepen their knowledge of art techniques and the topic or subject of their art. It allows children to make their thinking and learning visible. For example, if children are studying flowers, the teacher might bring real flowers, as well as photographs of flowers, books of flower pictures, and pictures of floral art into the classroom for children to use as they draw, paint, and create flowers from wire and from clay. The teacher may provide a well-stocked art studio and encourage children to revisit their work using a variety of media.

Literacy

The literacy center includes reading, writing, and listening. The reading area includes a comfortable reading space furnished with five to eight books per child. Some of the books are arranged with their covers showing, while others are grouped in labelled baskets. One or two books might be highlighted and include props, such as a flannel board or puppets, to accompany the book. Writing centers include a variety of different writing materials and different surfaces upon which to write. A computer is often available for story creation.

Music

Music can assist children to communicate powerful emotions, share cultural traditions, and build community. Children gain music skills and appreciation, spatial skills, seriation skills, motor development and rhythm, and language skills as they use the music center. The music center contains high-quality instruments, award winning music from different genres and cultures, and written music that is color-coded to notes on instruments so that children can successfully play songs. A tablet computer allows children to compose music. Materials, such as scarves, encourage children to move to the music.

Sensory

The focus of a sensory center is the water table or media table. As children use the media, they can enhance fine motor, cognitive, and social skills. This area is also soothing for children. Providing the media along with changing props allows children to engage in a variety of experiences. For example, at different times, the water table may contain whisks and soap flakes, bubble wands, different scents, doll clothes to wash, sponges, water wheels, materials for sinking and floating, ice blocks, tubing, materials to create boats, etc.

Manipulative

The manipulative center can enhance children's fine motor and perceptual skills, motor planning, and eye-hand coordination. Many of the materials also enhance cognitive skills. This area will include puzzles, games, and other materials to enhance fine motor skills. Children are especially interested in authentic materials that are used by adults, such as padlocks and keys, nutcrackers and nuts, a collection of jars and lids to match, and a collection of small coin purses to open and close.

Science

The science center assists children in exploring physical science, life science, earth science, and engineering. Materials are included that help children to be engaged in the scientific process. For example, children might be exploring how to move objects using ramps. The center should include a variety of ramp surfaces and materials to use on the ramps so children can conduct experiments. The center should also include a way for children to record their predictions and observations, measurement tools, and books about ramps. It might also include photographs that the children and teachers have taken of ramps in their environment.

Math

The math center includes a variety of materials to support the different math standards. This includes interesting, open-ended or self-correcting materials to classify, count, and use for patterning; numeral recognition activities, such as magnetic numbers and puzzles; materials for writing numerals, such as wipe-off cards; shape activities, such as pattern blocks; measurement tools and items to measure; and data analysis activities, such as small manipulative items and ice cube trays for creating graphs.

Block and building

As children build with blocks, they have rich opportunities to develop math and science skills and to engage in symbolic representation. A well-developed block area includes at least 100 unit blocks per builder using the center. Block accessories are included that meet the developmental levels and interests of the children. If children are creating houses, the teacher might add people, small materials that the children could use for furniture, and fabric and linoleum samples that could be used as flooring.

Scaffold Children's Learning

The teacher is not only the environmental designer, but s/he also facilitates learning as children use the environment. As children are involved in learning centers, the teacher engages in a variety of tasks to support learning. These include:

- Observing -- allowing the teacher to determine the children's development, interests, and need for support.
- Facilitating learning through modeling; asking open-ended questions; using rich, descriptive language and new vocabulary; presenting additional information and enhancing children's background knowledge; assisting children to reflect upon their learning; offering additional materials; being a play partner.
- Supporting peer interactions.
- Acknowledging learners.
- Helping children engage in sustained play.

- Reminding children of the rules and intervening to provide for safe play.
- Documenting learning.

Outdoors

The outdoor playground should be divided into zones. Well-designed playgrounds include places to climb, crawl, swing, and slide; areas for riding wheeled toys; a large open area to run and play games; messy areas, such as a sand area; places to play with water; places to grow things; places to observe nature; places to retreat; building areas; creative areas for music, movement, and art; and places for dramatic play.

Walls

Walls can be used to provide information, allow for vertical learning surfaces, display children's work, and display images of children, family, and staff. It is generally best to avoid store purchased cutouts or mass produced bulletin board displays. Also, avoid visual bombardment by making sure that there is plenty of blank space on walls. Design experts recommend neutral colors for walls, floors, shelving, and containers allowing the color to come from the toys, materials, and the space's inhabitants.

Whole Group

Classrooms need to have a place where children and the teacher can gather as a group. Because classrooms are often small, it is important that this space be multipurpose. For example, this space might be used as a music and dance area during learning center time.

Retreat Space

Alone spaces need to be in an enclosed, quiet space. There are many ways to create a retreat space. What you choose will be based upon what the children in your group find relaxing. This could include:

- Enclosing a corner of the room with a sheer curtain, adding floor pillows, and a tape player with music.
- Creating an enclosed art area with clay and tools for one child.
- Making a quiet "office" by cutting the side out of a refrigerator box and adding a desk and writing materials.
- Painting the inside of a box black and adding push button lights and glow in the dark chalk.

Reduce density

The number of children per square foot of space can have profound effects upon both children and adults. High density levels can increase stress, aggression, destructive behavior, and withdrawal in children. It can decrease positive social interactions, achievement, and attention span in children (Kantrowitz & Evans, 2004; Legendre, 2003; Maxwell, 1996, 2003). One study found that cortisol levels, which are linked to stress, increased when children had less than 54 square feet per child indoors (Legendre, 2003). Although many state standards require only 35 square feet per child indoors, many design experts recommend a minimum of 50 square feet (White & Stoecklin, 2003). The outdoor playground needs to contain at least 75 square feet of space per child. Space is typically calculated by only including the actual play space, not the space occupied by equipment, furniture, or dividers. In addition to having a space that is the correct size for the number of children using the space, make wise use of the space. Increase available play space by:

- Ensuring all space is multipurpose (e.g., lunch tables used for center activities, large group space separated for multiple activities during center time).
- Using smaller furniture.
- Being creative—a door of a closet might be removed to use the closet as a center.
- Making sure that each of the learning centers or outdoor learning zones is an adequate size to accommodate the number of children that typically use the space.
- Making sure that each of the learning centers or zones is actively used during center time or outdoor time.

Materials

When determining which materials to place in the environment, consider individual children’s developmental needs and interests, the children’s cultural backgrounds, curriculum standards and early learning guidelines, and the program philosophy.

Since children are generally at a variety of developmental levels, teachers will want to provide materials that meet these various levels. Teachers can do this by providing open-ended materials that can be used in a variety of ways. For example, a container of buttons may be classified in many different ways depending upon the child’s level. When teachers use closed-ended materials, such as puzzles, teachers will want to provide puzzles with a variety of different number of pieces to meet different developmental needs.

Materials should allow for active, hands-on learning. For example, rather than having a worksheet where children circle the correct number of items, have actual items for children to count. If possible, also use authentic items. For example, if there is a woodworking center, use real safety goggles and tools rather than plastic replicas (while considering safety implications).

Organize the materials on open shelves, with labeling so that children know where to find and put away items. All needed materials should be located together. For example, some teachers place all the materials needed for a math or a manipulative activity on a tray that the child can take to the table.

Meals and Snacks

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service Department provides preschool programs with guidelines to support meal and snack times. A publication titled “Feeding Children Responsibly” offers some helpful points to make the most out of meal times. Below are some tips for making mealtime a special experience that children look forward to, learn from, and enjoy.

Meals and snacks offer special opportunities for:

- Providing happy, relaxed experiences.
- Helping children develop positive food attitudes.
- Building children’s confidence and social skills.
- Communicating with parents.

To make the most of these opportunities, try to:

- Achieve quality service, making sure meals are both attractive and tasty.
- Encourage social interaction, teaching children the social aspects of dining as well as how to feed themselves.

- Make mealtime a happy time, providing a transition or quiet time just before meals so that mealtime can be relaxed and making sure the room is attractive and appealing for young children.
- Avoid making children feel rushed. Allow children to take their own time to eat. Having to eat in a hurry may spoil the pleasure of eating. In addition, short meal times may encourage poor eating habits. For example, children who are feeling pressured may choose to quickly consume their favorite foods and ignore other nutritious foods in the meal. Also, they may learn to eat too rapidly, a habit that may lead to over-eating and obesity.
- Make the most of menus, using menus as a tool to communicate with parents and sending a copy of your menus home with the children.

Add excitement to your meals. Expand on activities and cultural events happening in the classroom. Plan activities and/or special meals around holidays or other special events, such as the beginning of spring, National Apple Week, and National Nutrition Month.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Physical and Learning Environments subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

PHYSICAL AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS					
35. The physical environment, which includes the indoor and outdoor space, is designed and maintained to promote children’s health and safety.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Children are supervised at all times, primarily by sight.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Program staff maintain clean, organized, and uncluttered spaces for children.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Program staff reduce the spread of diseases by sanitizing and hand washing in accordance with state and federal health standards.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Appropriate materials and equipment are used for children’s age and/or developmental level.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Instructional staff display a written, predictable, but flexible schedule that provides intentionally planned routines and transitions that support growth and development.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Daily classroom schedules include intentionally planned indoor and outdoor activities that provide opportunities to learn and play individually, in small groups, and in whole group settings.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Children are offered a time each day for exploring self-selected centers that are inviting and purposefully planned.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Classrooms are organized to include at least one retreat space, individual learning centers, and a space for the whole group to meet. These areas are thoughtfully arranged, with consideration to noise levels, functionality, safety, and ample space for each activity.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Materials in learning centers are of good condition, well organized, of adequate amounts, and represent good variety in consideration of children’s abilities and culture.	1	2	3	4	5
45. Meal times are relaxed and pleasant. They provide children with opportunities to develop independence, as well as social and language skills. All meal and snack services follow state and federal guidelines.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Program staff provide safe, supervised, and adequate outside play space with age-appropriate equipment.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Physical and Learning Environment

Bullard, J. (2014). *Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight* (2nd ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson Education, Inc.

Curtis, D., & Carter, M. (2015). *Designs for Living and Learning: Transforming Early Childhood Environments* (2nd ed.). St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

DeViney, J. (2010). *Inspiring Spaces for Young Children*. Silver Spring, MD: Gryphon House.

Isbell, R., & Evanshen, P. (2012). *Real Classroom Makeovers: Practical Ideas for Early Childhood Classrooms*. Chicago: Gryphon House.

Zane, L. M. (2015). *Pedagogy and Space: Design Inspirations for Early Childhood Classrooms*.

Websites

Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs - <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/>

Head Start: National Center on Quality and Teaching - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/Learning%20Environments>

Nature Explore Outdoor Environments - <http://www.natureexplore.org/>

Outdoor Play Spaces - <http://earthplay.net/>

Reggio Inspired Environments - <http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2013/03/be-reggio-inspired-indoor-learning.html>

Videos

Bambini Creativi Reggio Inspired Preschool-Kansas City - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQdAU7Dm9A0>

Importance of Play - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnH4ljen7OI>

Inspiring Spaces for Young Children - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RD9XOow20E&list=PLSjzHGil7lTqIQGFWOBJJnRo0sMQZ3Q&index=2>

Planning for Transitions - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfvW3TKKAco>

Webinar on Environments - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDI_laZ0yTI

Children's learning and development are integrally connected to their families and communities.

Child Guidance



Child Guidance

What:

Adult actions that guide, correct, and socialize children toward appropriate behaviors are called child guidance. To effectively accomplish this, teachers must employ a variety of positive guidance strategies that foster self-regulation, respect for others, and meeting the needs of individual children as well as the group. Specific strategies include good limit setting and clearly communicating limits as well as teaching appropriate behavior, giving cues for the new behavior, giving choices, and supporting children in their new behavior.

Why:

Positive guidance is crucial because it promotes children's self-control, teaches them to take responsibility for their actions, and helps them make thoughtful choices about how they treat themselves and others. In studies of teacher-child relationships, findings show that children with positive experiences demonstrate positive peer and teacher interactions. Children who benefited from warm and respectful teachers reciprocated those behaviors with others (What Works Brief, CSEFEL, 2014). Research shows that verbal reinforcement of students for correct academic responses and appropriate social behavior leads to more correct responses, on-task behavior, and less classroom disruption (Sutherland, 2000). It is important to note that if antisocial behavior is not changed by the end of third grade, it should be treated as a chronic condition, much like diabetes. It cannot be cured, but it can be managed with the appropriate supports and continuing intervention (Walker, Colvin, and Ramsey, 1995). Practicing consistent, positive guidance is one of the most important ways teachers can support each child's healthy development.

How:

In order for children to develop socially and emotionally, preschool staff must communicate effectively with staff, parents, and children, as well as provide varied positive supports for children. The Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) system is an empirically validated, function-based approach that is used to eliminate challenging behaviors and replace them with prosocial skills. Many specific strategies under PBS, including creating a positive climate, building relationships, reinforcing positive behaviors, and addressing challenging behaviors, are critical to practicing consistent, child guidance.

Effective Communication

Good communication is an important part of building strong relationships. Below are some ideas from RaisingChildren.net that will support teachers in thinking about methods for effectively communicating with preschoolers.

- **Give your full attention.** Even a quick but focused connection can fulfill a child's need for communication.
- **Be aware of your tone.** Because preschoolers are relatively new to spoken language, they may have a heightened awareness of your tone and body language.
- **Reflect the child's unspoken emotions.** This helps put the child's feelings into words. If the child didn't get a turn at the playground, you might say, "You wanted to play with the ball next, didn't you?" or, "I can see you feel disappointed!"
- **Enlist help in figuring out a problem.** For example, you might say, "Did something in that movie scare you?" If the child doesn't answer, you might follow up by saying, "Could it have been the look on that person's face?"

- **Help develop emotional awareness.** Even if there is misbehavior, you can talk about it together. Most preschoolers can understand a sentence like, “Sometimes, I get mad too. It helps me to go into another room and take some deep breaths.”
- **Offer limited choices.** Preschoolers gain a sense of control by making their own decisions. You might say, “Do you want to get dressed before or after breakfast today?”
- **State desired behaviors clearly.** Don’t end your sentence with “okay” unless you are ready for the child to say “no.” Asking a child if an activity is okay can lead to a lengthy discussion and even a power struggle.
- **Grant a wish in fantasy.** If the child expresses sadness that a toy has to be shared, you might say, “Would you like it if you had the toy all to yourself? What would you do with it?” By expressing a wish and talking it through, even if it can’t be granted, a child begins to calm down.
- **Don’t over-explain.** Simple explanations can be more effective than long discussions. If the child is having a tantrum, holding the child close, or just staying nearby, can mean more than any words you can say.

Building Relationships

While building family and community relationships is important at all levels of education, it is critically important in preschool. Teachers must validate parents and caregivers as the first teachers of their children. Family members should be offered opportunities to engage in classroom experiences. Families should be supported through regular, ongoing, two-way communication that could include home visits or family-teacher conferences. Teaching staff should establish positive, personal relationships with each child and family to better understand the child’s individual needs, interests, and abilities and the family’s goals, values, expectations, and child-rearing practices. Community support services and consultants who are able to provide culturally and linguistically-appropriate services should be utilized whenever they are deemed appropriate. Below are some ideas to consider when building strong reciprocal relationships:

- To promote positive relationships with all children and adults, it’s important to establish interactions that are based on mutual trust and respect. Keep an open mind. Remember there are many ways to raise healthy, happy children. Presenting this openness to families automatically lets them know that you want to learn about them and that you respect them as the child’s first teacher.
- Encourage each child’s sense of individual worth and belonging.
- Establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each child and their family. As you grow in your understanding of each child and family, you may uncover things that represent conflict. Remember to approach those times with openness and positive intent. Get all the facts, truly listen, and try to hear the family’s point of view without judgement. It is likely that you will realize things were not exactly as you originally thought. Maintaining the relationship is paramount to the child’s well-being and continued growth and development.
- Recognize and be sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.
- Foster each child’s ability to contribute to the classroom community.
- Model warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions when interacting with children and families.
- Ensure children feel safe and secure and feel part of the classroom community.
- Invite families to fully participate in their child’s educational program.

Building strong relationships is a big part of establishing a productive classroom community, which, in turn, is foundational to good teaching and learning. One might say that relationships are the key to unlocking learning.

Positive Behavior Supports

As stated above, the PBS system is an empirically validated, function-based approach that is used to eliminate challenging behaviors and replace them with prosocial skills. The systematic approach employed by PBS works to prevent or reduce challenging behavior, while eventually enhancing quality of life. While most children respond to typical classroom management strategies such as redirection or environment adaptations, some children require additional, individualized supports that PBS offers. There are several strategies to provide PBS, including creating a positive climate, building relationships, reinforcing positive behavior, and addressing challenging behavior.

Creating a Positive Climate

A positive classroom climate begins with proactively building community. A successful classroom community promotes positive social skills and academic achievement. Children learn best when they feel they are part of a community in which everyone feels accepted and in which individuality is encouraged. Creating a classroom community requires planning and practice. Teachers can foster a sense of belonging through participation in class meetings, working collaboratively, and resolving conflicts cooperatively. Below are some ideas to consider when building strong communities of learners in the classroom:

- Create a welcoming and accessible setting for all children and their families.
- Provide children positive attention for their prosocial behavior.
- Encourage children’s engagement by providing daily, age-appropriate independence in a range of activities, routines, and tasks.
- Encourage and practice friendship skills, such as sharing and turn-taking.
- Foster each child’s ability to contribute to the classroom community. This might be accomplished by offering children meaningful classrooms jobs, allowing them to participate in setting up classroom expectations, working collaboratively to solve social problems as they naturally present themselves, and being allowed to have leadership roles when individually appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for children to request and receive help. An important first step is to notice and model a language of helpfulness, i.e., “You helped Tommy pick up all the blocks he was playing with. That was helpful.” The teacher may also use self-talk to model helpfulness. “Yesterday, I was having trouble with my computer, and I asked Mr. Brown to come in to help me. He was able to show me what to do. That was so helpful.”
- Teach children how to give compliments.
- Provide a warm and responsive environment that builds positive relationships with all children.
- Teach children how to resolve conflict with peers alone and/or with adult intervention as needed.
- Assist children in expressing empathy and sympathy to peers.
- Encourage children to recognize how actions affect others. This strategy is not a vehicle for handing out blame, but by using the facts about a situation, without emotion, children can begin to see the cause and effect relationship of different situations.
- Teach children how to accept the consequences of one’s actions. Being a calm, reassuring presence at these times can be helpful. Letting children know that you understand they are upset or that the situation is hard can support them in getting through it and maintain the relationship.

- Create a classroom environment that supports positive learning and development across all areas, notice children’s efforts toward the end product, and provide encouragement along the way, “You’re working really hard. You’re almost there.” Help them to reflect on their work, think about what might be next in the process, and develop a plan. Let children know that it is okay to fail; an ‘oops’ is just an opportunity to try again. Focus on the process and not the product. Provide lots of open-ended experiences in which there are multiple ways to accomplish something.

Reinforcing Positive Behaviors

In order to reinforce positive behaviors, teachers must first set clear behavioral expectations for the learning environment. Behavioral expectations are the appropriate behaviors expected from children during specific activities and routines. Teaching social skills is a proactive approach. To begin, a teacher must establish positive relationships with children. Often times, when children’s behavior is creating a challenge in the classroom or children are having difficulty meeting classroom expectations, the situation is greatly improved by refocusing on the relationship or connectedness within the relationship. As this improves, very often so do behaviors. It is also important to teach children the school routines and expectations in a clear and consistent manner. It is important to realize that in order to communicate expectations effectively, teaching is more than simply stating what to do—it means *explaining* in a variety of ways over time what you want to see, *modeling* what it looks like, allowing children time to *practice* with positive reinforcement, and *repeating and following* these same steps again as needed. It’s also important to model specific interactions -- child to child and child to adult -- that support the development of appropriate behavior and to provide differentiation and supports that are aligned to children’s developmental levels. A teacher may wish to utilize explicit PBS teaching strategies to support children’s meaningful participation in daily routines and activities. Focusing on the recognition and promotion of positive social-emotional development and support for children’s appropriate behavior is a best prevention for more challenging behaviors.

Addressing Challenging Behaviors

When a child’s behaviors becomes very challenging, reaching a point of serious and pervasive, the time has come to build partnerships and review the child’s behaviors, brainstorm possible support, and establish plans. When developing a comprehensive plan, the following ideas should be considered:

- Take note of relationships, refocusing on building positive supportive relationships.
- Consider changes to the physical environment, schedule, and materials, not only thinking about whether or not anything has changed recently that could cause challenging behavior, but what might change as a support in reducing unwanted behaviors.
- Teach feeling words using pictures of emotional expressions with the feeling word.
- Provide support by labeling the children’s emotions throughout the day.
- Ensure ongoing implementation of PBS.
- Provide children opportunities to develop new social and communication skills.
- Encourage problem-solving and using strategies to calm down instead of acting out.
- Plan intensive individualized interventions that can be implemented by a team for application in home, early education, and community environments.
- Continue to enhance relationships with peers and adults.
- Consider a functional assessment; a process of observing the child in key situations, reviewing the child’s records, interviewing caregivers and teachers, and analyzing the collected information.

- Identify the factors related to the child’s challenging behavior.
- Provide positive attention to children when they are engaged in socially competent behavior.
- Develop a behavior support plan that includes prevention strategies and techniques for teaching new skills.
- Implement the behavior support plan; an intensive approach to learning emotional literacy, controlling anger and impulse, interpersonal problem solving, and friendship skills.
- Collect data and monitor changes in the problem behavior and the development of positive social skills.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Child Guidance subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

CHILD GUIDANCE					
47. Program staff employ a variety of strategies to foster self-regulation, respect for others, problem-solving, and emotional and social development through ongoing interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
48. Program staff teach and model effective communication as a strategy to help children learn how to play with, learn, and communicate with others.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Program staff display a written plan outlining clear behavioral expectations, including the use of effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior.	1	2	3	4	5
50. The program has a written multitiered positive behavior support plan to ensure the social, emotional, and cultural development of each child.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Program staff create a positive classroom climate designed to ensure equality, inclusion, and citizenship by giving children opportunities to contribute to the classroom community and build feelings of interconnectedness.	1	2	3	4	5
52. Program staff develop relationships with children and families in ways that are linguistically and culturally sensitive.	1	2	3	4	5
53. Program staff partner with families to develop and implement individualized behavior plans that foster children’s inclusion and success.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Child Guidance

Beckner, R., Stormont, M., Lewis, T., & Johnson, N. (2007). *Implementing Positive Behavior Support Systems in Early Childhood and Elementary Settings*. Sage Publications.

Gartrell, D. (2013). *A Guidance Approach for the Encouraging Classroom 6th Ed.* Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. Belmont, CA.

Paulson, L. & van den Pol, R. (1998). *Good Talking Words: A Social Communications Skills Program for Preschool and Kindergarten Classes*. Sopris West: Longmont, CO

Sanchez, D., Steece-Doran, D. & Jablon, J., (2013), *Planning for Positive Guidance – Powerful Interactions Make a Difference*, Teaching Young Children. v. 6 n. 2.

Wong, H. K. (1991). *The First Day of School*. Sunnyvale, CA

Websites and Documents

Conscious Discipline - <https://consciousdiscipline.com>



Montana Office of Public Instruction, Montana Behavioral Initiative:
An Introduction to MBI document: <http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/mbi/MBIIntro.pdf>



National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) - www.naeyc.org/yc

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center - www.pbis.org

Responsive Classroom - www.responsiveclassroom.org



Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children – www.challengingbehavior.org



Technical Assistance Center
on Social Emotional Intervention
for Young Children

www.challengingbehavior.org

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) – www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/



Center on the Social and Emotional
Foundations for Early Learning
www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Education
Early Childhood and Parenting Collaborative - www.csefel.uiuc.edu

While building family and community relationships is important at all levels of education, it is critically important in preschool.

Family and Community Engagement



Family and Community Engagement

What:

Children's learning and development are integrally connected to their families and communities. Consequently, to support and promote children's optimal learning and development, programs need to establish reciprocal relationships with families. Teachers should actively work to create partnerships with each family, communicating regularly to build mutual understanding and trust and to ensure that children's learning and developmental needs are met. Families should be invited to fully participate in the educational program.

Why:

Research has shown that families who are engaged in their child's learning experiences early (preschool) are more likely to be engaged as they continue in their school experience. Children whose families are engaged in their learning experiences in a positive way show improved performance through all grades, regardless of the age of the child or the family's ethnicity, income, or education level. Therefore, family engagement could be considered an intervention that seems to transcend a variety of causal factors generally associated with lower child outcomes.

Children with families who are actively engaged in their learning:

- adjust to school easier;
- attend school more regularly;
- have better social skills;
- show improved attitudes and behavior at school and at home;
- have advanced language and math skills;
- earn higher grades and test scores; and
- are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to higher education.

How:

Building a welcoming environment is the first step for a program to maintain an atmosphere that both invites and welcomes parents to be a part of their child's school environment. Ways to accomplish this include:

- having staff greet families at the door;
- hanging signs so that families can navigate the building more easily;
- ensuring the first staff they meet, school secretary or other staff, are engaging and welcoming;
- providing adequate information before the beginning of the school year and opportunities to connect with staff through new parent orientations, such as before-school open houses, transition activities, and newsletters sent to homes;
- providing opportunities for parents to gather outside of the classroom on the first day of school for a coffee and donuts meeting, including a school parent engagement coordinator or other person that can be a point of contact at the school;
- soliciting parents' knowledge about their children and input about their goals and concerns, stressing to parents through every individual contact how important they are and promoting strength-based relationship building;

- holding meetings at other neutral places in the community to build relationships and meet parents' needs; and
- scheduling a welcome walk-through by school staff and parent representatives to determine how welcoming the school or program is and how to make changes to increase positive interactions.

Family Engagement

Relationships with Families

Teachers may wish to consider how some of the ideas presented below support programs as they continually strive for better communication and deeper relationships with families.

- Two-way, on-going communication is imperative.
- Program should provide clear information about the best way to communicate with program staff and request the same information from parents, for example:
 - "I have very limited time to talk at the beginning of the day and I really want to be able to give you my full attention. I usually have time for drop-ins at the end of the day."
 - "I welcome text messages or emails as I can reply to those faster than phone messages."
- Program should ask families what the best times and methods are for contacting them (email, texting, voicemail and/or notes home).
- Program should establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. Families typically have important information to share.
- Culture plays an important role in families' ideas about child-rearing, education, and socialization. Understanding and valuing families' culture can impact ways in which relationships are formed and maintained.
- Appreciate family differences and value their perspectives when designing program goals and activities.

Engaging Parents as Teachers

A child's first and most influential teacher is the parent. Believing in the power and potential of this connection will go a long way toward building respectful relationships and inviting parents to partner with programs in growing and developing their child. Consider the following additional ideas to engage parents as teachers:

- Provide relevant information about the child, school learning goals and initiatives, and parental education that provides support in building a home learning environment.
- Share data about child progress and performance in an accessible, understandable, actionable, and confidential manner on a regular basis.
- Provide families with specific family-friendly strategies and activities to help their children learn outside their regular school day.
- Use ongoing, regular communication to build parent education and capacity, such as writing weekly notes to children including very specific information about skills being covered in the classroom as well as positive accomplishments.

- Schedule family engagement nights during which families can have fun at school and participate in experiences and become aware of important ways to impact children’s learning and development.

Parent Leadership

One important strategy to engage family members is to elicit them in leadership roles. Below are some ideas to utilize family members as leaders:

- Identify all the ways the program can include and consult parents in the decisions.
- Notice whether or not the parent groups and parent leadership is reflective of the program’s diverse population and consider ways to encourage more equitable representation.
- Conduct an annual survey and/or support the development of a focus group to seek the input of parents on current and potential programs and policies.
- Sponsor a preschool accountability meeting, during which program leadership can describe programs and services.
- Invite parents to share concerns and ideas by having a suggestion box in the front office.

Communication with Families

An important teacher goal should be working closely with families to make decisions about how best to support children’s development and learning. Both parties should also be involved equally to handle problems or differences of opinion as they arise. Teachers should truly listen to parents/caregivers and seek to understand the family’s personal and cultural preferences.

Possible techniques for enhancing communication include:

- make home visits (explained in greater detail below) to find out children’s talents and interests;
- leave learning materials with families to be used with children and support parents in understanding the purpose and use;
- invite parents to observe and participate in the classroom, particularly during times when learning centers are used, so that parents can observe how teachers interact with children during play and exploration;
- consider opening a family center in the program or classroom, an inviting place to gather where parents can check out learning materials and games and include information on important parenting topics and easy family-friendly activities to do at home; and
- send home interactive learning kits.

Home Visiting

Some preschool programs have adopted the practice of home visiting as a way of building relationships and communicating with families. While this is an effective strategy, it does require some consideration. For example, staff will need to receive training and support. Professional development related to conducting safe and effective visits and policies that promote adequate time to accomplish home visits will need to be thought through before home visiting begins. If the idea of having someone from the program go into the home is uncomfortable for families, visits can occur in a neutral environment outside the home. The home visit should certainly be warmly offered to each family, and it needs to be voluntary. Parents should be encouraged, but not forced, into a home visit. The home visit is particularly effective at transition times, entering a program, transitioning to kindergarten, or when a child is leaving a program.

Transitions

In the preschool setting, you'll commonly see two different types of transitions:

- Daily transitions that occur when children are moving from one activity or experience to another.
- More lateral, program transition, when children move up or are promoted, such as entering preschool or moving up to kindergarten.

These two types of transitions are often confused. Guidance within this section of the document focuses on program transitions. (Daily transitions are addressed in detail in the Physical and Learning Environment section of this document.) Transitions of any kind can be difficult for preschool children, but lateral transitions are some of the most challenging for children and families. These times can cause confusion and frustration. Children and families need additional support before, during, and after a transition. It is important to remember that the greatest source of information about how to support and guide this process is the family. Teachers must remember at these times to keep open communication and actively seek information. Parents know what they need and what their child needs to make the transition smooth. Below are some supports that can help children and families move into and out of a program:

- During a home visit or alternative time when communication is optimal, describe for the family a typical preschool day, if the child is entering your program, or what a kindergarten day might look like. You'll not only gain insights into what unique supports might help this family transition, but staff can create connections and give parents an opportunity to share the family's composition and culture.
- Arrange for the family and child to come for a visit of the preschool or the new kindergarten program before the first day. A "dry run" can ease everyone's anxiety about the first day of school.

The ease with which children make the move to kindergarten depends to some degree on the amount of discontinuity they have to negotiate (Margetts, 2002). However, the benefits of supporting successful transitions are clear and include better behavioral and social-emotional adjustment, higher academic achievement, and increased family involvement.

Research and experience continue to show long-term, positive outcomes that can be linked to the quality and effectiveness of children's transition experiences (<http://www.denvergov.org>).

Community Engagement

Connecting to Community Resources

Because children and families are so interconnected, it is advantageous for programs to understand that when they take the time to evaluate and support the needs of families, children benefit. Below are some ideas that may help programs think about how to guide families towards community resources:

- Use existing community resource networks, such as the early childhood coalitions, to raise awareness of community supports.
- Connect with community agencies for lists of community resources, provide contact information, and make the list easily available.
- Refer families to persons who can help provide individualized resource and referral.
- Obtain family permission before making a referral.
- A teacher might say, "Our school has a family engagement coordinator. Can I have her give you a call?" This informs the family that their information is being passed to another staff member in the program and that the program functions as team.

High-quality preschools are characterized by the following Family and Community Engagement subcomponents. (See Appendix A for complete self-assessment).

FAMILY and COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT					
54. The program has a written plan for outlining protocols for developing collaborative, reciprocal relationships with each child’s family and community to foster children’s development in all settings.	1	2	3	4	5
55. Families are an integral part of decision making regarding their child’s educational goals and services through on-going communication and family conferences.	1	2	3	4	5
56. All families, regardless of family structure -- socioeconomic, racial, religious and cultural diversity; gender, abilities, or preferred languages -- are included in their child’s educational experience.	1	2	3	4	5
57. The program has established intentional practices to build community partnerships that support the betterment of each child and family.	1	2	3	4	5
58. The program assists and collaborates with families to locate, contact, and use community resources that support children’s well-being and development toward the attainment of individual goals.	1	2	3	4	5
59. The program provides access to health screenings and referrals for all enrolled children.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Information on Family and Community Engagement

Margetts, K. "Transition to School – Complexity and Diversity." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 10(2), 103-114.

Morrison, J., Storey, P., & Zhang, C. (2011). *Accessible Family Involvement in Early Childhood Programs*. Dimensions of Early Childhood. 39:3, 21-26.

Weiss, H., Caspe, M., & Lopez, M.E., (2006). *Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education*. Family Involvement Makes a Difference. Harvard Family Research Project. Cambridge, MA.

Websites

Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) Office of Head Start - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/transition>

Family Friendly Walk Through - <http://www.opi.mt.gov/Pdf/GradMatters/Resources/Family-Friendly-Walk-Through-Template.pdf>

Flamboyant Foundation - <http://flamboyantfoundation.org/areas-of-focus/family-engagement/>

Flamboyant Foundation Rubric for Family Engagement- <http://flamboyantfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Classroom-Family-Engagement-Rubric-V4-VF.pdf>

Harvard Family Research Project - <http://www.hfrp.org/>

IllinoisParents.org - <http://www.illinoisparents.org/>

Montana Office of Public Instruction Family and Community Engagement - http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/TitlePrgms/TitleA/TitleA.html#gpm1_5

National Standards for Family-School Partnerships <http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3126&navItemNumber=3983>

Parent Family and Community Engagement Framework
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/im/2011/pfce-framework.pdf>

Parent Teacher Home Visit Project <http://www.pthvp.org/images/stories/pdfs/pthvp-infopacket.pdf>

Transitions Best Practices - <http://www.denvergov.org>

Appendix A

Montana Preschool Self-Assessment

The Montana Preschool Self-Assessment instrument is designed to be used by preschool education programs and school districts to assess their level of implementation of the Montana Preschool Program Standards (Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 10.63) as they build, develop, and expand their programs to meet the unique developmental needs for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years. The standards outline eight components, and within each component are defined subcomponents proven to be effective indicators for increasing program quality.

To use the self-assessment, programs must carefully rate the level of implementation of the indicators of quality within the subcomponents using a rating scale of 1 to 5.

- 1- Subcomponent is *not* being implemented at this time.
- 2- Program staff are beginning to learn about this subcomponent, but it is not being implemented.
- 3- Program staff are beginning to implement this subcomponent.
- 4- Program staff have been implementing this subcomponent, but not all staff are consistent.
- 5- This is a sustained practice and is consistently implemented.

LEADERSHIP					
1. The program has developed effective procedures to continually utilize data to set goals and monitor progress for the program, staff, and children.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A program leadership team is established and meets regularly to focus on continuous improvement of the program.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Program leadership regularly meets to analyze program and child-level data to inform decisions about professional development, instruction, individualization, and family engagement.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Program leadership intentionally monitors progress toward goals and makes adjustments as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Program leadership is involved in setting measurable goals for the growth and development of children.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Professional development for staff supports teachers' individual needs and aligns with the goals and expectations of the program. (10.63.103(2))	1	2	3	4	5
7. Program leadership models and communicates collaboration and shared responsibility for program and child outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Instructional leaders support and monitor instructional experiences and interactions with children through regular observations.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Instructional leaders support and monitor family engagement experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Adequate professional development and curricular resources are given to meet program expectations and support growth and development in the 4 domains of learning outlined in the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS).	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for LEADERSHIP	/50				

EARLY LEARNING CONTENT STANDARDS

11. Teachers know and understand the MELS and can speak to how their current curriculum and instructional strategies support the growth and development of the standards. (10.63.110)	1	2	3	4	5
12. The program supports growth and development in the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS through the use of quality curriculum and effective instruction. (10.63.110)	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for EARLY LEARNING CONTENT STANDARDS	/10				

CURRICULUM

13. The program implements a research-based curriculum that enhances children's development and learning of the MELS. (10.63.111(1)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
14. Program staff utilize daily plans that guide the selection of experiences, materials, and equipment to support growth in the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS. (10.63.111(1)(c))	1	2	3	4	5
15. Program staff utilize planned opportunities for active exploration, discovery, and social interactions. (10.63.111(1)(d))	1	2	3	4	5
16. Children have the opportunity to self-select experiences and engage in play, which is supported by purposeful planning and adult interactions. (10.63.111(1)(e))	1	2	3	4	5
17. Program staff implement the curriculum across the domains in a manner reflective of children's families and communities, being responsive to diversity, including gender, age, language, culture, and ability. (10.63.111(1)(f)) (10.63.112(2)(f))	1	2	3	4	5
18. Program staff provide opportunities for all children and families to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians, particularly Montana Indian tribes. (10.63.111(1)(f)) (10.63.115(2)(f))	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for CURRICULUM	/30				

INSTRUCTION

19. The program utilizes effective teaching strategies that enhance children's development and learning of the MELS. (10.63.112(1))	1	2	3	4	5
20. Program staff use a variety of effective approaches and strategies, which include opportunities for both teacher and child-initiated interactions. (10.63.112(2)(b))	1	2	3	4	5
21. Learning experiences provided in the classroom are meaningful, planned, and purposeful. Teachers plan intentionally, keeping in mind curriculum goals, child outcomes, and content standards. (10.63.112(2)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
22. Staff use knowledge of each child's development to enhance instruction, modify strategies and materials, and adjust supports and challenges as children gain competence, understanding, and skills. (10.63.112(2)(d))	1	2	3	4	5

23. Program staff work together to implement learning plans that support children with special needs. (10.63.112(2)(h))	1	2	3	4	5
24. Based on acquired knowledge about the culture of children and families, teachers provide supportive resources to enhance learning. (10.63.112(2)(g))	1	2	3	4	5
25. Program staff build upon children’s language and understanding of concepts while increasing children’s vocabulary through direct and indirect learning opportunities. (10.63.112(2)(e))	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for INSTRUCTION	/35				
ASSESSMENT					
26. The program has established a written systematic plan for gathering and utilizing data that outlines the assessment tools that will be utilized, how often assessments will be administered, who will administer assessments, and how often the data will be reviewed. (10.63.111(2))	1	2	3	4	5
27. The program uses evidence-based screening tools to assess children’s progress towards achieving identified learning standards across the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS.	1	2	3	4	5
28. The program regularly monitors children’s progress toward achieving identified learning standards across the 4 domains of learning outlined in the MELS using formative and summative approaches, including universal screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessments. (10.63.111(2)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
29. Instructional staff clearly understand assessment goals and are administering assessments for their intended purposes.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Instructional staff understand how to interpret assessment results and use the information to guide instructional decisions. (10.63.111(2)(b))	1	2	3	4	5
31. Instructional staff have timely access to disaggregated data to inform instructional planning and decision making. (10.63.111(2)(c))	1	2	3	4	5
32. Families are involved as partners in linguistically and culturally responsive ways to inform decisions about children’s needs. (10.63.111(2)(d))	1	2	3	4	5
33. The program’s assessment data is used to determine the effectiveness of the program and guide plans for improvement. (10.63.111(2)(e))	1	2	3	4	5
34. Program staff inform instruction through observation and documentation of children’s strengths, interests, and needs in their play, work, and behavior. (10.63.111(1)(b))	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for ASSESSMENT	/45				
PHYSICAL AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS					
35. The physical environment, which includes the indoor and outdoor space, is designed and maintained to promote children’s health and safety. (10.63.113(1)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
36. Children are supervised at all times, primarily by sight. (10.63.113(1)(b))	1	2	3	4	5

37. Program staff maintain clean, organized, and uncluttered spaces for children.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Program staff reduce the spread of diseases by sanitizing and hand washing in accordance with state and federal health standards. (10.63.113(1)(c))	1	2	3	4	5
39. Appropriate materials and equipment are used for children's age and/or developmental level. (10.63.113(2)(b)(iii))	1	2	3	4	5
40. Instructional staff display a written, predictable, but flexible schedule that provides intentionally planned routines and transitions that support growth and development. (10.63.113(2)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
41. Daily classroom schedules include intentionally planned indoor and outdoor activities that provide opportunities to learn and play individually, in small groups, and in whole group settings. (10.63.113(2)(b)(i) (10.63.113(2)(b)(ii))	1	2	3	4	5
42. Children are offered a time each day for exploring self-selected centers that are inviting and purposefully planned. (10.63.113(2)(b)(i))	1	2	3	4	5
43. Classrooms are organized to include at least one retreat space, individual learning centers, and a space for the whole group to meet. These areas are thoughtfully arranged, with consideration to noise levels, functionality, safety, and ample space for each activity.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Materials in learning centers are of good condition, well organized, of adequate amounts, and represent good variety in consideration of children's abilities and culture.	1	2	3	4	5
45. Meal times are relaxed and pleasant. They provide children with opportunities to develop independence, as well as social and language skills. All meal and snack services follow state and federal guidelines. (10.63.113(1)(d))	1	2	3	4	5
46. Program staff provide safe, supervised, and adequate outside play space with age-appropriate equipment. (10.63.113(1)(e))	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for PHYSICAL AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS	/60				
CHILD GUIDANCE					
47. Program staff employ a variety of strategies to foster self-regulation, respect for others, problem-solving, and emotional and social development through ongoing interactions. (10.63.114(1))	1	2	3	4	5
48. Program staff teach and model effective communication as a strategy to help children learn how to play with, learn, and communicate with others. (10.63.112(2)(c))	1	2	3	4	5
49. Program staff display a written plan outlining clear behavioral expectations, including the use of effective methods to prevent and redirect misbehavior. (10.63.114(1)(e))	1	2	3	4	5
50. The program has a written multitiered positive behavior support plan to ensure the social, emotional, and cultural development of each child. (10.63.114(1)(a))	1	2	3	4	5

51. Program staff create a positive classroom climate designed to ensure equality, inclusion, and citizenship by giving children opportunities to contribute to the classroom community and build feelings of interconnectedness. (10.63.114(1)(b)) (10.63.114(1)(d))	1	2	3	4	5
52. Program staff develop relationships with children and families in ways that are linguistically and culturally sensitive. (10.63.114(1)(c))	1	2	3	4	5
53. Program staff partner with families to develop and implement individualized behavior plans that foster children’s inclusion and success. (10.63.114(1)(f))	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for CHILD GUIDANCE	/35				
FAMILY and COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT					
54. The program has a written plan for outlining protocols for developing collaborative, reciprocal relationships with each child’s family and community to foster children’s development in all settings. (10.63.115(1)) (10.63.115(2)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
55. Families are an integral part of decision making regarding their child’s educational goals and services through on-going communication and family conferences. (10.63.115(2)(b))	1	2	3	4	5
56. All families, regardless of family structure -- socioeconomic, racial, religious and cultural diversity; gender, abilities, or preferred languages -- are included in their child’s educational experience. (10.63.115(2)(d))	1	2	3	4	5
57. The program has established intentional practices to build community partnerships that support the betterment of each child and family. (10.63.115(2)(a))	1	2	3	4	5
58. The program assists and collaborates with families to locate, contact, and use community resources that support children’s well-being and development towards the attainment of individual goals. (10.63.115(2)(e))	1	2	3	4	5
59. The program provides access to health screenings and referrals for all enrolled children. (10.63.115(2)(h))	1	2	3	4	5
Sub-score for CHILD GUIDANCE	/30				

Scoring:

Preschool Program Standard	Score	Percentage
Leadership	/50	
Early Learning Content Standards	/10	
Curriculum	/30	
Instruction	/35	
Assessment	/45	
Physical and Learning Environment	/60	
Child Guidance	/35	
Family and Community Engagement	/30	
TOTAL SCORE		

Based on these results, which Preschool Program Standard components may need additional action?

Which subcomponent(s) within the identified Preschool Program Standard may need additional action?

What other data do you have that can help narrow decision further about which components and sub-components to take action on?

Appendix B

Action Plan

Program		Date	
Program Standard Focus			
Related Content Standard Focus			
Goal: <i>Goals and action steps should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound)</i>			
Goal Data Source: <i>How will this goal be measured over time?</i>			
Action Steps			
<i>When possible timeline for each action step should be between now and next PLT meeting.</i>			
Action Step	Person(s) Responsible	Resources Needed	Timeline
Completed Action Steps			

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