**ELEMENTS OF HIGH QUALITY EARLY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: Grades 1-3**

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# 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

1. Classrooms are intentionally designed to support learning through active engagement with peers and the environment. The classroom has:
* ***centers***/areas and materials to support children's development and learning in all domains and subject areas, a storage system that makes appropriate materials readily and independently 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*** and emotional ***breaks***,
* space for motor breaks 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. The learning environment is safe with adequate space, light, and temperature.
2. The learning environment, including all areas and materials, is ***accessible*** to all children including children with disabilities.
3. Classroom visuals and other learning including mastery objectives (can-do descriptors, daily schedules, tiered groupings, etc.) are posted as appropriate for content and student performance levels.
4. Classroom visuals and materials including photos, reflect a diversity of races, cultures, abilities, gender and age.

## 1.2 Outdoor Environment

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. Outdoor areas include variety of elements that promote the exploration of the natural environment to promote inquiry, ***self-regulation***, and an understanding of the relationship between living things and the environment.
3. 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

1. The principal and the teaching staff develop a daily schedule of learning that reflects ***integrated learning opportunities*** which incorporate time for:
* focus on curricular goals;
* rich and ***playful learning***;
* self-initiated learning; and
* creative expression, ***inquiry*** and exploration, both indoor and outdoor, with activities that include opportunities for varied groups, including individual, large group, paired and small group.
1. The schedule includes sufficient time to address meaningful instruction in all content areas, including social emotional learning, social studies, and the arts.
2. The schedule is constructed to minimize changes in teachers as well as ***transitions*** for children from group to group.
3. The teaching staff explicitly teach routines to facilitate ***transitions***.
4. The teaching staff provide predictable but flexible and varied ***transitions*** that are purposeful and intentionally support children’s learning and needs.
5. 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.

## 1.4 Interactions

1. The teaching staff build personal connections and relationships with children in order to build children’s language, ***social emotional competencies***, and content learning. Teaching staff:
* greet each child at the beginning and end of every day, including those who enter the classroom late;
* form close supportive relationships that encourage children to take risks, explore and engage in the learning process;
* 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 learning activities by talking and interacting with them and with materials to deepen and extend children’s thinking.
2. The teaching staff:
* cultivate children’s ownership and belonging by building a sense of responsibility, confidence, competence and citizenship; and
* provide support such as ***peer pairing***, ***social scripts*** and specific instruction to develop a supportive and accepting classroom climate.

## 1.5 Creating Caring Communities for Learning

1. Children have access to school-based resources to address health and social emotional or interpersonal need (social workers, guidance counselors or school adjustment counselors, school nurse, etc.).
2. The teaching staff inform families of school based resources, programs and approaches intended to address the health and social emotional needs of children.
3. The teaching staff support children to develop age appropriate social skills and behaviors through a positive, predictable and flexible learning environment. The teaching staff:
* help children understand emotion to support them to gain 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 labeling, genuine modeling, ***scaffolding***, and ***role playing*** to support children as they learn social skills, behaviors, and attitudes;
* model by interpreting social situations in ways that show empathy 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. The teaching staff create a climate of mutual respect and a secure emotional environment that enables children to explore and learn.
2. The teaching staff design activities to foster an inclusive environment including:
* proactively prevent bullying/harassment, recognize and report bullying
* demonstrate an understanding and sensitivity to the effects of bullying and the importance of following district procedures in reporting;
* teach ***conflict resolution skills***; and
* develop children’s ***self advocacy skills***.

# ELEMENT 2: CURRICULUM

**DEFINITION**

High quality early elementary 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/), vertically and horizontally aligned, and implemented through developmentally appropriate teaching strategies;
* planned integrated learning experiences linked to these standards; and
* daily schedules and routines into which developmentally appropriate activities and opportunities are integrated. (adapted from NAEYC; 2003 and 2009).

**INDICATORS**

## 2. Curriculum

1. Design and implementation of curriculum content is rigorous, engaging and tailored to children’s ages, interests, developmental capacities, language, culture, and abilities/ disabilities.
2. Curriculum is comprehensive, sequential and progressive, integrated across content areas and encompasses critical areas of development, including:
* health and wellness;
* large and fine motor
* social-emotional;
* language;
* cognition, including number concepts and general knowledge; and
* content areas such as math, science/technology and engineering, social studies and the arts.
1. Curriculum includes opportunities for intentionally integrating exploration and inquiry in content area topics.
2. Opportunities for critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity are planned and integrated throughout all curriculum areas.
3. Curriculum builds on ***background knowledge***, prior learning and experiences, and provides opportunities to advance learning.
4. Design and implementation of curriculum content is rigorous, engaging and tailored to children’s ages, interests, developmental capacities, language, culture, and abilities/ disabilities.
5. The curriculum supports the teaching staff’s ability to:
* 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 for academic and social learning;
* integrate curriculum and real-life situations to help students make connections between the classroom and their community; and
* offer classroom experiences that promote higher level thinking skills while stimulating children’s curiosity, experimentation, brainstorming, and problem solving.
1. Curriculum is accessible and inclusive of all children with and without disabilities.

# 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 viewed as a pathway for student learning, one that promotes a core classroom pedagogy to enrich students' love of learning and creativity. *Playful learning* opportunities, those learning experiences that support critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity, are foundational to the delivery of standards based curriculum aligned with the MA Curriculum Frameworks.**

## 3.1 *Intentionality*

1. The teaching staff intentionally plan classroom activities and interactions, including ***playful learning*** opportunities, by:
* observing each child 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;
* using their knowledge of optimal child-teacher ratios when designing activities; and
* using their knowledge of standards based learning 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 children’s daily schedule, in order to build children’s organizational and self-assessment 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.

## 3.2 Opportunities for *Interdisciplinary Connections*

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 inquiry opportunities 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 learning areas that incorporate content learning as well as social-emotional learning and provide children with opportunities to explore, ask questions, make choices, work together, solve problems and use their imaginations.

## 3.3 *Student Choice and Authentic Voice*

1. 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 considering the child’s culture, language, social-emotional and developmental needs, where children's feedback is valued and drives the planning and learning opportunities offered in the classroom.
3. 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 provides 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.
6. The teaching staff encourage and provide varied modes for children to describe in detail the outcomes of their plans and to use those outcomes as stepping stones to new plans.

## 3.4 *Differentiation*

1. The teaching staff provide the resources, background or information each child will 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 including children with disabilities and English language learners, can participate together; skillfully breaking down tasks 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, entering groups, turn taking, and collaborating;
* using ***embedded instruction*** that includes active learning based on prior knowledge;
* offering opportunities for children’s choice as a way to extend and deepen learning; 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 (***zone of proximal development***) 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. Teaching staff explicitly plan for and scaffold opportunities for ***playful learning*** throughout the day and help children enter into and sustain high quality learning activities, 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 gradually reduce ***scaffolding*** as children's skills develop, until the task or activity can be performed independently.

## 3.5 Range of Learning Opportunities

1. The teaching staff plan and provide opportunities for:
* various types of ***playful learning***, from sensory to mastery, and active learning that contribute to children’s development, including: language, construction, engineering, large and small-motor and cooperative learning, project based learning, service learning;
* playful and active learning 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;
* promote curiosity and inquiry;
* problem solve around interesting questions posed by children or adults; and
* engage with different types of materials to facilitate their learning.
1. The teaching staff plan and provide opportunities to build social-emotional competencies including: self-regulation, conflict resolution, and self-advocacy.

## 3.6 *Reciprocal Relationship between Language and Learning*

1. The teaching staff intentionally:
* plan to engage in two-way conversations with children throughout the school day;
* provide opportunities for children to engage in conversations with peers and adults through playful and active learning; and
* listen attentively to children's plans, interpret and expand on what children do and say, and ask questions that provoke and encourage children to think more deeply.
1. 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.
2. 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. The teaching staff intentionally scaffold language development, with strategies that include the following:
* providing visual supports and explicit introduction and modeling of vocabulary to support positive interactions between adults and children and children and their peers;
* 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.

# ELEMENT 4: ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

**DEFINITION**

The U.S. Department of Education defines Preschool through Grade 3 ***assessment*** as “a coordinated and comprehensive system of multiple assessments– each of which is valid and reliable for its specified purpose and for the population with which it will be used–that organizes information about the process and context of young children's learning and development in order to help early childhood educators make informed instructional and programmatic decisions.” (2011)

“These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop.” (NAEYC 2003)

**INDICATORS**

## 4. Assessment for Learning and Development

1. ***School leaders*** and teaching staff design on-going informal formative 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 large and fine motor, social-emotional, language and cognition;
	+ involve collecting evidence using multiple sources of information, such as: observation notes, child work samples, conversations with adults and peers, language samples, other ways children can represent their thinking, and feedback from families and other specialists/ providers that are working with the child, etc.; and
	+ use assessment results to guide curriculum planning, guide learning environments, inform individualized student supports, and support ongoing communication with families.
1. ***School leaders*** and teaching staff select formal assessment tools that:
* are ***evidence-based*** and used as an opportunity to collect information on a child’s strengths, challenges, and areas for growth;
* align measurement with goals and objectives that the teaching staff have for the child;
* are used for the purpose for which they were created and are grounded in the developmental continuum of each child’s goals and objectives; and
* are part of a ***cycle of assessment*** that includes informal and formal practices to regularly monitor student growth.
1. ***School leaders*** dedicate time to professional development, common planning, and other reflective opportunities for teaching staff to:
* review and reflect on formal and informal assessment results with colleagues, including related service providers and specialists;
* review data in the area of child outcomes, including looking at student work;
* examine data to identify trends in subgroups such as: gender, race, English language learner, economic status, etc.;
* examine potential needs regarding adjustment of instructional practices to allow each child to access curriculum; and
* make plans for next steps to ensure student growth and progress.
1. ***School leaders*** and teaching staff differentiate instruction by:
* identifying assessment tools and strategies that support the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of children and families; and
* ensuring that all children participate in appropriate assessment activities, regardless of performance level and in accordance with needed accommodations.
1. ***School leaders*** and teaching staff involve families in the assessment process by:
* providing ongoing, two way, ***culturally sensitive communication*** with families regarding children's progress;
* ensuring access for all families through multiple methods, e.g. translation, phone calls, etc.;
* supporting families in identifying and securing school and community resources when appropriate; and
* ensuring assessment data is kept confidential and that written releases are required from the family if data is to be shared.

# 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 grades Preschool through grade 3;
* work with teachers to identify high-quality curriculum, culturally responsive and developmentally-appropriate practices; and
* align on-going, job-embedded professional development opportunities, including coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, leadership development etc.

**INDICATORS**

## 5.1 Leadership Skills of Principals/Administrators

1. Principal/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, safe and healthy environments (see Element 1);
* providing feedback from observations, that reflects ***culturally responsive***, ***developmentally appropriate*** instruction and support of social emotional growth; and
* tailoring materials, schedules and space to Preschool through grade 3 students.
1. Principals/Administrators support ***culturally responsive*** and ***developmentally appropriate*** ***transition practices*** as they relate to children in Preschool through grade 3 and their families.
2. Principals/Administrators understand the need for and encourage teaching staff to get to know children and plan for their success at the beginning of the year.

## 5.2 Professional Development for Principals and Other Elementary Administrators

1. Principals/Administrators seek out professional development/knowledge around:
* all aspects of child development;
* ***developmentally appropriate*** instructional practices in academic and non-academic areas,
* elements of a key learning environment for children in grade Preschool through grade 3; and
* current shifts in learning standards, curriculum and instruction practices.

## 5.3 Planning and Delivery of Professional Development for Teaching Staff

Principal/Administrators:

1. provide joint professional development for all staff working with children.
2. regularly bring together Preschool through grade 3 staff to better understand the ***learning continuum*** of young children and support ***vertical alignment*** to ensure ***continuity*** in ***developmentally appropriate*** practices.
3. ensure that school personnel (e.g., clerical, cafeteria, custodial, maintenance and bus staff, etc.) receive information about ***developmentally appropriate*** ways to interact with children in Preschool through grade 3.
4. ensure training opportunities for all teaching staff in child development, with an emphasis on the early years and the connection to children’s learning in all domains.
5. monitor and support teachers’ understanding and ability to use assessment tools appropriately in the education of young children.
6. provide ongoing support to ensure that the daily learning environment, learning experiences, classroom management and teacher-child interactions reflect the children’s developmental stage.
7. ensure that teaching staff are competent in culturally and linguistically appropriate communication with families.
8. provide differentiated professional development based on the particular needs of the grade level and staff within a given grade level.
9. provide training opportunities that may include: professional learning communities, follow up, and in class support by classroom coaches or administrators, etc.
10. provide training opportunities to teaching staff that addresses vertical alignment by including interactions between preschool, kindergarten, and early elementary (Grade 1-3) teachers, when possible.
11. foster professional development opportunities with community-based partners, such as preschools, private schools, charter schools, after-school, out-of-school time programs and local business to ensure high quality learning opportunities across a child’s day and/or across the Preschool through grade 3.

# ELEMENT 6: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

**DEFINITION**

“Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families, schools, afterschool programs, and communities. It is a continuous process, based on family strengths, that takes place from birth to young adulthood. It happens across multiple learning settings, including the home, school, and community, where families are empowered as decision makers and leaders.” (Harvard Family Research Project, 2014)

INDICATORS

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

## 6.1 Welcoming All Stakeholders

1. All school and classroom staff welcome all families and work to create respectful and supportive collaborative relationships.

## 6.2 Communicating Effectively

1. Systems for two-way communication exist. The teaching staff and families communicate with one another on an on-going basis :
* using family’s primary language; and
* using multiple communication paths (phone, electronic, written, and face to face).
1. School leaders and the teaching staff see home visits as a way to build relationships with families and establish individualized communication systems.
2. School leaders 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;
* how to understand confidentiality;
* what proficient work looks like; and
* sharing understandings about individual children’s learning and development.

## 6.3 Supporting the Success of Children

1. In support of children’s learning, school leaders and educators honor the diversity of families in their school by ensuring responsiveness including:
* providing key information to families in their primary language, whether spoken or written;
* inviting families to share knowledge about their culture;
* incorporating children’s home culture and experiences into the school’s climate and culture and reflecting it through the curriculum.
1. School and community groups collaborate with families to support learning at home, at school and in the community.

## 6.4 Advocating for Each Child and Youth

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

## 6.5 Sharing Power and Responsibility

1. School leaders and teaching staff provide many and varied opportunities to involve all families in decision making related to program policies and classroom 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

1. School administrators and teaching staff develop partnerships and 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 moving between grades or programs.
2. District, school and teaching staff participate in local community group work related to Preschool through grade 3 education, and support cultural groups served by the district, school and/or classroom.

# ELEMENT 7: ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM QUALITY

**DEFINITION**

A high quality Preschool through grade 3 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 goals for program quality are shared with all stakeholders.
	3. The principal and teaching staff select and align measurement tools and other mechanisms to reliably and accurately measure progress on said indicators.
	4. 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, and child outcomes.
	5. The principal and teaching staff dedicate time to professional development, teacher planning, 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***).

# Glossary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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 (1.1c) | 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.  |
| AssessmentFormative, informal and formal (4) | ***Formative assessment*** can be a formal or informal planned act which provides evidence about students’ learning and assists in the planning process. |
| Authentic discourse (3.6d) | ***Authentic discourse*** is the practice of extended discussion throughout the day to deepen oral language, cognitive engagement and conceptual understanding.  |
| Background knowledge (2e) | ***Background knowledge*** is what children know before a topic is introduced that is related in some way to their previous understandings.  |
| Centers (1.1a.) | ***Centers*** are areas in the classroom where small groups of children may work or play with a specific utility and a common focus. Teachers intentionally organize materials in these spaces to engage children in learning. |
| Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grantee (6.6a) | Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grantees are locally based programs serving families with children birth through school age. There are five main goals of the CFCE program: Increase knowledge of and accessibility to high-quality early education and care programs and services for families with children prenatal through school-age; promote parent education, family engagement and early literacy; facilitate collaboration and community planning between local early education and care partners and other community stake holders, including parents; provide support and information to families with children transitioning between and among early education and care settings, home and school; and support early education and care programs across the public and private sectors in delivering high-quality service. |
| Conflict resolution skills (1.5e) | ***Conflict resolution skills*** are those skills needed to reacha peaceful solution to a disagreement. |
| Continuity (5.3b) | ***Continuity*** is the ability of early childhood educators to inform their practice using their understanding of child development to support growth and learning. |
| Continuous program improvement (7e) | ***Continuous program improvement*** is the process of developing goals and objectives in all areas of program functioning and then monitoring progress on those goals. |
| Culturally Responsive (5.1a, b) | ***Culturally responsive*** pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students’ unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student’s cultural place in the world. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/sel/sel-all.pdf>“Culturally responsive teaching is using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. The use of cultural referents in teaching bridges and explains the mainstream culture, while validating and affirming students’ own cultures. Culturally responsive teaching uses students’ identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments.” Gay & Ladson-Billings (2013). The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Curriculum Inquiry. 43:1. |
| Cultural sensitive communication (4.e) | Communicating in a ***culturally sensitive*** way is accomplished though communication that respects and accepts cultural differences and is delivered with an awareness of and addresses the native language needs. |
| Cycle of assessment (4.b) | ***Cycle of assessment*** includes observing, asking questions, collecting evidence, interpreting evidence and taking action. |
| Developmentally appropriate (5.1b, 5.2, 5.3b)(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). |
| Differentiation (3.4) | Carol Ann Tomlinson has said, ***differentiation*** is an organized, yet flexible way of proactively adjusting teaching and learning methods to accommodate each child's learning needs and preferences to achieve maximum growth as a learner |
| Dynamic partnerships (3.3b) | ***Dynamic partnerships*** are created by teacher-child relationships that 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 (3.4b) | ***Embedded instruction*** is a teaching strategy that makes use of everyday activities, routines and transitions to integrate targeted learning goals. |
| Evidence-based assessments (4b) | ***Evidence-based assessments*** are valid and reliable tools used to measure children’s skills and abilities for the purpose which they are designed.  |
| Experiential learning (3.5a) | ***Experiential learning*** is any learning that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or situations.  |
| Higher order thinking (3.1d, 3.4c) | ***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 (3.4c) | 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 to provide just the right level of scaffolding challenge students to perform at their highest or maximal level.  |
| Inquiry (1.3a)  | ***Inquiry*** or inquiry-based learning is a teaching strategy or method which 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.  |
| Interdisciplinary connections (3.2) | Fostering the skill of ***interdisciplinary connections*** can occur through a process that (a) explicitly defines the skill for children, (b) organizes their thinking around a universal concept, big idea, or overarching theme, and (c) provides time for children to generate and share their connections.  |
| 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.  |
| Intentionality (3.1) | ***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, to all aspects of teacher child interactions, including questioning, feedback to children, and listening to and responding to child language and thinking, and creating a safe and supportive emotional climate in the classroom.  |
| Learning continuum (5.3b) | 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).  |
| Modeling (1.5c) | ***Modeling*** is the act of teaching children through the example of doing or acting out the desired behavior. |
| Peer pairing (1.4c) | ***Peer pairing*** is a type of collaborative learning that involves children working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts or find solutions to problems.  |
| Playful learning (1.3a, f, 3.1a, 3.4d, 3.6b, c,) | ***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. |
| Reciprocal Relationship between Language and Learning (3.6) | ***Language*** facilitates ***learning***. Through interactions with adults and collaboration with classmates, children learn things they could not accomplish on their own. Adults guide and support children as they move from their current level of knowledge toward a more advanced level |
| Role playing (1.5c) | ***Role playing*** 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 (1.5c, 3.4b, e) | ***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 leaders (4a-e) | ***School leaders*** include principals, assistant principals, or other individuals who are responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in an elementary school or secondary school building. |
| 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.  |
| Self-advocacy skills (1.5e) | ***Self-advocacy*** is the skill children develop and use to communicate their needs, feelings, and concerns to other people including their peers.  |
| Self-directed play (3.5a) | ***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 (3.1b) | ***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 (1.2b, 1.5c) | ***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 opportunities 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.  |
| Social cognition (3.5a) | ***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.  |
| Social scripts (1.4.c) | ***Social scripts*** provide pre-taught language for specific situations. They can involve conversation starters, responses and ideas to connect conversations or change the topic. Social scripts can reduce the stress associated with social interactions and assist the child with independently navigating individual social dynamics. (Kamps et al., 2002). |
| Student choice and authentic voice (3.3) | ***Student choice*** and ***authentic voice*** refer to the strategy of encouraging children to choose and plan their own learning activities, in order to support the 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.  |
| Teacher guided play (3.5a) | ***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. |
| Transitions (1.3c-f) | ***Transitions*** are a time of change or moving children from one activity, cognitive focus, or place to another. Transitions should be preceded with notice and can provide rich opportunities for continued learning and assessment. |
| Transition practices (5.1b) | ***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 pre-K 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. |
| Universal Design for Learning (3.4b) | ***Universal design for learning*** means proactive, intentional planning for five elements: the environment, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and family involvement to meet the needs of the broadest range of students. There are three principles of UDL: provide multiple means of representation, provide multiple means of action and expression, and provide multiple means of engagement. [http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl/conceptofudl)](http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.WwMlyUgvyUk) |
| Vertical alignment (5.3b) | ***Vertical alignment*** is the educational practice of examining all elements of education across grade levels to ensure seamless transition and coordination of practices as students matriculate.  |
| Zone of Proximal Development (3.4c) | As defined by Vygotsky (1978) a child’s “***zone of proximal development***” is the range of tasks that the child can perform with guidance from others but cannot yet perform independently.  |