**Elements of High Quality Kindergarten 2.0**

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**Elements of High Quality Kindergarten 2.0**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (the Department) Office of Student and Family Support (SFS) is pleased to share with you a resource that was jointly developed by staff from the Department, Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), and Early Childhood Coordinators from Public School Districts across the Commonwealth. The initial version of the document, entitled *Fostering Learning in the Early Years: Elements of a High Quality Kindergarten,* now referred to more simply as the *Elements* document, outlines the elements of quality in kindergarten programs that research and practice show are critical to young children’s development and successful learning. While aligned with EEC’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for preschool programs, this document was designed for use with kindergarten programs that serve primarily 5- and 6-year old children.

In addition to being jointly written by staff from SFS, EEC and Public School Early Childhood Coordinators, *Elements of High Quality Kindergarten* 2.0 has also been reviewed by units within the Department, including Curriculum and Instruction, Student Assessment and Adult and Community Learning Services, and was piloted in the 2015-2016 school year by districts receiving state funds through the Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grant (Fund Code 701). Through the pilot and ongoing feedback from the field and from early childhood colleagues, we have revised the original document and are pleased to offer the *Elements* document, version 2.0.

The elements of high quality kindergarten include:

* [Learning Environment](#Learning_H);
* [Curriculum](#Curriculum);
* [Instruction](#Instruction);
* [Assessment of Children](#Child);
* [Leadership & Professional Development](#PD_H);
* [Family Engagement](#Family_H); and
* [Assessment of Program Quality](#Program)

The format for each of these seven elements provides a definition for each element, indicators of quality, followed by a rationale and/or the research for why and how it impacts children’s outcomes. The document is intended to be used as a guide to:

* provide the field with the latest research that supports high quality practices in each of the 7 areas;
* assess the quality of programs and instruction for kindergarten children;
* observe instruction in the classroom; and
* provide a resource and a road map for administrators and educators to creating high quality early learning opportunities for kindergarten students.

Please note that within the lists of Indicators for each element some indicators are listed in parentheses at the top of each section, with an asterisk (\*) at the start of the list. These indicators are those designated by the Elements team as Foundational indicators. This Foundational designation is given to basic or higher need, underpinning indicators, meaning they are seen as indicators which are recommended to be met first, because practices related to meeting Foundational indicators are seen as necessary prerequisites to meeting other indicators. In addition, we have used a ***bold-faced italicized font*** for terms within the *Elements* for which definitions may be found in the Glossary that begins on page 28.

# ELEMENT 1: Learning Environment

**DEFINITION**

The learning environment includes the physical environment, the learning experiences, and the social environment that the child experiences.

**INDICATORS**

## 1.1 Learning Environment and Materials (\*All: a, b, c, d, and e)

1. Classrooms are ***intentionally designed*** to support learning through play. The classroom has:
* centers/areas and materials to support children's development and learning in all domains and subject areas, including but not limited to: a classroom library; listening center; computer; dramatic play area with props; blocks; manipulatives; puzzles and games; water and sand table; math materials; science exploration with ***integrated observations*** tied to the beginning stages of the scientific process; supplies for writing activities; art area for open­ ended art experiences (e.g. paint, recycled materials, clay, etc.);
* a storage system that makes appropriate materials readily accessible to the children;
* a large group meeting area, a variety of small group work/play areas, and individual work/play spaces;
* space for quiet time including ***sensory breaks*** and/or rest is available;
* space for gross motor activities, is available for use by the children; and
* visual supports are in places where children can readily access them (e.g. classroom labels, schedule, steps for completing a task, etc.).
1. Class sizes of no more than 20 children with 2 qualified adults (a teacher and an instructional assistant or co-teacher(s) dedicated to the classroom).
2. The learning environment is safe with adequate space, light, and temperature.
3. The learning environment, including all areas and materials, is ***accessible*** to all children, including children with disabilities.
4. Classroom visuals and learning materials, including photos, reflect racial and cultural ***diversity***.

## 1.2 Outdoor Environment (\*a)

1. Outdoor areas have large motor equipment that is age appropriate, safe, clean and accessible to all children, including children with disabilities, with enough space for varied play.
2. The teaching staff provide opportunities for children to "use" the outside and to explore the environment (e.g. take walks, participate in field trips, climb, etc.).

## 1.3 Structure of the Day (\*a and d)

1. The principal and the teaching staff develop a daily schedule of learning that reflects ***integrated learning opportunities***. Integrated learning opportunities incorporate time for:
* focus on curricular goals;
* rich and ***playful learning;***
* ***self-initiated learning;***
* creative expression;
* ***inquiry*** and exploration;
* both indoor and outdoor activities; and
* varied groupings, including individual, large group, paired and small group learning.
1. The schedule includes sufficient time to address meaningful instruction in all content areas, including social emotional learning, science and technology/engineering; language arts, social studies, and the arts.

## 1.3 Structure of the Day (\*a and d) (continued)

1. The schedule is constructed to minimize changes in teachers as well as transitions for children from group to group.
2. The teaching staff provide predictable but flexible and varied routines and transitions that are purposeful and intentionally support children's learning and needs.
3. The structure of the day includes varied transitions which include creative opportunities for:
* ***playful learning;***
* movement experiences;
* support of social emotional learning; and
* assessment of children’s understanding.
1. The teaching staff build children's sense of responsibility, confidence and competence by supporting expectations that all children will participate daily in clean-up activities to keep the classroom neat and organized.

## 1.4 Interactions (\*a)

1. The teaching staff build personal connections/relationships with children in order to build children's language, ***social-emotional competencies***, and content learning; teaching staff accomplish this through many practices, including those that follow. Teaching staff:
* greet all children at the beginning and end of every day, including those who enter the classroom late;
* form close relationships, understanding that it is through relationships with children and adults that children explore and engage in the learning process;
* consistently demonstrate that they care about their children as individuals;
* validate children's interests and feelings; and
* give specific feedback and encouragement rather than evaluative praise or general comments.
1. The teaching staff engage with children in center activities by talking and interacting with them and with materials to deepen and extend children's thinking.

## 1.5 Creating Caring Communities for Learning (\*All: a and b)

1. Children have access to school-based resources to address health and social-emotional or interpersonal needs (social workers, guidance counselors or school adjustment counselors, school nurse, etc.).
2. The teaching staff support children to develop age appropriate social skills and behaviors through a positive, predictable and ***flexible learning environment***, by many practices, including those that follow. The teaching staff:
* help children understand emotion, which helps them have insight into their own and others feelings;
* support children's regulation of emotions by gradually guiding them toward ***self-regulation***;
* use instructional approaches such as genuine ***modeling***, ***scaffolding***, and ***role playing*** to support children as they learn social skills, behaviors, and attitudes;
* model ***pro-social behaviors*** by interpreting social situations in ways that show sympathy and caring;
* provide thoughtful and consistent responses to individuals and groups about behavior;
* encourage caring relationships between children and adults in the classroom and between other children; and
* encourage children to develop a caring attitude for their learning environment.

## 1.5 Creating Caring Communities for Learning (\*a and b) (continued)

1. The teaching staff create a climate of mutual respect and a secure emotional environment that enables children to explore and learn.

**RATIONALE/RESEARCH**

The physical environment sets the stage and creates the context for everything that happens in any educational setting—e.g., a classroom, a play yard, a multipurpose room, etc. A high-quality environment is safe; welcomes children; challenges, motivates, and engages children in a variety of activities; provides space for individual, as well as collaborative paired, small-group, and large-group activities; and generally supports the educational program's philosophy and goals. Ultimately, the physical environment must convey values and messages about who is welcomed, what is important, and what the beliefs are about how children learn (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Gullo, 2006).

Through exploration and play, children engage socially and physically while simultaneously building knowledge in cognitive domains such as science, math and literacy (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk and Singer, 2009). Cognitive development in early childhood depends on engaging with concrete objects that have been intentionally selected and designed to relate to instructional goals and support children’s construction of ideas (Piaget, 1969/2000; Katz & Chard, 2000). Social-emotional and interpersonal skill development depends on qualities and focus within interactions with other people, including respect for differences. Learning environments are designed with an emphasis on both academic and social elements, because as research indicates: “academic learning and social development are inextricably intertwined.” (Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2009, page 20).

In addition to the physical environment, the learning environment also includes the schedule and structure of the day (Gullo, 2006). “A consistent schedule means the sequence of components is predictable, but what happens within anyone component varies from day to day, depending on the children’s interests and teachers’ objectives…This variety is important to accommodate children’s range of interests and ways of learning, so that all children can find many engaging things to do throughout the day” (A. Epstein, 2007, page 13).

Positive relationships among teachers and families, between teachers and children, and among peers contribute to the development of harmonious classrooms, the management of challenging behaviors, and ultimately to children’s abilities to develop social-emotional and cognitive skills, including being able to develop positive relationships, regulate their own emotions and behavior (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), and engage in the learning process. Skilled teachers use pro-social rituals, routines and appropriate responses to create a learning environment where students take academic risks and behaviors that interfere with learning are prevented (Durlak, Weissburg, Dymicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2010); these components are also found in the Department’s Model Educator teacher rubric: [**Indicator II-B. Learning Environment**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartIII_AppxC.pdf)**.**

# ELEMENT 2: CURRICULUM

DEFINITION

High quality kindergarten curricula includes:

* goals for the knowledge and skills to be acquired, anchored in principles of child development and [state content standards](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/), and implemented through developmentally appropriate teaching strategies;
* planned learning experiences linked to these standards;
* daily schedules and routines into which developmentally appropriate activities and opportunities are integrated; and
* availability and organization of materials (adapted from NAEYC; 2003 and 2009).

**INDICATORS**

2. Curriculum (\* a, b, and c)

1. Curriculum is based on developmentally, culturally, and linguistically relevant research evidence, anchored in the MA Curriculum Frameworks and organized around principles of child development and learning.
2. Curriculum is comprehensive and integrated across content areas and encompasses critical areas of development, including:
* physical well-being and motor development;
* social-emotional development;
* language development;
* cognition, including number concepts and general knowledge; and
* content areas such as math, science, social studies and the arts.
1. Curriculum includes opportunities for intentionally integrating play and content area topics.
2. ***Playful learning*** opportunities, including imaginative play, are planned and integrated throughout all curriculum areas.
3. Curriculum builds on prior learning and experience, and provides opportunities to build ***background knowledge***.
4. Through the curriculum, the teaching staff:
* provide children with many and varied opportunities across the day to be active and engaged cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically and to develop positive attitudes toward learning;
* provide children ample opportunities throughout the course of the day to support the development of oral language;
* integrate curriculum and real-life situations to help students make connections between the classroom and their community, which is reflective of diverse cultures and languages; and
* offer classroom experiences that promote higher level thinking skills while stimulating children’s curiosity, experimentation, brainstorming, and problem solving.
1. Presentation of curriculum content is tailored to children’s ages, interests, developmental capacities, language, culture, and abilities/ disabilities.
2. Curriculum incorporates ***background knowledge*** gained at home, in the community, and within the culture, and is inclusive of all children with and without disabilities.

CURRICULUM: RATIONALE/RESEARCH

Implementation of a curriculum that is sensitive to the developmental capabilities and background of the individual children, that addresses the multiple domains of children’s development, and that supports the view that children are active participants in the learning process will promote positive, long-term achievement in academic settings (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Marcon, 2002; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005; Stipek et al., 1995).

A high-quality curriculum is executed, presented, and experienced as an integrated system. Children do not develop literacy skills only during reading time or mathematical skills only during a math-specific exercise but instead learn best when provided opportunities to practice and generalize those skills across the course of the day. Curriculum needs to be sensitive to diversity in culture and language, responsive to children with special needs, and to offer flexible and adaptable instruction for children who could benefit from increasing challenges or who need attention to specific areas. Research has demonstrated that kindergarteners need to be engaged in active, integrated learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

“An appropriate curriculum for young children is one that includes the focus on supporting children’s in-born intellectual dispositions, their natural inclinations. These would include, for example, the disposition to make the best sense they can of their own experiences and environments. An appropriate curriculum in the early years then is one that includes the encouragement and motivation of the children to seek mastery of basic academic skills, e.g., beginning writing skills, in the service of their intellectual pursuits. Extensive experience of involving preschool and kindergarten children in in-depth investigation projects has clearly supported the assumption that the children come to appreciate the usefulness of a range of basic academic skills related to literacy and mathematics as they strive to share their findings from their investigations with classmates and others. It is useful to assume that all the basic intellectual skills and dispositions are in-born in all children, though, granted, stronger in some individuals than in others…like everything else.” (Katz, 2015)

Research has consistently demonstrated the importance, centrality, and implications of play in the early childhood years as a foundation for concurrent and future learning (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). It is therefore an essential component of high-quality early childhood curriculum.

With any curriculum, teachers must apply their knowledge about how young children learn in order to deliver the curriculum in a way that is flexible and responsive to both child and adult input (Epstein, 2009).

# ELEMENT 3: INSTRUCTION

DEFINITION

All staff use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that are grounded in how children develop and learn and that enhance each child’s development and learning in the context of curriculum goals.

**INDICATORS**

**Play is the leading instructional approach for delivering standards-based curriculum that is aligned with the MA Curriculum Frameworks.**

## 3.1 *Scaffolding* (\*a, b, c, and d)

1. The teaching staff provide the factual background or information children need in order to explore, extend, and apply their learning and understanding of concepts.
2. The teaching staff recognize when and how children need support and adapt to learning and behavioral needs in a variety of ways:
* promoting active learning and varied learning opportunities based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in which children at all ability levels can participate together;
* skillful task breakdown into simpler steps that includes visual supports and verbal prompts, in order for one or more students to make meaningful progress;
* giving visual or verbal hints or prompts;
* modeling behavior that includes visuals and role play;
* providing ***scaffolding***, including individualized coaching, for children in developing friendships, managing feelings, sharing, turn taking, and collaborating;
* ***embedded instruction*** that includes active learning based on prior knowledge; and
* extending learning that offers opportunities to problem solve with increasingly complex thinking.
1. The teaching staff design experiences with the goal of developing ***incremental challenges*** that go just beyond a child's current level of comfort or mastery in many ways, with practices that include the following:
* making instructions or directions, when called for, direct and specific;
* modeling desirable behaviors and skills for children to see and hear in action;
* listening carefully to children’s plans and the questions children ask in order to prepare appropriate challenges and supports;
* building on prior knowledge to encourage ***higher order thinking;*** and
* using their knowledge of what children can already do to scaffold and support children to build new or more advanced skills; and supporting children to persist in challenging situations.
1. The teaching staff explicitly plan for and scaffold opportunities for ***playful learning*** throughout the day and help children enter into and sustain high quality play, where they engage in critical thinking and creativity, integrate concepts learned in academic content areas, and practice new skills independently and with peers.
2. The teaching staff scaffold language development proactively, with strategies that include the following:
* providing visual supports and explicit introduction of vocabulary to support positive interactions between adults and children and children and their peers;

## 3.1 *Scaffolding* (\*a, b, c, and d) (continued)

* promoting ***authentic discourse***, including continuing adult-child conversation through multiple exchanges;
* arranging for experiences that support children’s use of language;
* prompting children to elaborate on their conversations and explain their answers; and
* the practice of extended discussion throughout the day to deepen oral language and conceptual understanding.
1. The teaching staff gradually reduce ***scaffolding*** as children's skills develop, until the task or activity can be performed independently.

## 3.2 Intentionality (\*a)

1. The teaching staff ***intentionally plan*** classroom activities, including playful learning opportunities, by:
* observing children regularly throughout the day to learn about their interests, what they know, and what they are thinking about;
* using a broad range of teaching strategies and materials in planning that reflect knowledge of the individual children as well as the group, their interests, ideas and relationships; and
* using their knowledge of content areas and of development in all domains (cognitive, social­ emotional, approaches to learning and physical) to guide creating classroom activities that align with children's acquisition of core curriculum.
1. The teaching staff incorporates planning and ***self-reflection*** times into the daily schedule, in order to build children’s organizational and ***self-reflection*** skills.
2. The teaching staff arrange for experiences that support and scaffold children's use of language, their interactions with others, and their self-awareness.
3. The teaching staff use open-ended and essential questions to encourage children's language and ***higher order thinking***.
4. The teaching staff makes opportunities available for children to represent their thinking, ideas, and learning through oral language, writing, drawing, and/or three-dimensional media.
5. The teaching staff ensure children have the opportunity to revisit learning experiences and materials throughout the year through language rich play.

## 3.3 Range of Play Opportunities (\*a)

1. The teaching staff plan and provide opportunities for:
* various types of play that contribute to children’s development, including make-believe, sensory, language, construction,, large and small-motor, and ***mastery play***;
* play that develops ***self-regulation***, ***meta cognition***, problem solving, ***social cognition*** skills and language skills; and
* a range of ***self-directed play***, ***teacher guided play*** and ***experiential learning***.
1. The teaching staff plan and provide rich learning activities that promote active learning and support opportunities for children to:
* take on different roles in a cooperative group, such as leader, reporter, materials manager;
* experience learning in a different way;
* work in groups on shared projects;
* build language;
* problem solve around interesting questions posed by children or adults; and
* engage with different types of materials to facilitate their learning.

## 3.4 Reciprocal Relationship between Play and Language (\*a)

1. The teaching staff:
* plan to engage in two-way conversations with children throughout the school day;
* provide opportunities for children to engage in conversations with peers through play; and
* provide consideration for what children are seeing and saying as equal partners in a verbal exchange through language-rich play. This requires:
1. listening attentively to children's plans;
2. interpreting and expanding on what children do and say; and
3. asking questions that provoke and encourage children to think more deeply.
4. During ***playful learning*** opportunities, the teaching staff observe and interact with children to support their language and conversation skills, and to scaffold children's thinking and developing understanding.
5. The teaching staff provide playful learning opportunities for children to interact with peers in large and small groups and/or with a partner as a primary way of building language, social and emotional competencies and content knowledge.

## 3.5 Opportunities for Cross Curricular Connections (\*a, b, and c)

1. The teaching staff consistently offer opportunities for learning through projects that integrate content areas. Integrated projects:
* use social studies and science content as springboards for project based learning;
* embed language, writing, literacy, and mathematics concepts and skills;
* integrate the arts; and
* emphasize critical thinking skills in the process of learning or exploring.
1. The teaching staff use play as a means to integrate concepts across content areas including:
* science, technology and engineering concepts;
* history and social studies concepts;
* literacy and math concepts; and
* creative arts.
1. Teaching staff design Centers that incorporate content learning as well as social-emotional learning and provide children with opportunities to explore, ask questions, build language, make choices, work together, solve problems and use their imaginations.

## 3.6 Student Choice and Authentic Voice (\*a)

1. The teaching staff offer opportunities for children to participate in decision making activities, including:
	* developing classroom expectations and/or rules; and
	* planning content area activities.
2. Teaching staff build ***dynamic partnerships*** with children where children's feedback is valued and drives the planning and learning opportunities offered in the classroom.
3. The teaching staff recognize and honor children's emotional expressiveness and individual expression styles, along with promoting culturally and age appropriate expression.
4. The teaching staff use children's interest in and curiosity about the world to engage them with new content and developmental skills, and to encourage repeated practice of emerging skills.
5. The teaching staff provide diverse materials and time throughout the course of the day for children to independently select learning activities as a way to support children's agency and development of language.

## 3.6 Student Choice and Authentic Voice (\*a) (continued)

1. The teaching staff encourage children to describe in detail the outcomes of their plans and to use those outcomes as stepping stones to new plans.

RATIONALE/RESEARCH

“The developing brain is not an empty vessel, passively waiting to be filled with knowledge, but rather an active organ that grows through its own activity. The experiences that promote growth are those that provoke the brain’s activity, often through the child’s interest and engagement, especially through socially responsive interaction.” (Thompson, 2008)

Teaching staff who purposefully use multiple instructional approaches optimize children’s learning opportunities. These approaches include strategies that range from structured to unstructured and from adult directed to child directed learning opportunities. Children bring to learning environments different backgrounds, interests, experiences, learning styles, needs, and capacities. Teachers’ consideration of these differences when selecting and implementing instructional approaches helps all children succeed.

“…when young children engage in projects in which they conduct investigations of significant objects and events around them, for which they have developed the research questions and by which they themselves find out how things work, what things are made of, what people around them do to contribute to their well-being, and so forth, as can be seen in many reports of project work in the early years, (see reports of projects in each issue of *Early Childhood Research and Practice*<http://ecrp.uiuc.edu>) their lively minds are fully engaged. Furthermore, the usefulness and importance of being able to read, write, measure and count gradually becomes self-evident. We need significant meanings as the center of education. Significant meanings through action-based learning environments provide reasons for children to represent experiences through many formats and deserve to be the center of education.” (Katz, 2015, page 2)

Instructional approaches also differ in their effectiveness for teaching different elements of curriculum and learning. For a district to address the complexity inherent in any teaching- learning situation, it must use a variety of effective instructional approaches. In classrooms and groups that include teacher assistants or teacher aides and specialized teaching and support staff, the expectation is that these teaching staff work as a team. In either case the instructional approach creates a teaching environment that supports children’s positive learning and development across all areas.

The teaching staff must reflect on the ways kindergartners develop, meeting each child at his or her developmental level, and bridging children’s individual differences. Using research based teaching strategies in kindergarten all day and in each learning context is critical to children’s learning:

“Play is an essential ingredient in children’s social, emotional, intellectual and moral development. When children play, they expand their imaginations, practice language skills, and learn to control their impulses (creating and following rules in order to keep the play going). These skills are all necessary to navigate successfully in school….Having time to process academic information through play and other forms of learning is critical for all students…The young brain is constructed to make connections between and across concepts. Only later do students consolidate specific knowledge – math, science and literacy – as independent domains for learning.”(Sachs, Mardell, Ramsey, 2014, page 104; memo found inBohart, Charner, & Koralek, 2014).

“It is absolutely reasonable to expect that kindergarten is about ***playful learning*** and learningful play, and about ***academic socialization*** and social academics.” (Gullo, 2006, page 7).

# ELEMENT 4: ASSESSMENT of CHILDREN

DEFINITION

In the publication, “Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How” (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008), the authors articulate that assessment is critical to high quality early childhood programs and defines assessment as

**“….**gathering information in order to make informed instructional decisions….For younger children, thinking about purpose is equally central. Done well, ongoing assessment can provide invaluable information to parents and educators about how children grow and develop. Developmentally appropriate assessment systems can provide information to highlight what children know and are able to do (page 27)”.

**INDICATORS**

**4. Assessment of Children**

1. Principals and teaching staff design on-going assessment practices that:
	* are ***embedded*** within everyday teaching opportunities (not seen as something separate from or in addition to teaching);
	* inform daily instruction and learning;
	* use observation to document what children do and how they do it;
	* include the domains of cognitive, social-emotional, approaches to learning, and physical development;
	* involve collecting evidence using multiple sources of information, such as, but not limited to: observation notes, child work samples, conversations with adults and peers, and feedback from families and other specialists/ providers that are working with the child; and
	* use assessment results to guide curriculum planning, guide learning environments, inform individualized student supports, and share children’s progress with their families.
2. Principals and administrators dedicate time to professional developments days, common planning time, and other reflective opportunities for teaching staff to:
* review and reflect assessment results with colleagues;
* review data in the area of child outcomes, including looking at student work;
* review data in the area of program quality; and
* to make plans for next steps (continuous program improvement).
1. Principals and teaching staff:
* use evidence-based assessments as an opportunity to collect information on a child’s strengths, challenges, and areas for growth;
* select and align measurement tools with goals and objectives that the teaching staff have for the child; and
* ensure that the tools selected for assessment are used for the purpose for which they were created and are grounded in the developmental continuum of said goals and objectives.
1. Principals and teaching staff:
* identify assessment tools and strategies that support the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of children and families; and
* ensure that all children are included in assessment activities, including English language learners and children with disabilities.
1. Principals and teaching staff make opportunities available for children to represent their thinking, interests, ideas, and learning through oral language, writing, drawing, three-dimensional media, and/or physical responses, including performing media.

**4. Assessment of Children (continued)**

1. Teaching staff take time to transcribe a sampling of children's language, conversation, ideas, messages to document children's thinking and developing understanding during playful learning opportunities.

**RATIONALE/RESEARCH**

High quality early learning opportunities can result in positive outcomes for young children. The ability to understand children’s progress and both classroom environmental factors and instructional practices that are linked to better outcomes is tied to strong systems of strategic, ongoing, authentic assessment of children and program quality. A high quality kindergarten program incorporates on-going assessment of both children’s progress as well as the quality of the services being delivered to children. Data collected on children’s progress is used to inform instruction and measure progress in their learning; data collected on program quality is used to understand children’s progress in the context of the quality of the learning environment and should also be used to engage in continuous program quality improvement efforts.

In the formative years, development and learning is marked by tremendous variability and change as children’s brains are at their peak years of development. Summative and standardized assessments that capture skill achievement out of context, or asking children to perform “on demand,” may be considered by some as an important part of a comprehensive assessment framework, but are considered by others to be unreliable. Because of the wide range or natural variation in the timing and trajectory of development within all domains in young children, researchers have agreed that caution should be used in testing in early childhood: “standardized testing of children under age eight, when used to make significant decisions about the child’s education, is in direct conflict with the professional standards of every educational testing organization” (Miller & Alcon, 2009, page 41).

For this reason, it is critical that the assessment of young children include a comprehensive, developmentally, and educationally important set of goals, rather than a narrow set of skills. Best practice in assessment methods of young children, including kindergarteners, are “developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children’s daily activities, supported by professional development, communicating with families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes” (Miller & Alcon, 2009, pages 1-2).

Bowman, Donovan & Burns (2001) emphasize that the majority of assessment for young children is most appropriately “authentic” or a performance assessment, such as observational assessment. These types of assessments avoid ‘on-demand’ tasks and focus instead on the assessment of concrete, observable behaviors on real (or realistic) tasks that are part of children’s ordinary classroom experiences (page 248).

A high quality kindergarten program incorporates on-going purposeful assessment of both children’s progress as well as the quality of the services being delivered to children, but is careful to address key criterion. Key criterion are program elements and indicators which are research based and/or identified as important by major stakeholders such as NAEYC, or state kindergarten standards. Guidance from the Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children of the National Research Council includes the following:

“Interpreting outcome scores collected from children in an early childhood program requires the presence of a larger system, in the context of which particular assessments are selected, implemented, and interpreted. Using child outcome scores properly requires that the following seven conditions be met:

1. a clearly articulated purpose for the testing. For example, appropriate purposes for assessing young children include screening for developmental delays, guiding intervention and instruction, for progress monitoring, and for program evaluation (Bowman et al., 2001; Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). NAEYC (Bredecamp and Copple, 2009) has emphasized that appropriate practice includes use of assessment tools for the purpose for which they have been demonstrated to provide valid and reliable results;

2. identification of why given tools (particular assessments) were selected in relation to the purpose, instead of others;

3. a clear theory connecting the assessment results and quality of care. Without some supportable hypothesis regarding the potential impact of what is being assessed, schools are assessing without justification;

4. teacher evaluations that include observation of the quality of instruction and specification of what would be needed for improvement;

5. a clear plan for following up to improve program quality;

6. adults working collaboratively, strategizing to collect the required information with a minimum of testing; and

7. appropriate preparation of those collecting assessment data, to minimize disruptive effects on children’s responses.”(adapted from Snow & Van Hemel, 2008, page 19).”

“ …Inappropriate testing of young children runs the risk of generating insufficient information for the tester and discomfort (or just wasted time) for the testee; such risks are unacceptable and can be avoided only if it is very clear why people are engaging in the activity and what benefit will accrue from it.”(Snow & Van Hemel, 2008, page 27).

# ELEMENT 5: LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DEFINITION

Teaching staff have the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children’s learning and development, and to support families’ diverse needs and interests (NAEYC). Principals/administrators:

* provide teachers with strong instructional leadership in early learning;
* work with teachers to identify high-quality curriculum and developmentally-appropriate practices; and
* align on-going, job-embedded professional development opportunities.

**INDICATORS**

## 5.1 Leadership Skills of Principals and Other Elementary Administrators (\*a)

1. Principals/Administrators take responsibility for all of the following:
	* monitoring structural elements, such as class size and teacher-to student ratios;
	* monitoring process elements, such as the nature and quality of interactions between the child and teaching staff;
	* using their leadership and management skills to ensure appropriate environments ;
	* providing instructional feedback that is cognizant of ***developmentally appropriate*** practice when they observe and analyze interactions in the classroom; and
	* tailoring materials, schedules and space to early childhood learning.
2. Principals/Administrators understand and support providing the teaching staff with the time to get to know children and plan for their success at the beginning of the year before other content expectations are identified.
3. Principals/Administrators understand and support developmentallyappropriate ***transition practices*** as they relate to young children (and their families) entering kindergarten and first grade.

## 5.2 Professional Development for Principals and Other Elementary Administrators (\*a)

* 1. Principals/Administrators seek out professional development/knowledge around:
* child development;
* ***developmentally appropriate*** instructional practices (including ***playful learning*** opportunities); and
* elements of a key learning environment for young children in the kindergarten space.

## 5.3 Planning and Delivery of Professional Development for Teaching Staff (\*a)

1. The principal and other elementary-level administrators provide joint professional development for all educational staff connected with the kindergarten program, including but not limited to: public and community-based classroom teachers, teachers of specials (e.g., physical education, music, art, etc.), instructional assistants, classroom coaches, counselors, social workers, special education staff, and administrators.
2. The principal and other elementary-level administrators bring together staff across grade levels (vertical alignment) to better understand the learning continuum of young children and intentionally ensure continuity in developmentally appropriate practices.
3. The principal and other elementary-level administrators ensure that other school personnel (e.g., clerical, cafeteria, custodial, and bus staff, etc.) receive information about developmentally appropriate ways to interact with kindergarten-age children.

## 5.3 Planning and Delivery of Professional Development for Teaching Staff (\*a) (continued)

1. The principal and other elementary-level administrators provide training to all teaching staff in child development, with an emphasis on the early years and the connection to their learning in all domains.
2. The principal and other elementary-level administrators provide ongoing support to ensure that the daily learning environment, learning experiences, and teacher-child interactions reflect the children’s developmental stage.
3. The principal and other elementary-level administrators ensure that teaching staff are competent in culturally and linguistically appropriate communication with families.
4. The principal and other elementary-level administrators provide differentiated professional development based on the particular needs of the grade level and staff within a given grade level.
5. The principal and other elementary-level administrators provide training sessions that include, but are not limited to: professional learning communities, follow up, and in class support by classroom coaches or administrators.
6. The principal and other elementary-level administrators provide training to teaching staff that addresses vertical alignment by including interactions between kindergarten staff and preschool (PreK) and early elementary teachers, when possible. In other words, joint professional development opportunities are made available to community-based preschool and after-school and out-of-school time staff to ensure high quality learning opportunities across a child’s day and/or across the years before and after kindergarten.

**RATIONALE/RESEARCH**

The 2009 revision to the NAEYC standards for early childhood professional preparation includes six standards defining the core competencies expected for high quality early childhood educators, including the following: 1) skills and knowledge focused on promoting child development and learning, 2) building connections with families, 3) observing, documenting, and assessing, 4) using developmentally appropriate approaches to connect with children and families, 5) using content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum, and 6) becoming a professional (NAEYC, 2009). A focus on inclusion of each student, regardless of individual differences, and on understanding diversity, is embedded in each standard. Specialized professional development programs emphasizing each of these core competencies have been developed, and research findings underscore the rationale for training teachers in each area. For example, teachers need training on how to foster effective school-family partnerships, including connections with families before kindergarten admission, to improve the transition to kindergarten (Epstein, 2001). Early childhood education programs need to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to continue to reinforce or build skills in each of these six areas, depending on the areas of greatest identified need for each classroom and school.

Recent observational studies of preschool through third grade (P-3) classrooms found that the overall quality of teaching needs significant improvement, especially in the area of instructional support to students (Miller & Almon, 2009; LoCasale-Crouch, Konold, Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early, & Barbarin, 2007). Because the long-term effect of early education depends on continued high-quality teaching over time, it is critical that elementary school principals have the capacity to boost P–3 teacher effectiveness. A recent policy paper from the National Governor’s Association (Szekely, 2013) emphasized the need for increased focus on building capacity for early childhood administration and leadership, given their assessment that “few elementary school leaders have professional backgrounds or training in early education” (page 3). Further, Szekely writes, “Most states’ principal preparation systems could be improved to better equip elementary school principals to evaluate pre-K through third-grade (P–3) teachers, support improvements in teaching and learning, and guide teachers in using curricula and assessments in the earliest grades” (page 1).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2014) has identified six core competencies for effective leadership of early childhood education (P-3), which are summarized here. Effective principals of these grades:

* collaborate and work to coordinate across the patchwork of programs within early learning communities to define a P-3 continuum that transcends the boundaries of disparate funding sources, quality, and standards to create a seamless learning experience for children from age three to grade three;
* ensure implementation of developmentally appropriate teaching practices for all children;
* promote supportive and positive learning environments which are personalized to individual student needs, including effective applications of technology in the classroom;
* use multiple assessment measures to promote student learning growth;
* build collaborative working environments that support the professional growth of all who work in them; and
* make schools a hub of P-3 learning for families and communities.

Effective principals understand developmental differences in early childhood, and embrace high-quality early childhood programs, principles, and practices as the foundation for education throughout the school community. They work with families and community organizations to support children at home, in the community, and in pre-K and kindergarten programs. Effective principals ensure high-quality curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices that foster young children’s learning and development (NAESP, 2014).

# ELEMENT 6: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

DEFINITION

The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA: 2004) defines family engagement as “The participation of parents [family] in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that:

* Parents [family] play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
* Parents [family] are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; and
* Parents [family] are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child [Title 1,Section 9101(32), ESEA.]”[[1]](#footnote-1)

INDICATORS

# Indicators within the Family Engagement element are based onthe Massachusetts [Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/councils/parent/FSCPfundamentals.pdf). Document (2015).

## 6.1 Welcoming All Stakeholders (\*a)

1. All school and classroom staff welcome families to engage and participate in their child’s education, by creating environments that support respectful relationships with families of all kinds, including ensuring ***accessible programming*** that removes obstacles to participation related to disability, educational, or economic level.
2. The teaching staff welcome families of all kinds and work to create respectful and supportive collaborative relationships.

## 6.2 Communicating Effectively (\*a)

1. Systems for two-way communication exist. The teaching staff and families communicate with one another:
* on an on-going basis;
* using languages that families understand;
* using multiple communication paths (phone, electronic, written, and face to face); and
* so that families know how to get questions answered and concerns addressed.
1. Families have access to the school administration and to methods for identifying issues and concerns.
2. Principals and teaching staff see home visits as a way to build relationships with families and establish individualized communication systems.
3. Principals and the teaching staff engage with families through multiple means (e.g. curriculum nights, Parent Curriculum Guides, web-based resources) regarding:
* what children are learning;
* how to understand assessment information;
* what proficient work looks like; and
* sharing understandings about individual children’s learning and development.

## 6.3 Supporting the Success of Children (\*a)

1. Principals and educators are responsive to the linguistic diversity of their schools andhonor diversity in their family engagement strategies and communication in support of children’s learning. Methods for ensuring responsiveness include:

## 6.3 Supporting the Success of Children (\*a) (continued)

* every effort is made to provide key information to parents in their primary language, whether spoken or written;
* parents are invited to share knowledge about their culture; and
* children’s home culture and experiences are incorporated into school messages and activities[[2]](#footnote-2).
1. School, parent, and community groups collaborate to inform families and help them to support learning at home and at school, both in and out of school time hours.

## 6.4 Advocating for Each Child and Youth (\*a and b)

1. Principals and teaching staff partner with families in setting goals for their child/children.
2. Principals and teaching staff partner with families to support them in their role as their child’s first teacher and primary advocate.

## 6.5 Sharing Power and Responsibility

1. Principals and teaching staff provide many and varied opportunities to involve all families in decision making related to program and classroom policies and practices.
2. District and school staff encourage families to assume leadership roles through a variety of opportunities, including participation in the ***school site council***, governing, and other advisory groups.

## 6.6 Partnering with the Community (\*a)

1. School administrators and teaching staff develop partnerships with agencies and organizations in the community in order to provide resources/referrals to families for other needs or support, including but not limited to, adult basic education and English forSpeakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for parents, mental health counseling, medical, dental, and housing needs.
2. In order to inform programming, engage family involvement in education outside of school, and/or facilitate collaboration and coordination of services that support children and families, district and school staff, including teaching staff, maintain ongoing communication with:
* the local Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grantee;
* mental health providers;
* libraries and museums;
* pediatric doctors;
* police and fire departments; and
* other community organizations with goals related to child and family education and support.
1. District, school and teaching staff implement effective transition activities for children from early learning or home settings to kindergarten.
2. District, school and teaching staff participate in local community group work related to early childhood and support cultural groups served by the district, school and/or classroom.

**RATIONALE/RESEARCH**

The indicators for Family Engagement are directly aligned with the [Massachusetts Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals](http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/sac/parent/FSCPfundamentals.docx) document (2015) developed through the collaborative work of the Parent and Community Education and Involvement (PCEI) Advisory Council of the MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Decades of research studies (recent examples include: Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Reynolds & Clements, 2005) have demonstrated that higher levels of family engagement, (or as Epstein and Sheldon (2006) prefer to characterize this: stronger school-family partnerships), are directly related to higher levels of student achievement. Policy statements and best practice guides also support greater attention to family-school partnerships (National Education Association, 2008; Harvard Family Research Project, 2012). Research (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen & Sekino, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) shows that, regardless of family income or background, students with engaged families are more likely to:

* earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
* be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
* attend school regularly;
* have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
* graduate high school and go on to postsecondary education.

Research based programs have also demonstrated that effective family-school coordination can greatly improve the process of transition into kindergarten for young children, ensuring that children are “school ready”(National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement, 2014). Children and youth develop through opportunities to explore, learn, and cultivate their interests both in and out of school. Families help children uncover and expand these interests by encouraging them to try out new paths to learning. Singing songs, reading books, and telling stories are important parent–child activities that support learning when children are young. Early childhood educators have long noted that these interactions are most beneficial when they center on children’s natural inquiries. These parent–child activities need not take place only at home or school, but can occur at the grocery store, the laundromat, or anywhere and anytime children and families are together. As children get older, the characteristics of parent-child relationships shift according to children’s developmental needs but remain important. Families play a critical role in communicating the value of education, setting high expectations for children’s educational attainment, and encouraging children’s pursuits (Lopez & Caspe, 2014) from cradle to career.

“Family engagement occurs when there is an on-going, reciprocal, strengths-based partnership between families and their children’s early childhood education programs. From the literature and a synthesis of three definitions of family engagement, (Henderson and Berla,1994; Epstein, 2001; and Weiss et al., 2006), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009) has created a comprehensive definition of family engagement that includes clear examples of high quality features within six factors:

1. Early childhood education programs encourage and validate family participation in decision making related to their children’s education. Families act as advocates for their children and early childhood education programs by actively taking part in decision making opportunities. (Note: Some families may need additional support to fully realize this potential.)
2. Consistent, two-way communication is facilitated through multiple communication pathways (e.g., face to face, print and electronic notices, by phone, etc.) and is responsive to the linguistic preference of the family. Communication should be both school and family initiated and should be timely and continuous, inviting conversations about the child’s educational experience in his/her classroom as well as the larger program.
3. Families and early childhood education programs collaborate and exchange knowledge. Family members share their unique knowledge and skills through volunteering and actively engaging in events and activities at schools. Teachers seek out information about children’ lives, families, and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and instructional practices.
4. Early childhood education programs and families place an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home and in the community that extend the teachings of the program so as to enhance each child’s early learning.
5. Families create a home environment that values learning and supports programs. Programs and families collaborate in establishing goals for children both at home and at school.
6. Early childhood education programs create an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers are dedicated, trained and receive the supports they need to fully engage families. (Adapted from Halgunseth et al, 2009, pages 3-4).

A variety of other models and statements regarding family engagement and partnership have also emerged in recent years. In 2016 the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services issued a [joint policy statement regarding Family Engagement: From the Early Years to the Early Grades.](https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/policy-statement-on-family-engagement.pdf) In addition, the federal Department of Education has promoted its [Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf) as a guide to identifying goals and conditions necessary for development of effective family-school partnerships to support student achievement and school improvement. The framework identifies a set of four core components to be addressed before goals of improved capacity for effective partnership can be reached. In this framework, changes for both families and educators are required before partnership is effective, including improvements in the areas of educator and family cognition, connections, and confidence, as well as capabilities in multiple areas such as cultural competency, knowledge about learning and about how school systems work.

# ELEMENT 7: ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM QUALITY

**DEFINITION**

A high quality kindergarten program regularly evaluates program quality (on an annual basis, when possible), to better understand and identify factors related to children’s outcomes, in order to guide ongoing program planning and goal-setting. NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) (2003) define program evaluation as “a systematic process of describing the components and outcomes of an intervention or service.”

**INDICATORS**

7. Assessment of Program Quality

* 1. The principal and teaching staff have clear goals related to meeting indicators in the areas of learning environment, curriculum, instruction, children’s progress on selected outcomes, and professional development.
	2. The principal and teaching staff select and align measurement tools and other mechanisms to reliably and accurately measure progress on said indicators.
	3. The principal and teaching staff select classroom/program quality indicators for assessment that are tied to enhancing children’s development and learning, including but not limited to: learning environment, instruction, teacher-child interactions, child outcomes.
	4. The principal and teaching staff dedicate time to professional development days, teacher planning time, and other reflective opportunities to:
* review data, both in the areas of child outcomes and program quality;
* engage in inquiry regarding plausible explanations for outcomes observed; and
* make plans for program changes to address prioritized areas where progress on indicators is seen as insufficient (***continuous program improvement***).

**RATIONALE/RESEARCH**

Assessment of program quality provides administrators and educators with an on-going understanding of progress in meeting indicators that are tied to improved child outcomes as well as an opportunity to reflect on program goals and objectives and decide on the direction of changes which may be needed to improve outcomes.

Program evaluation is needed by school leaders and communities whenever decisions are being made regarding which elements of programming (e.g. parts of curriculum, assessments, components of daily schedule, RTI, interventions or supports) to continue or to revise and improve. NAEYC, along with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists from the State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE), has issued a joint position statement on early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation, arguing that the three elements are bound up in reciprocal relationships with each other (NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 2009). This policy document emphasizes the need for program evaluation to be used as a tool guiding continuous improvement, to identify children’s gains over time, and to inform decision-making. Programs are encouraged, as well, to recognize the need for high quality, “conceptually and technically sound evidence” (2009, page 2), relevant to program goals (including comprehensive goals such as family engagement when conducting evaluations, in order to provide teachers, families and communities with valid and reliable information regarding program outcomes (NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 2003).

While each school and district has freedom to identify the most relevant assessment tools to use in designing program evaluation, the Department’s website pages on [Accountability, Partnership and Assistance](http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/) provide links to several self-assessment tools aligned with six [key areas of District Standards](http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/ese/accountability/district-standards-indicators.pdf) and with the eleven [Conditions for School Effectiveness](http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/accountability-and-assistance-system-overview.html). Results of a school’s self-assessment may guide the selection of more targeted program evaluation assessment tools. Effective and valid program evaluation is an integral part of the data-use practices expected of any high functioning school (see Provini, 2011; and Reeves, 2015).

# GLOSSARY

The Glossary section has been divided in two parts. Part I provides the definitions of each of the 7 elements as outlined in the Elements document. Part II provides definitions for terms in a ***bold-faced italicized font*** that can be found within the text of the indicators for each of the 7 elements.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Term:** **(in alphabetical Order)** | **Definition:** |
| **Part I** | **Definitions of The Elements:** |
| Assessment of Children | In the publication, “Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What and How” (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008), the authors articulate that assessment is critical to high quality early childhood programs and define assessment as: **“…**gathering information in order to make informed instructional decisions…For younger children, thinking about purpose is equally central. Done well, ongoing assessment can provide invaluable information to parents and educators about how children grow and develop. Developmentally appropriate assessment systems can provide information to highlight what children know and are able to do (page 27)”.  |
| Assessment of Program Quality | A high quality kindergarten program regularly evaluates program quality (on an annual basis, when possible), to better understand and identify factors related to children’s outcomes, in order to guide ongoing program planning and goal-setting. NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) (2003) define program evaluation as “a systematic process of describing the components and outcomes of an intervention or service.”  |
| Curriculum | High quality kindergarten curricula includes:* goals for the knowledge and skills to be acquired, anchored in principles of child development, [state content standards](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/), and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies;
* planned learning experiences linked to these standards;
* daily schedules and routines into which developmentally appropriate activities and opportunities are integrated; and
* availability and organization of materials (adapted from NAEYC; 2003 and 2009).
 |
| Family Engagement | The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA: 2004) defines family engagement as “The participation of parents [family] in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that: * parents [family] play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
* parents [family] are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; and
* parents [family] are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child [Title 1,Section 9101(32), ESEA.]”[[3]](#footnote-3)
 |
| Instruction | High quality instruction consists of the use of developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that are grounded in how children develop and learn and that enhance each child’s development and learning in the context of curriculum goals. |
| Leadership and Professional Development | Teaching staff have the educational qualifications, knowledge, and commitment necessary to promote children’s learning and development, and to support families’ diverse needs and interests (NAEYC). Principals/administrators:* provide teachers with strong instructional leadership in early learning;
* work with teachers to identify high-quality curriculum and developmentally-appropriate practices; and
* align on-going, job-embedded professional development opportunities.
 |
| Learning Environment | The learning environment includes the physical environment, the learning experiences, and the social environment that the child experiences. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Part II:** | **Glossary terms from the indicators** |
| **Terms:** Presented alphabetically, followed by (location(s) in Elements where this term appears) | **Definition:** |
| Academic socialization (Instruction: Rationale) (Source: [research article](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/108158/Academic%20Socialization.pdf?sequence=1)) | ***Academic socialization*** refers to all aspects of the variety of parental beliefs and behaviors that influence children’s school-related development, or all the things parents do and say that influence how their children feel about and behave toward school.  |
| Accessible (1.1d) | Available, or able to be effectively used. A learning environment that is ***accessible*** to all young children, with and without disabilities, is one in which objects and materials are safe, proportioned to the size of a young child, easily reached for independent selection and used by all children, with enough space to support free movement between items as needed, and adequate numbers of items to provide all children with opportunities.  |
| Accessible programming (6.1a) | ***Accessible programming*** in the context of family engagementis the practice of providing scheduling accommodations, transportation, child care translators, or whatever other resources may be required in order to offer options for family members with different economic, cultural, linguistic or other differences based on ability or disability to be able to access school meetings or other resources. In the classroom context, a lesson that uses graphics or video can be made accessible by providing captions or the same material in an audio format or with verbal descriptions; concepts are made more accessible by being presented in multiple ways. In the classroom context, accessible programming is related to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), with its principles of providing multiple means of presentation and multiple means for students to demonstrate their learning.  |
| Authentic discourse (3.1e) | ***Authentic discourse*** is the practice of extended discussion throughout the day to deepen oral language, cognitive engagement and conceptual understanding. Many theorists have argued that social cognition or relationships precede cognitive development, so that when the teacher-child relationship powers meaningful or authentic conversations, these teacher-child conversations can be the driving factor to intentionally engage children in real problem-solving work and active learning.  |
| Background knowledge (2h) | ***Background knowledge*** is what children already know about a topic before they are introduced to any new content that is related in some way to their previous understandings. Research has demonstrated a strong relationship between academic background knowledge and academic achievement: the average correlation between a person's background knowledge of a given topic and the extent to which that person learns new information on that topic. (Marzano, 2004: *Building Academic Background Knowledge*). |
| Centers (3.5c) | ***Centers*** are areas in the classroom where small groups of children may work or play, often defined physically with dividers or furniture as markers of the space dedicated to each, where teachers organize materials and experiences designed intentionally to engage children in an area of curriculum, a theme, or a type of activity. |
| Continuity (5.3b) | An element of developmentally appropriate practice, ***continuity*** is the ability of early childhood educators to inform their practice with an understanding of children’s development that integrates knowledge of typical child development sequences and patterns with their knowledge of individual children and their developmental history, as well as knowledge of the children’s culture and language backgrounds, in order to support growth and learning which builds on and acknowledges the connections between these elements. |
| Continuous program improvement (7d) | Within NAEYC accreditation standards, ***continuous program improvement*** is addressed within standards for Leadership and Management, and refers to annual program evaluation and accountability such that programs are seen to be making measurable improvements related to goals and objectives in all areas of program functioning, including policies and procedures, program quality, children’s progress and learning, and family and community engagement and satisfaction.  |
| Cross-curricular connections (section 3.5) | ***Cross-curricular connections*** refer to instructional practices that involve presentation of curriculum content or processes from one subject area (e.g. art or music, math or literacy) within the context of content or methods from other areas of curriculum, with some emphasis on the relationships between the material from each content domain. For example, when children make up puppet role plays using numbers or letters as the puppet characters, they are integrating the study of letters or numbers and increasing familiarity with those letters or numbers with the demonstration of skills related to ELA standards for speaking and listening.  |
| Developmentally appropriate (5.2a)(Source: [NAEYC](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSDAP.pdf) ) | NAEYC defines ***developmentally appropriate*** practices as those that “result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge: what is known about child development and learning…; what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group and what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live” (Bredekamp & Copple 1997, pgs 8–9). |
| Diversity (1.1e) | ***Diversity*** is the presence or inclusion of individuals or representation from different backgrounds, including but not limited to different races, ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, genders, and/or socio- economic levels.  |
| Dynamic partnerships (3.6b) | ***Dynamic partnerships*** are found in classrooms where teacher-child relationships are actively reciprocal, such that educators seek to incorporate a balance between child- and teacher- directed learning experiences, and the ideas of the children are frequently used as springboards for planning further investigations, lessons or experiences. |
| Embedded instruction (3.1b) | ***Embedded instruction*** is a research-based teaching strategy or approach used to promote child engagement, learning, and independence in everyday activities, routines, and transitions. This is accomplished by identifying times and activities when instructional procedures designed for teaching a child’s priority learning targets are implemented in the context of ongoing [naturally-occurring] activities, routines, and transitions in the classroom. See [professional development research](https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pdf/PD_2015.pdf) by the National Center for Special Education Research, a branch of IES (2006-2015). |
| Embedded assessment practices (4a) | ***Embedded assessment practices*** are celebrated by NAEYC as a part of developmentally appropriate practice; see examples in an article on “[Joyful Learning and Assessment in Kindergarten](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201005/YCOnOurMindsOnline0510.pdf)” in the May 2010 issue of Young Children. When assessment is embedded, it makes use of ongoing observation of child behavior and performance in a variety of classroom contexts over time in order to determine when each child masters any given concept. Embedded assessment is a formative assessment practice that accepts the importance of respecting the need for young children to interact with concepts in ways that delight and engage them, and the importance of recognizing that in early childhood, skill levels within one class will exist across a continuum or range of mastery. As a result children are not likely to demonstrate skills all on the same day during a formal assessment; instead, teachers need to observe each child across time to determine when a child is ready to move on to the next step in a curriculum sequence. |
| Evidence-based assessments (4c) | ***Evidence-based assessments*** are tools used to measure skills and abilities which have been determined by research to be valid and reliable in the context or for the purpose which they are being used. This includes that the assessment tools or measures have been shown to be valid and reliable with the particular population of children being assessed. |
| Experiential learning (3.3a) | Broadly, ***experiential learning*** is any learning that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or situations. Experiential learning is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing, learning through experience, and learning through discovery and exploration, all which are clearly defined by these well known maxims: “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.” ~ Confucius, 450 BC “Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I will learn.” ~ Benjamin Franklin, 1750 “There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education.” ~ John Dewey, 1938. ([adapted from a web-posting at Northern Illinois University](http://www.niu.edu/facdev/_pdf/guide/strategies/experiential_learning.pdf)). Experiential learning is viewed by many as an essential element of developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education (see [Field & Bauml’s article](https://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201409/YC0914_Our_Proud_Heritage.pdf) in the September 2014 issue of *Young Children*.) |
| Flexible learning environment (1.5b) | A ***flexible learning environment*** is a space responsive to the changing needs of students and curriculum. By definition, a flexible learning environment is one where options for the use of space are adaptable to individual differences as well as to the demands of different content domains, where materials by design are more open-ended and can be used in multiple ways, where children are empowered to make choices regarding how they best learn, (e.g. reading or working while sitting, standing, lying on a rug, or standing; alone, in pairs or in small groups) and where the space can be redesigned and materials changed on a regular basis to accommodate new centers as well as a range of activities in different configurations. |
| Higher order thinking (3.1c, 3.2d) | ***Higher order thinking*** is a term with multiple meanings, including: 1) the ability to apply knowledge learned in one context to another, or to generalize understanding from one situation to another; 2) critical thinking, involving skills at the higher end of Bloom’s taxonomy (evaluation, synthesis or creation, and analysis), and aimed at reflecting or making rational and informed decisions; and 3) problem-solving, or the ability to figure out solutions in situations not previously encountered. (Definition informed by content taken from the ASCD website, including the [Introduction to a 2010 book by Susan Brookhart](http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109111/chapters/Introduction.aspx), on assessing higher order thinking skills).  |
| Incremental challenges (3.1c) | Providing students with ***incremental challenges*** refers to the application of a skilled teacher’s complex understanding of developmental sequences in any particular continuum of skills within child development, and that teacher’s ability to ask the right questions, design the appropriate activities, or provide just the right level of scaffolding or support to challenge students to perform at their highest or maximal level, on the path toward each child’s eventual skill mastery and independence.  |
| Inquiry (1.3a)  | ***Inquiry*** or inquiry-based learning is a teaching strategy or method practiced in many different forms, but which in general involves engaging children in a variety of complex thinking skills, including raising questions and investigating the answers, conducting explorations and observation, using tools to extend and deepen these processes, creating and carrying out investigations, and working collaboratively with others at various points along the way. Engaging children in collaborative inquiry is a NAEYC accreditation criteria or expected teaching practice within the Teaching standard (3.G.09).  |
| Developmentally appropriate instructional feedback (5.1a) | ***Instructional feedback*** from principals or supervisors in the early childhood classroom should focus on the degree to which instruction is or is not developmentally appropriate (DA). According to NAEYC descriptions of DAP, this means observational feedback should emphasize whether teaching practices demonstrate a match between the abilities and interests of the children and the expectations of the curriculum and teaching methods. Research has shown that a central characteristic of effective instructional practice in early childhood is effective teacher-child interactions in classroom instruction, including that interactions demonstrate positive relationships and teacher sensitivity to children’s needs and ideas. Supervisors should provide feedback on the extent to which they observe teachers listening to children and responding intentionally with modeling or comments and actions that build student understanding and behavior. See [What is DAP with Kindergarteners?](http://www.naeyc.org/dap/kindergarteners) and [Teacher-Child Interactions Research Summary](http://info.teachstone.com/research-summary-teacher-child-interactions-early-childhood).  |
| Integrated learning opportunities (1.3a) | ***Integrated learning opportunities*** in the early learning context refer to the interweaving of child-directed play and learning with adult led learning and guided play and learning experiences across the schedule of the day. Integrated teaching and learning means that early childhood professionals build inquiry opportunities in early childhood programs for children to interact with their environment, both physical and social, in response to their own hypotheses or curiosity about how their world works, *and* to interact with other children and professionals to extend this learning. Intentional teaching in this context requires responsive engagement with professionals who assess each child’s existing knowledge and plan for learning experiences that build these competencies, or move children forward in their learning from where they are in terms of their understanding using real life examples to make learning engaging and relevant. |
| Integrated observations (1.1a) | ***Integrated observations*** within the context of science exploration in an intentionally designed early childhood classroom refers to the practice of incorporating opportunities for children to actively interact with objects and activities in a hands-on way that allows them to observe and find out about how things in the everyday world work. For example, the theme of leaves in fall could be incorporated into a variety of activities that give children opportunities to observe and interact with leaves in multiple ways: counting leaves, jumping in leaves, sorting leaves, moving like leaves in the wind, examining leaves with a magnifier. |
| Intentionality (section 3.2) | ***Intentionality*** refers to teaching practices which are purposeful and goal-oriented in all areas of instructional practice, from lesson or learning environment and materials planning, or classroom management and child engagement, to all aspects of teacher child interactions, including questioning, feedback to children, and listening to and responding to child language and thinking, and creating an emotional climate in the classroom. As Ann Epstein expresses it in her book, “the teacher who can explain just why she is doing what she is doing is acting intentionally” (page 4, The Intentional Teacher, NAEYC, 2014).  |
| Intentionally designed (1.1a)  | See Intentionality, above. |
| Intentionally plan (3.2a)  | See Intentionality, above. |
| Learning continuum (5.3b) | In the context of the practice of vertical alignment (see below), the ***learning continuum*** for young children is the sequence and range of content knowledge and skills that are expected to be mastered across the grade levels (Pre-K-Grade 3) and early childhood age range (about age 3-8). A ***learning continuum*** in any given subject area is a sequence of skills that build in complexity from one level to the next. Initial skills provide the foundation of background knowledge necessary in order to begin learning skills at the next level. The learning skills are cumulative. This means that current instructional skills are in addition to skills acquired at earlier levels. |
| Mastery play (3.3a) | ***Mastery play*** consists of child-initiated play activities (games, role-playing, enjoyment) including interactions with either physical or social environments) in which the child exerts control over either physical or affective aspects of the environment which results in increased knowledge and skills. For example digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires, taking on social roles as family members or acting out different professions, etc. are different forms of mastery play.  |
| Metacognition (3.3a) | ***Metacognition*** is thinking about thinking, or a type of higher thinking that includes analysis and evaluation of one’s own thinking in order to make more conscious and active strategic decisions regarding how to direct or control one’s own cognitive processes, particularly in the context of learning. |
| Modeling (1.5b) | ***Modeling*** is the act of teaching children through the example of doing or acting out the desired behavior. |
| Monitor (5.1a) | ***Monitor*** in the context of the leadership skills listed refers to keeping track of and responding to needs in the areas being monitored. For example, when principals monitor class size and see that it is likely to become larger than is optimal, they respond in a variety of ways to mitigate the stresses of large class size, by adding new classes, advocating that more teachers or aides be hired, bringing in more volunteers, or recruiting student teachers.  |
| Playful learning (1.3a, 2d, 3.1d, 3.4c, 5.2a) | ***Playful learning*** is a construct gaining increasing attention in recent years as educators’ recognition of the need to integrate standards-based instruction with developmentally appropriate teaching practices has gained momentum. ***Playful learning*** refers to the intentional use of play as a pathway to learning, or the design of classroom environments and lesson structures which capitalize on the recognition of children’s intrinsic love of play and of the multiple uses of many forms of play (dramatic, constructive, turn-taking games, mastery, etc.) as powerful vehicles for developing language, cognition, self-regulation and social competence. |
| Pro-social behavior (1.5b) | ***Pro-social behavior*** is defined as showing concern, cooperation, kindness, and consideration for others; demonstrating a sense of caring for others. |
| Role playing (1.5b) | ***Role playing*** in the context of creating caring communities of learning (a subsection of the Learning Environments Element) is the process of taking on the language, actions and/or emotional expressions of a person who has a particular part in a given situation. Role playing includes make-believe or pretend play as well as use of assigned roles such as small group leader, recorder, illustrator, or being the one to pass out and collect materials. ***Role playing*** is an instructional approach and a natural play behavior with the power to teach or facilitate social skills and social understanding, behaviors and attitudes such as cooperation, honesty, respect, conflict resolution, perspective taking, and self-control. |
| Scaffolding (1.5b, 3.1) | ***Scaffolding*** is defined by the Division of Early Childhood within the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC-CEC) in their [recommended practices glossary](http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices) as referring to any learning situation in which a teacher provides physical, verbal or non-verbal hints or prompts to support the learner and then gradually over time withdraws these supports as the learner becomes able to engage in the learning with increasing independence. |
| School site council (6.5b) | The ***school site council,*** or ***school council,*** according to MA law, is an advisory group established to work with and advise each principal, particularly with regard to development of the required annual school improvement plan (SIP) and district curriculum accommodation plan. According to the statute (M.G.L Chapter 71, 59C), members of the school council must include the principal, parents, teachers and community representatives.  |
| Screening (4c) (Source: [NAEYC](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/CAPEexpand.pdf)) | ***Screening*** is the use of a brief procedure or assessment instrument designed to identify children who may benefit from more in-depth assessment in order to verify developmental and/or health risks. Although screening tools are brief and appear simple, they must meet strict technical standards for test construction and be culturally and linguistically relevant. Only staff with sufficient training should conduct screening; families should be involved as important sources of information about the child; and, when needed, there should always be referrals to further specialized assessment and intervention. Screening is only a first step, and is always linked to follow-up. Screening may be used to identify children who should be observed further for a possible delay or problem. However, screening should not be used to diagnose children as having special needs, to prevent children from entering a program, or to assign children to a specific intervention solely on the basis of the screening results. Additionally, screening results should not be used as indicators of program effectiveness. |
| Self-directed play (3.3a) | ***Self-directed play*** is play in which children have the freedom to determine the direction and content of their play activities as they choose. This means that the children playing have the opportunity to add in or take out objects, roles, or other elements of the play as they see fit, with only the limits of the time, space, and materials provided or available (and any safety concerns brought to their attention by supervising adults). |
| Self-initiated learning (1.3a) | ***Self-initiated learning*** is learning activities which are selected or chosen by the child or individual. |
| Self-reflection (3.2b) | ***Self-reflection*** is the ability to reflect on and evaluate the results of one’s actions and decisions. Self-reflection is one of the two standards (SEL12) making up the objectives for responsible decision making, one of the five core social emotional competencies included in the [MA Pre-K Standards for Social Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning](http://www.doe.mass.edu/kindergarten/SEL-APL-Standards.pdf). |
| Self-regulation (1.5b) | ***Self-regulation*** is defined slightly differently in different contexts. The definition within the [MA Pre-K Standards for Social Emotional Learning and Approaches to Play and Learning](http://www.doe.mass.edu/kindergarten/SEL-APL-Standards.pdf) is controlling one’s behaviors to conform to social norms.. The Division of Early Childhood within the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC-CEC) defines self regulation in their [recommended practices glossary](http://www.dec-sped.org/dec-recommended-practices) as the capacity to control one’s impulses to stop doing something (even if one desires to continue doing it) and to start doing something if needed (even if one doesn’t want to do it).  |
| Sensory breaks (1.1a) | ***Sensory breaks*** are an accommodation provided to students (with or without sensory integration disabilities) whose capacity to focus and learn, or to self-regulate and balance their sensory systems, benefits from the opportunity to experience movement, reduced or changed stimuli, or to re-center with some change in activity. The type of sensory break needed for each student will depend on their sensory profile or neurological needs. Sensory breaks may range from running an errand to increase arousal, to moving to a quiet corner, or group movement games, and are a proactive way to avoid sensory overload and breakdowns. |
| Social cognition (3.3a) | ***Social cognition*** is thinking about or developing understanding regarding how we interact with others and what works and does not. **Social cognition** is also defined as a sub-topic of social psychology that focuses on how people process, store, and apply information about other people and social situations. It focuses on the role that cognitive processes play in our social interactions.  |
| Social emotional competencies (1.4a) | There are five ***social emotional competencies*** identified by the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning ([CASEL](http://www.casel.org/)), and included in the [Massachusetts PreK and Kindergarten Standards for Social Emotional Learning](http://www.doe.mass.edu/kindergarten/SEL-APL-Standards.pdf). The five ***social emotional competencies*** are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Definitions for each are included in the standards and on the CASEL website.  |
| Student choice and authentic voice (section 3.6) | Another element of developmentally appropriate practice, ***student choice*** and ***authentic voice*** refer to the strategy of encouraging children to choose and plan their own learning activities, in order to support development of initiative, language and thinking skills, to help children identify their areas of greater interest and to have the opportunity to extend their thinking and deepen their engagement. As Copple and Bredecamp say “Choices empower children to be active thinkers who challenge themselves” (page 206, DAP, 2009). |
| Teacher guided play (3.3a) | ***Teacher guided play*** includes a wide variety of student-teacher interactions in both one-to-one and group situations which include teacher facilitation, modeling, or suggestions, such as when a teacher comments on a child’s construction to encourage them to reflect on what might happen next, when a teacher leads Simon Says or group movement activities by modeling or providing verbal directions, when a teacher sets up a center or provides a set of materials related to a theme he/she encourages children to explore, or when the teacher provides labels or signs related to a pretend play scenario and reminds the children what each one says in the course of engaging as a participant in play.  |
| Transitions (1.3b) | In the context of this indicator, ***transitions*** are changes in activities during the school day which require children to stop what they are doing and move from one location to another, often with the need to put away and/or take out new materials, and also to change which adults/teachers are in charge of their supervision. Transitions are a time of change or moving children from one activity or place to another and provide rich opportunities for continued learning and assessment. |
| Transition practices (5.1c) | ***Transition practices*** in the context of primary school leadership refers to administrative or principal’s actions toward families and with community based early childhood providers to support children as they move from preK to Kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade. Effective transition practices vary widely, but may include meetings with community providers, teacher classroom visits between schools; orientation meetings for families; screening and placement practices; and many more activities focused on providing a developmentally appropriate transition for all children. |
| Vertical alignment (5.3b) | ***Vertical alignment*** is the educational practice of examining any or all elements of education across grade levels, such as standards, materials, content and teaching strategies, comparing each grade level’s work with the grades before and after, and based on this analysis, altering instruction as needed to ensure there is logic and consistency in the order chosen for teaching the content in a subject area from one grade level to the next. |

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2. Consistent with Curriculum indicators 2 g. and h. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Department of Education, "Parent Involvement Title I, Part A, Non-regulatory Guidance," (Washington, DC, 2004). Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc> (Select “cancel” when asked for login id and password). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)