



National Child Care Information Center

A service of the Child Care Bureau

NCCIC

243 Church Street NW, 2nd Floor
Vienna, Virginia 22180

Phone: (800) 616-2242 Fax: (800) 716-2242 TTY: (800) 516-2242

World Wide Web: <http://nccic.org>

A FRAMEWORK for REVIEWING EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

Organize the Review

Identify key components of interest to the group, including the four areas identified in the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative. The guidelines should:

- 1) Specify the ages to be addressed: birth to 5, birth to 3, and/or 3–5;
- 2) Align with State K–12 standards; State standards; program/practitioner standards;
- 3) Focus on key domains of learning, including language and literacy, mathematics, social-emotional development, physical and motor development; and
- 4) Apply to a variety of care settings.

Search for Key Information

Many guidelines have an introduction, background, or overview section that describes several aspects of the State's efforts, including: its intent in developing guidelines; who led the effort and worked on the guidelines; what research or other resources were referred to; what ages and settings the guidelines apply to; whether the guidelines explicitly align with State K–12 standards; the approach to including children with special needs; and the consideration of language and cultural diversity.

A review of the text of the guidelines or the appendices may turn up useful information. Some guidelines' documents have companion pieces, including parent or teacher guides, that may be appropriate for review. Often the State Web site or contact person can be helpful in locating specific information.

Focus on the Guidelines

The review of guidelines will focus primarily on the actual guidelines, benchmarks, and examples provided in the States' documents. Questions to ask include:

- ✚ Is the format easy to follow?
- ✚ Do the guidelines include easy-to-understand benchmarks and examples?
- ✚ Is the language understandable to a range of early care and education providers?
- ✚ Do the examples reflect children's and adults' interactions in center-based, family child care, and home settings?
- ✚ Are the specific guidelines within a domain based on the latest, most rigorous research?

Sample Early Learning Guidelines: Key Features

Most States review other guidelines and resources when developing or revising their early learning guidelines. This document identifies examples of a variety of characteristics of early learning guidelines. These are examples, not best practices, and are meant only to serve as a way to look at specific features of early learning guidelines to get ideas about how to make States' guidelines most useful and effective for the children and providers in the State.

A list of State early learning guidelines is available on the Web at <http://nccic.org/pubs/goodstart/elgwebsites.html>.

Wyoming

Guidelines, benchmarks, and examples are clearly delineated.

Guidelines refer to what children need to know, understand, and be able to do within a specific developmental domain. Some alternative terms for guidelines are “Standards,” “Expectations,” and “Outcomes.”

Benchmarks are descriptors that identify progress toward, or attainment of, knowledge and competencies in a particular domain. Benchmarks may also be known as “Indicators,” “Building Blocks for Learning,” or “Objectives.”

Examples refer to observable behaviors of the skill or knowledge identified, often using language appropriate to a variety of care settings. Some alternative terms used are, “Steps for getting there,” “Snapshot,” and “Representative Examples.”

Wyoming's guidelines use a format that allows the reader to understand the clear progression from the domain to the subset of skills, the standards, and the performance indicators.

The examples apply to a variety of care settings.

The Snapshots on page 4 indicate the behaviors expected of children within a variety of care settings. See particularly Snapshots associated with Performance Indicators 3 through 6, which could apply to any setting, including the home.

Performance Indicator #8 includes adaptations for English language learners.

The language and literacy guidelines use a strong research base.

These standards address the key skills and knowledge shown in the research to support emergent literacy. These are receptive and expressive vocabulary, phonological awareness, book knowledge and appreciation, print awareness and concepts, early writing, and alphabet knowledge. This set of standards covers the language and literacy areas comprehensively and sets high expectations for children and caregivers within an appropriate context.

Wyoming's *Early Childhood Readiness Standards* (September 2002) is available on the Web at <http://www.k12.wy.us/eqa/nca/pubs/standards/earlychild.pdf>.

Louisiana

✚ The guiding principles are excerpted from Connecticut.

Louisiana received permission from Connecticut to use its guiding principles. If sections of another State's or national organization's guidelines are appropriate or useful for your State's guidelines, consider asking permission to use or adapt the section. Guiding principles, or other preamble or introductory sections, give caregivers and other key stakeholders an understanding of the State's vision for children, understanding of and beliefs about how children learn, and the role of families and providers in supporting early learning.

✚ Adaptations for children with special needs are included.

These are center-based standards that include adaptations for children with special needs. The placement and language of the adaptations illustrate how providers can make adaptations and indicate the importance of attending to children's special needs.

✚ The guidelines are linked to multiple assessment tools.

Louisiana's guidelines identify how each performance indicator is linked to a variety of measures, including child outcomes, program standards, and national and State-developed assessment tools (Head Start Child Outcomes, ECERS, etc.).

✚ Developed guidelines for 4-year-olds, and then birth to three-year-olds.

Louisiana chose to focus on developing guidelines for 4-year-old children, in part because the effort was led by the Department of Education and also because it wanted to focus on public pre-K. Louisiana has recently completed infant and toddler guidelines under the leadership of the State Department of Social Services, Child Care Division and the Head Start Collaboration Office.

Louisiana's *Standards for Programs Serving 4-Year-Old Children* (2002) is available on the Web at <http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/assessment/standards/PDFs/PrekStandards6-02-02.pdf>.

Louisiana's *Standards for Infant and Toddlers* (2003) is available on the Web at <http://www.dss.state.la.us/Documents/OFS/OpeningStandardsforInfantsandToddlers.pdf>.

Colorado

✚ The guidelines make explicit reference to the early childhood foundation for each K–12 standard.

The guidelines are written in an easy-to-read narrative style and include developmentally appropriate information for each K–12 standard. The guidelines make a clear link to alignment of curriculum between early care and education and public school. These guidelines recognize that early learning standards are not an attempt to “push down” the expectations of school-age children but are meant to validate the learning that takes place in the preschool years.

Colorado's *Building Blocks to Colorado's Content Standards* (August 2003) is available on the Web at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/earlychildhoodconnections/early.htm>.

California

✚ Developmental profiles are available for children ages birth to 14 years.

California's *Desired Results* represents a comprehensive system including program standards and a variety of training activities. The *Desired Results* system is just being phased in and its use is required of all programs or providers receiving public funds. The guidelines cover a broad age range. It is one of the few State sets of standards that explicitly address the early learning needs of infant and toddlers.

California's *Desired Results for Children and Families* (July 2001) is available on the Web at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/desiredresults.asp>.

Indiana

✚ The guidelines integrate the developmental needs of second language learners.

✚ There are references to multiple domains within each standard.

Indiana's guidelines explicitly identify how one developmentally appropriate activity or interaction (identified in these standards as a "Scenario") can be used to address multiple domains, including language and literacy, social-emotional development, cognitive skills, physical, self-help, and others. Further, the scenarios are applicable to a variety of care settings, including at home with parents. Some are also applicable to second-language learners.

Foundations for Young Children to the Indiana Academic Standards is available on the Web at <http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/primetime/foundations.html>.

Missouri

✚ The State has developed companion handbooks for teachers and parents to facilitate implementation.

Missouri chose to take one domain—literacy—and develop the guidelines and related implementation materials for parents and providers. The State has since developed guidelines in the social-emotional and science domains. Missouri began by developing guidelines and implementation materials in one domain; other States take a broader approach by developing guidelines in multiple domains and then creating implementation tools. These decisions are made based on available human and fiscal resources, as well as staff and consultant availability.

The parent handbook serves as a vehicle for providing parent information on child development and opportunities for involvement in the child's learning. The teacher guide gives some curriculum and program organization strategies to implement the guidelines. Both of these guides can be used as a sourcebook for more intensive training workshops or programs.

Missouri Pre-K Literacy Standards is available on the Web at http://www.dese.state.mo.us/divimprove/fedprog/earlychild/PreK_Standards.html.

Pre–K Standards

✚ The Mathematics guidelines reflect the most recent research.

These guidelines are an example of a resource developed by a national group in collaboration with CTB/McGraw-Hill. Included is a review of the most recent research on how young children learn mathematical concepts. In the “Vignettes,” adjustments in materials and expectations appropriate for 3-year-olds, and 4- and 5-year-olds are identified.

PreK Guidelines for Learning and Teaching (October 2002) is available on the Web at http://www.ctb.com/media/articles/pdfs/resources/PreKguidelines_summary.pdf.

Arkansas

✚ Materials are included to link early learning guidelines to program quality.

✚ The State developed products to involve the family in supporting the learning identified in the early learning guidelines.

✚ A *Framework for Infant and Toddler Care* that aligns with the *Early Childhood Education Framework* for 3- and 4-year-olds has been developed.

Arkansas’ Early Childhood Education Framework aligns the “developmental learning strands” (or standards) with benchmarks for 3- and 4-year-old children. Elements of program quality are specified within the context of implementing the standards and benchmarks. Arkansas has also developed materials for families to support the use of the standards at home. *A Framework for Infant and Toddler Care* aligns with the *Early Childhood Education Framework* and specifically addresses the developmental needs of children ages birth to 3 years.

Arkansas Framework for Infant and Toddler Care (July 2002) is available on the Web at <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/bench.pdf>.

Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework (July 1999) is available on the Web at <http://www.arkansas.gov/childcare/ARKANSAS%20EARLY%20CHILDHOOD%20EDUCATION%20FRAMEWORK.pdf>

The National Child Care Information Center does not endorse any organization, publication or resource.