

## **QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Two generally accepted approaches to measuring the quality of early childhood programs focus on process and structure. Research has consistently found that these indicators are related, and influence the quality of the educational experiences for children. Therefore, process and structural features, essential elements of a high quality early childhood program must be addressed together to achieve *Centers of Excellence* for prekindergarten services. The New York City Department of Education, in alignment with the New York State Education Department, promotes these essential elements of high-quality prekindergarten programs.

### **PROCESS QUALITY**

Process quality emphasizes the actual experiences that occur in educational settings, such as adult-child interactions and the types of activities in which children are engaged. It also includes health and safety provisions, as well as available materials, relationships with parents and professional development.

#### ***Aspects of Process***

- **Environment**: Environments for young children must be physically safe, socially enhancing, emotionally nurturing, and intellectually stimulating. The room is well-equipped, with sufficient appropriate materials and toys. This carefully designed setting promotes self-selection by children from a wide array of age appropriate materials. Both the classroom and the playground invite children to engage in active learning whereby they construct their own knowledge through interaction with adults, other children and materials. The equipment and materials that support this learning are easily adapted to the diverse interests, needs and abilities of children. Children and adults with special needs have easy access to the indoor and outdoor spaces and materials. Within this setting, the teaching team creates a climate of acceptance and they are attentive and responsive to individual children --- their interests, strengths, capabilities, culture, race and gender.
- **Curriculum**: The prekindergarten curriculum enables children to reach a deeper understanding of a subject when they can make meaningful connections across several disciplines. These connections are achieved through the implementation of inquiry-based projects or themes. Curriculum content is based on the observations of children's interests, questions children ask or shared experiences within the natural environment. Opportunities for art, music/movement, science, math, block play, social studies, sand, water, dramatic play and outdoor play are provided daily. Prekindergarten learning experiences are integrated across content areas and are augmented with a variety of multicultural and nonsexist activities and materials that are adapted to meet the special needs of individual children, English language learners and children with disabilities. The teaching approach is well planned and intentional to help children cumulatively master more complex skills and knowledge. Communication occurs throughout the day, with mutual listening, talking/responding, and encouragement to use reasoning and problem-solving skills.

The primary focus of the curriculum is to emphasize the importance of developing the whole child, in four learning domains, including social- emotional, physical,

creative expression/aesthetic, and cognitive development that includes language and literacy development, and mathematical and scientific thinking.

- **Assessment:** Assessment occurs within the context of everyday experiences. Beginning with the information and observations shared by family members as the child moves from home to the preschool, assessment continues as teachers and other staff members observe and record behaviors throughout the day. These systematically collected observations inform instructional practices about how to support children's strengths and abilities and provide the foundation for meaningful parent-teacher conferences about a child's progress. A research-based assessment tool with a clear protocol that measures children's progress in all learning domains is critical.
- **Family Involvement:** Family members play a critical role in supporting growth and development of their children. In early childhood programs, families are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of the program—planning, implementation, and evaluation. The family involvement activities include, but are not limited to, parent meetings, classroom participation, training sessions, parent-teacher conferences, weekly communication with other families and informal gatherings. Families are encouraged to share their ideas, interests and concerns to support their child's development and to enhance prekindergarten services. To promote and maintain meaningful family involvement experiences, materials are written in the primary languages of the families, and translators, where ever possible, are provided for family members who speak languages other than English.
- **Comprehensive Services:** Comprehensive services are an integral part of an effective early childhood program. These services are designed to build upon the strengths and alleviate the needs of young children and their families. Comprehensive services include health services, physical examinations and primary prevention, vision and hearing screening, nutrition services, social services and counseling. Services in accordance with Education Law section 4410, for preschool children with disabilities, shall be integrated into the program and provided in accordance with the needs specified in a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Furthermore, comprehensive services in the child's home language must be provided for children who come from homes where the predominant language spoken is other than English.
- **Transition and Continuity:** In order for children to move smoothly from home to preschool and through the early elementary grades, there must be similarities in goals, philosophy and expectations, for children, families, and staff. Any special needs of children should be provided within the early childhood setting to reduce the fragmentation of services and to facilitate inclusion. Families are to be encouraged to participate in all aspects of prekindergarten. Furthermore, it is critical that all prekindergarten providers ensure curriculum continuity through the implementation of a strategic plan that promotes articulation with their participating collaborators.
- **Professional Development:** Professional development services, specifically geared towards early childhood education are an essential component of high-quality developmentally appropriate practices. These services must be rigorous, content relevant, organized, strategic, as well as sustained throughout the year to ensure the

effective implementation of standards-based developmentally appropriate prekindergarten instruction. Reflecting best available research and practice in teaching, learning and leadership, the professional development activities are focused on areas related to *process quality*, such as teacher-child interactions, child assessment, early literacy, mathematical and scientific learning, English language learners, students with disabilities, music/movement, the arts, family involvement, physical education, social studies, social and emotional development, the *Speaking and Listening Standards—Preschool to Grade Three*, and the *Prekindergarten Performance Standards*. Professional development shall be provided by the Region, in collaboration with the community-based organization early childhood provider, to ensure that the teaching staff and administrators are provided with information to strengthen overall program implementation in terms of instruction, assessment, family involvement, support services, transition and continuity. A minimum of four (4) professional development days for staff must be provided each year.

## **STRUCTURAL QUALITY**

The second way to measure quality is to review the *structural characteristics* of the program, such as adult-child ratios, class size, qualifications and compensation of teachers and staff, and square footage. Structural features are frequently regulated through state/city licensing requirements.

### **Aspects of Structure**

- **Group Size and Adult-Child Ratio:** The nature and needs of young children require consistent care and attention. The younger the children, the smaller the group and the lower the adult-child ratio. To ensure that programming is individualized and appropriate to their age, there are two adults available for each group of 18 children; the adults include a certified teacher and a paraprofessional (teacher assistant/teacher aide) working together. Class sizes of 19 or 20 prekindergarten children require a certified teacher and two paraprofessionals (teacher assistant/teacher aide).

**Group Family Child Care:** No residence may have more than one program per home where the license began after March 1, 2002. Residences where the program's licenses began before March 1, 2002 shall be limited to a maximum of 10 children per program, including school age children, at any one time. Each program within such a residence may have no more than 10 children at any one time.

**Bilingual Classes:** When there are 18 children who are English language learners, and the children at the identified site speak the same language, a bilingual class shall be formed. If a provider does not have a sufficient number of children speaking the same language to form two sessions (A.M. and P.M.), the provider may form one bilingual session, either an A.M. or a P.M. session. It is required that instruction be provided by a licensed or certified bilingual early childhood teacher. The teacher must be able to speak the native language of the children.

In the absence of a certified bilingual early childhood teacher, a monolingual certified teacher should be paired with a bilingual teacher assistant/teacher aide. If this can not be achieved a certified English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher must be provided. All bilingual and ESL instruction must follow New York City Department of

Education standards and the principles of bilingual education, including, but not limited to, developing a strong foundation in the native language.

- **Staff Qualifications:** The critical relationship between staff experience, high quality training, commensurate compensation and the effectiveness of a program is well documented. Staff, teachers, social workers, and administrators, must have in-depth knowledge of child development and how young children learn. As of September 2006, all teachers providing instruction in the Universal Prekindergarten Program must have New York State certification valid for service in the early childhood grades. A bilingual certification extension or license is required when instruction is provided to students who are English language learners. A special education certification and/or license is required where instruction is provided to students who are classified as needing special education services. A social worker is certified as a social worker. A teacher assistant/teacher aide providing support in a prekindergarten classroom shall have a high school diploma and six hours of college credit in a related field pursuant to New York State regulations. It is recommended that programs for children who are English language learners have a teacher assistant(s)/teacher aide(s) assigned that are bilingual in the children's native language.
  
- **Leadership and Administrative Supervision:** The leadership articulates the prekindergarten philosophy to parents, staff and the community, and serves as a source of support for staff and families by facilitating ongoing opportunities for learning and development. Alongside these responsibilities, the supervisor continually assesses program quality, institutes measures of accountability to strengthen the instructional practices and promotes curriculum alignment with the feeder schools.
  
- **Space:** The early childhood classroom is a minimum of 30 square feet per child (540 square feet for 18 children) of wall to wall useable space. Bathroom facilities are within the room or readily accessible for young children. Large-muscle room (75 square feet per child) and/or outdoor space is provided. Space, equipment and furniture shall be provided and maintained in a state of good repair and sanitation. Every early childhood provider must secure and identify a facility that meets the following requirements:
  - Americans with Disabilities Act compliance
  - Fire and safety building codes compliance
  - The City of New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Day Care Article 47 compliance and any pending revisions
  - A minimum of 30 square feet per child
  - Outdoor play area of at least 75 square feet per child or a play area within walking distance of the site is provided
  - Office space and kitchen facilities

Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be maintained on file at the site.