

## Context

The NYC DOE Division of Early Childhood Education is committed to ensuring that all students leave our prekindergarten programs prepared for success. This means that program leaders and teachers are responsible for developing a culture of inclusion that values all students and communicates high expectations for learning.

Principles of developmentally appropriate practice say that learning in preschool occurs at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly for each child across the domains of development.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, both children with disabilities and those that are typically developing benefit from a classroom setting that builds students' cognitive, language, physical and social-emotional skills.

The following guidelines and resources will assist program leaders and teachers in understanding how to establish an inclusive environment that meets the needs of all learners.

## Developmental Screening<sup>2</sup>

- [State regulations](#) require that within the first 45 days of entrance into prekindergarten, every child must be screened with a valid and reliable developmental screening tool (e.g., Early Screening Inventory- Revised, Ages and Stages Questionnaire – 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Brigance Inventories System II.)
- A developmental screening tool will capture potential developmental delays, possible giftedness, and whether or not support is needed in learning the English language.

## Children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

- Many children with disabilities can and will participate in UPK programs. All families of children with disabilities have the right to apply to UPK if they are interested.
- If a child's IEP recommends Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) services and/or related services, the child can receive these services in a UPK class.
- If a child's IEP recommends a full-day or half-day special class or special class in an integrated setting, the [CPSE](#) will find an appropriate class for the child.
- Each child's IEP must be reviewed annually. A program recommendation can only be changed after an IEP meeting and as appropriate.

## Developing an Inclusive Learning Environment

- Ensure that the curriculum advances all domains of the [New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core](#) (i.e., approaches to learning, physical development and health, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and cognition and knowledge of the world.)
- Integrate learning across domains of development through interdisciplinary units of study.
- Provide ample opportunities for children to engage in active hands on exploration, discovery, and problem solving through a combination of purposeful play in learning centers (e.g. blocks and dramatic play) and teacher initiated experiences (e.g., read aloud, small groups.)<sup>3</sup>

- Consider how children's IEP goals can be seamlessly incorporated into all classroom activities. For example, meal time can be an opportunity for children to practice communication skills (by expressing a preference for one food item over another) or fine motor skills (by opening food containers without assistance.)
- Collaborate with resource providers to understand students' needs and develop strategies for supporting those needs within the classroom.
- Promote student choice and encourage independence during center time by allowing students to select the activities in which they want to engage.
- Get to know each student as an individual (by observing their behaviors, listening in on conversations, meeting with families) so that students' needs and interests can be incorporated into classroom discussions and activities.
- Model behavior that promotes and encourages acceptance, understanding and sensitivity to peers.
- Communicate high expectations for all students.
- Partner with families to ensure families are aware of their child's needs and positioned to support those needs at home.
- Ensure the physical environment is accessible and welcoming for all students. Students should be able to navigate the room and access materials.
- Use cooperative learning, and other strategies to create a community and strengthen student relationships.

#### **Authentic Assessment<sup>4</sup>**

- Track student progress by monitoring and evaluating student learning and development across all domains of the [New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core](#).
- Use the results of authentic assessment data to plan and revise instructional content to meet students' specific needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S. eds. 2009. Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth to age 8. Washington, D.C: NAEYC.

<sup>2</sup> NYC DOE Division of Early Childhood Education [screening and assessment information](#)

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE Division of Early Childhood Education [curriculum guidance document](#)

<sup>4</sup> NYC DOE Division of Early Childhood Education [screening and assessment information](#)

## AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN PREKINDERGARTEN

The early grades play a critical role in setting children on a path towards college and career readiness. In high quality prekindergarten settings, teachers make the most of this unique time in a child's development by understanding how each child is progressing in all domains and tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. They support growth of the whole child by building a solid foundation of the cognitive and social-emotional skills-Academic and Personal Behaviors<sup>1</sup>-needed to support resiliency and persistence in achieving educational goals.

Early childhood educators can ensure instruction meets the needs of every student by providing children with experiences that reflect how young children develop and learn. Young learners progress at different paces, in different ways, and frequently in a non-linear manner. Effective instruction accounts for this natural variation in a child's cognitive, language and social-emotional development by using insights gained from multiple contexts over time to determine what each child needs to move forward. Evidence of a child's growth observed in everyday classroom experiences enables teachers to look at the strengths and challenges of the whole child. Holistic information about children allows teachers to develop goals and plans for all students and this information is especially impactful for developing individualized plans for children with special needs and English Language Learners.

Once teachers understand the needs of each child, they can ensure instruction advances positive learning outcomes for all children by adopting instructional practices that reflect how young children learn best: through active, multi-modal activities<sup>2</sup> that treat social-emotional and cognitive skill development as inter-related, connected processes. Students that participate in standards based curricula which focus on the integration of content and social-emotional learning aligned with student needs, have a greater chance for academic success<sup>4</sup>.

The Division of Early Childhood Education proposes a significant investment of time and energy in strengthening prekindergarten instructional practice in order to make the most of the early years as a foundation for long term success. Effective classrooms advance the cognitive, social, emotional, and language development of every child through active, multi-modal, scaffolded learning, with content integrated across disciplines. As a result, children will build on their natural curiosities in environments where inquiry, hands-on learning, discovery, and problem solving support them in making connections, understanding abstract concepts, and making sense of the world around them.

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<sup>1</sup> [Academic and Personal Behaviors](#), NYCDOE

<sup>2</sup> Bordrova E. & Leong D.2003. [Chopsticks and counting chips: do play and foundational skills need to compete for the Teacher's attention in an early childhood classroom?](#) *Young children* on the web.

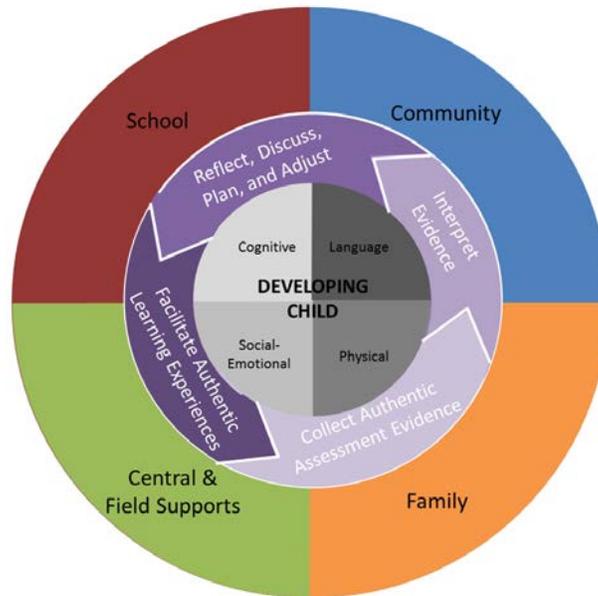
<sup>3</sup> Florez, I.D, 2011. [Developing Young Children's Self-Regulation through Everyday Experiences](#). *Young Children*. Washington, DC: NAEYC

<sup>4</sup> Copple, C., & S. Bredekamp, eds. 2009. *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*, 3rd ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

### Summary of Position

The Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core Learning Standards set a clear picture of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their prekindergarten year experiences. Given the way young children develop and learn, this authentic assessment-informed instructional planning should result in high quality, rigorous, Common Core-aligned instruction in the context of authentic learning experiences and authentic assessment that support the development of the whole child.

Authentic Learning Experiences	Research-based Authentic Assessment
<p>Prekindergarten students engage in authentic learning experiences that allow them to expand on ideas and concepts learned through standards based instructional units that also foster the Academic and Personal Behaviors necessary for long term success. These experiences are intentionally designed by teachers &amp; informed by authentic assessment practices.</p>	<p>Teachers will use an authentic assessment system (OR “authentic assessment practices”), with practices that include observations, conferencing, anecdotal notes, and evaluation of student work, and take place in the context of typical, everyday classroom activities to monitor performance and progress across all developmental domains, including social and emotional development.</p>



This model represents the philosophy of early childhood education - the whole child is developed through authentic classroom experiences and reflective practices in a collaboration amongst the child’s community.

\*Adapted from Elmore’s Coherence framework and Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological model

### ***Authentic Learning Experiences and Authentic Assessment Opportunities***

All students will participate in learning experiences that encourage engagement and allow for the development and integration of academic and personal behaviors. Prekindergarteners should engage in authentic learning experiences that allow them to expand on ideas and concepts learned through standards based instructional units in ways that foster personal behaviors, the experiences necessary for long term success.

To inform instruction that advances social emotional and cognitive development simultaneously, schools will use a research-based authentic assessment system including observations, conferencing, anecdotal notes, and evaluation of student work, that take place in the context of typical, everyday classroom activities to monitor performance and progress across all developmental domains, including social and emotional development.

Authentic Assessment practices should:

- Include the collection of evidence of student learning (e.g., observational notes, student work products/samples, conferencing notes, formal assessment data, videos and photos of students engaging in learning experiences, audio recordings of student conversations, etc.).
- Ensure student learning experiences are encourage student engagement and allow for the development and integration oral language development and cognitive skills.
- Ensure authentic assessment system monitors student performance and progress across all developmental domains, including social and emotional development.
- Ensure families are aware that all children are being challenged by the Common Core to prepare them for the world beyond school.
- Ensure that families understand that students are engaging in authentic learning experiences that develop cognitive skills alongside personal and social skills.

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS FOR LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS**

By September 2015, 73,250 four year olds will have access to high quality full-day prekindergarten programs in both public schools and community based early childhood centers (CBECCs) in New York City. This is up from 53,605 in September 2014. These four year olds reflect the linguistic diversity that exists within the larger K-12 system. In 2013, over 41% of students enrolled in the New York City Department of Education spoke a language other than English at home. English language learners (ELLs) make up about 14% of the entire student population.<sup>1</sup>

Prekindergarten teachers are responsible for establishing a learning environment that supports the needs of all learners. The following document serves as guidance to help teachers and school leaders understand some of the specific needs of linguistically diverse students, as well as the classroom supports that facilitate their full inclusion into the environment.

### **Considerations**

All children in the preschool setting are emerging language learners and students learning English as a second, or even third, language often exhibit the same characteristics as those developing their first language. However, there are some specific considerations for students learning English.

- Language learners contextualize language’s use within a relevant context. Therefore it is important to ground children’s learning in hands-on experiences that allow for real-world application.<sup>2</sup>
- Cultural differences in language acquisition exist and inform children’s experiences with language within the classroom. For example, in some cultural groups children are expected to listen to adults rather than engage with them in conversation.<sup>3</sup>
- Language acquisition can be accelerated by making explicit connections between English and the child’s home language(s).<sup>4</sup> For example, days/días, time/tiempo, name/nombre.
- “Just as children learn and develop at different rates, individual differences exist in how children whose home language is not English acquire English.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Supporting linguistically diverse students in the Classroom**

Ensuring that linguistically diverse students have opportunities to engage in classroom learning experiences requires intentional planning and preparation on the part of the teacher and school community. School leaders and teachers should:

- Design units of study that include opportunities for children to hear and use languages other than English.

- Ensure that all children have regular, frequent, and open-ended opportunities to engage in authentic language experiences in the language(s) of their choice.
- Include families as active participants in the early learning process to support language learners' linguistic diversity and use of his/her languages. Language acquisition is an active process which includes participation of the child, his/her peers, his/her family, and teacher(s).
- Talk with children and engage them in exchanges related to their experiences, interests, and ideas to understand their cultural and familial influences.
- Scaffold children's language learning by ensuring that various materials in the classroom can be used by children to convey their thoughts, ideas, and interests.
- Ensure that the materials in the classroom reflect cultural diversity so that young learners can identify themselves and their experiences in the classroom in authentic and meaningful ways.
- Communicate high expectations for all students in the classroom and ensure that the instructional strategies support individual students, groups of students, and the whole classroom.
- Employ a variety of techniques to support interactive and engaging learning experiences, (e.g., cooperative learning, project-based learning, inquiry, multimodal instruction, games.)
- Track student progress by monitoring and evaluating student learning using a formative assessment system.
- Create a predictable learning environment so that linguistically diverse students can be empowered to negotiate their own way around the classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> New York City Department of Education's Division of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners, Office of English Language Learners 2013 Demographic Report

<sup>2</sup> McGee, L.M. & Richgels, D.J. (2003). *Designing early literacy programs: Strategies for at-risk preschool and kindergarten children*. New York: Guilford Press.

<sup>3</sup> Copple, C, & Bredekamp, S. (eds.) (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth to age 8*. Washington, D.C: NAEYC.

<sup>4</sup> Helman, L.A. (2004). Building on the sound system of Spanish: Insights from the alphabetic spellings of English-language learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(5), 452-460.

<sup>5</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995). *Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity: Recommendations for effective early childhood education*. Washington, DC.

## Context

The earlier in a child's educational process family involvement begins, the more powerful the potential effects on a student's learning. By involving families as early as prekindergarten, we have an opportunity to make a long term impact on how families engage with schools and schools engage with families. <sup>1</sup>

The following guidelines are part of the Division of Early Childhood Education's [5 Pillars of Family Engagement](#). School leaders and teachers can use these guidelines to implement practices that support families in becoming and remaining collaborative partners in their child's education.

### ➤ **What we know about family engagement in prekindergarten:**

- Meaningful engagement of our pre-kindergarten families requires the school and classroom culture to honor what families know about their children and link families to the learning that is happening at school so they can support it. <sup>2</sup>
- With direction and support from schools, all families can become more engaged in their child's education, which correlates to children doing better in school. <sup>3</sup>

### ➤ **Establish a welcoming environment**

#### Program leaders should consider:

- Training staff on [pre-k specific policies](#) and protocols
- Training staff on cultural competencies/responsive practices
- Hiring staff that reflects the linguistic and cultural needs of your pre-k families
- Providing opportunities for families and pre-k staff to meet before the start of the school year
- Dedicating a space at school building or program location for families to congregate.

#### Teachers should consider:

- Sending welcome letters to families of pre-k students before the start of the school year
- Interacting with families at drop-off/pick up
- Creating a classroom environment that helps families understand student learning by including anecdotes and pictures on bulletin boards and/or in centers
- Inviting families to regularly participate in classroom events and learning opportunities.

### ➤ **Share Expectations and Make Joint Decisions with pre-k families**

#### School leaders should consider:

- Sharing information with families about the [Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core](#)
- Hosting parent-teacher conferences at least twice a year where teachers share authentic assessment data with families and engage in conversation about individual children's progress
- Conducting a needs assessment of your pre-k families and offering programs that are responsive to those needs

Teachers should consider:

- Contacting all families in a timely manner to talk about individual students' needs, strengths or challenges
- Providing families opportunities to be experts about their children by eliciting information informally and formally in conversations, conferences, and surveys.

➤ **Extend learning between school and home**

School leaders should consider:

- Offering pre-k teachers support and ongoing feedback about how to develop complementary learning activities for families to engage in at home
- Ensuring that every school event that includes families makes time to link those families to what their children are learning
- Providing information to families (e.g., in the form of meetings, workshops, written materials, conversations) about how pre-k children learn best.

Teachers should consider:

- Providing guidance for families about how to extend learning at home by modeling learning activities for families at workshops or during classroom visitations
- Classroom newsletters that include standards-aligned links to learning for families in the form of conversation prompts, suggested shared reading and family projects
- Family projects sent home that extend standards-based learning and offer opportunities for students and families to share back at school
- Bulletin boards display information that explains how the student work connects to what students are learning
- Classroom lending libraries for families to take out books (may include questions and activities for at home extensions.)

➤ **Establish ongoing effective communication**

School leaders should consider:

- Developing routines for sharing information in multiple languages as needed
- Communicating regularly with families through a variety of methods (e.g., in-person conversations, emails, school website, newsletters, by phone, at school meetings and/or during events)
- Providing a drop-off/pick up protocol that allows teachers and families to informally connect.

Teachers should consider:

- Getting to know your families well enough to identify and respond to their preferred modes of communication; this may mean that you need to communicate with different families in different ways (e.g., text messaging, email, phone calls) and in different languages
- Communicating with families proactively; do not wait for problems to occur to connect with a family.

➤ **Support transitions into and out of the pre-kindergarten program**

School leaders should consider:

- Opportunities for pre-k families to visit the school in advance of the school year to ease the anxiety of transitioning to a new place (tours)
- Developing partnerships with local community-based early child care centers and daycare centers to create a child-friendly transition plan for students arriving from other settings
- Developing capacity of staff to engage with families as partners around transitions
- Establishing protocols to support transitions into pre-k and to kindergarten such as phase-in days, transition meetings, and family orientations
- Sharing Kindergarten expectations with families in meetings or workshops
- Helping families apply to Kindergarten.

Teachers should consider:

- Making families a part of your physical space by posting pictures of students and families together
- Supporting children's use of transitional objects, when necessary
- Understanding that bringing 4 year olds to school is a transition for the families as well as the child
- Talking to families about how you and they can reinforce skills that will set children up for smooth kindergarten transitions (shorten naps midyear, practice lunch in the cafeteria, teach and practice zipping jackets, buttoning pants, putting on backpacks, make schedule adjustments that will help pre-k students adjust to kindergarten)
- Planning events at the end of pre-k to allow families to celebrate the skills and knowledge that children.

**Conclusion**

Each family has its own values and beliefs about education, based on culture and past experience. How families choose to engage in their children's education will be diverse as well. As pre-kindergarten families transition into your school community, some will want to be present in your school building by attending workshops, meetings, and classroom events. Other families may be *perceived* as absent, but are actually very engaged in their child's learning at home by setting routines, reading together, completing projects and activities, and talking about education as a family value. Many families will engage both at school and at home. Both school-based and home-based actions are meaningful ways for families to support their children's education. It is a school's role to build relationships with your families in order to understand and reinforce those ways of engaging, and to find new ways of moving forward as partners to support pre-kindergarteners' school success.

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, A. and Mapp, L. 2002. [A new wave of evidence: the impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement](#). Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.

<sup>2</sup> Mapp, K and Kuttner, P. 2013. [Partners in education, a dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships](#). SEDL.

<sup>3</sup> Van Voorhis, F, Maier, M., Epstein, J. and Lloyd, C. 2013. [The impact of family involvement on the education of children ages 3-8](#). MDRC.