



Preschool Teaching and Learning

The fundamental elements of quality preschool teaching and learning practice include well-organized and managed learning environments, responsive social and emotional supports, and use of curricula materials and meaningful instructional interactions to facilitate children’s thinking and skill development. Implementation of curricula, lesson planning, and interactions and instruction are informed by on-going assessment of children’s progress towards early learning and development standards and kindergarten readiness goals. Professional development and continuous improvement of instructional practice occurs through embedded routines of peer-to-peer technical assistance that incorporates discussion of data (children’s progress, learning environments, and teacher-child interactions), examination of practice, and collaboration to improve teaching and learning.

Organized environments that support children’s engagement with materials and peers are the foundation for all learning in early childhood classrooms. Effective preschool teachers support children’s exploration in the learning environments through relationship building; awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness to children’s emotional and learning needs; and by regarding and expanding children’s perspectives. There is an absence of negativity, sarcasm, hostility, and aggression in teachers’ interactions with children.

Research-based curriculum provides learning goals and activities in the major domains of children’s development and the key knowledge and skill areas to support kindergarten readiness. Curricula provide guidance on what to teach (content) and how to teach (learning experiences and strategies for teaching). Curricula content is drawn from current child development science, early childhood teaching and learning science, interests and ideas of the children, and the values of the community.

Effective preschool instruction for all children requires the design of learning opportunities and interactions that facilitate children’s inquiry, thinking, and construction of understanding and knowledge about concepts. Young children vary widely in their development, skills and abilities, and background knowledge. Effective teachers are sensitive and skilled in interactions; they use ongoing formative assessment of each child’s skills to plan learning opportunities; and they use curricula materials and activities to engage and individualize instruction for all children, regardless of their abilities and disabilities.

Ongoing assessment is integral to curriculum and instruction. The objective is to help children achieve kindergarten readiness through individual learning goals. Assessment information helps monitor progress — both for individual children and for the program as a whole. Assessment information needs to be valid, reliable, useful, and timely so the results can inform curricula development and instruction. Systematic, ongoing assessment provides valuable information on children’s learning and helps inform curriculum planning and teaching across all domains of development and learning.

Professional development is designed to support teachers’ continuous learning, effective implementation, and improvement of practice. Teachers engage in weekly/monthly sessions of peer-to-peer technical assistance involving discussion of child and teaching data, observing and examination of practice, and planning improvements to teaching and learning opportunities.

The Award of Excellence for Preschool Teaching and Learning, part of ExceleRate Illinois, reflects these principles.

Has your program already achieved the Gold Circle of Quality? If so additional technical assistance can be received to work toward this Award of Excellence at www.theounce.org/Lead.

For more information, contact gov.ExceleRateAoEs@illinois.gov.

Standards

Standard 1	<p>Program demonstrates exemplary preschool classroom learning environments.</p> <p>Evidence: Self-Study and Program Portfolio demonstrate ECERS Activities Subscale average score of at least 5.75 (no classroom below 5.0); AND CLASS Emotional Support scores not below 5.0 for any classroom; AND Classroom Organization scores not below 5.0 AND no classroom below 5.0 on the CLASS Classroom Organization Dimension of Instructional Learning Formats.</p>
Standard 2	<p>Program implements supplemental, content-based curricula (social emotional/executive functioning, literacy, math, and science) that is research-based and aligns with the IELDS. Lesson plans show connection to the goals of the supplemental curricula's goals, and therefore also to the IELDS.</p>
Standard 3	<p>Program demonstrates high-quality developmentally appropriate instructional practices in the content areas (social emotional/executive functioning, literacy, math, and science).</p> <p>Evidence: Self-Study and Program Portfolio demonstrate ERS Activities Subscales average scores of at least 5.75 on Interactions and Language/Reasoning and Talking items with no classroom below 5.0 on these items; AND CLASS Emotional Support scores not below 5.0 for any classroom, AND CLASS Instructional Support average scores of at least 4.0 with no classroom Instructional Support average score below 3.25.</p>
Standard 4	<p>Program uses assessment data collected at the beginning of the year (i.e., within 45 days of enrollment) to identify initial instructional goals for children, including goals in the area of social-emotional/executive functioning and, for children for whom screening data identifies a developmental concern, informs parents of the plans to provide children with additional teaching and learning supports.</p> <p>Evidence: Self-Study and Program Portfolio demonstrate initial goals are identified from screening or other assessment data, including goals in the area of social-emotional/executive functioning, OR score of 6 or higher on PAS item #10 is demonstrated by the evidence submitted in the Self-Study materials.</p>
Standard 5	<p>Program utilizes appropriate assessment tool or tools that align with supplemental, content-based curricula to document children's progress overtime with measurable content-learning outcomes; assessment results are used to inform implementation of the curricula's scope and sequence and activities or to inform the design of project-based learning experiences and content-area instructional practice.</p>
Standard 6	<p>The program demonstrates commitment to achieving the principles of full inclusion and full participation of children with disabilities and their families in natural environments.</p>
Standard 7	<p>Programs implement opportunities for peer-to-peer technical assistance to support teachers' ongoing learning, reflection and examination of practice, and improvement of practice. Peer-to-peer technical assistance may include protecting time weekly or bi-weekly for classroom teams to engage in Lesson Study and to design lesson plans collaboratively, and monthly for teachers from other preschool classrooms or kindergarten/primary grade classrooms, as well as with related support staff, to convene as a Community of Practice or Reflective Practice Group to discuss child progress and classroom quality data, observe and examine practice, and collaborate to further develop curricula and improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of learning environments and instruction.</p>