



National Child Care Information Center

A service of the Child Care Bureau

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FRAMEWORK for QUALITY in EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

The effective development and use of early learning guidelines contributes substantially to an early care and education system that establishes a strong foundation for all young children's learning. The following framework can assist states in developing and evaluating comprehensive early learning guidelines.

Guidelines are:

- *Based on research*
Use the strongest research evidence available in each domain to identify the skills critical to children's development. In some content areas, the research evidence available for young children may be sparse. In this case, the strongest evidence garnered from professional practice should be used. Include a review of the literature concerning the developmental trajectories for children with special needs and second language learners.
- *Focused on outcomes – what children need to know and do*
Recognizing that young children develop along varied paths, guidelines should focus on the critical skills shown in the research to have a significant and positive impact on children's development and school readiness. Benchmarks or indicators identify the incremental steps young children normally make as they achieve new skills. Examples make clear how adults can support positive outcomes for children through daily activities.
- *Comprehensive but not overwhelming—balanced among all domains of development*
All critical skills associated with each domain should be addressed. Coverage of domains should also be balanced, representing an understanding of the interconnectedness of children's development.
- *Aligned with K-12 standards*
Early learning guidelines are intended to provide the foundation for children's learning and success in school and beyond. Aligning early learning guidelines with K-12 standards helps adults support children's learning across various levels of schooling. The degree of alignment between early learning guidelines and K-12 standards may depend on a number of factors, such as the appropriateness of the language and content domains for early learning.
- *Inclusive of all children*
Early learning guidelines will be most useful when they embrace the diversity of children in early care and education settings. When guidelines are written in language that reflects the variety of cultures, languages, and developmental abilities of children, they will have the greatest opportunity to support children's development and unify all adults around a vision for children.

- *Easily understood by parents, teachers, child care providers, and policy-makers*
The language used to describe specific guidelines must be clear and jargon-free. Succinct statements identifying recognizable skills help the adults caring for young children observe the child's emerging skills and knowledge. Examples make clear how adults can support the development of children through involvement in their daily activities. The language and illustrations should reflect the diverse characteristics of young children and the diverse settings of care.
- *Applicable to all early care and education settings*
Early learning guidelines are meant to describe what children need to know and be able to do, regardless of the settings in which they spend their early years. It is important that a wide range of settings, reflecting the diversity of environments that young children experience, are used in the examples. References to adults should be inclusive of all the adults that can support children's development.

Developing early learning guidelines is a complex process requiring a multitude of decisions related to research, language, format, and comprehensiveness. Guidelines are meant to be dynamic documents, subject to regular revision as new research becomes available. The indicators identified here are not meant to be exhaustive, but to serve as a framework for making decisions related to the State's early learning guidelines document.

Related Resources

The State of State Prekindergarten Standards in 2003 (2003), by Susan B. Neuman, Kathleen Roskos, Carol Vukelich, and Douglas Clements, published by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). Available on the Web at <http://www.ciera.org/library/archive/2003-01/index.htm>.

Meeting Great Expectations: Integrating Early Education Program Standards in Child Care (August 2003), by Rachel Schumacher, Kate Irish, and Joan Lombardi, published by the Center for Law and Social Policy. Available on the Web at http://www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1061231790.62/meeting_rpt.pdf.

Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success (April 2003), a joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). Available on the Web at http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/creating_conditions.asp.