Early Learning

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

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RIDE Rhode Island Department of Education

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Section 1: Introduction

Background

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is committed to ensuring all students have access to high-quality curriculum and instruction as essential components of a rigorous and relevant education that prepares every student for success in college and/or their career. Rhode Island's latest strategic plan outlines a set of priorities designed to achieve its mission and vision. Among these priorities is *Excellence in Learning*. In 2019 **Rhode Island General Law (RIGL) § 16-22-31** was passed by the state legislature, as part of Title 16 Chapter 97 - The Rhode Island Board of Education Act, signaling the importance of *Excellence in Learning* via high-quality curriculum and instruction. RIGL § 16-22-31 requires the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and RIDE to develop statewide curriculum frameworks that support high-quality teaching and learning.

The Early Learning curriculum framework, for children ages Birth through 5, is specifically designed to address the criteria outlined in the legislation, which includes but is not limited to, the following:

- Informing education processes such as selecting curriculum resources and designing assessments
- Encouraging real world applications of standards-aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Countering the perpetuation of gender, cultural, ethnic or racial stereotypes
- Presenting specific, pedagogical approaches and strategies to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of multilingual learners.

The Early Learning framework was developed by an interdisciplinary team through an open and consultative process.

Early Learning Context in Rhode Island

In the 2020-21 school year there were approximately 70,220 children ages Birth through age five in Rhode Island. 39% (27,344) of these children reside in one of the state's four core cities, consisting of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket. As of the 2021-22 school year, 30.5% (21,459) of the Birth through Five population were enrolled in a licensed community-based early learning program, child care or family childcare home, 1.7% (1,205) in Head Start, and 4% (2,834) received preschool services in Rhode Island public schools (RI KIDSCOUNT, 2022). The Department of Human Services, who oversees these licensed programs, works collaboratively with RIDE to ensure early learning programs throughout the state continuously increase quality and improve the education provided to children aged birth through 5. Through the BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), both center-based and Family Child Care providers are encouraged to increase their star rating (quality rating), in turn receiving higher child care subsidy rate.

RI Pre-K. RI Pre-K provides free, high-quality Pre-K education to eligible four-year-old children. RI Pre-K is offered through a unique, mixed-delivery model comprised of Head Start programs, local education agencies/school districts, and community-based childcare providers. RI Pre-K programs are awarded through a competitive grant application process that evaluates the organization's demonstrated ability and experience to provide a high-quality early childhood program and a commitment to continued quality improvements. Providing access to voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs is a strategy proven to help close the achievement gaps that are noticeable even before children enter school and to provide increased educational opportunities to students.

Multilingual Learners. The term "multilingual learners" (MLLs) refers to the same population in federal policy as English learners (ELs). All early childhood settings across Rhode Island are responsible for supporting MLLs in cultivating cultural, linguistic, and intellectual strengths through integrated content and language instruction, enrichment opportunities, and a whole-child approach to teaching and learning.

Early Intervention. Children under the age of three are eligible for EI if they have a "single established condition" known to lead to developmental delay (e.g., very low birth weight, Down Syndrome, etc.) or if they have a significant developmental delay in one or more areas of development. One of the goals of EI is to provide support to families so their children can develop to their fullest potential and to best accomplish this, services are provided in places where children usually play or take part in daily activities. Anyone may refer a child to EI such as a pediatrician, social worker, childcare provider, friend, or family member. Referrals for EI should be made directly to the individual Early Intervention agency listed here.

Early Childhood Special Education. Early Childhood Special Education is a federal and state mandated program for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. It refers to the range of special education services that apply specifically to children between the ages of 3 and 5, prior to Kindergarten. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rhode Island Regulations Governing the Education of Children with Disabilities ensure that all children with disabilities, including children with developmental delays, who require special education to meet their educational needs are provided with appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) in accordance with their individual needs. To be eligible for special education children must be referred, evaluated, and determined eligible for services. This document describes the process of responding to referrals, conducting evaluations, and determining eligibility in alignment with the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices.

Vision for Student Success in Early Learning

RIDE envisions an educational landscape in which all children in Rhode Island will enter Kindergarten developmentally, social-emotionally, and educationally ready to succeed, putting them on a path to read proficiently by 3rd grade (ECCE Strategic Plan, 2021).

From birth, children are curious and primed for learning. Child growth and development is particularly rapid during the first five years of life and are influenced by a complex combination of factors including all of their interactions with the physical and social world (Kupcha-Szrom, 2011; Center on the Developing Child, 2012). RIDE envisions high-quality early learning environments and curricula as having a focus on the whole child, recognizing that development is integrated, and occurs simultaneously across all domains. It is through play-based learning experiences that children will develop, generate knowledge of the larger world, and begin to acquire qualities for lifetime learning. As such, the goal of the Early Learning framework is to create conditions in which all of our state's youngest learners will have the opportunity to be immersed in a play-based environment supported by high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that are aligned with the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS).

Through continued interagency collaboration with the Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Children, Youth, and Families, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and the Governor's Office, RIDE will establish research-based policy and guidance to build a strong foundation for early learners' future education, relationships, and development.

Purpose

The purpose of the Early Learning framework is to provide guidance to educators, curriculum leaders, instructional coaches, district and program administrators, educator preparation providers and professional learning providers, and family and community members around the implementation of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS), particularly as it relates to the design and use of curriculum materials, instruction, and assessment for programs serving children ages Birth through five. The framework streamlines a vertical application of standards and assessment across the early learning continua, increase opportunities for all children to engage in developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and ultimately support educators and families in making decisions that prioritize children's learning. These uses of the curriculum frameworks align to the overarching commitment to ensuring all children have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment that prepares them to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Success Criteria

This framework should support educators in accomplishing the following:

- ✓ Equitably and effectively support the learning of all students, including multilingual learners and differently-abled students.
- ✓ Support and reinforce the importance of culturally responsive and sustaining education practices.
- ✓ Prepare students to thrive and succeed in college and/or their careers.

Guiding Principles for Rhode Island's Frameworks

The following five guiding principles are the foundation for Rhode Island's Early Learning Curriculum Framework. The guiding principles speak to the coherence of an educational system grounded in rigorous standards. This framework integrates recommendations and resources that are evidence-based, specific to the standards, support the needs of all learners – including multilingual learners and differently-abled students, and link to complementary RIDE policy, guidance and initiatives to create a vision of a coherent, high-quality, educational system.

The Guiding Principles for the Early Learning Framework are intended to frame the guidance within this document around the use and implementation of standards to drive curriculum, instruction, and assessment within a multitiered system of supports (MTSS). These principles include the following:

1. Standards are the bedrock of an interrelated system involving high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

2. High-quality curriculum materials align to the standards and in doing so must be accessible, culturally responsive, supportive of multilingual learners, developmentally appropriate, equitable, as well as leverage children's' strengths as assets.

3. High-quality, equitable, and developmentally appropriate instruction is data driven and relies on evidence-based assessment, drawing on families and communities as resources.

4. High-quality assessments must be valid and reliable, aligning to the standards and equitably providing educators with opportunities to monitor child learning and development. Play is the primary means children use to demonstrate early learning accomplishments.

5. All aspects of a standards-based educational system, including policies, practices, and resources, must work together to support all children, including multilingual learners and those that are differently-abled.

What is 'Curriculum'?

RIDE has previously defined curriculum as a "standards-based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. Curriculum is the central guide for all educators as to what is essential for teaching and learning so that every student has access to rigorous academic experiences." Building off of this definition, RIDE also identifies specific components that comprise a complete curriculum. These include the following:

- ***Goals*:** Goals within a curriculum are the standards-based benchmarks or expectations for teaching and learning. Most often, goals are made explicit in the form of a scope and sequence of skills to be addressed. Goals must include the breadth and depth about what a student is expected to learn.

- ***Methods:*** Methods are instructional decisions, approaches, and routines that teachers use to engage all students in meaningful learning**.** These choices support the facilitation of learning experiences to promote a student's ability to understand and apply content and skills. Methods are differentiated to meet student needs and interests, task demands, and learning environment. They are also adjusted based on ongoing review of student progress towards meeting the goals.

- ***Materials*:** Materials are the tools and resources selected to implement methods and achieve the goals of the curriculum. They are intentionally chosen to support a student's learning, and the selection of resources should reflect student interest, cultural diversity, world perspectives, and address all types of diverse learners. To assist childcare centers, family childcare homes, Head Starts, and Pre-Kindergarten programs, and other early childhood programs across the state with the curriculum selection process, RIDE identified an "Approved List of Pre-Kindergarten Curricula." The intent of this list is to provide programs with the ability to choose a high-quality curriculum that best fits the needs of its students, teachers, and community and is aligned with the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) as well as a department-developed rubric to demonstrate alignment to the expectations for high-quality curriculum in the State. See the "Selecting High-Quality Materials" section on page 18 for more information on RI's List of Approved Curricula for Children ages 3-5 years.

- ***Assessment***: Assessment in a curriculum is the ongoing process of gathering information about a student's learning. This includes a variety of ways to document what the student knows, understands, and can do with their knowledge and skills. Information from assessment is used to make decisions about instructional approaches, teaching materials, and academic supports needed to enhance opportunities for the student and to guide future instruction.

Another way to think about curriculum, and one supported by many experts, is that a well-established curriculum consists of three interconnected parts all tightly aligned to standards: the intended (or written) curriculum, the lived curriculum, and the learned curriculum (e.g., Kurz, Elliott, Wehby, &

Smithson, 2010). Additionally, a cohesive curriculum should ensure that teaching and learning is equitable, culturally responsive, and offers students multiple means through which to learn and demonstrate proficiency.

The *written curriculum* refers to the learning experiences and other supports included in the curriculum guide. This aligns with the 'goals' and 'materials' components described above. Given this, curriculum materials (lesson plans, books, learning activities) do not comprise a curriculum on their own, but rather are the resources that help to implement it. They also establish the foundation of students' learning experiences. The written curriculum should provide students with opportunities to engage in learning experiences that build on their background experiences and cultural and linguistic identities while also exposing students to new experiences and cultural identities outside of their own. The written curriculum is crucial in building a foundation for high-quality learning; however, it is important to remember that it is only as good as how it is used and/or implemented.

The *lived curriculum* refers to everything that children actually experience in the learning setting, including how the teacher delivers curriculum, how children experience the curriculum, and how learning is assessed. In other words, the lived curriculum is defined by the quality of instructional practices that are applied when implementing the written curriculum. This aligns with the "methods" section in RIDE's curriculum definition. The lived curriculum must promote instructional engagement by affirming and validating students' home culture and language as well as provide opportunities for integrative and interdisciplinary learning. Learning experiences should be instructed through an equity lens, providing all children with a rich, high-quality learning experience.

Finally, the *learned curriculum* refers to how much of and how well the intended curriculum is learned and how fully students meet the learning goals as defined by the standards. This is often defined by the validity and reliability of assessments, as well as by student achievement, their work, and performance on tasks. The learned curriculum should reflect a commitment to the expectation that all students can access and attain widely held developmental milestones aligned with the RIELDS. Ultimately, the learned curriculum is an expression and extension of the written and lived curriculum and should promote critical consciousness in both educators and students, providing opportunities for educators and students to improve systems for teaching and learning in the school community.

Key Takeaways

- First, the **written curriculum** (goals and HQCMs) must be firmly grounded in the standards and include a robust set of HQCMs that all teachers know how to use to design and implement instruction and assessment for students.
- Second, the characteristics of a strong **lived curriculum** include consistent instructional practices and implementation strategies that take place across classrooms that are driven by standards, evidence-based practices, learning tasks for students that are rigorous and engaging, and a valid and reliable system of assessment.
- Finally, student learning and achievement are what ultimately define the overall strength of a **learned curriculum**, including how effectively students are able to meet the standards.

What is a Curriculum Framework?

The early learning and K-12 content area frameworks are designed to provide consistent guidance around how to use standards to support the selection and use of high-quality curriculum materials, evidence-based instructional practices, as well as valid and reliable assessments - all in an integrated effort to equitably maximize learning for all students. The curriculum frameworks can also be used to inform decisions about appropriate foci for professional learning, certification, and evaluation of active and aspiring teachers and administrators.

The curriculum frameworks include information about research-based, culturally responsive, and equitable pedagogical approaches and strategies for use during implementation of high-quality curriculum materials and assessments to scaffold, develop, and assess the skills, competencies, and knowledge called for by the state standards.

Organization of the Curriculum Frameworks:

- **Section 2** lists the standards and provides a range of resources to help educators understand and apply them. Section 2 also addresses how standards support the selection and implementation of high-quality curriculum materials.
- **Section 3** provides guidance and support around building high-quality, standards-aligned instruction in the early learning classroom.
- **Section 4** offers resources and support for using high-quality, standards-aligned early learning assessment.

In sum, each curriculum framework, in partnership with high-quality curriculum materials, informs decisions at the classroom, school/program, and district/community level about curriculum material use, instruction, and assessment in line with current standards and with a focus on facilitating equitable and culturally responsive learning opportunities for all students.

Summary of Section Structure

Section II: Implementing a High-Quality Curriculum

- ✓ Early Learning Standards by developmental domain
- ✓ Selecting HQ Curriculum Materials
- ✓ Professional Learning

Section III: Implementing High-Quality Instruction

- ✓ Connections to HQ Instructional Practices in K-12
- ✓ Foundational instructional principles in early learning
- ✓ Preparing the classroom environment
- ✓ HQ Instructional Strategies in Early Learning

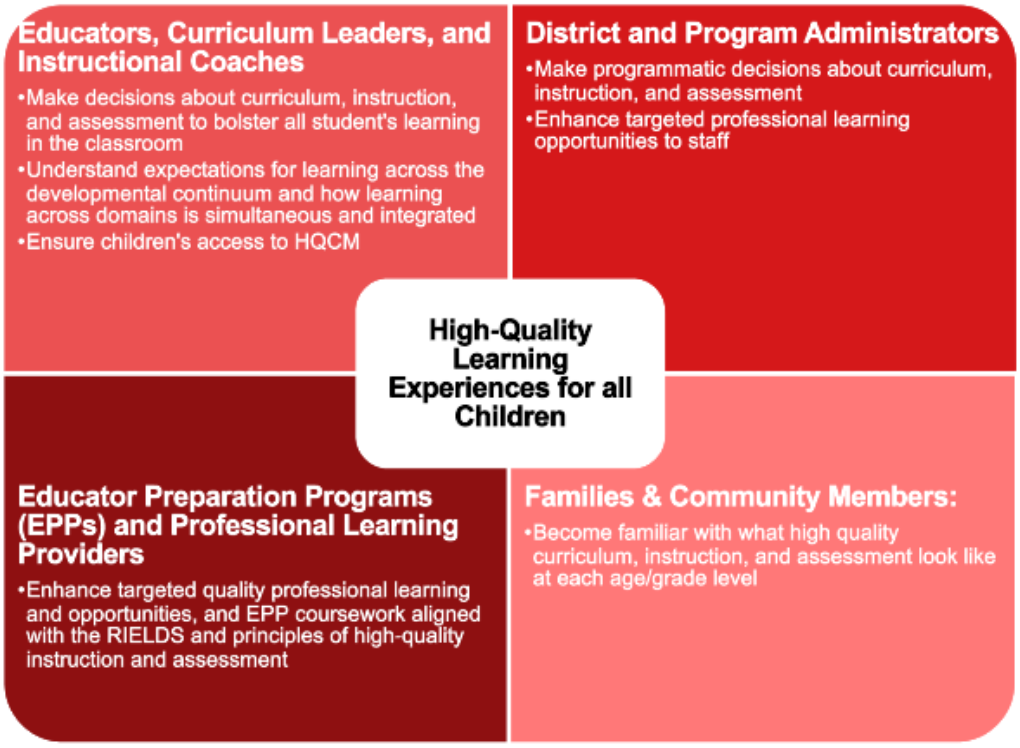
Section IV: High-Quality Learning Through Assessment

- ✓ Principles of HQ Assessment
- ✓ Purpose and Types of Assessment
- ✓ Hallmarks of HQ Early Learning Assessment
- ✓ Assessment and the Instructional Cycle
- ✓ Engaging Families in Assessment

What does effective implementation of the Curriculum Framework look like?

The primary audiences for the information and resources in the Early Learning Curriculum Framework are educators in Rhode Island who make decisions and implement practices that impact students' opportunities for learning in line with standards. This means that the primary audience includes educators, instructional leaders, education coordinators, and district and program administrators.

Below are examples of how RIDE envisions the guidance and resources within this framework being used. These examples are not exhaustive by any measure and are intended to give early childhood



stakeholders an initial understanding of how to practically begin thinking about how to implement and use this framework to inform their daily practice.

Educators, Curriculum Leaders, and Instructional coaches such as curriculum coordinators, education coordinators, and principals can use the curriculum frameworks as a go-to resource for understanding how the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards align with the high-quality curriculum materials (HQCMs) that have been adopted in their district/program and to make decisions about instruction and assessment that bolster all children's learning opportunities. For example, the frameworks can be used to:

- Unpack and internalize age-level standards and alignment of standards across domains;
- Analyze HQCMs and assessment(s) adopted in the district or program and understand how the standards are applied within curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- Norm on high-quality instructional practices that are specific to early learning and practices aligned with K-12;
- Guide decisions related to instruction and assessment given the developmental expectations for children articulated in the standards and the HQCMs; and,
- Plan universally designed instruction and aligned scaffolds that ensure all children can engage meaningfully with developmentally appropriate instruction.

District and program administrators can use the curriculum frameworks to calibrate their understanding of what high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment should look like within and across disciplines and use that understanding as a guide to:

- Make resources available to educators, families, and other stakeholders in support of child learning and development;
- Norm "what to look for" in classrooms as evidence that children are receiving a rigorous and engaging instructional experience; and
- Structure conversations with teachers and families about high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Educator Preparation Programs and Professional Learning Providers can use the curriculum frameworks to enhance targeted quality professional learning opportunities for the field. For example, the frameworks can be used to:

- Enhance educator or aspiring educator knowledge about the standards and pedagogical approaches in Rhode Island;
- Roll out a vision for curriculum and instruction in the district or program, followed by curriculum-specific professional learning;
- Build capacity of educators and aspiring educators to engage in meaningful intellectual preparation to support facilitation of strong lessons;
- Aid educators and aspiring educators in making sense of the structure, organization, and pedagogical approaches used in different curriculum materials; and,
- Build capacity of educators and aspiring educators to address individual learning needs of students through curriculum-aligned scaffolds.

Families and community members can use the curriculum frameworks to become familiar with what curriculum, instruction, and assessment should look like at each age and stage of development. For example, the frameworks can be used to:

- Generate awareness of what high-quality, standards-aligned and developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum, instruction and assessment should look like;
- Support decision-making and selection of care-based settings based on knowledge of high-quality early childhood practices; and,
- Support home- and community-based (extracurricular) experiences that are play-based, standards-aligned, and developmentally appropriate.

Overview and Connection to Other Frameworks

RIDE has developed curriculum frameworks for a variety of K-12 content areas including mathematics, science and technology, ELA/literacy, History and Social Studies, World Languages, and the arts. While the Early Learning framework addresses the comprehensive development of children across content areas, there is coherence across all curriculum frameworks, including a common grounding in principles focused on connections to content standards and providing equitable and culturally responsive learning opportunities through curriculum resources, instruction, and assessment. The curriculum frameworks also explicitly connect to RIDE's work in other areas including, but not limited to, multilingual learners, differently-abled students, college and career readiness, and culturally responsive and sustaining practices. Below is a brief overview of how this and the other curriculum frameworks are organized, as well as a summary of how the specific curriculum frameworks overlap and connect to each other.

Section	What is common across the content area curriculum frameworks?	What is content-specific in each content area's curriculum framework?
Section 1: Introduction	Section 1 provides an overview of the context, purpose, and expectations related to the curriculum framework.	Each curriculum framework articulates a unique **vision for how the framework can support high-quality teaching and learning.**

Section	What is common across the content area curriculum frameworks?	What is content-specific in each content area's curriculum framework?
Section 2: Implementing a High-Quality Curriculum	The introduction to this section defines how RIDE defines HQCMs in relation to standards. The final part of this section explains how HQCMs are selected in RI and provides related tools.	The middle section of each curriculum framework has **content-specific information about the standards behind curriculum resources and the vision for student success** in the targeted content area. The final part of this section includes some **specific information about the HQCMs for the targeted content area**.
Section 3: Implementing High-Quality Instruction	This section provides an overview of how high-quality instruction is guided by standards and introduces five cross-content instructional practices for high-quality instruction. This section also includes guidance and tools to support high-quality instruction and professional learning across content areas.	This section expands upon the cross-content instructional practices by providing **content-specific information about instructional practices.** This section also includes **more specific guidance and tools for considering instruction and professional learning in the targeted content area**.
Section 4: High-Quality Learning Through Assessment	The curriculum frameworks are all grounded in common information described here about the role of formative and summative assessment and how these align with standards. Some standard tools and guidance for assessment in any content area are also provided.	**Content-specific guidance about tools and resources for assessing students in the targeted content area** are included in this section.

Connections to Other RIDE Resources

This curriculum framework is designed to be a valuable resource for educators and families. It is intended to support early childhood program providers in developing a robust and effective system of teaching and learning. To achieve this, it also connects users to the vast array of guidance and resources that the RIDE has and will continue to develop. Thus, when logical, direct references are made, including direct hyperlinks, to any additional resources that will help educators, families, and community members implement this framework.

References

Kurz, A., Elliott, S. N., Wehby, J. H., & Smithson, J. L. (2010). Alignment of the Intended, Planned, and Enacted Curriculum in General and Special Education and Its Relation to Student Achievement. *The Journal of Special Education*, *44*(3), 131-145. Retrieved from Alignment-of-the-Intended-Planned-and-Enacted-Curriculum-in-General-and-Special-Education-and-Its-Relation-to-Student-Achievement.pdf (researchgate.net)

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Section 2: Implementing a High-Quality Curriculum

Introduction

Having access to high-quality curriculum materials is an important component of increasing equitable access to a rigorous education that prepares every student for college and careers. In answer to this national movement to increase access through high-quality materials, the State of Rhode Island, in 2019, passed RIGL§ 16.22.30-33. The legislation requires that all RI LEAs adopt high-quality curriculum materials in schools for children in grades K-12 that are (1) aligned with academic standards, (2) aligned with the curriculum frameworks, and (3) aligned with the statewide standardized test(s), where applicable. While the legislation does not explicitly include early learning in scope, it is critical that programs serving young children adopt high-quality curriculum materials in alignment with the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) as research indicates the positive influence that a high-quality and developmentally appropriate early childhood education has on child developmental outcomes.

RIDE uses a variety of factors to determine high-quality curriculum materials, primarily using information from EdReports, a non-profit, independent organization that uses teams of trained teachers to conduct reviews of English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, and science curricula. At the moment, EdReports exclusively reviews and reports on curriculum materials serving children in grades K-12. With regards to early learning, the Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) through the Administration for Children & Families release the Curriculum Consumer Reports, which provide review summaries and ratings of comprehensive infant and toddler, preschool, family childcare, and home-based childcare curricula against the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and other standards for high-quality curricula (e.g., NAEYC). The conclusions drawn from these reports may not be entirely applicable when vetting curriculum against individual state's standards for early childhood development as state's standards for early childhood and the Head Start Program Performance Standards may differ. As a result, many states develop their own processes for evaluating and approving early learning curriculum. These processes most typically involve a) analyzing the alignment between an early learning curriculum and state standards b) vetting curriculum against a state-developed rubric containing additional indicators that are indicative of high-quality. It is critical that the adoption of high-quality early learning curricula include considerations of the needs of the children that they serve. Selection is only the starting point in the larger process of adoption and implementation. Early learning programs should consider curriculum adoption and implementation as an iterative process where the efficacy of a curriculum is reviewed and evaluated at the program level on an ongoing basis.

While the standards describe what students should know and be able to do, they do not dictate the manner by which they should be taught, or the materials used to teach and assess them (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Curriculum materials, when aligned to the standards, provide students with varied opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills outlined by the standards. Assessments, when aligned to the standards, have the goal of understanding how student learning is progressing toward acquiring proficiency in the knowledge and skills outlined by the standards as delivered by the curriculum through instruction (CSAI, 2018).

No set of age-level standards can reflect the great variety of abilities, needs, learning rates, and achievement levels in any given classroom. The standards define neither the support materials that some students may need, nor the advanced materials that others should have access to. It is also beyond the scope of the standards to define the full range of support appropriate for multilingual learners and children that are differently-abled. Still, all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills that will be necessary in their lives. The standards should be read as allowing for the widest possible range of

students to participate fully from the outset with appropriate accommodations to ensure equitable access, particularly those from historically underserved populations (MDOE, 2017).

Having access to high-quality curriculum materials is an important component of increasing equitable access to a rigorous education that prepares every student for college and careers.

The Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards

The 2023 Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) are designed to provide guidance to families, teachers, and administrators on what children should know and be able to do as they enter kindergarten. They are intended to be inclusive and developmentally appropriate for all children – multilingual learners, children with special health care needs, children that are differently-abled, and children who are typically developing – recognizing that all children may meet age-level expectations as indicated in the RIELDS.

The RIELDS articulate shared expectations for young children's development across 9 distinct domains: Physical and Motor, Social and Emotional, Language, Literacy, Cognitive, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Creative Arts development. Further, they provide a common language for measuring progress toward achieving specific learning goals (Kendall 2003; Kagan & Scott-Little, 2004). The RIELDS extend educational expectations to infants and toddlers, and they are integrated with preschool early learning standards to create a seamless birth to 60-month continuum and are aligned with K-12 Rhode Island Core Standards for Mathematics, ELA/Literacy, and Social Studies, the Next Generation Science Standards, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Frameworks. The standards are to be used for the purposes of:

- Guiding early educators in the selection of curriculum
- Informing families about learning milestones
- Providing a framework for implementing high-quality early childhood programs
- Promoting optimal early learning trajectories.

While the RIELDS represent expectations for all children, each child will reach the standard milestones at their own pace and in their own way. Therefore, to meet the RIELDS, individual children will require different types and intensities of support across domains. The RIELDS are therefore not intended to be used as specific teaching practices or materials, as a checklist of competencies, nor as a stand-alone curriculum or program: rather, the standards are intended to represent the expectations for children's learning and development and are to serve as a guide for selecting curriculum and assessment tools.

Organization of the RIELDS

Rhode Island's Early Learning and Development Standards are organized into domains, components, Standards, and Examples:

Domains: represent the broad areas of early learning	Physical and Motor development Social and Emotional development Language development Literacy development Cognitive Development Mathematics development Science development Social Studies development Creative Arts development
Components: specific areas within a domain	**Domain**: Physical health and motor development • Component 1: Health and safety practices

	• Component 2: Gross motor development • Component 3: Fine motor development.

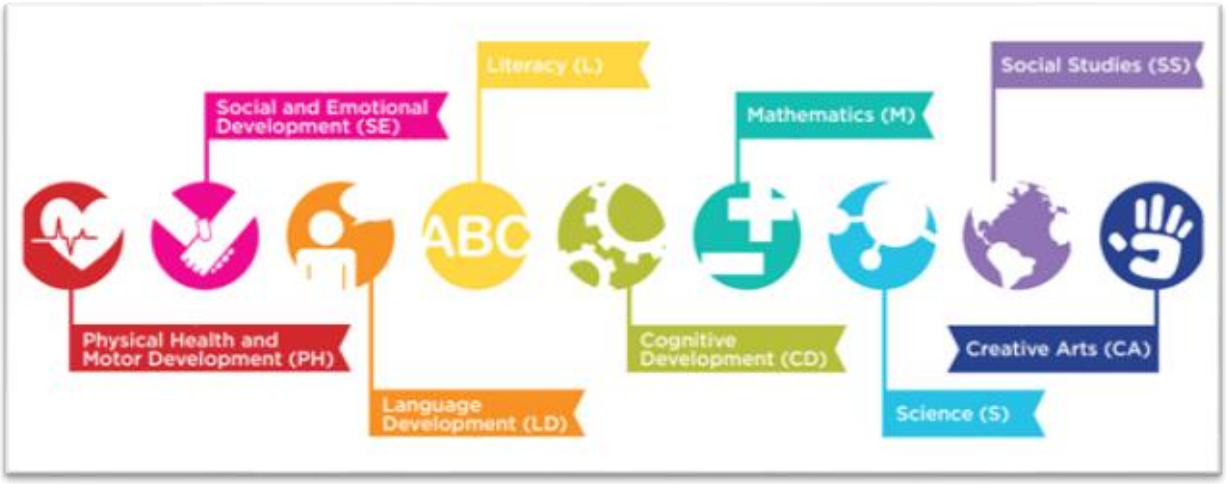
Standards: general categories of competencies, behaviors, knowledge, and skills that children develop in increasing degrees and with increasing sophistication as they grow	**Domain:** Physical and Motor Development
	• Component: Gross Motor Development
	  ○ *Standard* Children develop large muscle control, strength, and coordination.
	  ○ *Standard:* Children develop travelling skills.

Examples: establish the specific developmental benchmarks for the competencies, behaviors, knowledge, and skills that most children possess or exhibit at a particular age for each learning goal. Seen altogether, the examples depict the progression of development over time ranging from Birth through 60 months.	**Domain:** Physical and Motor Development
	• Component: Health and Safety Practices
	  ○ *Standard:* Children become increasingly able to identify unsafe situations and gradually learn strategies for responding to them.
	  ▪ Example (**9 months**): Children express discomfort or anxiety in stressful situations.
	  ▪ Example (**60 months**): Children follow safety rules.

Early Learning Continuum: The early learning and development standards outline a Birth- to 60-month continuum, with six developmental benchmarks.	

Developmental Domains

As noted above, the RIELDS are organized across 9 central domains, by which expectations for children's growth and development are indicated.



Below is a summary of each developmental domain found in the RIELDS.

Physical Health and Motor Development

The emphasis in this domain is on physical health and motor development as an integral part of children's overall well-being. The healthy development of young children is directly related to practicing healthy behaviors, strengthening large and small muscles, and developing strength and coordination. As their gross and fine motor skills develop, children experience new opportunities to explore and investigate the world around them. Conversely, physical health challenges can impede a child's development and are associated with poor child outcomes. As such, physical development is critical for development and learning in all other domains. The components within this domain address health and safety practices, gross motor development, and fine motor development.

Children with physical challenges may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting gross and fine motor goals; for example, by pedaling an adaptive tricycle, navigating a wheelchair, or feeding themselves with a specialized spoon. Children that are differently abled may meet these same goals in a different way, often at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, or in a different order than their peers. When observing how children demonstrate what they know and can do, teachers must consider appropriate adaptations and modifications, as necessary. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support the physical health and motor development of all children. It is important to remember that while this domain represents general expectations for physical health and motor development, each child will reach individual standards at their own pace and in their own way.

Social and Emotional Development.

Social and emotional development encompasses young children's evolving capacity to form close and positive adult and peer relationships; to actively explore and act on the environment in the process of learning about the world around them; and express a full range of emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways. These skills, developed in early childhood, are essential for lifelong learning and positive adaptation. A child's temperament (traits that are biologically based and that remain consistent over time) plays a significant role in development and should be carefully considered when applying social and emotional standards. Healthy social and emotional development benefits from consistent, positive interactions with educators, parents/primary caregivers, and other familiar adults who appreciate each child's individual temperament. This appreciation is key to promoting positive self-esteem, confidence, and trust in relationships. The components within this domain address children's relationships with others—adults and other children—their personal identity and self-confidence, and their ability to regulate their emotions and behavior.

All children, including multilingual learners and children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting social and emotional goals; for example, children with visual impairments and/or children from other cultures may vary in direct eye contact and demonstrate their interest in and need for human contact in other ways, such as through acute listening and touch. Children that are differently abled may initiate play through use of subtle cues, at a different pace or with a different degree of accomplishment. In general, the presence of a disability may cause a child to demonstrate alternate ways of meeting social and emotional goals. The goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. When observing how children respond in relationships, teachers must consider appropriate adaptations and modifications, as necessary. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least

restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support the social and emotional development as well as the cultural and experiential backgrounds of all children.

It is important to remember that healthy social/emotional development goes hand in hand with cross-domain learning and development. Children's development of a self-awareness and affirmation, for example, is strongly linked to their learning in Social Studies (e.g., Self, Family, and Community). Their development of emotional recognition and regulation contributes to their development of cognitive skills (e.g., Attention and Inhibitory Control) and their abilities to persist at learning activities in language, literacy, mathematics, and science. Successful experiences in the content areas also positively contribute to children's social/emotional development.

Language Development.

The development of children's early language skills is critically important for their future academic success. Language development indicators reflect a child's ability to understand increasingly complex language (receptive language skills), a child's increasing proficiency when expressing ideas (expressive language skills), and a child's growing understanding of and ability to follow appropriate social and conversational rules. The components within this domain address receptive and expressive language, pragmatics, and English language development specific to multilingual learners. As a growing number of children live in households where the primary spoken language is not English, this domain also addresses the language development of multilingual learners. Unlike most of the other progressions in this document, however, specific age ranges do not define the indicators for English language development (or for development in any other language). Multilingual learners are exposed to multiple languages for the first time at different ages. As a result, one child may start the process of developing second-language skills at birth and another child may start at four, making the age thresholds inappropriate. So instead of using age ranges, the RIELDS use research-based stages to outline a child's progress in sequential English language development. It is important to note that there is no set time for how long it will take a given child to progress through these stages. Progress depends upon the unique characteristics of the child, their exposure to English in the home and other environments, the child's motivation to learn English, and other factors.

Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of language development. If a child is deaf or hard of hearing, for example, that child may demonstrate progress through gestures, signs, symbols, pictures, augmentative and/or alternative communication devices as well as through spoken words. Children that are differently abled may also demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the same goals, often meeting them at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, and in a different order than their peers. When observing how children demonstrate what they know and can do, the full spectrum of communication options—including the use of American Sign Language and other low- and high-technology augmentative/assistive communication systems—should be considered. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support the language development of all children. When considering Principles of UDL, consider the variation in social and conversational norms across cultures. Crosstalk and eye-contact, for example may have varying degrees of acceptability in different cultures.

Literacy Development.

Development in the domain of literacy serves as a foundation for reading and writing acquisition. The development of early literacy skills is critically important for children's future

academic and personal success. Yet children enter kindergarten varying considerably in these skills; and it is difficult for a child who starts behind to close the gap once they enter school (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). The components within this domain address phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, text comprehension and interest, and emergent writing. As a growing number of children live in households where the primary spoken language is not English, this domain also addresses the literacy development of multilingual learners. However, specific age thresholds do not define the indicators for literacy development in English, unlike most of the other developmental progressions. Children who become multilingual learners are exposed to English (in this country) for the first time at different ages. As a result, one child may start the process of developing English literacy skills very early in life and another child not until age four, making the age thresholds inappropriate. So instead of using age ranges, the RIELDS use research-based stages to outline a child's progress in sequential English literacy development. It is important to note that there is no set time for how long it will take a given child to progress through these stages. Progress depends upon the unique characteristics of the child, their exposure to English in the home and other environments, the child's motivation to learn English, and other factors.

Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of literacy development. For example, a child with a visual impairment will demonstrate a relationship to books and tactile experiences that is significantly different from that of children who can see. As well, children with other special needs and considerations may reach many of these same goals, but at a different pace, in a different way, with a different degree of accomplishment, or in a different order than their peers. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different.

Cognitive Development.

Development in the domain of cognition involves the processes by which young children grow and change in their abilities to pay attention to and think about the world around them. Infants and young children rely on their senses and relationships with others; exploring objects and materials in different ways and interacting with adults both contribute to children's cognitive development. Everyday experiences and interactions provide opportunities for young children to learn how to solve problems, differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar people, attend to things they find interesting even when distractions are present, and understand how their actions affect others. Research in child development has highlighted specific aspects of cognitive development that are particularly relevant for success in school and beyond. These aspects fall under a set of cognitive skills called executive function and consist of a child's working memory, attention and inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility. Together, these skills function like an "air traffic control system," helping a child manage and respond to the vast body of the information and experiences they are exposed to daily. The components within this domain address logic and reasoning skills, memory and working memory, attention and inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility.

Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of cognitive development. For example, a child with a physical disability may require adaptive toys to explore cause-and-effect relationships and a child with a speech impairment may use augmentative and/or alternative communication devices to retell a familiar story or activity. Children that are differently abled may reach many of these same goals, but at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, or in a different order than their peers. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support the cognitive development of all children.

Mathematics

The development of mathematical knowledge and skills contributes to children's ability to make sense of the world and to solve mathematical situations they encounter in their everyday lives. Knowledge of basic math concepts and the skill to use math operations to solve mathematical situations are fundamental aspects of school readiness and are predictive of later success in school and in life. The components within this domain address number sense and quantity; number relationships and operations; classification and patterning; measurement, comparison, and ordering; and geometry and spatial sense.

Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of mathematics development. For example, a child who is blind may begin to identify braille numbers and a child with a physical disability may identify numerals through use of an eye gaze. Children that are differently abled may reach many of these same goals, but at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment than their peers. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best serve the mathematics development of all children.

Science

From the moment they are born, children share many of the characteristics of young scientists. They are curious and persistent explorers who use their senses to investigate, observe, and make sense of the world around them. As they grow and develop, they become increasingly adept at using the practices that scientists use to learn about the world—including asking questions, planning, and carrying out investigations, collecting and analyzing data, and constructing explanations based on evidence. Like young engineers, they also become increasingly skilled at identifying and addressing problems that arise in their play and designing and testing solutions, especially in their constructive play with objects and materials. The RIELDS science domain includes a standard focused on the science and engineering practices as well as standards that address children's learning of basic concepts in physical, Earth/space and life science. Children deepen their understanding of these concepts gradually over time and many experiences. Crosscutting concepts, including cause and effect, patterns, and structure and function (e.g., how something is made relates to how it is used) are also incorporated and embedded within each standard. Engaging in the science and engineering practices in the service of building their understanding of science concepts creates many opportunities for children to develop mathematics knowledge and abilities as well as skills in the physical, language, literacy, cognitive, and social-emotional domains including essential, but less readily observable executive function skills such as working memory, attention to tasks, and cognitive flexibility.

All children come to a school or community-based setting with a variety of prior experiences in science can take part in and learn science. In relation to the standards, each child will express their development and learning in different ways, at different times, and at different paces. Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of the science domain. For example, a child with a cognitive delay may require additional hands-on-learning opportunities to generalize science content and a child with an expressive language delay may require pictures or photographs to contribute observations and predictions after classroom-based investigations. Children that are differently abled may reach many of these same goals, but at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, and in a different order than their peers. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most

inclusive approach to developing environments, adopting curricula, and facilitating children's experiences in ways that best support science learning for all children. It is important to remember that the practices of science incorporate a wide range of skills across the domains of development and learning. For example, the practices include multiple opportunities for children to engage in productive talk and exercise language and literacy skills as they formulate questions, explore and describe observable phenomena, record findings, and discuss their emerging ideas with others. As you plan science experiences it will be important to think broadly about children's levels of development and learning and consider their day-to-day family, home, and community experiences so that you implement and facilitate science experiences that are meaningful and responsive to children's lives, interests, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and leverage their strengths, and support areas for growth in context.

Social Studies

The field of social studies is interdisciplinary, and intertwines concepts relating to government, civics, economics, history, sociology, and geography. Through social studies, children can explore and develop an understanding of their place within and relationship to family, community, environment, and the world. Social studies learning supports children's emerging understanding of social rules, and their ability to recognize and respect personal and collective responsibilities as necessary components for a fair and just society. By engaging with familiar adults and peers through the course of their everyday lives, children across the birth through five continua are introduced to the different perspectives that they and others share and to life within their community – such as an understanding of principles of community care, supply and demand, occupations, and currency (Civics & Government and Economics). In addition, social studies learning helps children to develop an awareness of the passage of time and diversity (History), and place (Geography). As children learn about their own history, the history of others, and the diversity in the environment in which they live, they place themselves within a broader context of the world around them and can think beyond the walls of their home and early childhood classroom.

Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of social studies development. For example, a child with a physical disability may require environmental modifications, such as a lower cubby or extensions on the sink faucets to follow classroom routines such as putting away a backpack upon arrival and washing hands after a meal. A child with a cognitive delay might need picture cues to recall information about the immediate past. Children that are differently abled may reach many of these same goals but at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, and in a different order than their peers. However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support the social studies development of all children. It is important to remember that as social studies learning experiences and assessments are planned to reflect upon the diversity of the children the classroom and how the components within this domain can be represented in ways that are meaningful to children's individuality, their family, their homes, and their community as well as the ways in which Social Studies development relates to development in other domains. The development of personal responsibility and group membership, for example, have strong links to Social Emotional Development.

Creative Arts

The arts provide children with a vehicle and organizing framework to express ideas and feelings. Music, movement, drama, and visual arts stimulate children to use words, manipulate tools and media, and solve problems in ways that simultaneously convey meaning and are aesthetically pleasing. As such, participation in the creative arts is an excellent way for young children to learn and

use creative skills in other domains. The component within this domain addresses a child's willingness to experiment with and participate in the creative arts.

Children that are differently abled may demonstrate alternate ways of meeting the goals of creative arts development. Children who are non-verbal, for example, may focus on activities that are rhythmic rather than vocal, and children who are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to respond to music by feeling the vibrations in the air. Children with other special needs and considerations may reach many of these same goals but at a different pace, with a different degree of accomplishment, and in a different order than their peers However, the goals for all children are the same, even though the path and the pace toward realizing the goals may be different. Principles of universal design for learning (UDL) offer the least restrictive and most inclusive approach to developing environments and curricula that best support participation in creative arts for all children.

Selecting High-Quality Curriculum Materials

In March 2021, RIDE issued a Request for Information from publishers of evidence-based, comprehensive, and content/domain-specific curriculum for children ages three to five to align with the RIELDS. The review of the curriculum was executed through a two-tiered process: first, with general alignment with the RIELDS and with evidence-based and theoretical methodology. Curricula in alignment with these sections of the rubric moved forward to the second phase of review where it was assessed for alignment with other metrics of high-quality in the early learning context (e.g., classroom materials, child assessment system, developmentally appropriate practice, usability). The curriculum alignment and endorsement process additionally considered elements of differentiated supports present in the materials submitted *(e.g., curriculum supports for multilingual learners, children that are differently abled, younger 3-year-olds, children transitioning to kindergarten).*

Through submissions received, RIDE has been able to endorse a final list of curricula that is RIDE-approved. The assessment and the final curriculum endorsement are intended to be used for the purpose of selecting curricula for use in childcare centers, family childcare homes, Head Starts, Pre-Kindergarten programs, and other early childhood programs across the state. RI Pre-K programs are required to adopt a curriculum that is RIDE-approved. While this is only compulsory for RI Pre-K programs, it is encouraged that other programs utilize a RIDE-approved curricula to best support children's learning and development in alignment with the RIELDS.

The Selecting and Implementing a High-quality Curricula In Rhode Island: A Guidance Document: outlines the provisions of RIGL§ 16.22.30-33 with regard to adopting high-quality curriculum and includes a list of approved curricula for Early Learning as of January 2021 (Appendix C). The Early Learning and Development Standards webpage on the RIDE website provides further information on Rhode Island's Approved List of Pre-Kindergarten Curricula, and opportunities and resources for program leaders, educators, families, and other early learning-invested community members.

At RIDE, we are cognizant of the importance of being a part of the global community and support simultaneous multilingual learning. Many of RIDE's endorsed curricula are offered in both English and in Spanish. If early learning programs are interested in offering a supplemental foreign language learning curricula and assessment, they must ensure that the supplemental programs selected align with the RIELDS and the instructional and assessment guidance provided in Sections III and IV of this framework.

Additional Resources

Tools to support understanding of the RIELDS and selecting of High-Quality Curriculum

Resource	Description
Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS)	This **standards document** includes developmental and learning standards for children ages Birth through 60 months. The standards represent the development of the whole-child with focus on standards across 9 developmental domains: Physical and Motor, Social and Emotional, Language, Literacy, Mathematics, Cognitive, Science, Social Studies, and Creative Arts development.
RIELDS Fun Family Activities Cards & Fun Family Activity Cards Toolkit.	These **family resources** offer information and enjoyable ways to support the development and learning of young children, based on the RIELDS. The toolkit resource provides educators with tips on how to use the Fun Family Activity cards to encourage families in supporting their child's learning and development.
RIELDS Professional Development Trainings	This **webpage** lists all of the professional development offerings aligned with the RIELDS that are accepting registration at a given time. RIELDS Professional Development courses are available to all educators that are interested in deepening their knowledge of the RIELDS, the curriculum and planning process, instructional cycle, and implementing a program that is aligned with the standards.
Selecting and Implementing a High-Quality Curriculum in Rhode Island: A Guidance Document	This **curriculum selection guidance document** outlines the provisioners of RIGL § 16.22.30-33 with regarding adopting high-quality curriculum and includes a list of approved curriculum for K-12 as well as pre-kindergarten (Appendix C).
RI's Approved List of Pre-Kindergarten Curricula	This **approved curriculum list** indicates curriculum for children ages 3 to 5 that are aligned with the RIELDS as well as against a department-developed rubric that demonstrate alignment to expectations for high-quality curriculum in the state of Rhode Island. This list is intended to influence the selection of high-quality curriculum materials in child care centers, family child care homes, Head Starts, Pre-Kindergarten programs, and other early childhood programs across the state.
2021 Early Learning and Development Standards Curriculum Alignment: Guidance Document	This **guidance** document provides information to educational stakeholders in child care centers, family child care homes, Head Starts, Pre-Kindergarten programs, and other early childhood programs across the state, on RIDE's curriculum alignment and endorsement process.

Section 3: Implementing High-Quality Instruction

Part 1: Introduction and Overview

As described in Sections 1 and 2 of this framework, while robust standards and high-quality curriculum materials (HQCMs) are essential to providing all students the opportunities to learn what they need in college and a career of their choosing, high-quality instruction is also needed. Standards define what students should know and be able to do. HQCMs that are aligned to the standards provide educators with a roadmap and tools for how students can acquire that knowledge and skill. It is high-quality instruction that makes the curriculum come alive for students. High-quality instruction gives all students access and opportunity for acquiring the knowledge and skills defined by the standards with a culturally responsive and sustaining approach. "When educators have great instructional materials, they can focus their time, energy, and creativity on meeting the diverse needs of students and helping them all learn and grow. (Instruction Partners Curriculum Support Guide Executive Summary, page 2).

The process of translating a high-quality curriculum into high-quality instruction involves much more than opening a box and diving in. This is because no single set of materials can be a perfect match for the needs of all the students that educators will be responsible for teaching. Therefore, educators must intentionally plan an implementation strategy in order to have the ability to translate high-quality curriculum materials into high-quality instruction. Some key features to attend to include:

- Set systemic goals for curriculum implementation and establish a plan to monitor progress,
- Determine expectations for educator use of HQCMs,
- Craft meaningful opportunities for curriculum-based embedded professional learning,
- Factor in the need for collaborative planning and coaching; and,
- Develop systems for collaboratively aligning HQCMs to the needs of multilingual students and differently abled students.

Thus, with a coherent system in place to support curriculum use, educators will be well-positioned to attend to the nuances of their methods and make learning relevant and engaging for the diverse interests and needs of their students.

Given the above, what constitutes high-quality instruction? In short, high-quality instruction is defined by the practices that research and evidence have demonstrated over time as the most effective in supporting student learning. In other words, when teaching is high-quality, it embodies what the field of education has found to work the best. Therefore, this section provides a synthesis of research- and evidence-based practices that the Rhode Island Department of Education believes characterizes high-quality instruction in Early Learning. This section begins by describing the high-quality instructional practices that apply across content areas and grades with details and examples that explain what these instructional practices look like in Early Learning, and also explains other specific instructional practices that are at the core of high-quality instruction in Early Learning. The instructional practices articulated in this section are aligned with and guided by best practices for multilingual learners and for children that are differently abled, and specific information and resources are provided about how to support all students in their learning while drawing on their individual strengths. These instructional practices also contribute to a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) in which *all* students have equitable access to strong, effective core instruction that supports their academic, behavioral, and social emotional outcomes. This section on instruction ends with a set of resources and tools that can facilitate high-quality instruction and professional learning about high-quality instruction, including tools that are relevant across content areas and

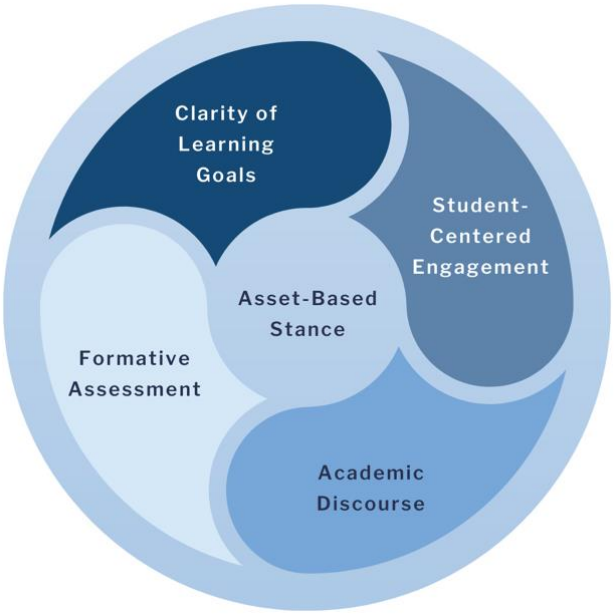
grade levels and those that are specific to Early Learning. In reviewing this section, use Part 2 to understand what high-quality instruction should look like for all students in Early Learning.

Part 2: High-Quality Instructional Practices

In order to effectively implement high-quality curriculum materials, as well as ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and prosper, it is essential that educators are familiar with and routinely use instructional practices and methods that are research- and evidenced-based. In developing the K-12 curriculum frameworks, RIDE established five practices that are essential to effective teaching and learning and are common across all disciplines. Part 2 begins by outlining these high-quality instructional practices and then dives deeper into instructional practices that are essential and more specific to early learning educational settings, servicing children ages birth through 5 years. Call-out boxes are embedded throughout this section drawing connections between high-quality instruction in the early learning context with the five high-quality instructional practices identified for all disciplines. While these call-out boxes represent a few of these notable connections, readers may notice other parallels between the high-quality instructional practices and the early learning instructional guidance.

High-Quality Instruction in All Disciplines

Below are five high-quality instructional practices that RIDE has identified as essential to the effective implementation of standards and high-quality curriculum in all content areas (see figure to the right). These practices are emphasized across all the curriculum frameworks and are supported by the design of the high-quality curriculum materials. They also strongly align with the instructional framework for multilingual learners, the high-leverage practices (HLPs) for children that are differently abled, and RIDE's educator evaluation system. Below is a brief description of each practice.



Asset-Based Stance

Teachers routinely leverage students' strengths and assets by activating prior knowledge and connecting new learning to the culturally and linguistically diverse experiences of students while also respecting individual differences.

Clear Learning Goals

Teachers routinely use a variety of strategies to ensure that students understand the following:

1. *What they are learning* (and what proficient work looks like),
2. *Why they are learning it* (how it connects to what their own learning goals, what they have already learned and what they will learn), and
3. *How they will know when they have learned it*.

Student-Centered Engagement
Teachers routinely use techniques that are student-centered and foster high levels of engagement through individual and collaborative sense-making activities that promote practice, application in increasingly sophisticated settings and contexts, and metacognitive reflection.

Academic Discourse
Teachers routinely facilitate and encourage student use of academic discourse through effective and purposeful questioning and discussion techniques that foster rich peer-to-peer interactions and the integration of discipline-specific language into all aspects of learning.

Formative Assessment
Teachers routinely use qualitative and quantitative assessment data (including student self-assessments) to analyze their teaching and student learning in order to provide timely and useful feedback to students and make necessary adjustments (e.g., adding or removing scaffolding and/or assistive technologies, identifying the need to provide intensive instruction) that improve student outcomes.

High-Quality Instruction in Early Learning
This section discusses several high-quality instructional practices that RIDE has identified essential to the effective use of the early learning standards (RIELDS) and implementation of high-quality curriculum. These instructional practices are organized within three key areas:

1. **Set the Stage for Learning** – Foundational early learning instructional principles that will "set the stage" for supporting children's development and learning throughout the school year.
2. **Get Ready: Prepare the Environment** – Important considerations for setting up the physical classroom environment and schedule in ways that are developmentally appropriate, mindful, and responsive to the needs of the children served.
3. **Facilitating Children's Learning: Instructional Strategies** – Specific instructional strategies that support children's growth and development of 21st Century Skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity ("The 4 C's).

RIDE recognizes and is committed to providing all children with equitable learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. This framework is informed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education position statement, and includes considerations related to creating a caring, equitable community of engaged learners; establishing reciprocal relationships with families; and observing, documenting and assessing children's learning and development, all of which early childhood educators may use in practice to promote an inclusive and equitable space for the state's youngest learners. Furthermore, the topics addressed in this framework will integrate considerations related to promoting universal design, encompassing the birth through five age spans, and supporting multilingual learners and children that are differently abled throughout.

Set the Stage for Learning

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), defines Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as:

"Methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approaching to joyful, engaged learning. Educators implement developmentally appropriate practice by recognizing the multiple assets all young children bring to the early learning program as unique individuals and as members of families and communities. Building on each child's strengths – and taking care not to harm any aspect of each child's physical, cognitive, social, or emotional well-being – educators design and implement learning environments to help all children achieve their full potential across all domains of development across all content areas. DAP recognizes and supports each individual as a valued member of the learning community. As a result, to be developmentally appropriate, practices must also be culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate for each child." *(NAEYC, 2020, p.5).*

Connections with K-12 Content Area Frameworks: Asset-Based Stance
Through developmentally appropriate practice, educators gain a deeper understanding of commonality, individuality, and context of the children that they serve and adjust instruction to accommodate prior learning, cultural and linguistic differences, and differential experiences. In doing so, developmentally appropriate practice embodies an assets-based approach to instruction.

Developmentally appropriate practice requires early childhood educators to seek out and gain knowledge and understanding using three core considerations:

- ***Commonality*** *– current research and understandings of processes of child development and learning that apply to all children, including the understanding that all development and learning occur within specific social, cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts.*
    - **Example**: Educators have a strong foundational understanding of the Rhode Island and Development Standards (RIELDS) and are also learners who consistently seek out research-based resources to improve their teaching and knowledge of child development and learning
- ***Individuality*** *– the characteristics and experiences unique to each child, within the context of their family and community, that have implications for how best to support their development and learning.*
    - **Example**: Educators are cognizant of the unique characteristics of each child that they are supporting *(e.g., identities, interests, strengths, abilities, languages, needs…etc.); educators engage with families in meaningful ways early and often*
- ***Context*** *– everything discernible about the social and cultural contexts for each child, each educator, and the program as a whole.*
    - **Example:** Educators understand how different contexts within a child's identity and life (e.g., race/ethnicity, language, gender, class, ability, family composition, socioeconomic status…etc.) intersect and impact their development and learning.

Through a deep understanding of the three considerations above, educators determine how curricula may be scaffolded and adapted to facilitate each child's progress toward their individual learning goals. Developmentally appropriate practice involves flexibility in opportunities, materials, and teaching strategies offered to support each child's individual learning needs.

DAP Teaching Strategies. NAEYC identifies 10 effective and Developmentally Appropriate teaching strategies. These teaching strategies cannot be achieved all at once; rather, an effective educator or family childcare provider is expected to remain flexible and observant, consider what children

already know and are able to do and determine which teaching strategy is appropriate to use in a particular situation. The 10 DAP teaching strategies are defined below with respective examples:

DAP Teaching Strategy	Example
Acknowledge what children do or say. Let children know that we have noticed by giving positive attention, sometimes through comments, sometimes through just sitting nearby and observing.	*"Thanks for your help, Kavi."* *"You found another way to show the number 5."*
Encourage persistence and effort rather than just praising and evaluating what the child has done.	*[To an infant walking towards you]: "One more step – you've got this!"* *"You're thinking of lots of words to describe the dog in the story. Let's keep going!"*
Give Specific Feedback rather than general comments.	*"The beanbag didn't get all the way to the hoop, James, so you might try throwing it harder"*
Model attitudes, ways of approaching problems, and behavior towards others, showing children rather than just telling them.	*[To a toddler when another child wants his ball]: "There are more balls here, should we get him one?" [And walks over to get the ball for the other child]* Educator remarks, *"Hmmm. that didn't work and I need to think about why."*
Demonstrate the correct way to do something. This usually involves a procedure that needs to be done in a certain way.	*Assist a toddler with handwashing, talking about it as you do it.* *When following a recipe for making playdough, demonstrate how to measure out flour using a measuring cup so they can see what it looks like to measure a dry ingredient.*
Create or Add Challenge so that a task goes a bit beyond what the children can already do.	*For infants, move a block that they are reaching for further away or bring it a little closer so they can successfully reach it.* *For younger preschoolers, encourage children to move their arms and legs in a coordinated manner to "pump" on a swing, but stand nearby to offer support (via pushing) when necessary.*
Ask Questions that provoke children's thinking.	*"If you couldn't talk to your partner, how else could you let him know what to do?"*
Give Assistance (such as a cue or hint) to help children work on the edge of their current competence	*"Can you think of a word that rhymes with your name, Matt? How*

	about bat… Matt/Bat? What else rhymes with Matt and Bat?
Provide Information, directly giving children facts, verbal labels, and other information.	*"This one that looks like a big mouse with a short tale is called a vole."*
Give Directions for children's action or behavior	*"Touch each block only once as you count them."* *"You want to use the whisk to mix the flour and the water to create the dough."*

10 Effective DAP Teaching Strategies, National Association for the Education of Young Children: https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/topics/inforgraphic_DAP_2%202.pdf

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

Resource	Description
Which DAP Resource is for Me?	This **webpage** offers a wide range of resources on developmentally appropriate practice. Resources include content that supports NAEYC's revised position statement and relates to equity and supporting children's social and emotional development.
DAP: Focus on Infants and Toddlers Online Module	This **online module** available for purchase through NAEYC provides an overview of developmentally appropriate practice through narration, interactive knowledge checks, and sample classroom scenarios related to the 10 teaching strategies of DAP through an Infant/Toddler classroom lens.
DAP: Focus on Preschoolers Online Module	This **online module** available for purchase through NAEYC provides an overview of developmentally appropriate practice through narration, interactive knowledge checks, and sample classroom scenarios related to the 10 teaching strategies of DAP through a preschool classroom lens.
Which DAP Resource Is for Me?	This **landing page** offers educators a wide range of resources on DAP. These resources are organized by theme to support educators with finding a resource that best supports their needs.

Play in Early Childhood

Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.
-Fred Rogers

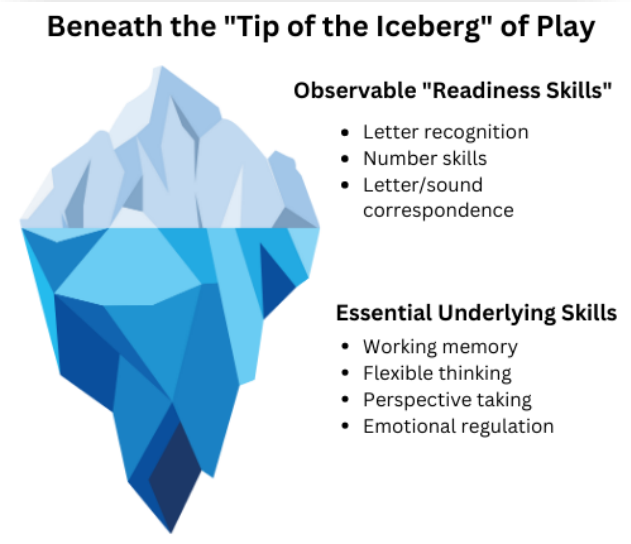
Play is essential to a child's development. Researchers in the field of education, child psychology, and neurology have found play to contribute to the development of skills and behaviors across all core domains of child development written in the RIELDS: Physical Health and Motor, Social-Emotional, Language, Literacy, Cognitive, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Creative Arts development. Neurologists who study the brain credit play with promoting early brain growth and development (NPR, 2014). As discussed in Section I and II of this Framework, play-based learning meets the needs of the whole child and supports the integrated nature of child development across various domains. In a single play experience, a child may develop physically as they engage in fine- and gross-motor activities and socially as they negotiate the play with peers. They use and learn language skills as they interact with their peers and cognitive skills as they plan, direct, and structure their play scenarios. Play also exposes children to basic concepts in science and social studies. For example, when an infant repeatedly experiments with dropping, throwing, or rolling a ball or other object they observe that the ball always falls to the ground at some point but that they can change how it moves and where it lands by how they act on it. They also learn about how their primary adults react and respond to their experiments with positive or negative feedback. In general, play supports a wide range of skillsets in four key areas identified as essential to life and work in the 21st century: critical-thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity, also referred to as the "4Cs". When educators intentionally design and plan learning experiences so they are rooted in play, children have opportunities to develop skills across the domains, generate knowledge of the larger world, acquire dispositions for learning that will last a lifetime.

Connections with K-12 Content Area Frameworks: Student-Centered Engagement
Through student-centered engagement educators provide students with opportunities for individual and collaborative sense-making. When early childhood educators create intentional, play-based learning experiences, they provide children with opportunities to activate prior knowledge and expose them to academic concepts and social experiences in increasingly complex ways.

"Yet, while experts continue to expound a powerful argument for the importance of play in children's lives, the actual time children spend playing continues to decrease. Today, children play eight hours less each week than their counterparts did two decades ago. Under pressure of rising academic standards, play is being replaced by test preparation in kindergarten and grade schools, and parents who aim to give their preschoolers a leg up are led to believe that flashcards and educational "toys" are the path to success. Our society has created a false dichotomy between play and learning" where none exists (Elkind, 2008, p.5).

One reason for this dichotomy is that the benefits of play are not generally as directly observable as the school-readiness skills such as letter recognition, number skills, and letter/sound correspondence that are often taught through direct instruction. Although play can support these concrete skills, researchers more often associate play with benefitting the critical, but less directly observable skills that are foundational to school readiness. These include executive function skills such as working memory, flexible thinking, perspective taking, and self-regulation. When thinking about the benefits of play it is important to look "under the water" as well as above it, as indicated in the following graphic.

Defining and Describing Play.
Researchers have determined that play generally includes the following key elements: joy, active engagement, meaning or relevance, social interaction, imagination, and iteration and variety (Gray, 2017; Yogman et al., 2018; Zosh et al., 2018). Although active engagement is an essential element, an activity does not need to include all of these elements in order to be considered playful. Researchers categorize play in a few different ways, including by **type of play** (e.g., what children are playing with and how), by **type of social play** (e.g., how children interact with others during play, and by **the continuum of play** as it relates to how children and/or adults initiate and interact during play:



Farran, D.S., 2022. Early Developmental Competencies: Or Why Pre-K Does Not Have Lasting Effects. Retrieved from https://dey.org/early-developmental-competencies-or-why-pre-k-does-not-have-lasting-effects/

Types of play. Although researchers express variations of how they categorize play, different types of play are generally described as physical play, language play, exploratory play, constructive play, fantasy play, and social play. Infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children all engage in these different types of play, and all of these types of play are overlapping and incorporate benefits that are more of less directly observable.

Type of Play	Description	More directly observable benefits	Less directly observable benefits
Physical Play	Crawling, rolling, climbing, running, jumping, chasing, wrestling	• Developing large muscles and coordination	• Developing sense of self and confidence • Learning one's own physical abilities and limitations • Developing impulse control
Language Play	Playing with sounds, making up words, singing to self, playing with rhymes, puns, and the rhythms of language	• Developing phonological awareness • Learning new words • Developing pre-reading and writing skills • Learning grammar rules	• Creativity with sound and language • Thinking about meanings of words and similarities and differences • Expanding communication skills
Exploratory Play	Using all senses to observe objects, materials, and living things; acting on objects and living things to observe what happens; tinkering	• Using tools for observations • Learning about cause-and-effect relationships	• Curiosity and persistence, • Motivation to explore and learn • Risk-taking • Critical thinking and problem-solving
Constructive Play	Building or making something using many different objects and materials including blocks, collage items, or recyclables.	• Exercising motor skills • Practicing hand-eye coordination	• Relationship between parts and whole • Engineering design and innovation • Critical thinking and problem-solving

Pretend or Fantasy Play	Take on pretend roles which may be roles in the family, community roles, fantasy characters, animals etc.	• Exploring different roles and relationships • Exercising the imagination • Addressing fears or relieving stress	• Perspective-taking • Problem-solving • Creative and flexible thinking • Communication
*Social Play	Children engage in play with others	• Taking turns • Sharing	• Communicating with different children • Cooperation and collaboration skills

Types of Social Play. Social play is especially important because it promotes basic social skills such as sharing and turn taking, as well as critical thinking (e.g., the ability to incorporate other perspectives into one's own thinking) and the abilities to communicate and collaborate with others. It also supports speaking and listening skills (e.g., the ability to listen and respond respectfully to observations and ideas that differ from one's own). The different types of social play described below are associated with certain ages and stages, however, keep in mind that children don't simply move neatly from one type to the other nor should we expect them to. Rather, children develop skills in each stage while simultaneously strengthening their skills in the previous stages. The types of social play children engage in are also closely tied to their previous experiences with social play, the expectations around play in their families and cultures, their multilingual learner status, any developmental challenges they may have that impact communication and/or social interaction, and their individual temperaments (Rymanowicz, 2015):

Unoccupied Play: This type of play is associated with infants exploring objects in their immediate vicinity. This type of play does not appear to have any organization but has many foundational benefits. It helps children gain knowledge of what their bodies can do and how they can move their arms, legs and other body parts and exposes children to resulting sounds, textures, and sensations they experience as they move. It also enables them to experience how their movements affect the immediate environment and how their actions cause different responses to the people around them. For older children, this type of play can fuel creativity and problem-solving as they try out what appears to be random strategies for exploring new objects and materials. Children engaged in unoccupied play benefit by having interactions with adults that draw their attention to the effects of their movements on their environment and the resulting stimuli they can observe through their senses.

Below are examples of children's unoccupied play:

- ✓ An educator might say to an infant kicking a mobile: "Listen to the sound you made by kicking it with your feet! Ding! Ding! Ding!"
- ✓ An infant may reach for a dangling toy, splash their hands in water, or kick their feet.
- ✓ An infant may wave their hands and in the direction of a toy without further engagement with it.

Solitary Play: This type of play is associated with older infants and young toddlers as they start moving away from a primary adult and reaching for, playing with, and interacting with objects independently. The ability to play independently is an important skill for children to develop and preschoolers will engage in this play, with some even preferring it. When a child engages in solitary play, they are generally deeply engaged in what they are doing and may not appear to notice what is going on around them. How children engage in this type of play is frequently connected to their previous experiences with play, the messages they get from their families about play, their temperaments, and/or their language knowledge. Educators can support this type of play by engaging directly with the solitary player and supporting their play by focusing on what they are doing, notifying, thinking, and wondering about. Learning more about their prior play experiences at home and their families (if they have siblings or friends they play with) can help the educator make decisions about when and how to support social play.

Below are examples of children's solitary play:

- ✓ A toddler may use containers to fill and dump sand in the sandbox while not appearing to notice the activity happening in the playground.
- ✓ A preschooler may be so engrossed in painting a picture at the easel that they do not appear to notice children playing loud music with instruments in an adjacent area of the classroom.

Onlooker Play: This type of play involves children observing but not interacting with other children and is associated with toddlers but may occur at any time during the preschool years depending on children's prior experiences, language, and temperaments. The onlooker child may ask questions of, or converse with peers, but typically keeps a distance and observes the play. This type of play enables children to learn through modeling and may benefit from the educator describing to the onlooker what the playing children are doing and/or supporting the onlooker to enter the play and help the play children invite the onlooker into.

Below are examples of children's onlooker play:

- ✓ Children may observe how other children use the available materials, how they interact with one another, and the language and words they use as they play.
- ✓ A toddler or a multilingual learner may observe other children playing at the water table without making any moves to join in.

Parallel Play: Children play alongside other children without any social interaction between them. Despite playing within proximity, children's play does not typically overlap. This type of play benefits from individual interactions with the child who is parallel playing as well as support for them to begin and interact with children playing in proximity.

Below are examples of children's parallel play:

- ✓ A toddler may play at the same water table with other toddlers, but not seem to notice what they are doing.
- ✓ A preschooler may build a structure with blocks while not engaging or even appearing to notice peers who are building collaboratively nearby.

Associative Play: This type of play is typically associated with young preschool-aged children and involves engaging with peers in a mutual activity or sharing toys and materials but not necessarily organizing their play in relation to one another. Children may engage in simple social interactions as they begin to practice social skills they have been introduced to through onlooker or parallel play. This type of play frequently involves support from the educator around sharing and turn-taking with materials.

Below are examples of children's associative play:

- A child may share a favorite crayon with a peer at the art center or show a peer at the water table how they got water in a bucket.
- While at the sand table, children may talk with each other and share trucks and rocks; however, they are not playing with any formal plan or set of rules.

Cooperative/Collaborative Play: This type of play is associated with preschoolers and involves children organizing their play around shared goals and/or rules. This type of play frequently involves some controversy as children negotiate materials, roles, and what to do next. It requires frequent support from the educator to support sharing, turn-taking, and problem-solving.

Below are examples of children's cooperative/collaborative play:

- Children may play "house" at the dramatic play area and agree on roles they will each play and begin to construct the play scenario together.

- While on the playground, children may organize a game with peers, such as tag or a relay race.

A Continuum of Play. Viewing play as a continuum is the most important way to categorize play, because it challenges the false dichotomy between play and learning and provides specific information for educators on how they can leverage play to support children's development across the domains of the RIELDS. When adults think about play, they typically think about the two ends of this continuum, including "free" play that is child-initiated, child-directed, and child-structured OR play with games that is adult-initiated and structured including sports games, board games, and games such as *Simon Says, or Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.*

According to play researchers, the most useful way to think about play in the classroom is to picture it on a continuum with free play at one end and games with other structured activities on the other end. In between these two endpoints is a broad range of child/adult interactions now referred to as "guided play." Below is a chart that depicts the continuum of play-based learning, followed by descriptions that provide a more fulsome overview of each type of play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Although in this graphic the author uses the terms Inquiry Play, Collaborative Play, and Learning Play to describe different types of guided play as indicated earlier in this document, ALL types of play are important.

- Free play, Guided play, and Games and other structured activities all provide a context for children's learning and development.
- The educator has an important role in supporting every type of play and this role differs across the different types of play.
- Children should experience a balance of each type of play with an emphasis on guided play as the one in which educators can plan for and address goals for children's development and learning within the developmentally appropriate context of play.

Research finds that the "quality of adult interactions in play scenarios may be more important than the quantity. When adults respond in a child-directed manner, children's play can be more elaborate (White, 2012). Below is a more fulsome description of each type of play that falls on the continuum of play-based learning.

Continuum of Play-Based Learning				
Child Directed	Educator Guided			Educator Directed
Free Play Children initiate and direct their own play. Educators observe and facilitate the environment.	**Inquiry Play** Children ask questions and explore ideas. Educators offer resources and nudge children to go deeper.	**Collaborative Play** Educators co-design play with children and may join their play.	**Playful Learning** Educators set up experiences that children explore to meet specific learning objectives.	**Learning Games** Children follow the rules of prescribed learning activities designed by educators to promote specific skills.
Running, jumping, make-believe, drawing, building with materials	*Making instruments with elastic bands, investigating how worms move and*	*Playing restaurant or grocery store with pretend money*	*Rehearsing and performing a scripted play, doing a scavenger hunt, baking cookies*	*Matching and number line games, word bingo, rhyming word games, Simon*

	simple machines work		*with a large, illustrated recipe poster*	*Says, games using dice*

***Adapted from** Pyle & Danniels, 2017*

- **Free Play.** In free play, children have autonomy and control over what and how they play. During this type of play, children engage with different learning centers, materials, and peers based on their instincts, imagination, and spontaneous interests. Free play often takes the form of physically active play (typically outdoors), pretend play, socio-dramatic play, and constructive (building) play, or even creative arts. It rarely includes any specifically planned goals for children's learning and development. It does, however, provide many opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills. During socio-dramatic play for example, children periodically step out of their pretend roles to make decisions about how the scenario will unfold or to assign roles to children who join in. The educator has a critical role in supporting free play and this includes intentionally planning for and supporting it. The following are some examples of how educators might support children's self- initiated and self-directed play.

Below are examples of how you can support child directed free play:	
Free Play Children initiate and direct their own play. Educators observe and facilitate the environment.	• Providing sufficient space and time for it in the daily schedule. • Making open-ended objects and materials available that will stimulate children's physical, dramatic, and creative free play with consideration to their ages and stages (e.g., balls of different sizes and shapes; dolls and dress-up clothes; paints, chalk, plain paper); and collections of natural materials, buttons, and other objects. • Clearly labeling shelves with word and picture cues so all preschoolers, including multilingual learners, can select and replace them independently. • Ensuring that spaces for free play are accessible to all children including those with physical disabilities. • Giving specific praise for children's free play such as *I'm impressed by how you use your imagination to create that block building,* or *I enjoyed watching the family activities you created together in the dramatic play center.* • Modeling playful use of materials, for example using a leaf as a paint brush or using a toy block as a telephone • Giving encouragement for children to solve problems that arise in their play rather than solving problems for children (e.g., how to get a block building to stand up or how to deal with disagreements about sharing materials or taking turns) • Providing scaffolds for children who need emotional or language support to enter play. For example, you might help a child enter an existing play scenario "Juan would like to play. How can he join in?" • Resisting the urge to engage in guided play when children are momentarily bored or unoccupied.

- **Guided Play.** Guided Play combines child autonomy with adult guidance – children engage in child-directed aspects of free-play while adults provide scaffolding, for example, by setting up learning centers with intentional activities and materials related to learning goals, by organizing activities that encourage children to explore a particular concept, and/or by structuring activities to focus on specific skills (Hassinger-Das, Hirsch-Pasek, & Golinkoff,

2017; Weisberg et al., 2017). Educators then observe children's play to formatively assess how they are using the materials and meeting broad learning goals. Below are three forms for support that Guided Play may take:

Inquiry Play – Adults prepare learning centers in the classroom with broad learning goals for supporting conceptual development and/or critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and/or creativity. They may provide objects, experiences, posters, and other materials to promote aspects of the curriculum, yet give the child autonomy to freely explore these materials on their own. Educators can support this type of play by:

Below are examples of how you can guide children's inquiry play:	
Inquiry Play Children ask questions and explore ideas. Educators offer resources and nudge children to go deeper.	• Setting up the dramatic play area to align with a thematic or topic focus *(e.g., as a post office or supermarket for a community helpers or food unit)* • Providing materials for preschoolers to explore a concept such as shadows inside *(e.g., flashlights, differently shaped objects, and a blank wall or surface)* and outside *(e.g., challenging them to change the sizes and shapes of their own shadows or to create shadow shapes with a partner)* • Providing materials for infants and toddlers that engage them in exploring size and shape *(e.g., a variety of objects and containers with different-sized openings)* or texture and how objects move *(e.g., large balls and different surfaces to roll them on.* • Providing "maker" materials for children to create their own tools for exploration, for example making their own instruments to explore sound *(e.g., cups or boxes and thick rubber bands to make stringed instruments or containers made of different materials to make drums).* • Supplying a variety of ways for children to meet goals for inquiry learning, for example, enabling children to meet goals for representation by talking about their process, showing it using paper or playdough, or demonstrating using props and their own bodies. • Intentionally planning questions or challenges that will generate problems for children to solve. For example, what types of blocks work best for making tall towers? or What different colors can we make using primary colors, white, and black paint? • Helping children share and compare their observations, experiences, and ideas before and after a playful exploration. How are our ideas the same and different? • Supplying multiple cues for language in all phases of an inquiry-based activity including props, pictures, gestures, body language, and using cognates (words that sound the same in two languages such as insect/insecto or observe/observar).

- **Collaborative Play** – Educators enter children's play and may participate as a co-designer or co-player and scaffold children's play by making comments, asking questions, or extending children's interests and encouraging their further exploration. Educators can support this type of play by:

Below are examples of how you can guide children's collaborative play:	
Collaborative Play Educators co-design play with children and may join their play.	• Supporting play "from the inside" by taking on a supporting role in children's dramatic play *(e.g., as a customer at the restaurant or a patient at the doctor's office).* It is important to note that educators should take on a supportive but non-dominant role *(e.g., educator should be the patient at the hospital, but not the doctor).* • Interacting with children at play in ways that emphasize a specific concept *(e.g., asking them about the sizes and shapes of blocks they used in their building play).* • Co-playing to support and build language development or exploration for *example (e.g., playing alongside children at the water table and narrating their own observations and questions about how things sink and float).* • Supporting play "from the outside" by making suggestions for roles children might not have thought of to enrich the play scenario or guiding children to resolve disputes that arise in children's group play to support social/emotional skills development.

- **Playful Learning –** The educator sets up more structured experiences to address specific learning goals in a domain although cross-domain skills may be, and should be, integrated. Educators can support this type of play by:

Below are examples of how you can guide children's collaborative play:	
Playful Learning Educators set up experiences that children explore to meet specific learning objectives.	• Engaging children in a planting or playdough-making activity with sequenced steps to follow using word and picture cues to support specific communication *(e.g., language, print concepts)* and/or collaboration goals *(e.g., sharing and turn-taking).* • Engaging children in group activities such as writing and illustrating a classroom book to support learning goals related communication *(e.g., print or book knowledge and/or sound/letter correspondence)* and/ or problem-solving and collaboration *(e.g., what illustrations should be included and who will draw different ones).*

- **Learning Games.** Children also need opportunities to engage in structured play including games with rules. When designing these types of play opportunities, educators will determine specific goals and outcomes they want a child to achieve. Educators must individualize for children by using their knowledge of child growth and development and the RIELDS, to determine the appropriateness of a game based on children's ages and stages and their family and cultural norms. Intentionality is key. This should be evident in the way the educator uses the curriculum and assessment data to plan and guide the play, how the educator engages children in and facilitates the play and how the play supports individual children's progress toward the learning goals. ***Educators can support this type of play by:***

Below are examples of how you can direct learning games:	
Learning Games Children follow the rules of prescribed learning activities designed by educators to promote specific skills.	• Engaging children in games appropriate to their development levels. *For example, older infants and toddlers will enjoy rolling a ball back and forth to you and or to you and one or two other children. For toddlers, you can gradually add simple rules like "roll the ball to the friend with a blue shirt on."* • Providing age-appropriate board games for preschoolers such as Chutes and Ladders and/or Candyland. Remember that games with rules challenge children's skills on several levels. Your goal may be for children to learn one-to-one correspondence as they move their game pieces, but they will also be practicing social skills such as turn-taking and executive function skills such as task persistence and impulse control. • Adjusting the rules or shortening the game to address children's developmental levels and prior experiences with structured games. For example, you might have a rule that players only go up ladders but not down chutes. If a child quits a game in frustration, then no learning has taken place. • Creating your own board games to go with a topic or theme using poster board and markers. • Incorporating movement and creativity into games while maintaining a specific learning objective. *For example, children take turns rolling dice and choosing whether they want to jump, hop, or wave their arms to match the numeral rolled.* • Learning about games played in different families and cultures. *For example, dominoes is a favorite game in some families that can be used to support matching and number skills at a variety of levels.* • Introducing toddlers to treasure hunt games to support early literacy development. *For example, use large cards with word and picture cues of objects in the classroom for them to seek and find. You can increase the challenge as children get faster at finding the objects by including pictures of objects that are less easily observable.* • Engaging children in games such as Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes to support goals for physical/motor development and coordination, language, and/or collaboration (moving in unison with others and the music). • Facilitating large motor games such as Red Light/Green Light and Simon Says to support large and small muscle development, comprehension skills, and/or impulse control.

"When educators have a comprehensive understanding of the intimate relationship between play and content learning, they can intentionally adjust their practices to support children's play as well as their academic growth (Bjorklund, Magnusson, & Palmer, 2018; Zosh et al., 2022).

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about the importance of play.

Resource	Description
The Power of Play	This **white paper** offers a unified definition of play, the ways in which early childhood development and play are intertwined, and tips for how educators can facilitate play within or outside of the classroom environment.
The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds	This **clinical report** highlights factors within the home environment that have reduced free play for young children and how advocates may support families, school systems, and communities with protecting play and maintaining a balance in children's lives.
The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children	This **clinical report** provides pediatric providers with the information they need to promote the benefits of play and to write a prescription for play at well visits to complement reach out and read.
Play Research	Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek, a Faculty Fellow in the Department of Psychology at Temple University and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute is dedicated to research examining the role of play in learning. Committed to translating current research in the science of learning for professional and lay audiences, this **website** provides the administrators, educators, and other ECCE stakeholders with digestible research on key topics related to play and other aspects of early learning.
The Importance of Play for Young Children (Chapter 1 excerpt)	This Chapter 1 **excerpt** from "This is Play" discusses play in the context of the Infant and Toddler years; specifically, what play looks like in the early years, why play is essential to growth and development, and how educators can best support play for the youngest age ranges.
Active Play in Many Languages	This **article** presents the benefits of active play as a way of promoting social connections for new multilingual learners in the classroom as well as some tips on preparing and communicating in ways that support safe and collaborative gross-motor play.
Guided Play: Principles and Practices	This **article** expands upon the ways that Guided Play techniques enhance curriculum and may lend itself as a successful approach for education across a range of content.
Summertime, Playtime	This **article** discusses the importance of free play in children's lives within the context of the summertime and selecting a child's summer programming.

Integrated Curriculum.

Through use of the RIELDS and a RIDE-endorsed high-quality early childhood curriculum to fidelity, early childhood care and education partners will develop a greater understanding of the integrated nature of child development. To quote an excerpt from The Integrated Nature of Learning (2016), *"Young children build knowledge as they make sense of their everyday experiences. However, they do not build domain-specific knowledge separate from knowledge in other domains. For example, they do not build concepts that are solely about mathematics in one moment and solely about language in another moment."* Breaking with conventions from K-12 education where children are exposed to content areas through specific learning blocks – such as a Literacy Block and a Mathematics Block, early childhood development occurs simultaneously through children's engagement in routine activities, play, and the social environment. Consider the following learning experiences in a preschool classroom:

> Imagine a classroom with large windows, of which a bird feeder is attached outside. Inside the classroom's science/nature center nearby is a clipboard on a table that a child can use to record their observations of the birds that they see visiting the feeder. Printed on the paper attached to the clipboard are images and written names of different species of birds, and space for children to record observations. We may observe children counting the number of birds per species that visits the feeder *(Counting and Classification, working memory),* record a written or drawn observation of the characteristics of the birds they see *(fine motor development, emergent writing, cycle of inquiry, visual arts),* and share their observations with peers and familiar adults *(expressive language, cycle of inquiry, relationships with others)*. Through this exemplar classroom activity, it is possible for a child to grow in areas of Physical Health & Motor, Social-Emotional, Language, Mathematics, Cognitive, Science, and Creative Arts development simultaneously.

The example above is just one small instance of how early learning is integrated across all areas of development, and while specific domains of learning are identified, each area of learning is influenced by progress in others. Recognition of cross-domain learning through is necessary when considering the entirety of the instructional cycle as integrated curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment practices are interconnected. When we plan curriculum and anticipate the breadth of skills that a children may use in a particular activity, educators will be better equipped to use instructional strategies to support cross-domain learning and will be able to anticipate the areas of development to observe and record for assessment. An integrated approach to the instructional cycle will support the development of the "whole child."

The "Get Ready: Prepare the Environment" subsection of this Framework provides detailed guidance on how educators may design their classroom and learning centers up for success, based on ITERS-3 and ECERS-3 quality metrics, and ways to integrate cross-domain learning within and across different learning centers. Furthermore, Section IV of this framework offers guidance on the integrated nature of child development and curriculum as it relates to assessment. Through responsive classroom

design and teaching practices that support an integrated curriculum, educators will be able to strengthen the development of the whole child.

To Learn More

Below is a variety of links to resources to learn more about the integrated nature of curriculum.

Resource	Description
The Integrated Nature of Learning	This **publication** examines how play, learning, and curriculum work together in early education. It describes the relationship context for early learning and the role of the educator in supporting children's active engagement in learning. The discussions facilitated in this publication reveal the ways in which learning experiences in one domain are connected to learning in other domains.
The Science and Mathematics of Building Structures	This **article** is a case study of how a unit on buildings, supported by thoughtful educator preparation of the environment, supports children with experiencing integrated learning of science and math concepts within a language and literacy learning context.
Cross-Domain Development of Early Academic and Cognitive Skills	This **opening paper** presents the background to a Special Issue devoted to cross-domain development of academic and cognitive skills in young children (Birth – 8). The larger Special Issue contains 22 articles centered on core domains of school readiness and how these domains develop together and are affected by other factors and domains.
The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs	This **policy brief** identifies important elements of high-quality early childhood education programs as indicated by research and professional standards, of which standards and curricula that address the "whole child" are critical.

Building Positive Relationships

"No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship." – Dr. James P. Comer

Building relationships is an integral part of creating a safe and unified early learning classroom. Keeping in mind theories of attachment developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, attachment relationships in the earliest stages of life play an important role in a child's development and their ability to create and maintain healthy relationships later in life. An attachment bond is developed with figures closest in one's lives and in early childhood, this may include primary caregivers, siblings, close relatives, or educators. When children have a secure attachment with someone, they feel safe, seen and known, comforted, valued, and supported to explore. If trusted adults act in ways that are inconsistent, rejecting, or even neglectful, this secure attachment may be compromised, and children may develop insecure attachments in their social relationships, experiencing feelings of rejection, neglect, and fear. These insecure attachments impact the development of a variety of social-emotional skills – such as the development of self-help, self-regulation, confidence, and relational skills – and largely increases the risk for externalizing problems (Attachment Project, 2022; Pasco Fearon et al., 2010; Mayo Clinic, 2022).

Research finds that the emotional climate of a classroom characterized by an educator's approving behavior, positive emotional tone, and active listening is associated with gains in children's cognitive self-regulation skills (CSR). CSR skills assessed were related to sustained focus, working memory, attention shifting, and inhibitory control. *(Fuhs, Farran, & Nesbitt, 2013).*

Positive and responsive educator-child relationships and interactions are an active and crucial ingredient for building a strong attachment bond and supporting children's growth and development. **Responsive caregiving** refers to a caregiver's nurturing and intentional interactions with a child based on their strengths, temperaments, areas for growth, and unique needs. For Infants and Toddlers, **serve and return** interactions ("give-and-take" interactions) between a child and responsive caregiver builds neural connections that strengths a child's brain to support the development of communication and social skills. According to the Center on the Developing Child, when a baby babbles or uses facial gestures or expressions and adults respond with similar vocalizing and gestures, the interaction "creates a relationship in which the baby's experiences are affirmed and new abilities are nurtured" (National Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p.2). Children's early learning is social, and relationship based. When educators use responsive caregiving practices children are more confident, collaborative, and open to new learning (ELKC, 2020). Every moment represents an opportunity to support positive relationships. Establish them early and nurture them consistently to help children achieve positive outcomes.

Interactions are the words and gestures that you share with others. Within a single school day, a educator will have many different **"everyday" interactions** with children – often spontaneous, warm, caring, and encouraging. Whether it be a simple classroom welcome greeting, or a conversation in a learning center, everyday interactions between educators and children occur all day long and are important components to establishing a strong relationship between a educator and a child. When educators engage in interactions with children that are intentional, purposeful, and culturally responsive, however, these "everyday" interactions transform into **"powerful Interactions"** and have the most significant and positive impact on a child's learning. Through powerful interactions, educators develop a deeper connection with children – one of trust and security – and are more confident, focused, and open to learning. As researchers note, when an educator engages in a

powerful interaction, they "make a conscious decision to say or do something that conveys to the child, "I notice you, I'm interested in you, and I want to know you better" (Dombro, Jablon, & Stetson, 2020).

There are three steps that an educator can pursue to turn an ordinary, everyday interaction into a powerful interaction:

Step 1: Be Present | **Physically and mentally slow down and pay closer attention to what is happening in the moment.**

- Tune into what is going on throughout the classroom.
- Reflect upon your feelings and emotions and how your beliefs, values, and biases may impact your interactions with each child.
- Plan what you would like to accomplish in the day – the goals for learning that you would like to see evidence of, and the strategies that you can use to expand this learning.

Step 2: Connect | **Acknowledge and validate children by letting them know that you see them, are interested in them, know who they are, and want to spend time with them.**

- Give your full attention to the child that you are interacting with and show interest in their activities.
- Take notice of the eye contact, level, and facial expressions that you are using in your interactions; ensure that your signals are warm, positive, and attentive.

Step 3: Extend Learning | **Connect with the child to stretch their knowledge, skills, thinking, or language and vocabulary.**

- Use mirror talk to describe what a child is doing; reflect or repeat back what the child is saying or doing.
- Ask the child questions about their activity.
- Encourage the child to try something new or to think in new ways.
- Introduce new vocabulary and use modeling to strengthen language growth.
- Demonstrate new skills and scaffold/provide support during play.

Dombro, A.L., J. Jablon, & C. Stetson. 2020. *Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend Their Learning.* 2nd ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

The three steps outlined above should happen sequentially to support more powerful interactions with children. Through this process, educators will find that their interactions will be more intentional and individualized, partnerships with families with grow, and the classroom culture and climate will improve. An intentionally designed and implemented curriculum, classroom environment, thoughtful schedules, and educator reflection can also improve the quality of educator-child and child-child interactions, and are discussed in greater detail within this Framework.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about building positive relationships with the children in your classroom/program.

Resource	Description
Attachment in Early Care and Education Programs	This **tip sheet** provides strategies to promote responsive relationships and quality care with infants and toddlers.
A Guide to Serve and Return: How Your Interaction with Children Can Build Brains	In this **guide**, educators will learn more about what "serve and return" interactions are, the science behind it, and easily implementable strategies for engaging in these interactions with children.
Responsive Caregiving as an Effective Practice to Support Children's Social and Emotional Development	This **webinar,** facilitated by BabyTalks, provides researched-based teaching strategies that support responsive caregiving and the importance of healthy, early relationships in a child's life.
Building Positive Relationships with Young Children (Supporting Social Emotional Development)	In this **video**, educators, family child-care providers, and early childhood experts discuss the impact that adult relationships with children have on children's development, behavior, and readiness to learn and share strategies for building these strong relationships with all children ages Birth through Five.
Building Positive Relationships in the Early Childhood Classroom	This **article** provides tips on how educators can build closeness with the children that they serve and how they can minimize conflict in their classroom.
Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education	This **position statement** adopted by the NAEYC National Governing Board in 2019 is a foundational document that outlines steps needed to advance equity in early childhood education. This document provides specific recommendations to educators and program leaders for advancing equity and offers a synthesis of current early childhood education research through the lens of equity.

Universal Design for Learning

"Universal Design is not a "special ed" thing, or even a "general ed" thing. It's just an "ed thing." - Mike Marotta

Every child has unique developmental and learning needs and, when setting up an early childhood classroom environment for success, educators must teach with an approach that accommodates the needs and abilities of all learners. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that removes the physical and structural barriers within an environment to support access. In providing multiple and varied formats for instruction and learning, UDL ensures that all children have access to learning environments, a general education curriculum, and everyday routines and activities (NAEYC, 2009). Ultimately the goal of UDL aims to **change the design of the environment rather than changing the learner.** When a curriculum is easily accessible, all children are primed to become "expert learners" – a learner that is aware of their own learning needs and is able to seek out ways to ensure that those needs are met. By reducing environmental and structural barriers to learning, all learners will have the ability to engage in rigorous and meaningful learning.

The UDL guidelines developed by the Center for Applied Special Technologies (CAST) is a tool, offering educators concrete suggestions that can be applied to learning in any developmental domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities. UDL guidelines are organized horizontally and vertically: vertically, the guidelines are organized according to three principles of UDL – **engagement, representation,** and **action and expression**.

The guidelines are also organized horizontally by offering educators different strategies for supporting each of the three principles.
Listed below are descriptions of what each of the three UDL principles are and some examples of what this may look like in an early childhood classroom:

Multiple means of engagement → Learners differ **in the ways that they are engaged or motivated to learn**; this is influenced by a child's neurology, culture, interests, and background knowledge along with a variety of other factors. No one means of engagement is a perfect fit for all learners in all contexts; therefore, providing options for engagement is essential.

Below is an example of how the matching of upper and lower-case letters is varied based on children's interests:

- On the block rug, there are cars with lower case letters and garages with upper-case letters.
- In the water table, there are foam lower case letters and various containers labeled with upper case letters.
- Outdoors, there is a hopscotch set up with lower case letters and bean bags for tossing with upper case letters.

Multiple means of representation → Learners differ **in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information** that is presented to them. Some children may grasp information more efficiently through visual or auditory means while others may be more receptive to content through kinesthetic learning (learning while doing). There is no one mean of representation that will be of perfect fit for all learners in all contexts; therefore, providing options for representation is essential.

Below is an example of how the exploration of the concept of patterns may be universally designed:

- Books with pictures of patterns are available and read.
- Posters with patterns are displayed within appropriate centers at children's height and are used in guided instruction.
- Using musical instruments to explore patterns of sound.
- Movement activities are presented at group or outdoors that involve patterned finger-play or gross-motor sequences (e.g., hop, step, hop, step)
- Pointing out patterns in nature (e.g., the pattern of veins on leaves)

Multiple means of action and expression → Learners differ in the ways that they can **navigate a learning environment and express what they know**. Action and expression in learning require strategy, practice, and organization – all of which look different among different learners. Children with physical disabilities (e.g., cerebral palsy) will physically approach a learning task differently than a multilingual learner, for example. Likewise, a multilingual learner will express and communicate themselves differently than a child that has an executive function disorder. There is no one mean of action and expression that will be optimal for all learners; therefore, providing options for action and expression is essential. Below are examples of the varied ways that a child may express their knowledge of a story:

Below are examples of the varied ways that a child may express their knowledge of a story:

- Arranging felt pieces depicting the characters and scenes from a book in the correct sequence on a felt board.
- Drawing a picture of a scene from a story that was memorable to them.
- Acting out a story in the dramatic play center.
- Using puppets to retell a story.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about utilizing universal design in your classroom:

Resource	Description
Universal Design for Learning Guidance version 2.2.	This **website** provides a wealth of information related to the UDL Guidelines, including the three overarching guidelines of UDL, and various "Checkpoints" that fall within these principles. Each checkpoint includes strategies that educators can use as guidance when implementing a curriculum with UDL considerations. The Research page provides viewers with research evidence by UDL Guideline Checkpoint.
U.S. Department of Education-Funded Centers that Support UDL	This **resource** provides a list of U.S. Department of Education-funded centers that support Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Each center offers information, guidance, and/or resources related to UDL.
Tool Kit on Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	This **toolkit** offers a collection of resources on Universal Design for Learning that expands two of the substantive areas addressed in the initial release of the Tool Kit, including assessment and instructional practices.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL): An Educator's Guide	This **article** dissects the Universal Design for Learning framework developed by CAST and backed by research and evidence-based educational practices and utilizes videos and examples of what UDL looks like in the classroom.
Creating Inclusive Environments that Support All Children	This **webinar** explores how to support educators in implementing effective, evidence-based teaching practices and creating inclusive environments where every child feels safe and has a sense of belonging.

Meaningful Family Engagement

Families play a key role in supporting children's learning and development and are a child's first and primary educator. As such, a high-quality early childhood program must meaningfully partner with families to effectively engage them in their child's early learning and development. Family engagement is defined as the "collaborative and strengths-based process through which early childhood professionals, families, and children build positive and goal-oriented relationships." (Head Start EKLC, 2022). Family engagement should not be mistaken for "**Family Involvement**," which is when a school or program "leads with its mouth" by telling families how they can contribute to their child's education. In contrast, **family engagement** is much more collaborative with a program or school "leading with its ears" – listening to family's goals, ideas, and concerns as partners in children's education (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

Children are at forefront of all meaningful family engagement practices and, keeping this in mind, programs communicate with and involve family members as partners in their child's education and in program decision-making. Meaningful family engagement is not simply a one-time event; rather, it is an ongoing cycle where families and staff work together to promote equity, inclusivity, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness to improve overall program practice and quality.

Children need positive interactions with family members and peers to develop self-confidence, a sense of security, and a love of learning. Decades of research has shown that meaningful family engagement is related to improved/increased:

- ✓ **Student achievement**
- ✓ **Attendance and behavior**
- ✓ **Social emotional skills**
- ✓ **Graduation Rates**

(The IRIS Center, 2008, 2020)

Engaging with families does not happen overnight and does not happen through any one strategy; rather, family engagement is unique, individualized, and multi-pronged. NAEYC, in partnership with Pre-K Now through the Engaging Diverse Families Project (EDF) conducted a review of empirical research on family engagement and identified several overarching themes for a programs' successful family engagement practice. Below, are 6 principles for effective practice, a description of the practice, and some examples for how this practice may be implemented in a program and/or classroom (NAEYC,2010):

NAEYC Principles of Effective Practice	Description	Examples
1. **Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child.**	Programs invite families to actively take part in making decisions concerning their children's education. Educators and families jointly set goals for children's education and learning both at home and at school.	✓ New family orientations ✓ Family conferences ✓ Home visits ✓ Child and/or family history survey
2. **Educators and programs engage families in two-way communication.**	Strategies allow for both school- and family- initiated communication that is timely and continuous. Conversations focus on a child's educational experience as well as	✓ Student success meetings ✓ Written questionnaires ✓ New family orientations

	the larger program. Communication takes multiple forms and reflects each family's language preference.	✓ Individual, daily conversations at pick-up and drop off, or through web-based parent-educator communication apps ✓ Monthly newsletters
3. **Programs and educators engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal.**	Programs and families benefit from shared resources and information. Programs invite families to share their unique knowledge and skills and encourage active participation in the life of the school. Educators seek information about children's lives, families, and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and teaching practices.	✓ Open-door policy for family visits ✓ Encourage and welcome family volunteers in the classroom ✓ Family conferences ✓ Engage families with the child assessment process
4. **Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community.**	Programs use learning activities at home and in the community to enhance each child's early learning and encourage and support families' efforts to create a learning environment beyond the program.	✓ Family projects ✓ Family night events ✓ Monthly calendar with suggested home/community activities ✓ Lending library of books, games, art supplies, puzzles, etc.
5. **Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts.**	Programs invite families to actively participate in making decisions about the program itself. Programs also invite families to advocate for early childhood education in the wider community.	✓ Beginning of year needs assessment. ✓ End of year feedback survey ✓ Family Advisory Councils ✓ PTO committees
6. **Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement.**	Programs institutionalize family engagement policies and practices and ensure that educators, administrators, and other staff receive the supports they need to fully engage families.	✓ Program-wide trainings, workshops and resource fairs related to family engagement. ✓ Provide opportunity for families to provide input on program philosophy, long and short-term program goals, designing family engagement opportunities. ✓ Share community resources that support families' interests and needs.

Table: National Association for the Education of Young Children (2010): *Principles of Effective Family Engagement. Retrieved from: https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement/principles*

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about meaningful family engagement.

Resource	Description
RI Early Learning and Development Standards: Fun Family Activities	These **activity cards** give families information and enjoyable ways to support the development and learning of young children outside of a school-based environment. The activities are based on the RI Early Learning and Development Standards and are intended to help children develop skills that are important for future learning.
Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework	This **framework** provides programs with a research-based, organizational guide for implementing Head Start Performance Standards for parent, family, and community engagement.
Family Engagement Plan Suggested Activities	This **guidance** provides strategies and suggested activities for effective family engagement activities that programs, and public-school districts may use to reflect and develop their own unique events and practice.
Family Engagement: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities	This **module** addresses the importance of engaging families of students with disabilities in their child's education. This module highlights some of the key factors that affect these families and outlines some practical ways to build relationships and create opportunities for involvement.
Strengthening Relationships with Families (On Demand)	This **online module** available for purchase includes practical strategies and useful resources to strengthen relationships with families in an early childhood program. The online module is 1 hour of professional learning and the content is aligned with the 6 principles of family engagement identified by NAEYC and shared in this section.
Families and Educators Together: Building Great Relationships that Support Young Children	This **book** available for purchase offers strategies, resources, and examples from early childhood programs on ways to engage families in the early childhood community.

Get Ready: Prepare the Environment

Organizing and Designing the Physical Space

The preparation of a developmentally appropriate physical classroom space prior to the start of the school year is an exciting time for educators. This is an opportunity for educators to start from scratch – reflecting upon best practices and areas of improvement from the prior school year to assemble the pieces of the classroom puzzle into a cohesive space. Additionally, educators and administrators are provided more time to review the expectations for Space and Furnishings in the ITERS-3 and ECERS-3 to build a space that is of high-quality and most responsive to the needs of the children that it will support knowing that classroom set up may vary year to year based on the needs of the children enrolled in the group.

When beginning the process of classroom design and organization, it is important for educators and administrators to keep in mind key design considerations related to space and boundaries, proximity and distance, home and culture, flexibility and permanence, and engagement in Learning/Challenging behavior (National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2012). These key considerations and recommendations for organizing the physical classroom space are explained below:

General Classroom Space

The classroom is a blank canvas for educators to design prior to the start of the school year. When considering a developmentally appropriate organization of the physical space, the classroom must be of ample size that allows for children and staff to circulate freely. Throughout the classroom, there should be an ample quantity of furniture for routine care, play, and learning, such as cubbies for storage of children's possessions, child-sized chairs for children to eat or work at, shelves for the storage of materials without overcrowding. The space must allow for a variety of **interest centers,** space for meals and group times, and natural lighting to come in through windows or skylights. Interest centers are a clearly defined play area intended for a particular type of play, with materials that are organized by type and stored so that they are accessible. Furniture is provided if needed and an appropriate amount of space is provided for the type of play being encouraged by the materials and the number of children allowed to play in the center. For example, if the science learning center can accommodate 3 children at a time, it is expected that this center has enough seats at the respective table, room for movement, and accessible signage to indicate "3 children" as the capacity. Learning center capacity will fluctuate depending on the purpose of the center and the size of the space.

Additionally, classrooms should utilize furniture that is designed for a specific activity whenever possible *(e.g., an easel for art, sand-water table, dramatic play housekeeping furniture)*. While a rug is not required for every learning center in the classroom, furnishings that provide a substantial amount of softness must be accessible, such as through a child-sized couch, several cushions or pillows, a beanbag, or a small mattress. Educators must consider children's needs when designing the layout of the classroom; for example, structural adaptations, such as through the installation of ramps, handrails, wheelchair access, push plates instead of doorbells, and door handles instead of doorknobs are ways in which classrooms may be more readily accessible for all. Additionally, spatial considerations must be made to allow children and adults with wheelchairs, walkers, and other assistive equipment, can freely move around and access all areas of the learning environment. For children that are sensitive to loud sounds and bright lights, educators may need to find ways to minimize noise and to create a dimly lit space for them.

Accounting for Proximity and Distance: Proximity and distance refer to the placement of interest centers across the physical space. When designing a classroom, educators and administrators must consider the proximity of centers with lower activity levels *(e.g., Cozy space, Library, Writing)* to centers with high activity levels *(e.g., Blocks, Dramatic Play, Music & Movement)*. Quieter centers should be physically placed further away from noisier centers; through this separation, children immersed in quiet activities are less distracted by their peers in noisy centers and likewise, those in noisy centers have more flexibility in their noise level and animation. Spaces such as the Math/Manipulative, Science, Art, and Sensory have

a medium noise level and may be placed in between noisy and quiet interest centers to serve as a "buffer," or transitory space. Educators must be careful not to arrange all interest centers against the wall around the perimeter of the classroom. Rather, interest centers should be intentionally scattered throughout the room to prevent long stretches of open space for children to use as places to run, which would pose as a safety hazard. Educators may creatively use rugs, shelving units, and other furniture used for specific activities to create boundaries to define learning centers and to break up open space. Learning centers must also have separate access points as to not disrupt play; for example, a child or adult should not have to walk through the Block center to reach the Science/Nature Center. Different interest centers will require a different amount of space. Some centers, such as a "cozy area" may be intended to be for one child while the block center may accommodate 4 children. Classroom design and size of center must offer sufficient space to accommodate the type of play require and the number of children who want to participate. The capacity of the spaces must be clearly marked with signage and pictures/words to communicate to adults and children the capacity. Additionally, the space should be arranged in in an obvious way so that it is easily implied the capacity for the center. If a space for privacy contains 2 child-sized beanbags, then the furniture would suggest the center cannot contain more than 2 children.

Educators should also consider the proximity of learning centers to facilities or materials needed to complete activities for the given area. Sensory and Art centers should be located closer to sinks for children's easy access for handwashing. Cozy spaces should be in low-traffic areas to allow for uninterrupted alone time. Shelving units containing toys and activities for a particular center should be located within the interest center so that materials are easily accessible for children's independent use.
All spaces in the classroom must be visible to adults. Likewise, adults must be visible to children to allow for supervision.

Learning Centers

As defined by the ECERS-3, an "Interest Center" is a clearly defined play area set-up for a particular kind of play – materials are organized by type and stored for children's easy access and furniture is provided to support the use of these materials. When building a high-quality physical space, classrooms should create **the following number of interest centers by age-group: 2 (Infant Play Areas), 3 (Toddlers/Twos), and 5 (Preschool/Pre-K), including a "Cozy Area" which is one of the required interest centers across all age groups.** The type and quantity of learning centers within a classroom is largely dependent on classroom size, layout, and educator preference; however, the ITERS-3 and ECERS-3 suggest that classrooms may consider the following *(note: expectations for each learning center listed will vary by infant/toddler, or preschool/pre-k age grouping):* Blocks, Art, Dramatic Play, Science/Nature, Math/Number, Fine Motor, Gross Motor, Music and Movement, Sand/Water, Space for Privacy/Cozy Area, and opportunities for engagement with language and books integrated throughout (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014; Harms et al., 2017).

Connections with K-12 Content Area Frameworks: Clear Learning Goals
By establishing clear learning goals, educators routinely use a variety of strategies to ensure that students are understanding what they are learning, why they are learning, and how they will know when they have learned it. When early childhood educators build learning centers with connection to a curriculum and observe and interact with children as they play in these learning centers, they will develop a greater understanding of whether the learning centers and instructional interactions are supporting children with achieving that learning goal.

Although each interest center includes a basic set-up and materials designed to support a particular type of play or activity, remember that children will deepen their understanding of concepts and

develop their skills across the domains in every interest center. Also, an interest center, no matter how well-provisioned it is, cannot maximize children's learning in a domain. For example, as children play in the block center, they are introduced to science and math concepts as they experience the properties and attributes of the building materials (e.g., size, shape, weight, and texture) and how these characteristics influence the designs they can create with different blocks. These are important standards-based concepts that are not available for children to fully explore in the math or science interest areas alone; rather, it is the integrated nature of early childhood curriculum that makes this type of learning and development possible. For each of the interest centers described below, you will find suggestions for creating cross-domain learning opportunities within and among the different centers.

Blocks

Blocks may take a variety of forms. When building the block interest center in in a classroom servicing Infants, toddlers, and twos, the center should contain **soft blocks, cardboard blocks, and smaller blocks** (e.g., alphabet blocks, table blocks) (Harms et al., 2017). In a Preschool/Pre-K classroom, the block center should contain **unit blocks and, in the higher levels of quality, large hollow blocks** (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2017). Unit blocks are typically made of wood, plastic, or hard foam and are built on the same basic standard of measurement. Large hollow blocks, in contrast allow children to build larger structures and can be made of wood, cardboard, or plastic. Additionally, the block center may offer children "Accessories" that can be used with the blocks. These accessories may include small people, vehicles, animals, road signs, trees, or any other small figure that can enhance block play. The Block interest center is required in a classroom serving older Toddlers and Twos; however, classrooms with children aged 24 months and older must offer children access to block accessories to achieve a higher level of quality.

A Block center should be large enough for at least 3 children to build and contain ample storage on open shelves that are labeled with pictures and written language. A low pile rug or foam mat is recommended for this area to provide some level of softness and muffle any sounds from tumbling blocks.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Provide clipboards, paper and pencils for drawing and writing about structures.
- ✓ Include dramatic play props such as builders' hats and vests.
- ✓ Include books such as *Dreaming Up* and *How a House is Built* to inspire children's building.
- ✓ Provide tools for measuring the size of their created structures, such as a tape measure, ruler, or yard stick.
- ✓ Display photos of children building and their structures.
- ✓ Display posters of buildings in the children's community to inspire design and construction.
- ✓ Introduce challenges such as "Which blocks work best for making a tower/a school?" or "Choose an animal and design a home for it."

Gross-Motor

A gross motor space are outdoor spaces that are spacious enough to allow for vigorous play, including running and the use of wheeled toys. Only when weather does not permit the use of outdoor space can an indoor space be substituted. Gross-motor spaces are easily accessible to the children and if not located within or adjacent to the classroom, do not require a long walk, disruption of other classrooms, or use of stairs to access. The spaces should be generally safe with no major hazards (e.g., protrusions are masked, protective cushioning for hard fall zones, bollards to protect a playground, (a short post used to create a protective or architectural perimeter), and may have two different play surfaces (e.g., one soft and one hard) to accommodate different types of activities.

Gross-motor spaces should contain enough stationery and portable equipment to interest all of the children and keep them active and involved. **Stationary equipment** may include climbing structures, ramps for crawling, cushions or rugs for tumbling, tunnels, basketball hoops, balance beams. **Portable gross motor equipment** may include wheeled toys, push toys, jump ropes, balls, and hula hoop. All equipment should be appropriate for the age and ability of the children that it is intended to serve. Through this equipment, children should be able to participate in a variety of age-appropriate skills such as reaching, crawling, swinging, jumping, hopping, tossing, catching, throwing, kicking, hanging by arms (for 4+ year olds only), pushing or pulling, or using a jump rope or hula hoop. The Public Playground Safety Handbook provides specifications for guidelines on safe playgrounds.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Take advantage of any available outdoor natural spaces, the trees and other plants that grow there, and the small animals that live or visit there to enrich living-things-related activities.
- ✓ Provide tools for digging and for observing and collecting natural materials outdoors.
- ✓ Introduce gross motor art and music activities outdoors, for example, painting murals with water on the side of the school building or creating a marching band.
    - *Note: Credit for instruments and art materials outside are only given after they meet the minimum requirement for gross motor time of 15 minutes for the ECERS-3 observation.*
- ✓ Provide materials for explorations that require a lot of space, for example, balls and ramps or shadow activities.

Dramatic Play

Children frequently play pretend in all interest centers; however, the Dramatic Play center is a separate defined space where children clearly engage in pretend or make-believe play. In an Infant, Toddler and Twos classroom, the Dramatic Play center should contain many and varied materials that allow meaningful play. For Infant classrooms, the center may contain soft dolls, animals, pots and pans, toy food, toy telephones, toy vehicles, hats, and purses for dress-up, and small people and/or animal figures. For Toddler and Twos classrooms, the center may contain simple dress-up clothes, child-sized house furniture, cooking/eating equipment, dolls, doll furnishings, soft animals, play buildings with accessories, toy telephones, small people and animal figures, toy vehicles. The materials provided should promote the combining of props. If a toy pot is provided, for example there should be a spoon for stirring, or if there is toy food, there should be a method of collecting the food (shopping cart or basket). For toddlers and twos, the classroom should provide opportunity for children to engage in Dramatic Play not only within the indoor learning center, but also in the outdoor or indoor gross-motor space (Harms et al., 2017).

General housekeeping materials are a requirement within Dramatic Play centers. Other themes may be added into this center to support meaningful play with many and varied materials. In a Preschool/Pre-K classroom, the Dramatic Play center may a variety of materials that allow for engagement in a variety of play themes including (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014):

Dramatic Play theme	Examples
Family life at home	Home furnishings such as stove, sink, refrigerator, small table and chairs, and crib; household props such as dishes, utensils, play food, pots, baby dolls)
Different kinds of work	Doctor's office; grocery store; hair salon; post office
Fantasy	Science fiction (e.g., time travelling, exploration); medieval castle; magician
Leisure	Camping; sports; birdwatching; beachgoing

All Dramatic Play centers, regardless of age, should have materials that integrate at least 4 representations of diversity and the entirety of the dramatic play center should present a unified play theme. Representations of diversity may include, but are not limited to, representations of different races and ethnicities through dolls, foods of different families and cultures, and equipment used by those that are differently abled. This learning center should also contain furniture in accordance with the theme, such as a chair, tables, and child-sized kitchenette for home living, or a grocery market, and other props that enhance the theme of the dramatic play space.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:
✓ Create literacy opportunities by suggesting a library, post office, or bookstore play theme (make a field trip with children to get ideas for setting it up).

- ✓ Include props with authentic print such as calendars, cookbooks, address books, baby books in the languages spoken by children's families (family life at home) or, for example, relevant signage, order forms, sales slips, or play prescriptions for different work settings.
- ✓ Introduce play themes for jobs or careers in engineering or science that are engaging but may be unfamiliar to children such as an architect's office, a park ranger station, or a weather station.
- ✓ Provide materials and facilitate discussions related to mathematics explorations, when relevant to the theme of the dramatic play center. For example, if the center theme is a flower shop, provide cash register, money, and a telephone to increase exposure to written numbers and mathematic learning in daily events.

Art

The art center typically consists of a child-sized table that can accommodate 3-4 children, and an easel (if available) located within proximity to a sink. In addition to always carrying paper, the art center should contain at least one drawing material and a variety of age-appropriate art materials. An art center is not a requirement within an Infant classroom. For Toddler, and twos classrooms, the art center may contain crayons, watercolor markers, brush and finger paints, play dough, and collage materials of different textures (Harms et al., 2017).

Within a preschool/pre-K classroom, the art center should contain a variety of materials for child use from each of the following categories:

Materials Category	Examples
Drawing materials	Crayons; markers; colored pencils; chalk; pastels
Paints	Tempera; watercolors; finger paint
Three-dimensional objects	Play dough; wood scraps; clay; cardboard boxes
Collage materials	Cloth scraps; yarn; paper scraps; foam shapes
Tools	Scissors; paintbrushes; stamps with pads; rulers; glue

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Include displays on the wall or in binders of artwork done in various media.
- ✓ Rotate images and childhood stories of interesting artists and their work.
- ✓ Provide props for observational drawing (e.g., colored pencils for drawing the life cycle of a butterfly in the Science/Nature center).

Math

A math center contains materials that children can play with to learn math concepts and practice math skills. Infants, toddlers, and twos are capable of learning math and number concepts very early in life and as such, classrooms should contain many appropriate materials. For infant classrooms, math materials may include number picture books, grasping toys or rattles of different shapes, busy boxes with numbers or shapes, nesting cups, or stacking rings. Toddler classrooms may contain similar types of materials as the Infant classroom, in addition to some more complex materials – such as cash registers, toy telephones with numbers of keys, number blocks, and easy shape sorters, for example. Two-year-old classrooms may include pegs with number boards, blocks with various shapes and sizes, simple number puzzles, and safe tape measures. Aside from offering math materials in a defined learning center, educators may embed learning of math concepts in daily routines (e.g., giving a time warning before transition), and during music & movement activities (e.g., songs with counting or numbers woven into the lyrics) (Harms et al., 2017).

In a preschool/pre-k classroom, a classroom should offer at least 10 different appropriate math materials, with 3 materials belonging to each of the 3 categories of materials such as (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014):

Materials Category	Examples
Counting/comparing quantities	Unifix cubes with number trays; small objects to count into numbered containers; games that require children to determine more or less; chart and graph activities for children to use by placing materials into cells; dominoes; playing cards; games with dice; abacus; pegboards with numbers printed and holes to match; puzzles where written numbers are matches to quantities on a puzzle piece; beads with bead patterns
Measuring/comparing sizes and parts of wholes	Measuring cups and spoons; a balance scale with things to weigh; items to measure (rulers, yardsticks, tape measures); height charts; puzzles with geometric shapes that may be put together; shape with parts to divide and put back together to make whole (fractions)
Familiarity with shapes	Shape sorters; puzzles with different geometric shapes; unit blocks with image/outline labels on shelves; geoboards; magnetic shapes (magnatiles); shape stencils; attribute blocks of different sizes

The capacity of the math center will vary based on classroom space, furniture (tables/chairs) and shelving available. Math materials are to be used on tabletops and stored on open shelves for accessibility.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Incorporate math concepts and skills into play in other interest areas. For example, introduce children to attributes of blocks during block-building activities and have them measure and compare the heights and widths of their structures; have them explore volume with different shapes and sizes of containers at the water table; have them categorize the books in the library by topic or organize the paint brushes in the art area by size.
- ✓ Introduce topics of study that engage children in using mathematics for data collection and analysis. For example, do an extended study of balls and ramps and have children collect data on how far different balls roll off a ramp. Combine their data on a class chart and have children share their ideas about what features of a ball make it a good roller and why they think so.
- ✓ Do a study of water and create a Venn diagram for categorizing items that float, sink, or stay suspended in water. Use the diagram to compare characteristics of these different objects and share ideas about characteristics that matter in sinking and floating.
- ✓ Guide children to collect natural materials while outside and compare and contrast the characteristics of the materials (e.g., collecting fallen leaves or rocks and organizing the materials by size, shape, and color).

Science/Nature

Infants, toddlers, and twos, children may interact with nature through the exploration of natural things outdoors (e.g., infant sitting on blanket on grass; toddlers exploring dandelions in the yard) or by being provided experiences with nature indoors (e.g., watching birds at the birdfeeder while indoors, pointing out plants in the classroom). Educators may augment children's interactions with the natural world through appropriate books, pictures, or toys that represent nature realistically. Having a defined Science/Nature or a Sand/Water table are not required in an infant or toddler classroom; it is recommended for classrooms serving twos (Harms et al., 2017).

A preschool/pre-k classroom should have a defined Science/Nature center that contains at least 15 nature/science materials belonging to 5 categories, listed below:

Materials Category	Examples
Living Things	House plants, class pets, outside garden
Natural Objects	Rocks, seashells, bird's nest, pinecones, insects in transparent plastic
Factual books/nature-science picture games	Matching Game (adult animals with their babies); book about different kinds of sea life
Tools	Scale, magnifying class, microscope, magnets

Sand or water with toys	Sensory table with digging tools, measuring cups, containers

The center should contain at least 5 books related to nature/science. While artificial representations of natural objects (e.g., cloth flowers, plastic insects) may be placed within this learning center, these objects are not counted as a "nature/science material" defined by the ECERS-3 (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2017).

Science is an active process of inquiry and children need authentic, facilitated opportunities to use and engage with the practices of science during active and on-going investigations in Physical, Life, and Earth/Space science. Care should be taken to ensure that the science area is maintained as a vibrant and engaging space and that the science children experience is enhanced by, but not limited to the science area.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Rotate materials in the area so that they align with a current topic or reflect a concept or phenomenon children have expressed an interest in. For example, you might include rocks children collected outdoors along with a container with separate compartments for organizing the rocks in different ways.
- ✓ Ensure that materials in the science area are conceptually related and not a random collection. For example, along with plants you might include a watering can, a spray bottle, measuring tools, a field guide or children's book about plants, and a notebook to collect and record information about their growth over time. Along with a basket of shells, you might include a field guide to shells and photos showing where different shells are found in nature.
- ✓ Guide children to collect natural materials while outside and compare and contrast the characteristics of the materials (e.g., collecting fallen leaves or rocks and organizing the materials by size, shape, and color).

Reading

Exposure to and interactions with books is critical to help strengthen infant, toddler, and twos' emerging language and literacy development. While classrooms serving children under the age of three are not required to have a clearly defined reading center, it is expected that books are accessible to children throughout the classroom. The ITERS-3 recommends the classroom offer at least 10 books to children; however, the more books available, the better. Books for this age group are expected to be reachable, and have easily turned pages, clear pictures, and length and number of printed words to match children's developmental ability. Electronic books (e-books) are allowable if they are accessible for children's independent use, and any sound or animation is turned off (Harms et al., 2017).

Within a preschool/pre-k classroom, books are organized in a defined reading interest center, including several comfortable furnishings accompanied by some other softness. The reading center may consist of rugs, child-sized furniture, book storage (bookshelves, open shelves, baskets) and pillows, bean bags, or large soft toys (e.g., stuffed animals) that children can lean on. The reading center should contain many books – defined as at least 20 books for 10 children, 30 books for 15 children, and 1 more for each additional child (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014).

Books are expected to be easily reachable, in good repair, developmentally appropriate for the ages and interests of the children, and absent from frightening, violent, or negative content. A wide selection of books covering a variety of general topics should be included, such as variations in gender, race, cultures, feelings, occupations, health, sports/hobbies, abilities, among others.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Include nonfiction books on topics of interest such as children's field guides (e.g., to trees, birds, insects) and other books with interesting and detailed images children can describe and talk about (even if the text is advanced).
- ✓ Incorporate wordless books and books written in the primary home languages of children in the class; look for children's book readings on YouTube done by native speakers.
- ✓ If possible, provide multiple copies of a popular or topic-specific book so children can "read along" with each other while each holding their own book.
- ✓ Display photos of a variety of people reading alone and together or even photos of children's families reading together at home.
- ✓ If space allows, include a rocker or adult sized chair that invites an adult and child to read together.

Cozy Area and Space for Privacy.

A cozy area is a clearly defined space with a substantial amount of softness where a child may lounge, daydream, read, or play quietly and escape the normal hardness of the typical early childhood classroom (e.g., wood or tiled floors). The space may be furnished with a soft rug, pillows, cushions, beanbags, and other items that add to its softness. The cozy area should be placed in an area of the classroom that is protected from interruption, actively play, and is used for calm/quiet activities.

A space for privacy is an area that gives children relief from the pressures of group life. The space from privacy is a smaller space where 1 or 2 children can play. The signage, size of, and furniture provided within this space should obviously way to signal the capacity of the space for no more than 2 children. This space is to be placed in a quieter location in the room where it is protected from intrusion and distraction. Children using the space should be allowed to move materials with them to the space, if their preference is to work alone (e.g., child wants to take a toy truck with them from the block center to the private space). A space for privacy may be used for any type of play if it is limited to 2 children and is protected from active play and interruption. Some common spaces for privacy include an art easel, writing center, sand/water table, or lofted nook (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014).

When arranging the classroom space, it is important to keep in mind that a cozy area is not recommended for infant or toddler classrooms (it is recommended for Twos), however these spaces need more soft furnishings accessible to create a warm and comfortable classroom environment for these youngest learners. A cozy area and space for privacy are both required in a Preschool and Pre-K classroom. These spaces may be the same area if they are protected from interruption, active play, and are used for calm and quiet activities.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Include books centered on identifying and expressing feelings and/or bedtime type stories with simple, predictable text such as *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown.
- ✓ Display a feeling poster and/or children's drawings of themselves expressing different emotions.
- ✓ Provide soft toys (stuffed animals).
- ✓ Provide sensory fidget toys such as sensory bottles, stress balls, sensory tubes, and pop bubble toys.

Music & Movement.

Activities related to music and movement may be confined to a specific learning center in a classroom; however, this is not necessarily a requirement. Rather, music and movement activities should be accessible for child engagement throughout free/choice play. Some educators may choose to define a music and movement center and store materials there. Others may choose to embed these toys within other centers, such as in a gross motor center. Music and movement may include access to musical instruments, recorded music, singing, or other movement activities.

Educators may engage infants and toddlers with music and movement related activities by offering them musical materials (e.g., rattles, blocks with bells in them, push toys that pop), singing songs and lullabies, playing age-appropriate song recordings, and/or by leading children in movement activities (e.g., finger plays, dance). Offering age-appropriate musical *instruments* (e.g., drums, xylophone, cymbals) are only expected for twos, preschool, and pre-k classrooms (Harms et al., 2017). Within the preschool/pre-k classroom specifically, opportunities to engage in music and movement should be plentiful, including access to at least 10 different musical instruments, and access to other group singing/dancing activities, should be accessible for at least 1 hour (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014).

When designing the classroom environment educators should be wary of the types of instruments available, the location of the music/movement activities, the time of day that this play is offered, and the overall noise level that these activities may create.

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Take instruments into the gross motor space indoors or outdoors where children can play loud music, dance, sing, and march.
  - *Note: Credit for instruments and art materials outside are only given after they meet the minimum requirement for gross motor time of 15 minutes for the ECERS-3 observation.*
- ✓ Play different types and genres of music to create a mood in an interest center or to accompany a learning activity.

Fine Motor/Manipulatives.

The fine motor/manipulative center, like music & movement, may consist of activities embedded within other learning centers (e.g., math and art), or may be a separate space entirely if classroom size allows. Fine motor materials should be age-appropriate and accessible to children throughout a bulk of fine and free play time blocks. For infants, fine motor materials may include grasping toys, busy boxes, nested cups, textured toys, cradle gyms, and containers to fill and dump. For toddlers and twos, these materials may include shape sorting games, large stringing beads, large peg boards with pegs, simple puzzles, and medium or large interlocking blocks (Harms et al., 2017).

In the preschool/pre-k classroom, this center should contain materials from 4 distinct categories and note that at least 1 material from each of these categories should be accessible to children throughout the classroom (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014):

Materials Category	Examples
Interlocking building materials	Interlocking blocks of varied sizes
Art materials	Crayons or pencils for writing; scissors for cutting; playdough and tools for rolling/squeezing/cutting
Manipulatives	Stringing beads; pegs and pegboards; table blocks
Puzzles	Floor puzzles, framed puzzles

To support children's integrated learning, educators may:

- ✓ Make use of manipulative toys as nonstandard measuring tools, for example, have children use pegs or unifix cubes to measure their and their classmates' heights or the sizes of their block structures.
- ✓ Use manipulatives in counting, sorting, sequencing, and categorizing activities.
- ✓ Use puzzle activities as an opportunity to support problem-solving and teach children how to look for clues to determine whether a given piece fits in a particular space.

All learning centers should be clearly marked with signs that include a picture of the learning center, a written name of the center, and the number of children each center can have at capacity. Signage of the learning center as well as labels of stored materials accessible to children should be written in the languages of the children in the classroom.

Creating a Child-Centered Space

A high-quality early learning classroom supports all children, inclusive of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, home language, or ability level. The classroom is intended to be an extension of a child's home environment where they can feel loved, supported, and reflected. As such, the physical environment of the classroom should be designed in a way where children feel they have "ownership" over their environment.

When building the classroom, educators may first reflect upon the ways that they can make the space feel "home-like." Previously discussed under "Learning Centers," some centers should contain more or less furnishings that offer a degree of "softness." Soft furnishings allow children to escape from the normal hardness of the typical early childhood classroom and provide the classroom with more of a home-like feel. Classrooms should also be designed to accommodate displays that are easily visible to children. Displays may contain children's individualized work (artwork that a child carries out in their own creative way), photographs (of children with peers or family), and other materials related to a curricular theme, topic, or current interest. The more materials on display that relate directly to the work children have completed, their interests, and their community, the more they will feel like the physical space is an environment that the environment belongs to them and they belong in the environment.

Educators should also reflect upon the ways that the physical space promotes inclusion. In reference to the ITERS-3 and ECERS-3, a high-quality classroom contains at least 10 easily visible positive examples of diversity among books, displayed pictures, and accessible play materials.

Below are a few of the ways that diversity may be integrated into the classroom:

- ✓ Play food within the dramatic play center contain a variety of diverse food options pizza (Italian), tacos (Mexican), Sushi (Japanese), or croissants (French) to represent diversity.
- ✓ Books within the reading center contain representations of children with varying races, genders, abilities, interests, or languages.
- ✓ Singalong songs featuring a variety of languages - signing language for some words or playing songs from different cultures.
- ✓ Posters hung around the room may show adults with non-traditional gender roles (e.g., show women and men as firefighters).
- ✓ Shelves, center signs, and other child-focused texts are accessible in children's home languages in addition to English.

<u>Balancing Consistency and Flexibility</u>

An educator will need to negotiate between maintaining consistency and allowing for flexibility in their classroom as they become more familiar with individual needs of the children that they serve. Children crave consistency – a topic discussed in greater detail under "Schedules & Routines." There are elements within an early childhood classroom setting that provide a framework for consistency throughout a school year – including the types of learning centers offered, the components and basic structure of the daily schedule, and the classroom routines. The consistency in these overarching systems make children feel safe, secure, and comforted in an environment where they have greater control over knowing what to expect. Therefore, it is critical to maintain consistency wherever it makes sense to throughout the school year to provide children with this comfort.

An early childhood classroom, however, is also an ever-evolving environment that requires observing, reflecting, and modifying to best accommodate the needs of children. As the year progresses, educators must be flexible in reorganizing certain classroom elements based on changes in needs. Despite thoughtful planning, there are elements of the design of the classroom that may not always work, and educators must be flexible in adapting the environment to children's needs. At the beginning of the school year, educators will be able to see how children interact with the classroom layout and may need to rearrange the space to be more supportive if it is serving as a barrier to productive learning. Educators will have to continuously question whether the organization of the space prevents runways and large open spaces, minimizes disruption between centers, is safe and allows for educator monitoring, and is child centered. Spaces that are not organized in a way that works need to be reconfigured to meet children's needs.

Research shows that changes in the classroom environmental arrangement, such as the rearrangement of furniture, implementation of activity schedules, and altering ways of providing instructions around routines have been found to increase the probability of appropriate behaviors and effectively decrease the probability of challenging behaviors. (The IRIS Center, 2015).

Many of RI's Approved List of Pre-Kindergarten Curricula are organized into units of study, with weeks dedicated to the exploration of a particular topic/theme. Throughout the school year, educators will need to be mindful to adapt learning centers to align with curricular themes, children's interests, and additional opportunities for topical expansion and exploration. Educators may consider the types of materials that are accessible within the centers, rotating materials to allow for a mix of familiar and new, refreshing displays with new materials based on topics explored and children's interests, and adapting the environment and materials for children's use. By having aspects of flexibility and change in the classroom, educators will keep their classroom a fresh and exciting place to learn in; however, maintaining in schedules, routines, general classroom arrangement, and other classroom expectations, provide children with a sense of safety and comfort.

To Learn More

Below is a variety of links to resources to learn more about organizing and designing the physical classroom space.

Resource	Description
Early Childhood Environments: Designing Effective Classrooms	This **online, self-paced module** guides learners through the elements that make up a well-designed early childhood environment and the strategies that educators may user to make the classroom environment more conducive to children's learning and development. Perspectives and resources are provided on the physical, social and temporal early childhood environment.
Designing Environments	This **video** and **supporting resources** provide educators with a variety of guidance, resources, and activities to support the features of the physical and social classroom environment that maximize young children's engagement and learning.
Resources for Infant/Toddler Learning Environments	This **list** provides a variety of resources to guide educators in thinking about setting up an Infant/Toddler learning environment up for success. The resources will guide thinking about play spaces, areas for caregiving

	routines, and ways to integrate home languages into children's environments.
Developing a Deeper Understanding of All Young Children's Behavior	This **article** discusses how culture shapes our views, values, beliefs, and even our expectations for children's behavior and provides educators with actionable strategies to reflect upon instructional practices to support cultural diversity in the classroom.
Calendar Time for Young Children: Good Intentions Gone Awry	This **article** provides a fresh perspective on the use of "calendar time" in the classroom based on child development and best practices.
Studies vs. Themes: 5 Ways They Differ	This **article** describes some essential differences between curricular "themes" and "studies."

Creating Meaningful Classroom Routines and Schedules

Schedules and routines are key components of creating a classroom environment that is responsive, engaging, and intentional. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they each have very different meanings (Head Start ECLKC, 2022):

Schedules

- Represents the "big picture;" the main activity blocks that happen throughout the day
- E.g., *Small group time, Outdoor/Gross Motor time, Morning Meeting*

Routines

- The steps needed to complete each part of the schedule
- E.g., *Washing hands after playing outside; clean up toys before transitioning; helping educator set the table for snack on Thursdays*

Schedules and routines influence children's emotional, cognitive, and social development; they provide children with a sense of safety, security, and comfort in providing a sequence of activities that are to be expected from day to day. In turn, children gain a greater sense of control and autonomy over their environment and community over the predictability of their daily lives and their ability to be active participants in their education and care setting.

While more formulaic schedules are normative for preschool-aged children, it is important to note that schedules must be more fluid within an Infant and Toddler classroom. Infant and Toddler schedules should promote individualized care and adapt to each child's interests, needs, and abilities to support their development (State Capacity Building Center, 2020). If an Infant is tired and needs to sleep, for example, the schedule should be flexible and responsive to the child's need for a nap. That said, infants and toddlers still benefit from a schedule and routines that establish a sense of regularity in their day. When experiencing familiar activities and routines on a daily basis, infants and toddlers develop relationships with people they interact with and gain a sense of belonging and self-confidence and will grow to develop a greater independence and adaptability (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006). As children grow and develop, a class wide schedule and accompanying routines will be more developmentally appropriate.

Schedules. Schedules represent the "big picture" of the main activity blocks that occur within a given day. In the classroom environment, schedules assist educators with organizing the day into concrete units of time and arrange meaningful experiences for children. Schedules typically include time for free play, small group learning, snacks/meals, gross motor/outdoor play, transitions, read-alouds

and more. The Rhode Island Department of Education, in recognition of best practices for early childhood education structure, recommend that programs offer a full, 6-hour day (360 minute) schedule, 5-days a week. A full-day schedule offers children more opportunity to engage in high-quality learning activities throughout the day and enables educators to implement a chosen curriculum with greater fidelity. Research finds that full-day programs have substantial, positive impacts on child development including, but not limited to, cognition, literacy, math, social-emotional, and physical development (REL, 2021). Regardless of whether a community-based Organization or Local Education Agency can offer a full- or partial-day of early childhood programming, when creating a daily classroom schedule, there are a variety of key considerations that educators must factor in:

Daily schedules should reflect a balance of activities. Schedules should provide children with ample opportunity to engage in active as well as quiet activities, which may include gross motor/outdoor and free play in comparison to rest/quiet periods. The schedule should also include a balance of indoor to outdoor activities, large to small group activities, and child-initiated to educator-prepared activities. Having structure, yet variation within the school day provides children with predictability and variety within their daily schedules. Educators should consider the activities and adults available at a given time to manage the classroom effectively and to ensure that children are able to be meaningfully supported; activities available should offer children variety yet should not be so plentiful as to overwhelm children or push children into playing in isolation for long periods of time (CSEFEL, 2007).

Programs should consider high-quality components of a program structure as defined by the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2015). To achieve the benchmark score for high-quality on the ECERS-3 (5), programs should provide children with at least 1 hour of free play and 30 minutes of gross motor play. Programs are expected to allow children access to materials in various learning centers (Nature/Science, Blocks, Math, Dramatic Play, Music and Movement, Fine Motor, Art) for at least 1 hour. Longer play periods increase play behaviors. The use of electronic media and technology (e.g., dance or song videos, creative drawing on tablet, hand-held games) must be minimized and used carefully and intentionally.

Daily Schedules should emphasize learning in small groups and developmentally appropriate whole group instruction. Whole-Group activities for play and learning, while widely used in the preschool and pre-k contexts specifically, are recommended to be responsive and flexible to maximize child engagement. Many children have difficulty sitting still or engaging in a whole-group experience. Educators should minimize whole group times to developmentally appropriate lengths of time for the ages of the children in the classroom. Educators should allow for child movement while in whole group and be prepared for children to self-transition to a more engaging activity. Some whole group activities, such as a Circle time, or a story time followed by singalong, may be common practice in the early childhood classroom; however, it is important to be responsive to the needs of the children in the classroom. These same activities can be done with smaller groups to allow less wait times and more active engagement with the educator (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2015).

Daily schedules should be built around knowledge of children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds, levels of alertness (AM/PM) and attention spans. The unique needs of the children in classes will change from year to year; therefore, the daily schedule is dynamic and should always change. If children are more active in the mornings, plan for gross/motor development activities to occur during this time. If many children are having difficulty engaging in whole-group activities, try to embed these activities within a small group setting instead. If children are more restless during rest/quiet times, shift the schedule to include more active/gross motor activities prior to quieter and calmer parts of the day. As the school year progresses, schedules may

continue to evolve to reflect the needs of the children in the classrooms. Educators should continuously reflect upon their knowledge of the children in their care and determine what time of schedule will best meet their needs.

Educators should plan the method by which non-negotiables are integrated into the schedule as well as how the schedule is taught and communicated out. There are certain instances when a educator may find that they have little control over their schedule based on requirements set by the school or program. For example, in a Local Education Agency/Public School, early childhood educators may have to consider blocks of time for "Specials" such as Library, Gym, or Music outside of their classroom. In a community-based organization or Head Start classroom, meals are often delivered to classrooms and served within a specified ServSafe timeframe. Such instances may be required by the school or the program; therefore, educators will have to rearrange their schedule to account for these non-negotiables and determine which activity blocks would more appropriately precede and succeed this.

Daily schedules should minimize disruptions and transitions throughout the day. Disruptions throughout the regular school day can be challenging for young children. Reactions to transitions are generally strongest at the beginning of the school year and may ease as children develop a sense of regularity with daily schedules and classroom routines. When transitions occur, children may react in frustration over leaving an activity that they were engrossed in. Transitions may also lead to unease, confusion, and fear over the unknown – especially if the disruption is unexpected. Keeping this in mind, it is critical that educators consider minimizing disruptions and transitions throughout the day wherever possible. Schedule planning should be appropriately timed, with reference to metrics in the ECERS-3, to allow children ample opportunity to be engaged in a variety of different activities and to minimize transitions as much as possible throughout the day.

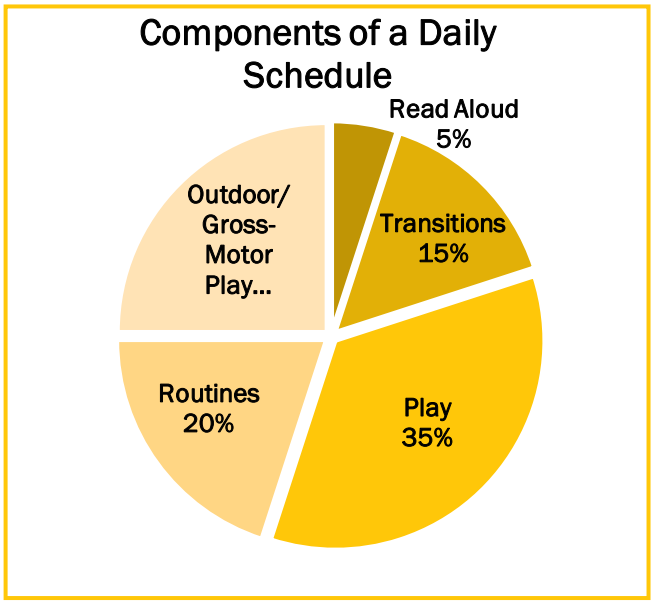
When transitions occur, they should be thoughtfully designed and responsive to the children in the classroom. When initiating a transition, educators should build out sufficient time, such as 5-10 minutes, for the actual transition. Prior to the transition, educators should prepare children by offering verbal and non-verbal cues to announce the progression of the daily schedule. Educators should regularly and consistently reinforce these cues to integrate them into children's everyday routines. For children that have more difficulty transitioning, individualized plans may need to be created to manage these components of the schedule.

Formative Assessment should be embedded within the daily schedule. Formative Assessment, as described in Section IV of this Curriculum Framework, is not a single event or measurement but rather an ongoing, planned and intentional process/set of strategies used to evaluate learning as it is occurring, and to use this information to adjust instructional practices. Assessments are formative when they are specifically and intentionally planned by the teacher to inform their instruction and implementation of the curriculum. By collecting data through written notes, pictures, videos and questioning, educators are able to gather evidence of children's learning and developmental progress and are able to make curricular and instructional decisions (Bohart & Procopio, 2018). Daily schedules should not include separated time blocks for the collection of assessment data; rather, educators should intentionally design activities by which data on particular developmental standards, as outlined in the RIELDS, can be collected. An

Connections with K-12 Content Area Frameworks: Formative Assessment
Formative Assessment is used in the K-12 space as a method of analyzing teaching and student learning and is identified as one of the core high-quality instructional practices. To be discussed in greater detail in Section IV of this framework, formative assessment is a critical type of assessment that is routinely used in the early learning context.

entire day in the early childhood classroom presents an opportunity for educators to engage in formative assessment data collection. By observing two children in the block area, for example, a educator may be able to record observational data on aspects of their physical health and motor development (fine motor development), social emotional (relationships with others, self-regulation), and language (receptive and expressive language), among others. It is important to continue to recognize the integrated nature of child development and in turn, the assessment of child development across varying domains.

RIDE considers a full day to consist of a 6-hour day; however, recognizes that programs may operate on a longer or shorter schedule. Regardless of duration, RIDE recommends prioritizing play and gross-motor opportunities while also allotting time for necessary routines, transitions, and read aloud opportunities. As indicated above, it is strongly encouraged that book reading is not exclusively delivered in a whole group format; rather, it should be embedded throughout all learning centers where appropriate. Below is an exemplar breakdown of key components in the daily schedule. **The chart and table on this page** provide an overall breakdown of key components within the daily schedule and approximately how much time each activity should consume in an average day for classrooms operating on a full, 360-minute (6-hour) schedule. The schedule will vary by program duration and should be adjusted as necessary, in recognition that more or less time will be spent on activities based on the length of the day.



Routines. Routines consist of the small, multi-step activities needed to accomplish components of the daily schedule. Routines are regularly occurring activities and procedures typically found within the arrival, bathroom, clean-up, snack/meal, story, nap, and departure times of the day. A series of responses to a clean-up routine, transitioning from choice time to read-aloud may involve:

- Placing small toys in appropriate bins.
- Picking up larger toys and placing them on labeled shelves.
- Leaving the learning center once it is clean.
- Assisting peers with cleaning up toys in different learning centers.
- Cleaning up table and washing hands after lunch.
- Writing their name on a clipboard to sign in for the day.

Teaching Schedules & Routines. Once schedules and routines are established, educators need to plan the ways in which they will communicate it to the children in their classroom.

Infant/Toddler Considerations:
Within an Infant and Toddler classroom, the placement of the schedule is primarily intended for use by families and teachers. Schedules for Infants and Toddlers should be individualized based on a child's individual needs in the moment (e.g., feeding a hungry baby; putting a child down for a nap when they are tired; changing a dirty diaper when necessary. As children get older, a more general routine will be followed. It is recommended that programs develop strong relationships with families to gain a greater understanding of the child's schedule.

When teaching the daily schedule, educators should be mindful to:

- Post the schedule in place(s) that are noticeable and accessible to children throughout the day.
- Follow the schedule consistently to set a precedent for predictability in the classroom.
- Individualize instruction of the schedule for children so that all children can develop an understanding of these shared expectations. Educators may use a combination of auditory *(e.g., clapping, timer, music)* and visual *(e.g., pictures, photos, graphics, words)* to signal the sequence of scheduled activities within a day. Educators should explain the schedule using home languages wherever possible – learning basic words of phrases and including home language on a written classroom schedule.
- Provide positive and constructive feedback on children's efforts to follow the schedule.

When teaching routines, educators should be mindful to:

- Model expected behaviors within a given routine for children. If a child is having difficulty cleaning up a learning center, for example, the educator should sit with the child and guide them with the steps of the cleaning up process *(e.g., If a child spills sand from the sand table onto the floor, the educator may suggest the child may grab the dustpan and brush to clean it up).* As with daily schedules, educators may integrate a child's home language into instruction of the routines either verbally (if they can speak the home language), or by learning basic words/phrases and written language.
- Maintain a schedule of predicable classroom routines throughout the school year. It is important to note that predictable classroom routines benefit all children, especially multilingual learners by allowing them to anticipate what will happen each day, including the type of language they will need for each activity (Bunce & Watkins, 1995; Tabors, 2008)
- Use visual supports to assist children with following the steps within a routine independently *(e.g., next to the sinks in the bathroom, an educator may display a sequence of images outlining the handwashing process)*
- Offer positive and constructive feedback on children's efforts to follow routines.

To Learn More

Below is a variety of links to resources to learn more about creating meaningful classrooms routines and schedules.

Resource	Description
Calendar Time for Young Children: Good Intentions Gone Awry	This **article** provides a fresh perspective on the use of "calendar time" in the classroom based on child development and best practices.
Daily Routines and Classroom Transitions	This **landing page** provides a variety of resources that support daily routines and transitions in the classroom.

Helping Children Understand Routines and Classroom Schedules	This **training kit** provides important content to assist in-service and pre-service providers conduct staff professional development activities on understanding routines and classroom schedules.
Schedules and Routines	This **video** shows how schedules and routines help to promote children's learning. This video is part of a series of 15-minute in-service suites on Engaging Interactions and Environments
Classroom Transitions	This **video** provides educators with strategies for helping children to use positive behaviors during classroom transitions.
Individualized Care	This **resource** communicates the importance of individualized care. It promotes essential program practices to ensure quality in family childcare and center-based programs that serve infants and toddlers.

Facilitating Children's Learning: Instructional Strategies

Introduction

Life in the 21st century is more complex than ever before and that we are living in a world that is increasingly technology oriented. This has implications for how young children today will learn and work in the future as well as how they will raise their families and participate in their communities. As mentioned above, the key skill sets identified by the National Education Association as skills children will need to navigate this 21st century world include critical thinking and problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity, collectively referred to as the **"The Four C's."** These skillsets are fully compatible with Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Universal Design for Learning, RIDE's focuses on play and equity, and they are integrated with children's development and learning across the domains of the RIELDS. The intentional organization around the Four C's:

- Allows for direct alignment with the RIELDS domains as well as integration of RIDE's focuses on play, and equity-based and culturally responsive teaching practices.
- Enables us to incorporate examples that cross domains, for example, supporting children's communication skills during a physical motor activity or supporting problem-solving during an art activity.
- Includes teaching strategies that incorporate technology in the service of supporting children's development and learning across the domains and their simultaneous development of the 4C skillsets.
    - *Note: Digital technology, including computers, tablets, smartphones, and other devices should only be used in the early childhood classroom to support planned and intentional goals for children's development and learning. The emphasis should always be on children's active use of these tools for a purpose and never involve children as passive consumers.*

Most importantly, The Four C's should not be siloed; rather, these skill sets intersect and overlap with one another, and are best taught in an integrated way. As noted above, there are times when you will focus on teaching individual skills through educator-structured activities and games, however, as indicated throughout this document, integrated teaching is emphasized as it is most responsive to how young children learn.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about The Four C's and RIDE's design of this section of the Framework aligning with this vision.

Resource	Description
21st Century Skills, Early Learning Framework	This **framework** is a collaborative effort by members of Partnership for 21st Century Learning (established by the NEA in 2002) to define and describe 21st century skills and how they might be supported and observed with young children (18 months-6 years) in early learning environments. It incorporates The Four C's (Critical Thinking and Problem-solving, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity) as well as a set of skills centered on social-emotional development and technology literacy.
Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society	This white paper describes The Four C's, why they are important skillsets for teaching and learning, and presents a discussion of each of the skillsets and how to support them across the curriculum and is applicable for all educators.
Daily Routines and Classroom Transitions	This **landing page** provides a variety of resources that support daily routines and transitions in the classroom.
The Importance of Building 21st Century Skills in Young Children	This **tip sheet** shares skills and strategies to support children's growth and development of 21st Century Skills across The Four C's – Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Communication.
Introduction to the 4 C's	This **video** provides an overview of The Four C's of 21st learning as described in the NEA's publication "Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society: An Educator's Guide to "The Four C's,'"
Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells Us About Raising Successful Children	This **book** introduces the concept of "The 6 C's," mirroring the 4 C's that are used in K-12 education and presented in this Early Learning Framework, with the addition of "Content" and "Confidence." For the purposes of this framework, these two additional C's is integrated within the discussion of standards-based instruction (Content) and initiation during communication and relationship building (Confidence).

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

"Teach children how to think, not what to think" Margaret Mead

Critical thinking is a widely accepted educational goal. At its core, critical thinking is careful thinking directed to a goal. Critical thinking is a complex system that people of all ages use to make judgments and decisions, resolve problems, analyze new information, and create different solutions. Critical thinking skills also mutually support executive function skills including working memory, impulse control, planning and completing tasks and the ability to look at things from different perspectives – all of which are skills that fall under the social and emotional and cognitive developmental domains. Critical thinking is "the ability to process and evaluate information and is how we determine right from wrong. Whether a child is solving a math equation or acquiring a new language, critical thinking can aide and accelerate the learning process. It is an essential life skill that every child needs to develop as they progress and mature through life." (Hitchcock, 2022; Little Thinkers Center, 2019).

Instructional strategies for supporting children's critical thinking skills:

- ✓ Provide experiences and materials that provoke infants' and toddlers' curiosity and desire to explore.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for children to share, compare, and test their ideas about how and why things happen the way they do.
- ✓ Integrate purposeful reasons for using mathematics into children's play experiences.
- ✓ Help children do research using books, digital resources, and topic experts.
- ✓ Support flexible thinking by asking children to compare their ideas before and after several hands-on experiences with a topic. For example, after several explorations of trees on the playground you might say *Before we explored our trees, many of you thought trees were not alive. What do you think now? Why do you think so?*
- ✓ Introduce children to different ways of organizing information. For example, use a Venn diagram to sort items that sink, float, and stay suspended in water or use simple graphs to show and compare children's breakfast or color preferences.

Problem-solving is a process that involves identifying a problem, generating and testing possible solutions, and choosing the one that works best. All kinds of problems arise naturally in the context of children's play. For example, a child's block structure keeps falling; they can't seem to create a color they want at the easel; or two children can't agree on what roles they will play in a dramatic play scenario.

Instructional strategies for supporting children's problem-solving skills:

- ✓ Integrate problem-solving opportunities during children's play and routines.
- ✓ Frame classroom dilemmas as scientific or social studies problems to be solved.
- ✓ Facilitate children's problem-solving rather than solving problems for them.
- ✓ Use stories to elicit children's ideas about how they might solve a problem a character is facing.
- ✓ Engage children in early engineering and use of engineering practices including identifying the problem, investigating possible solutions, and identifying, testing, and refining the solution through trial and error.
- ✓ Positively reinforce innovative and "out-of-the box" thinking and problem-solving.

Critical thinking and problem-solving are closely related and mutually reinforcing skillsets. We need to be able think critically to solve problems. That makes problem-solving opportunities a great context for supporting critical thinking. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are used throughout all domains of learning. Children exercise these skills when engaging in Mathematics, Science, and/or Engineering activities because these content areas naturally incorporate processes that involve finding answers to questions and solutions to problems based on evidence and using logic and reasoning. Children use them when engaging in social studies activities because the abilities to make decisions based on evidence and collaboratively solve problems form the underpinnings of an inclusive and democratic community and society. Critical thinking and problem-

solving skills can be supported during extended studies of STEM and Social Studies topics, during single content-focused activities, and throughout the day during children's play and routines.

To Learn More
Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about Critical Thinking and Problem Solving as part of supporting children's 21st Century Learning:

Resource	Description
Supporting Critical Thinking in Toddlers	This **video** illustrates an educator narrator's strategies for engaging toddlers in explorations and talk that is responsive to what they are doing and noticing and that supports early critical thinking skills.
The Importance of Critical Thinking for Young Children	This short **article** discusses the importance of critical thinking, why it is important, and what readers can do to help children learn and practice these skills.
Supporting Young Children's Thinking Using Problems They Care About: Design in ECE	This **webinar** provides educators with ideas for engaging children in meaningful explorations that support STEM learning and problem-solving in the context of authentic explorations.
What are you thinking? Scaffolding Thinking to Promote Learning (NAEYC)	This **article** provides examples of educators engaging with children in ways that support them to share their ideas and reasons for them.
Fostering Critical Thinking in Young Children	This **article** discusses the value of starting early with Critical Thinking and provides some strategies for supporting the development of these skills in the context of preschool.
Playing Around with Number Composition: Games, Stories, and Everyday Problem Solving in the Preschool Classroom	This **article** incorporates examples of supporting mathematical problem solving into different learning centers throughout the day.

Communication

A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language. -Noam Chomsky

Communication is one's ability to share thoughts, ideas, questions, and solutions.

> *"Communication is a collaborative process that develops from birth. There is no one way that children learn to communicate, but research has shown that it is significantly influenced both by the social and cultural environment surrounding a child and by individual factors such as their interests, dispositions, health and wellbeing. Communication is about more than just spoken or written words, and it encompasses many forms of shared understanding and expression. Communication is crucial to children's holistic development, and research evidence supports the pivotal role that educators play in facilitating the development of children's communication skills in educational settings." – (White, 2019)*

All of us, including young children, are living in an increasingly multicultural and "global" community and, due to advances in technology, use a variety of digital tools to communicate with friends and family in distant locations and exchange information with people across the globe. Researchers predict that future jobs and careers will increasingly bring groups of people together who have diverse cultures, languages, life experiences, and perspectives. Supporting children's communication skills in the 21st century includes a stronger emphasis on supporting their abilities

to: use multiple modalities to get their ideas across (e.g. storytelling, pictures, and models); understand that different people have different cultural norms for communicating; listen and respond effectively and respectfully to a range of opinions and ideas; use language for a variety of purposes (e.g. to ask questions, seek out information, describe their ideas and reasoning) and to begin to learn how to use technology as a tool for communication, where appropriate. This section will describe Productive Talk, Language and Literacy, and Communication for Multilingual Learners in the early childhood context and provide implementable instructional strategies that educators may use to support communication in the classroom.

Productive Talk

Conversation, or talk, involves more than the giving and receiving of information. Talk is a dynamic social and educational process that engages participants in thinking and learning together, an important component of early education environments. When educators facilitate academically productive talk with young children, they introduce a topic of mutual interest; encourage children to share their questions, experiences, and ideas and listen to those of others, and support children's reasoning and their ability to take other perspectives. In the process, they support children's vocabulary and speaking and listening skills as well as their cognitive and social skills development.

Connections with K-12 Content Area Frameworks: Academic Discourse
Academic discourse is an effective and purposeful questioning and discussion technique that fosters rich peer-to-peer interaction and the integration of discipline-specific language into all aspects of learning. While the term "academic discourse" is not widely used in the early learning context, the term "productive talk" is and carries the same meaning and implications.

The ability to facilitate productive talk requires a shift in how educators view their role. Educators, with good reason, are apt to view their role as the person who provides information to children. Facilitating productive talk means shifting this view to include drawing on children's knowledge, experiences, and ideas related to a topic. It also means balancing educator talk and child talk and shifting away from an Initiate/Respond/Evaluate (IRE) model in which the educator asks the questions, children respond, and the educator evaluates their responses as right or wrong. When engaging in productive talk the educator encourages children to **build on, add to, or question** what other children have said, encouraging peer-to- peer interaction in the process. Research finds that productive classroom talk has a positive impact on children's oral language abilities which, in turn, impacts later reading comprehension, social acceptance, and self-regulation skills.

Instructional strategies for supporting children's communication skills:

- ✓ Use props, visuals and images from books and digital resources to support and focus the conversation. *For example, in a conversation before launching a building activity, the educator might use actual blocks, photos of children building, a child's drawing of their building, images in a book about building such as Dreaming Up, or a short video of children building to draw out children's ideas about which blocks work best for building different types of structures.* These strategies are essential for promoting inclusion for multilingual learners as well as children with cognitive, speech and/or language challenges.
- ✓ Think about the difference between these two questions: *What happens to trees in the fall?* and *What have you noticed about the trees outside on the playground?* The first one suggests a correct answer while the second one encourages children to draw on their own experiences and observations to respond.

- ✓ Think about the difference between these two questions *Why does that stick float?* and *Why do you think that stick floats?* Inserting "do you think" in a why question is a handy way to communicate that you are asking for a child's thinking rather than a correct scientific answer.
- ✓ Create group talk norms with children and refer to them frequently. For example, these might include points such as *Listen respectfully to our friends; Ask questions; If you already shared, give someone else a chance to share; and/or invite quiet friends into the conversation.* Preschool educators sometimes express that they have one or two children who monopolize classroom conversations. This may happen because they have particularly strong language skills in English or because they have a strong knowledge base on a variety of topics and are the first to answer educator questions. Remember that referring to talk norms and setting clear limits that do not allow children to monopolize conversations helps everyone. It provides space and time for quieter children to participate in the conversation. It also teaches valuable listening and turn-taking skills to children who tend to monopolize conversations that will benefit them later in school, life, and work.
- ✓ Use plenty of "wait time" and be comfortable with silences. Children need time to process what has been said, think about a response, and put it into words and different cultures have different norms about whether and when it is appropriate for children to jump into conversations, particularly with adults. Along with establishing positive relationships, creating a culture that values talk, and asking productive questions, wait time communicates that children's responses are worth waiting for.
- ✓ If children need a concrete signal for speaking and listening, try using a talking stick or other item that children pass from one to another that signals whose turn it is to talk and whose to listen.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about Productive Talk:

Resource	Description
The Right Question at the Right Time	This article introduces the concept of productive questions and provides multiple examples of the types of questions that would and would not enhance children's exploration and communication.
Engaging Children in Meaningful Conversations	This video provides suggestions for promoting conversations with children around meaningful topics.
Eight Simple Rules for Talking with Preschoolers	This article offers eight rules that can be integrated into daily classroom routines and activities to support preschoolers' literacy development and school readiness.

Language and Literacy

Language and literacy development is integrated and supports children in comprehensively understanding what communication looks like, sounds like, and means. Research finds that children's language ability is recognized as central to later literacy proficiency and school readiness. Language and Literacy are two separate and distinct domains of early childhood development as defined by the RIELDS. Language development is a child's ability to understand increasingly complex language (receptive language), increase in proficiency when expressing ideas (expressive language), and show a growing understanding of and ability to follow appropriate social and conversational rules (pragmatics). Literacy is the process of learning words, sounds and written language.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary development is one of the most impactful skills needed in supporting children's successful literacy development and school readiness. Exposure to and learning of new vocabulary occurs through these early social interactions. A longitudinal study found that "educator talk" (greater quality (variety, sophistication) of words) within a preschool setting were directly related later language and literacy (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). This study is consistent with and supported by a wealth of other research that has found that children acquire vocabulary from experiences with adults who scaffold their use of rich and varied language (Wasik & Campbell, 2012). For infants and toddlers, desired goals related to vocabulary development will focus heavily on fostering secure relationships with caregivers and family members in ways that are culturally and linguistically responsive. Secure and responsive relationships, interactions, and experiences lay the foundation for vocabulary and concepts that support later academic development across all subject areas (Whittmer & Honig, 2020).

Instructional strategies for supporting children's vocabulary:

- ✓ For infants and toddlers, describe what you are doing to the child and ask questions, even if the child is not yet talking (e.g., describing diapering, how they are getting the bottle ready)
- ✓ Respond to infant or young child's babbles, gestures, or cries appropriately with words.
- ✓ Remember that when you teach a new vocabulary word, you are also teaching the concept the word stands for. Concrete words like the names for objects (e.g., block, marker, easel) can be relatively easily taught by pointing to or showing a picture of the object. However, words for more abstract concepts (e.g., shape, size, texture) and words with multiple meanings in English (e.g., drop, soft) need more context and context clues for children to grasp their meanings.
- ✓ Intentionally plan for the target vocabulary words you will teach, discuss their meanings with children, and use them repeatedly in different situations including during children's play, during book readings, and during daily routines. Research shows that children need to hear a word used in context about twenty times before they can make it their own.

- ✓ Choose words that are responsive to children's current levels of word knowledge and emphasize words that children can use in different situations and settings (Tier 1 and 2 words) rather than specialized vocabulary that children will only encounter in limited contexts (Tier 3 words).
- ✓ Introduce conceptually related words together. Research shows that children can learn word meanings more easily if sets of related words are introduced and used together. For example, during a life science study you might introduce the words bird, egg, nest, and fly together or, with children where more challenging vocabulary is appropriate, you might introduce soil, habitat, burrow, segment, and earthworm.
- ✓ Use TPR (total physical response). This is a strategy that associates a word with a physical action and is typically the way we demonstrate word meaning to infants and toddlers. It can be effectively used with older children and is essential for providing language cues for multilingual learners. TPR is especially effective for getting across the meanings of action words.
- ✓ Leverage play, routines, and transitions as contexts for introducing, using, and reinforcing vocabulary!
- ✓ Sing traditional children's songs that go along with a topic or theme or make up your own words to traditional tunes including any new vocabulary words you are teaching in the lyrics. Research shows that pairing words with music activates working memory.

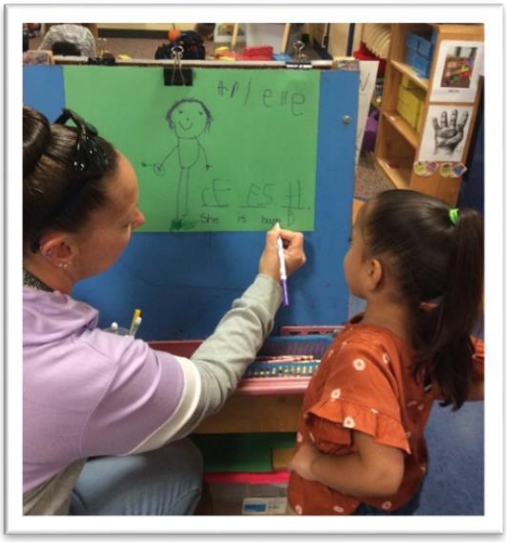
To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more on supporting children's vocabulary learning:

Resource	Description
Developing Vocabulary Through Purposeful, Strategic, Conversations	This **article** provides suggestions for incorporating vocabulary from read-alouds throughout daily activities.
A Guide to Serve and Return: How Your Interaction with Children can Build Brains	This **guide** provides information on responsive interactions between a child and their caregiver, termed "serve-and-return interactions," what these interactions are, the science behind them, and how they strengthen children's brain development – including the development of communication and social skills.
Supporting English Learners in Preschool: Strategies for Educators	This **research to practice paper** describes practical strategies and approaches that all preschool educators can use to promote English language learner's oral language, receptive language, and pre-literacy skills.
What We Know About Early Literacy and Language Development	This **handout** provides information on how early language and literacy skills unfold for infants and toddlers across the first three years of life.
Susan B. Neuman: Living in a World of Words Surrounded by 'Book Deserts'	This video offers some strategies for how educators and families can bring more words into children's lives.

Early Literacy

Early literacy does not necessarily refer to the formal teaching of "early reading;" rather, it relates to the development of literacy skills that occurs naturally through children's enjoyment and exposure to books (Zero to Three, 2003). Literacy development begins in infancy and is heavily related to children's exposure to literacy materials (e.g., books, paper, crayons, signs) and their relationships and interactions with trusted adults. As discussed earlier in this framework, building a positive relationship with caregivers and engaging in powerful conversations primes children with the confidence they need to engage in the learning process. It is through a social, play-based process that children gain significant knowledge of language, reading, and writing.



The development of early literacy skills is critically important for children's future academic and personal success, yet children enter kindergarten varying considerably in these skills, and it is difficult for a child who starts behind to close the gap once he or she enters school (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). The components of early reading and writing in the RIELDS include phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, text comprehension and interest, and emergent writing and the following strategies may be used to support these components.

In July of 2019 and later amended in July of 2022, Rhode Island legislators passed The Rhode Island Right to Read Act, requiring Preschool/Pre-K through educators in Local Education Agencies to develop the knowledge and practices of the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy in response to high rates of children reading below a basic level in the fourth grade. **Science of Reading**, or scientific reading instruction, is defined as researched-based instruction that is grounded in the study of the relationship between cognitive science and educational outcomes. **Structured Literacy** is explicit, systematic, diagnostic, cumulative instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, syllable types, morphology, semantics, and syntax. Providing a strong foundation in each of these skills develops the neural routes necessary to become a proficient reader. In the early years, an emphasis should be placed on phonological awareness, phonics, encoding, and practice in decodable texts until children are able to read real and nonsense words of all syllable types. To ensure students can accurately decode and fully comprehend grade-level text by third grade and beyond, it is necessary to enhance educator knowledge in the science and research of how children learn to read and the instructional approaches that align with this research.

Instructional strategies for supporting children's early literacy skills:

- ✓ Create a literacy-rich environment: create and display print at children's eye-level that they will be interested in looking at and talking about, transcribe their descriptions of their drawings and on their words about what they are doing, noticing, and thinking about with photos you take of classroom experiences, label the play materials and shelves where they belong in the learning centers so children can access and replace materials independently.
- ✓ Support reading and writing across interest areas by including reading and writing materials for specific purposes in the learning centers. For example, in the block center include books about building and clipboards with paper and markers so children can draw or label their structures. When the dramatic play

center is transformed to a doctor's office include pads of paper and pencils for doctor's notes and magazines and books in the waiting area.

- ✓ Facilitate dialogic book-readings that get children engaged in telling the story as well as listening to it. Some prompts you might use to support dialogic reading include *completion prompts* (e.g. educator begins the sentence and child completes it); *recall prompts* (e.g. educators asks children what they remember about a story from a previous reading); *open-ended or productive prompts* (e.g. educator asks children to describe an image and what they observe) or prompts that help children *make connections to related experiences (e.g. educators prompts a discussion about a virtual field trip they made to a zoo while reading a book about animals).*
- ✓ Create charts, documentation panels and other displays that tell a story about what children are doing and learning or to highlight a new skill they are developing and include text, photos, children's work samples, and children's words. This type of documentation also serves as a prop for conversations with children and families.
- ✓ Explicitly model using reading and writing for a variety of purposes. You might, for example jot a reminder note on a post-it, make a "things to do" or "things to gather" list, write out the recipe for playdough or a classroom snack, look up information in a non-fiction book in the classroom library, or do a google search for information on a topic of interest.
- ✓ Support phonological awareness by playing games with rhymes and with words that begin or end with the same sound. Sound out interesting words with children and talk about how many different sounds they hear in a word.
- ✓ Have models of the alphabet displayed on the wall at and available in different learning areas at child-height and use them to talk about letters, their shapes, the sounds they make, and words that begin with them.
- ✓ Explicitly model how to write upper- and lower-case letters when creating class charts and other displays.
- ✓ Integrate routines in the schedule that incorporate writing for a purpose and incorporate supports for individual children's writing at developmentally appropriate levels. For example, you might establish a sign-in routine at arrival time; a sign-up routine for play in the interest areas; or a routine for writing get-well cards, invitations, or thank-you notes for different purposes

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about supporting children's reading and writing skills:

Resource	Description
Literacy-Rich Environments	This **article** describes the characteristics that constitute a "literacy-rich environment," why this type of environment is important for children's development, and the role of the educator in supporting this environment.

Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read Aloud with Young Children	This **article** describes the method of reading termed "dialogic reading" and how educators can best support this strategy in their classrooms.
Language and Literacy Environments in Preschools	This **article** describes some basic strategies for supporting language and literacy development with preschoolers.
Roots of Reading	Hosted by Fred Rogers, the *Roots of Reading* **series** looks at the earliest stages of literacy in such locations as baby speech lab and a Head start center. The program examines how parents, childcare providers, and kindergarten educators can get children started on the road to literacy.
Supporting Language and Literacy Skills: • From 0-12 Months • From 12-24 Months • From 24-36 Months	These **articles** are intended to provide families with suggested activities and answers to frequently asked questions to support their child's language and literacy development from birth through age three.

Communication for Multilingual Learners

Supporting language and literacy development for multilingual learners begins by taking an asset-based approach and recognizing that being multilingual, AND the process of becoming multilingual, confers cognitive, social, and linguistic benefits to children. It also means recognizing that learning multiple languages can be challenging for children, especially when different languages are used in different contexts. **Research indicates** that multilingual learners benefit when educators provide explicit support for language and literacy learning and create connections between the languages children are learning at home and school.

Instructional strategies for supporting communication for multilingual learners:
✓ Learn about and avoid common myths about how children learn multiple languages. Many of them, for example, *children will soak up English from their peers without adult support* and *total immersion in English is the only way to learn it* persist to this day.
✓ Provide explicit, systematic instruction in vocabulary. Offering multiple exposures to words supports children in developing a rich understanding of word meaning and use. Read-alouds that include explanations of targeted vocabulary and presenting vocabulary thematically may be beneficial.
✓ Discuss words and their meanings. Be aware that many words in English have multiple meanings that can cause confusion for all children. You may use "drop" to refer to a small amount of water but children may think you are using it as in "drop something on the floor".
✓ Use props, pictures, gestures, total physical response, body language, facial expressions, and demonstration as cues for language. The more cues children have to a word's meaning, the better.
✓ Group children in a variety of ways sometimes grouping multilingual learners with native English speakers and sometimes with children who share their home language.
✓ Use open questions or questions that can have multiple answers to help multilingual learners expand their own methods of communicating.

- ✓ When possible, leverage bilingual staff's knowledge to make connections between words in English and the equivalent words in children's home languages.
- ✓ Use cognates (words that have a common root and similar meaning in two different languages) whenever possible. STEM includes many Spanish/English cognates such as describe/describir, observe/observar, explore/explorar, investigate/investigar, record/recordar, science/ciencia, mathematics/ matemáticas, engineer/ingeniero, and many everyday words are cognates as well.
- ✓ Enlist all of the children in the class to be "Language Helpers" and teach specific gestures for communicating non-verbally to express an invitation to play.
- ✓ Encourage families to talk and read to their children in their home language as a way of strengthening children's foundational language (L1) skills.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about supporting communication development in multilingual learners:

Resource	Description
Dual Language Learners Toolkit: For Educators, Caregivers, and Family Service Staff	This **toolkit** offers resources that educators, caregivers, and family services staff may use to foster the learning and development of young children that are multilingual learners.
Early Language Development	These **tools and resources** offered by WIDA promote multilingual children's language development by helping educators plan equitable and engaging learning opportunities for young multilingual learners.
Supporting Dual Language Learners	This **article** describes family engagement strategies for partnering with multilingual learners' families in ways that support emerging bilingualism and language development in multiple languages.
Bilingual Infant/Toddler Environments	This **guide** offers research on first and second language acquisition and development on infant and toddlers within the context of Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs.
Five Tips for engaging Multilingual Children in Conversation	This **article** offers five strategies for engaging multilingual children in conversation, grounded in the work of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE).
Supporting Emergent Bilingual Children in Early Learning: Checklist	This **checklist** supports educators with preparing a classroom that will strengthen children's bilingual learning within a rich literacy and language classroom environment.
Dual Language Learners with Disabilities: Supporting Young Children in the Classroom	This **module** offers an overview of young children who are dual language learners and highlights the importance of maintaining children and families' home language while they are learning a new or second language. This module discusses considerations for

	screening and assessing these children and identifies strategies for supporting them within the context of an inclusive preschool classroom.
Supporting English learners in preschool: Strategies for Educators	In this **article**, the authors describe a professional learning program- *Supporting Preschoolers with Language Differences*- and one educator's experience as she applied new strategies with her own multilingual learners and along with her instructional coach, captured evidence of children's cross-domain learning during authentic classroom scenarios.
Supporting Dual Language Learners in the Pre-K Classroom	This **blog** post describes a research-based framework for supporting young multilingual learners and the environmental strategies, instructional strategies, and family engagement strategies educators can use to support children's learning of English and their home language.
8 Strategies for Preschool ELLs' Language and Literacy Development	This **article** describes some methods and strategies that research has proven effective in preparing young ELLs for Kindergarten.
Encouraging the Development of and Achievement of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood	This **research brief** describes successful early childhood education programmatic and instructional features that promote multilingual development and learning.

Collaboration

"Unity is a strength… when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved" – Mattie Stepanek

As our world gets smaller and the issues we face as a global community get more complex, the need for skilled workers who can collaborate increases. Collaboration goes a step beyond cooperation. It is the ability to work toward a common goal with others, with an emphasis on working in diverse groups or teams. The ability to collaborate draws on a range of cognitive, social, and language skills including viewing things from different perspectives, listening carefully to other people's ideas and opinions, and sharing one's own ideas and opinions respectfully and articulately and in different ways. An emphasis on collaboration also supports a positive and inclusive classroom climate. There are many opportunities to support collaboration throughout the day in early learning settings.

Instructional strategies for supporting children's collaboration skills:
✓ Enlist children's help in deciding how many children can safely play in each learning area and have them assist with making signs that indicate that number. ✓ Periodically and intentionally group children in learning centers who have different temperaments, approaches to learning, prior knowledge, and background experiences to enable children to be exposed to perspectives, ideas, and ways of communicating that are different from their own. ✓ Engage toddlers in simple games that involve back and forth interactions such as rolling a ball back and forth, taking turns making funny faces, or trading crackers at snack time. ✓ Create classroom helper tasks appropriate to children's developmental levels and rotate the tasks frequently so that all children have opportunities to contribute to the smooth running of the classroom. Think creatively about tasks beyond the traditional ones of plant waterer and line leader. For example, you might create the job of "class reporter" whose job is to take photos of children cooperating, or you might create jobs that reflect children's individual skills development such as "Shoe tier" or "Measurer." For older infants and toddlers, you will need to enlist their help with certain individual tasks, such as asking them to hand you a diaper, or to retrieve a ball from the yard. ✓ Take, display, and talk about candid photos of children in the classroom working together or helping each other and caption as such. Help preschoolers learn to take photos of children helping. ✓ When engaging children in potentially competitive explorations keep the focus on what they are doing rather than who is doing it. For example, ask *Which tools worked best for measuring?* rather than *Whose tools worked best?* ✓ Intentionally plan and facilitate activities in which pairs or small groups of children work together to complete a task such as painting a mural, completing a puzzle, building a tower, or making a card for a special person at school.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about supporting children's collaboration with others:

Resource	Description
How to Encourage Collaborative Play in the Preschool Classroom	This **one-pager** describes activities for promoting collaboration across interest areas.
Helping Children Play and Learn Together	This **article** describes strategies for preparing the environment, enhancing the social emotional environment, and supporting peer collaboration and interactions using a classroom case study to illustrate the strategies in action.
Early Childhood in the Social Studies Context	This **article** describes the importance and relevance of Social Studies "projects" to young children's everyday lives and experiences and to their development of social

	relationships and skills that build the foundation for their future roles as citizens in a democratic society.
Supporting Collaboration and Group Work in Preschoolers: Here's what to know	This **article** provides guidance to families on the benefits of cooperation and collaboration, and how these skills can be strengthened at home.

Creativity

"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun". Mary Lou Cook

Creativity includes and is often associated with the visual and performing arts but it is not limited to artistic and musical expression. It is also essential for science, mathematical, linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, naturalist and even social and emotional intelligence. After all, being creative allows children to be more flexible and emerge as better problem solvers, which makes them more capable in terms of adapting to technological advances and make the most of new opportunities. Creativity helps children to cope with their feelings and fears, self-regulate and manage their emotional state, and pursue independent learning and is present in all types of play referenced earlier in this section.

Everyone uses creativity in everything that they do. Children may express creativity through the thoughts and feelings expressed in a drawing, or through the language that they use while engaging in pretend/fantasy play. They may creatively innovate a solution to grab an object that is out-of-reach, or to determine how to stabilize a block structure that continues to fall. Creativity is present in everything that we do and therefore, it is deemed an essential 21st century skill necessary for success.

Instructional strategies for supporting children's creativity:

- ✓ Provide models and suggestions of things children might draw such as still life, a view out a window or their own reflection in the mirror.
- ✓ Use everyday observations as opportunities for children to share their ideas about how and why things work the way they do and to support creative as well as critical thinking. Be sure to ask what they think and avoid suggesting that there is one correct answer to the question. For example, at mealtime or snack time you might ask *Why do you think we use spoons to eat pudding instead of forks? On a wet day you might ask, "Where do you think rain comes from?"*
- ✓ Model generating multiple solutions to a problem and encourage children to do so as well.
- ✓ Provide objects and materials in the learning centers that are different from the ones they normally use. For example, place flat pieces of cardboard and cups in the building center; cardboard boxes instead of furniture in the dramatic play area; pipe cleaners and buttons in the art center; and/or unusual shapes of paper *(e.g., long and narrow or triangle-shaped) in the writing area.*
- ✓ Refrain from making suggestions about how a child might improve on a piece of artwork.

- ✓ Positively reinforce children when they use classroom objects and materials in novel ways

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about supporting children's creativity in the classroom.

Resource	Description
What is Creativity. Why is it Important, and How Can you Help Children Develop It? (NAEYC)	This **webinar** provides rich guidance to educators on inspiring creative thinking across all areas of learning in the classroom.
Creativity and Play: Fostering Creativity	This **article** defines creativity and the creative process, and how educators can support creativity through play. This is a landing page article on the topic of Creativity and Play; however, readers may also find links to video clips, activities, reading lists, and related websites.
Nurturing Creativity	This **e-newsletter** uses examples and quotes from Gowrie Victoria Docklands, Melbourne, where creativity is valued at all levels – in the curriculum for children, in the creativity educators bring to planning and implementing the curriculum, and in the service and leadership – thus treating "creativity" as an overall approach to practice.

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Section 4: High-Quality Learning through Assessment

Introduction and Overview

As described in the previous sections, the early learning curriculum framework is built upon the foundation of rigorous standards and high-quality curriculum materials (HQCMs). Section 3 discussed how this foundation informs high-quality instruction. This section focuses on how the curriculum frameworks should also ensure high-quality learning through assessment. When properly designed and implemented, a comprehensive assessment system provides multiple perspectives and sources of data to help educators understand the full range of child achievement. Assessment information may be used to evaluate educational programs and practices and make informed decisions related to curriculum, instruction, intervention, professional learning, and allocation of resources to inform program improvements, so programs are better equipped to better meet children's needs.

Assessment information also informs educators and families on child development and learning and its relationship to ongoing instructional practice. Various types of assessments are required because they provide different types of information regarding a child's development and learning. A comprehensive assessment system must be appropriate for the children served and address the assessment needs of children at all grade levels, including those who speak languages other than English, are differently abled, who struggle, and who excel.

Child development and learning is most maximized with an aligned system of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. When assessment is aligned with instruction, both children and teachers benefit. Children are more likely to learn because instruction is focused and because they are assessed on what they are taught. Teachers are also able to focus, making the best use of their time. Assessments are only useful if they provide information that is used to support and improve child development and learning.

Assessment inspires us to ask these hard questions:

- "Are we teaching what we think we are teaching?"
- "Are students learning what we want them to learn?"
- "Is there a way to teach the subject and student better, thereby promoting better learning?"

Section 4 will orient you to the purposes and types of assessment within the early learning context, the hallmarks of high-quality early learning assessment, partnerships with families for the child assessment process, and factors to consider when assessing differently abled children or multilingual learners (hereafter "MLLs").

Purposes and Types of Assessment

Assessment in Early Learning

Assessment of children within the educational space is complex and requires teacher and program administrator's thoughtful consideration of the purpose of the assessment, type of assessment, and process for how data is collected.

Purpose. Assessment has multiple purposes in early learning. Educators assess children's learning and development to make decisions about instruction, determine eligibility for special services and program placement, and to inform families about children's progress in the early childhood setting. Assessment data is also used to measure program and instructional efficacy, or to benchmark data for accountability purposes at the local, state,

and national level. When it comes to the assessment the "why" should precede the "how" because assessments should be designed and administered with the purpose in mind. Most assessments are used for one of the three general purposes: to inform and improve instruction, to screen/identify (for interventions), and to measure outcomes.

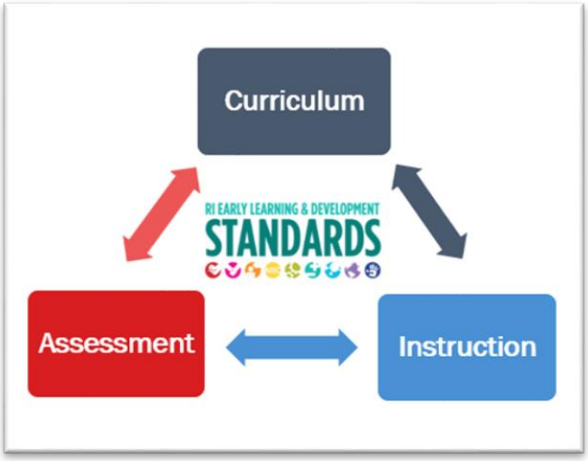
Type. There are three types of assessment in early learning, discussed later in this Framework within the early learning context – one of which is administered by trained professionals (Developmental Screening, a type of Interim Assessment) and the other types of assessment are administered by educators (Formative, Interim, and Summative assessment). While the types of assessment used between the early learning and K-12 contexts may be the same, what differs are the **processes and practices** by which **the assessment is administered, and data is collected.**

Practice. Formal/standardized assessments may be presented as standardized tests, developmental screenings, and/or diagnostic evaluations. Within the early learning context, assessments administered by educators typically use Informal/Authentic practices for collecting data. Informal assessments are ongoing assessments incorporated into day-to-day classroom activities and measure children's performance and progress on an individualized basis (NAEYC, 2022). Specific strategies for implementing authentic assessment practices in the early learning classroom are addressed on pages 96-105 of this framework.

The Instructional Cycle

Highlighted in Section II, the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards articulate shared expectations for what young children should know and be able to do by certain age-ranges. Spanning nine developmental domains, the RIELDS reinforce the idea that early learning and development is integrated across all areas of development and while specific domains of learning are identified, each area of learning is influenced by progress in others. The RIELDS are never to be used as a checklist, an exhaustive list of the ways a standard may be represented, or as a stand-alone curriculum or assessment tool; rather, they are the foundation of **the instructional cycle** which signifies the cyclical nature of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and illustrates how each element is connected in inextricably linked to the others. When teachers have a solid understanding of developmental expectations through the RIELDS, they can plan and deliver instruction (curriculum & instruction), and assess outcomes, and determine child, teacher, and program needs (assessment). Findings from assessment yield valuable information for program leadership and educators on curriculum, instruction, and assessment and therefore, the cycle continues.

The Instructional Cycle



To leverage this cycle intentionally for the benefit of all children including MLLs and children that are differently abled additional considerations apply. Teachers need to be acutely aware of the diversity between and within different groups of children, plan assessments that are responsive to variability among MLLs and their development strengths and tease out various influences that impact children's learning to avoid misinterpretations that inhibit ongoing curricular and instructional

supports. The Instructional Cycle is cyclical, and information gained through assessment helps families, educators, and program leaders make decisions about what is known about children's learning and what can be done to better support learning.

Types of Early Learning Assessments

There are three types of early learning assessments that are commonly administered by educators within the context of the early learning classrooms: **Formative**, **Interim**, and **Summative Assessment.** Each type of assessment is distinct in how frequently data is collected and the purposes for which the data is analyzed and used, which is summarized in the graphic below:

Type of Assessment		
Formative	**Interim**	**Summative**
• Frequent and ongoing • Data informs short-term curricular and instructional planning	• Intermittent; however, administered once per year for Developmental Screenings • Generally aggregate formative assessment data to reveal child growth on a smaller scale and inform short term curricular and instructional changes	• Infrequent • Data reveals "big picture" growth, and informs long term programmatic improvement
Informal (Authentic) and/or Formal (Standardized) Assessment Practices		

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a type of assessment that teachers use to collect data for the purpose of continuously measuring children's progress towards learning goals and tailoring instruction to an individual and group over a shorter timeframe. Formative assessment does not occur within a single event or measurement, but rather is an ongoing, planned, and intentional process used to assess learning as it is occurring, and to use this information to adjust instructional practices.

Purpose: To continuously measure children's progress toward learning goals for curricular and instructional planning.

Administrator: Teachers, Teacher Assistants

Occurrence: Frequent/Ongoing

Informal or formal tools may be used to collect data during the formative assessment process. The collection and analysis of data is ongoing and may be used by educators in the moment to adjust instruction, or may be used to make, adjust, or enrich plans for upcoming learning activities and routines to be more responsive to children's learning and developmental needs. Educators who aim for continuous improvement assess children's learning continually through repeated assessment measures over time as they work with, watch, listen, and have conversations with children during play.

In the Introduction to Observation and Assessment, Shannon Riley-Ayers describes Formative Assessment as:

- ✓ Individualized and flexible to meet the context, and is comprehensive;
- ✓ Collecting and using information to inform and plan for high-quality instructional practices, and communicate progress to children, families, and others;

- ✓ Meeting children where they are, what they bring to the learning environment and where they are ready to go next; and,
- ✓ Embracing play and exploration, since children demonstrate stronger skills through play; and
- ✓ Contributing to a comprehensive approach to decision-making (however not to be used in isolation).

It is recommended best practice for teachers to embed formative assessment in instruction by working directly with children to gather information about what they know and can do, how they process information and solve problems, and how they interact with other children and adults. Creating a strong partnership with families for the purposes of collecting and communicating formative assessment data is particularly important for families of children that are differently abled and children who are multilingual learners. Additional recommendations for formatively assessing young MLLs include obtaining multiple sources of information on children's early language experiences and leveraging staff who share their linguistic and cultural backgrounds to assist with gathering and interpreting assessment data. Additional considerations for assessing MLLs are provided below in the under Authentic Assessment practices.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about formative assessment:

Resource	Description
View from the classroom: Formative assessments in early childhood education	In this **blog series**, the Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL) interviews educator Rori Hodges about her experience using formative assessment in a pre-k classroom.
Excerpt from Spotlight on Young Children: Observation and Assessment	This **book excerpt** describes the characteristics of formative assessment.
Every Child Shines: Using Formative Assessment to Reflect on Children's Knowledge and Skills	This **video**, introduces formative assessment in an early learning classroom (pre-k and kindergarten focused), including best practices and the benefits and uses of formative assessment data at the classroom, local, and state levels.

Interim Assessment

Interim assessments in early learning track learning over a period of time (e.g., quarterly, trimester) for the purpose of measuring children's growth against standard(s) or benchmark(s) at designated checkpoints throughout the year. Interim assessments offer teachers opportunities to gather information about many things that are relevant to the teaching and learning process such as:

- ✓ Individual and collective student growth;
- ✓ Efficacy of teaching practices, programs, and initiatives;
- ✓ Projections of whether a student, class, or school is on track to achieve established proficiency benchmarks; and,
- ✓ Instructional needs of individual students

Purpose: Generally used to measure children's growth against standard(s) or benchmarks at designated checkpoints throughout the school year. For Developmental Screenings, this typically occurs once per year to identify children that may benefit from additional supports.

Administrator: Teachers, Teacher Assistants

Occurrence: Generally intermittent (3-4 times/school year; quarterly, trimester); once per year for developmental screenings

Some interim assessments **aggregate formative assessment data** at critical points during the learning cycle. Others, like Developmental Screenings collect data at single points during the school year. In doing so, interim assessments have a broader set of purposes than both formative and summative, as it provides educators with data for instructional, predictive, and evaluative purposes. These assessments can help identify gaps and inform decisions around differentiating instruction, so that all students can grow regardless of where they are starting. Additionally, interim assessments may also be predictive and evaluative. Data gathered from interim assessments can help educators predict child performance on important markets and evaluate whether teaching strategies, curricula, and program structures are effective.

Developmental Screening

Developmental screenings, a type of interim assessment, sample developmental tasks in a wide range of areas and have been designed for the purpose of determining whether a child may experience a challenge that will interfere with the acquisition of knowledge or skills. Developmental screening assessments are intended to identify children that may benefit from additional services and supports, or those that may need more thorough and detailed assessment to determine if a referral for further evaluation is necessary to promote positive outcomes in kindergarten and beyond. Developmental screening tests focus on a child's ability to acquire skills as opposed to other types of screenings that seek to find out what skills the child has already acquired (e.g., literacy screenings and readiness testing). Developmental screenings are only administered by healthcare, early childhood, community, or school-based professionals that are trained in administering the instrument.

- ✓ **For children aged birth to three,** screening is done as recommended by a pediatrician, in a pediatrician's office. During these early years, an Infant and Toddler teacher plays a critical role in communicating with parents about the importance of visiting a pediatrician routinely with their child and to encourage parents and other family members to talk with their pediatrician about their child's progress.
- ✓ **For children aged three to five,** Section. 300.111 of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (Child Find) requires states have policies and procedures to ensure that all children with disabilities residing in the State and who are in need to special education and related services, are identified, located, and evaluated. Rhode Island has established developmental screening programs called Child Outreach which seek to annually screen all children in the following areas: Vision, Hearing, Speech/Language Skills, Social/Emotional Development, and General Development including, but not limited to gross and fine motor skills, language, and cognition. Developmental screening, as conducted by Child Outreach, occurs once annually, and asks children to complete developmental tasks to determine whether they may experience a challenge that will interfere with their learning or development of skills in the classroom context.

It is important to remember that developmental screening assessments should never be used as the sole measure to identify children for special education. Screening assessments – although vital in determining who might require additional support and/or services – are limited assessments often used to identify whether a child is experiencing a delay in development in one or more areas; however, further data would need to be collected to identify specific areas, the underlying cause, and the appropriate supports. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind accommodations that must be made when screening multilingual learners. The use of screening assessments developed for monolingual English-speaking children can result in screeners having difficulty distinguishing between language differences and language disorders (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007). Screenings of MLL children should be implemented in English as well as in the child's primary home language and NAEYC recommends that young MLLs be screened using "linguistically and culturally-appropriate

screening tools" (NAEYC, 2005). Families must grant school departments permission to screen their child and, after screening occurs, are always notified of any/all results along with Special Education Evaluation Teams affiliated with Rhode Island's public-school districts, including when relevant, specialists who understand a child's home language and culture. If a child is identified as potentially needing additional diagnostic testing, these trained professionals assume responsibility for requesting it.

Research consistently finds that positive developmental and academic outcomes are associated with early identification and attention to potential problems. For instance, approximately 10% of all children born each year have developmental disabilities or are at risk for delays in learning and development. When children with developmental delays receive early identification and intervention services, there is greater likelihood that these children will require fewer intensive services or no services at all when they are older. Early identification not only effectively promotes positive outcomes for young children and families, but also has substantial cost-benefits to our educational systems and to society.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about interim assessment, and more specifically, developmental screenings:

Resource	Description
Understanding Formative, Interim, and Summative Assessments in the Classroom	This **article** provides an overview of the roles that formative, interim, and summative assessment play in the classroom.
Interim Assessment	This **video** developed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, shares the purpose and importance of interim assessments and the data that it yields.
What are interim assessments?	This **video** provides an overview of the purpose of interim assessments, what these assessments look like in the classroom, and how these assessments support program equity.
Learn the Signs. Act Early	This **landing page** developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers families guidance and resources on how to encourage child development and what to do if there is cause for concern over development. The "Learn the Signs. Act Early" program aims to improve early identification of children with autism and other developmental disabilities so children and families can get the services and support they need.
Early Intervention Program	This **webpage** provides key information on Rhode Island's Early Intervention program, which promotes the development and learning of Infants and Toddlers who have a developmental disability or delay in one or more areas.
Child Outreach Screening	This **webpage** provides information for educators and families on Rhode Island's Child Outreach Screening program.
Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!	This **guide** offers educators and programs guidance on how to talk to families and how to best support children throughout the developmental screening process.

Infant/Toddler Development, Screening, and Assessment	This **module** provides content on early development and quality child care policies and practices for consultants working in child care settings serving children ages birth to 3 years.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessments are a type of assessment that measure a child's achievement at the beginning and end of a defined period or experience, for the purpose of measuring growth against standard(s) or benchmark(s) across a school year. Summative assessments may be administered at the beginning and end of an instructional unit, term, or school year and helps teachers and program leaders to answer the question, "What did children learn?" Summative assessments provide an overall picture of child development and learning and can be useful in predicting child outcomes/supports or evaluating the need for pedagogical or programmatic changes.

Purpose: To measure children's growth against standard(s) or benchmark(s) across a school year to inform classroom, and program/district improvement

Administrator: Teachers, Teacher Assistants

Occurrence: Infrequent; 1-2 times - at the beginning and end of a school year

While formative and interim assessment data is used within a shorter time frame to adjust curriculum and instructional practices to be more responsive to children's strengths, needs, and interests, summative assessments play a larger role at the administrative level. Summative assessments yield important data that may be used to make program or district-wide decisions on curriculum and instruction, staff needs (e.g., professional learning, internal supports), and environmental needs (e.g., classroom materials, classroom arrangement, schedules).

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about summative assessment:

Resource	Description
Summative Assessments	This **video**, developed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, shares the purpose and importance of summative assessments and the data that it yields.
Observation, Assessment, and Planning	This **article** offers guidance on how summative and formative assessments are used in the early learning context. *Note that Birth to 5 Matters via the Early Years Coalition is a registered charity in English, Wales and Scotland; however, the information presented in this article on assessment is universal.*

Hallmarks of High-Quality Early Childhood Assessment

Formative, interim, and summative assessments of children ages birth through five must inherently embody characteristics of high-quality that are guided by sound professional standards. Below are a list of high-quality considerations or "hallmarks" of high-quality early childhood assessment:

Assessments of children ages birth through five should consider:
✓ Aligning with the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) and focus on goals which are developmentally and educationally appropriate.
✓ Addressing all domains of learning to support the development of the whole child, not just assessment of learning in the cognitive, mathematics, and/or literacy domains.
✓ Involving the collection of data over time using a variety of methods.
✓ Relying on demonstrated performance during real, not contrived activities.
✓ For standardized assessments, utilizing instruments selected by qualified professionals for *reliability, **validity, and ***appropriateness with the population of children being assessed.
✓ Supporting children's psychological safety and self-esteem and be sensitive to children's motivation, interests, and attention spans.
✓ Providing a clear benefit for children either in the services they receive or in the quality of their educational program.
✓ Inclusivity in the variety of ways in which children may express their learning and development.
✓ Embedding an understanding that children's development and learning are influenced by their family, community, and cultural backgrounds

Note: The hallmarks of high-quality early childhood assessment do not necessarily apply to standardized assessment tools used for the purposes of screenings.

***Reliability** – the degree to which an assessment is consistent across different instances of measurement (e.g., different teachers or raters, times of measurement, or sets of test items)*

*** Validity** – the accuracy of the assessment in measuring what it is intended to measure*

**** Appropriateness** – *Translations of English language instruments are carefully reviewed for linguistic and cultural appropriateness by native speakers well versed in the complex issues of assessment and translation.*

Authentic Assessment Practices & the Assessment Cycle

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment practices are assets-based, individualized, and inclusive methods for collecting assessment data in early learning settings (Zero to Three, 2008). **It is a practice that differentiates educator-administered assessments in the early childhood context from those in kindergarten and the elementary grades.** Dr. Margarita Milenova from the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota defines authentic assessment practices as processes that require "*children (to) apply their knowledge and skills in a situation that is meaningful to them and is within the range of a typical classroom activity*" (Milenova, 2020; Leong, Bodrova, & Oralie, 2004). The term authentic assessment describes *how* the data is collected rather than *why*. Formative, summative, and interim assessments may all be considered "authentic" if data collection methods embody the following characteristics:

Research finds that the use of authentic assessment practices in early learning classrooms:

- ✓ **Helps teachers to better assess and serve young children.**
- ✓ **Influences teachers' behaviors and the selection of teaching materials and groupings of activities.**
- ✓ **Provides a basis for the adjustment of teaching strategies.**
- ✓ **Strengthens children's relationship with their teacher.**

(Zollitsch & Dean, 2010)

- ✓ **Data is collected within the child's natural environment** (e.g., during play, classroom routines).
- ✓ **Data is collected through multiple methods including observation and documentation.**
- ✓ **Data collection occurs over time and in multiple contexts** (e.g., different learning centers, different times of the day).
- ✓ **Analysis of data considers the individual characteristics and context of children** (e.g., life experiences, culture, personality, and dispositions).
- ✓ **Analysis of data requires educator reflection to inform later practice.**

In addition, authentic assessment practices used with young MLLs needs to take into consideration the child's linguistic and cultural background and information from the family about the child's learning and development at home and as expressed in the primary home language, In order to assess MLLs effectively in the EC setting, educators need to have a knowledge of individual children as well as an understanding of the process and stages of their English language development. It is highly recommended that staff who share linguistic and cultural backgrounds be included in any assessment efforts.

The Assessment Cycle

Earlier in this section, the Instructional Cycle is described as the process through which standards-aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment are inextricably linked through a cyclical process. Within this, assessment may be broken down into a cycle of its own. An educator cannot simply do assessment without intention; rather, assessment follows an intentional and reflective set of steps termed **the assessment cycle.** Through the assessment cycle, teachers engage in several steps that include planning for assessment; implementing assessment; reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting the data; sharing data with internal and external partners; and finally, making curricular, instructional, and assessment decisions based on the data's findings. Through this last step, the assessment cycle ultimately feeds into the larger instructional cycle by influencing the planning and

implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Below is a description of each of these steps along with examples of what each step may look like in the early learning context.

Planning for and Implementing Assessment

Planning for assessment requires careful reflection on what the assessment will cover, how the assessment data will be collected, and when the assessment will occur. Planning is a critical step to ensure that assessments are conducted with intentionality and that the assessment process involves the collection detailed and varied information on each of the children in the classroom, covering all standards across all developmental domains in the RIELDS.

If using a RIDE endorsed curriculum, an assessment system is built in and vetted for alignment with the RIELDS. The curriculum oftentimes offers a schedule that guides the timing of assessment, such as the specific standards that each activity is aligned with across curricular units. In following this guide, the educator will be prepared to collect data on a child's development across all domains. If using a locally developed curriculum, it is recommended that educators create a guide for assessment and identify the standards that curricular activities are aligned with. In doing this, they will be sure to collect assessment data that encompasses all the standards in the RIELDS.

While all educators should have a plan for assessment and utilize a guide to intentionally support this process, it is also important to remember that every component of the day offers rich opportunities for the collection of data whether it be during indoor and outdoor activities, transitions, or daily routines; therefore, assessment requires planning, but should not be a burden on the educator. By following children's interests, educators can create activities with the goal of intentionally obtaining information about specific developmental standards, or other goals and objectives. The collection of assessment data can be short and frequent, conducted throughout the day, or even focused on one activity. The timing and scheduling of assessments are entirely dependent on what the educator wants to know and how they will measure it.

Prior to jumping into the process of collecting, recording, and analyzing data, educators will need to plan the logistics of the assessment process keeping in mind the following questions:

What is the purpose of this assessment?

When planning for assessment, educators should first ask themselves what it is that they would like to know about the children's development and learning in relation to the RIELDS. Using the RIELDS consistently as a resource will ensure that educators will formulate age-appropriate questions about individual children's competencies across the full range of learning domains, components, and standards. It is important to note, however, that the educator may simultaneously collect and record data on a number of individual children during group activities.

Educators may plan assessment around a single competency. For example, if you want to learn more about a child's expressive language development, a question that would frame the assessment might be: *"How often does the child use complex parts of speech in English and/or their home language?"* Recognizing the integrated nature of early childhood development, educators may also choose to plan to collect data relevant to multiple questions across multiple domains of development at once ("Work Smarter, not harder"). For example, a planned activity in the block center (e.g., "brick" cardboard boxes, hard hats, and

measuring tape) may yield important information on children's fine motor and mathematic development. Sometimes the purpose of assessment will be to find out about child(ren)'s interests, preferences, or temperament. In that case, your question may center on how the child(ren) uses classroom areas or materials, or how they respond to specific teaching approaches or groupings, for example, *"How often does Jose choose to visit the classroom library?" Or "How participatory is Sherry at large group versus small group activities?"* More specific purposes and questions yield more specific data.

Educators must identify ahead of time what they want to find out about an individual or group of children based on previously collected information and the RIELDS and plan curricular activities around these goals.

What is the best source of data?

Once you identify the purpose of the assessment, you will need to determine the ways in which you will collect data to answer your question. It is helpful to identify the best source of data by asking yourself the 4 W's: Who, What, When, and Where, defined below:

Who: Refers to both who you will observe to answer your assessment question as well as who will be responsible for collecting the data. Educators may consider whether the assessment question needs to be answered for all the children in the classroom or just a few children. Educators will also need to consider whether they will collect the data, or whether another colleague such as an assistant, itinerant teacher, or other early childhood specialist will assist? Educators should also consider the ways that families can contribute to the collection of data.

What: Refers to what you will do to stage or facilitate an activity that will gather data to answer your assessment question. You may question the materials or learning activities that you can provide to help children engage in the behavior or practice the skill. You may consider the interests and strengths of the children that they can leverage to ensure they are able to demonstrate the aspects of learning and/or development that you are focusing on. You may also scaffold an activity for a child so they can best demonstrate their learning in an area of strength.

When: Refers to when you will conduct the assessment. Assessment collection periods can be short, frequent, and conducted throughout the day or they can be focused on a particular activity. Educators may identify the best sources of data to answer their assessment questions by considering whether transitions and routines will serve as a sources of assessment data; whether assessment data be collected in the morning or the afternoon; or during small group, free play, indoor, or outdoor play. Certain times of the day may present better and more strategic opportunities for collecting assessment data than others.

Where: Refers to the context of where the assessment will take place. Maintaining authentic assessment practices, assessment will be conducted in the child's natural environment while engaged with play; however, you may consider whether you would like to utilize a single learning center or multiple learning centers as your source of assessment data, or whether data collection will occur indoors or outdoors.

Identifying the best source of data through timing and scheduling (when) and logistics (who, what, and where) of assessment are entirely dependent on what you want to know and how you will find it out. Just like a detective, an educator looks for clues that indicate what children know or can do as a result of their instruction.

How will I record this data?

Once an educator plans out the purpose of assessment and the sources through which they may collect assessment data, they will need to the methods that they will use to record the data. Educators may collect data through a variety of methods, a few of which are listed below. Some tools, like family questionnaires, rubrics, or checklists, for example, may be developed by the program/district, the RI Department of Education, or the curriculum publisher, while other methods are conducted independently by the teacher and/or assistant teacher.

Example tools/methods of recording child assessment data:		
Observation Notes (Anecdotal/Running Records)	**Transcripts of children's discussions/comments/ explanations**	**Work Samples**
Checklists	**Photographs**	**Audio Samples**
Rubrics	**Videos**	**Family Questionnaires/Notes**

As part of the planning process, educators will need to consider the **appropriateness of different methods** of recording assessment data in different circumstances. If collecting data on children's expressive language and relationships with peers, educators may choose to serve as an onlooker, watching and listening on children's play and interactions while recording data through observation notes, video, or audio samples. If educators would like to collect data on children's writing development, they may choose to collect a sample of the child's writing or drawing. The appropriateness of different methods of recording assessment data and the educator's role in collecting data (e.g., active interaction vs. passive observation) is entirely dependent on the source of data discussed above. Planning authentic assessment practices ahead of time – ideally as a part of the curriculum planning process – helps to determine which methods to collect assessment information in the most efficient way within the context of instruction.

According to (Milenova, 2020), When collecting data through observation, data collected should be:

- ✓ **Specific: describe the scene and the child(ren)'s behavior as you would to someone who has no prior knowledge about the child**
- ✓ **Concise: Report only the relevant information about the child and situation**
- ✓ **Objective: Try not to make any assumptions about what you are observing**
- ✓ **Strengths Focused: Report only on what the child can do, not what they cannot do**

Additionally, it is important for educators to use **many and varied methods** to record data to support the breadth of ways that students may express learning, keeping in mind principles of universal design, and learning and assessment considerations for multilingual learners and children that are differently abled. For example, a multilingual child may interact with children socially in a different way rather than just through language; therefore, educators will need to adjust their methods of data collection to reflect these, and other children's needs and abilities. When planning the different ways you may assess children, think about the different levels of knowledge, skill, and varied interests of the children in your class and the different ways that you may integrate assessment opportunities into play. Consider the

different ways that children may describe, show, or demonstrate their learning in relation to the RIELDS and individualized learning goals. There is no limit to the amount of data that educators may collect for each child in the classroom; rather, the more data collected, the more complete story one will gather of a child's growth and development. By collecting data for each child from a combination of the methods listed above (or others), data will be more diverse and representative of different skills, behaviors, and competencies, and educators will be better equipped to analyze data and draw conclusions. Furthermore, partnering with families for the collection of child assessment data is an important way for educators to gather more data about each child in their classroom and provides valuable insights into aspects of each child's development that educators may not be able to observe directly within the classroom setting. Specific guidance related to engaging families in assessment data collection can be found in The Assessment Team – Families as Partners section below.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about planning for authentic assessment practices in the early learning context.

Resource	Description
Planning for Assessment	This **toolkit** includes a variety of resources to assist teachers for efficiently planning for conducting ongoing assessments within a preschool classroom.
Observation, Screening, Assessment, and Documentation	This **video** offers specific tools to assist practitioners in learning, practicing, examining, and mastering strategies to improve their assessment of young children.
DAP: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning	This **excerpt** from NAEYC's DAP position statement highlights practices for observation, documentation, and assessment that are developmentally appropriate for children from birth through the primary grades.
Documenting Observation	This **guide** provides a detailed overview of different methods of documenting observational data, examples of these methods in practice.
Infant and Toddler Development, Screening, and Assessment	This **module** supports practitioners working in childcare settings with the screening and assessment of infants and toddlers.
Quick and Easy Notes: Practical Strategies for Busy Teachers	This **article** offers practical tips for practitioners to engage in systematic, observation-based assessment by keeping anecdotal records on each child.
Observing Young Children	This **video** discusses various types of observations in the early childhood classroom and how to plan observations to get the most useful results.

Reviewing, Analyzing, and Interpreting Assessment Data

Every piece of data is only a record of an event or behavior until it is analyzed and interpreted by teachers, families, or other early learning specialists. Analyzing assessment information to determine whether it is meaningful, accurate, and well-supported helps to identify what a child or group of children know and can do. Having that information supports curricular and instructional planning that can respond to, extend, or deepen the child's learning.

How do I prepare data for analysis?

By using a variety of the methods of collecting assessment data listed above *(e.g., observation notes, videos, work samples),* educators will collect a lot of **data/artifacts** about each child in their classroom. Many educators will store data for each child in a secure portfolio system either in paper files, or through an online system (e.g., *Teaching Strategies GOLD; COR Advantage*). As this data is collected, educators will need to refer to the child's portfolio and organize it on an ongoing basis to gain a sense of the developmental domains that they collected data on, the children that the data encompasses, and any gaps in data collection that may still exist. Based on this knowledge, educators can identify the developmental domains or the specific children that they will need to collect more data on. Teachers may ask themselves the following questions when deciding whether they have collected enough data for each child:

Teachers may ask themselves the following questions to decide whether they have collected enough data for each child:

- ✓ **Is there an adequate quantity of data collected for each child in the classroom?** For example, after organizing my data, do I find that my photographs (and other methods of data collection) encompass all the children in the classroom at once, or do children have substantial data/artifacts associated with them individually as well?
- ✓ **Is there an adequate quantity of data collected for each of the assessment questions that I intend to answer?** For example, if I am interested in collecting assessment data on the language domain, do I have enough data/artifacts related to each child's expressive and receptive language, and pragmatics?
- ✓ **Is the data collected of quality?** For example, if I am organizing my observational notes, are the notes thorough and descriptive? Am I able to draw meaningful information from these notes that are related to the assessment question that I am collecting data on?
- ✓ **Is the data accurate?** For example, if I feel that a child is below widely held expectations for a certain developmental milestone, do I feel that this is well supported and consistent with the data/artifacts that I have collected?

What does meaningful documentation look like?

The data/artifacts collected up until this point is considered "raw" because it is in its initial state before review. The review, analysis, and interpretation process take the process of organizing data to the next level because it is at this step that educators determine whether a piece of data carries meaning that can be used as evidence for a child's development. Educators are always observing and working directly with their children and collecting data daily; however, a piece of data is not considered to be a piece of "**documentation**" until it is

reviewed and used as evidence of a child's development. An entire running record, for example, contains many different observations and conversations and it is possible that only a small portion of the record may yield data that can be used as evidence of a child's development within a particular standard. In "The Power of Documentation in the Early Childhood Classroom" Dr. Hillary Seitz notes:

> *"An effective piece of documentation tells the story and the purpose of an event, experience, or development. It is a product that draws others into the experience – evidence or artifacts that describe a situation, tell a story, and help the viewer to understand the purpose of the action."*

Below are some examples of how data/artifacts may look in their initial, "raw" state prior to review, and what this same data/artifact may look like after the educator has had a chance to review it, refine the observation note, and use it as clear evidence of a child's development with alignment to the RIELDS.

Pre-Review Data	Post-Review Documentation
Anecdotal Record: Hannah walked towards the climbing frame. She placed her foot on the first step then stopped. Tom, Jake, and Beth lined up behind her. She stood back and waved them on. "You go," she said. When they had passed, she stepped up again but backed away when more children arrived for their turn at the climbing frame. Hannah stood at the base of the frame for a moment looking toward the painting easels. She walked towards them.	Hannah is able to apply the social skills of turn taking and uses clear language to express her thinking (RIELDS SE 1.B; LD 2.A). Hannah appears to be less self-confident when interacting with peers in small groups and appears to choose more solitary experiences (SE 2.B). Hannah demonstrates the skill of decision making about her choice of experiences (CD 4.A).
Photograph: 	D looked at a familiar book. He looked from left to right, front to back, treating each page individually. He used some language from the familiar book and some vocabulary words like *caterpillar* and *cocoon* which we have been learning (RIELDS L. 2.B).

Work Sample	
	Today we made blueprints and then we followed our blueprint to make our design on the rug. Z was able to attend and engage throughout this activity (RIELDS CD 3.A). She did not need help and she was able to persist. She showed flexibility in thinking, and she was able to use her plan to create her structure. She did this whole activity independently. Z made a house (RIELDS CD 3.A, 4.A; SE 2.B; CA 1.A)

How do I review, analyze, and interpret data?

Once enough data has been collected for each child for the assessment question at hand, educators may begin to review, analyze, and interpret data to make informed conclusions about the development and learning of the children being served.

Educators may ask themselves the following questions while reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting data:

- ✓ **"What patterns do you see among individual children, within small groups of children, and across the entire class?"** For example, do you notice that most children in your classroom are above, meeting, or below developmental expectations for a particular standard, or entire developmental domain?
- ✓ **"Are there particular standards within a developmental domain that need extra support?"** For example, does the data suggest that one child, groups of children, or the entire class may need extra support with Literacy Comprehension and Interest?
- ✓ **"What change, if any, have you noticed over time?"** For example, do you notice any patterns of growth in development occurring over a period, like from the beginning to midpoint of the school year? What factors may have impacted this change?
- ✓ **"Are there any outliers in your data?"** For example, did you collect a piece of data highlighting an outlier in a child's development? Is this an area where a child may need more support or was this outlier due to other environmental/contextual factors? Is this outlier supported by other data or is it in isolation?
- ✓ **"Do any gaps still exist in data collection that prevent you from making informed conclusions?"** For example, do you find that you have more data on Math and Literacy development as opposed to science development? Is this due to a lack of engagement in science experiences? What can you do differently to collect more data from this domain?

- ✓ **"Do you understand the data and its implications?"** For example, do you understand the story that the data is showing? Do you understand the area(s) in which children need support? Are there any data outliers that may impact your conclusions? How will you use this data to inform you curriculum, instruction, and classroom environment? How can you use this data to inform decisions at the program/district level?

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting assessment data in the early learning context.

Resource	Description
Documenting Children's Learning	This **video** discusses the importance of documentation and how teachers may use this information to help achieve different goals in the classroom.
Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments	This **report** shares clear guidelines regarding the nature, functions, and uses of early childhood assessments, including assessment formats that are appropriate for use in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, based on model elements of school readiness.
Using Data to Inform Teaching	This **toolkit** contains training videos and handouts intended to support practitioners with the use of assessment data to inform and adjust teaching practices.
Early Childhood Data Use Assessment Tool	This **tool** is designed to identify and improve data use skills among early childhood educators so they can better use data to inform, plan, monitor, and make decisions for instruction and program improvement.
Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments	This **report** identifies four categories of assessment purpose with accompanying recommendations for educators and policymakers.

Sharing.

Once child assessment data has been reviewed, analyzed, and interpreted, it is important that it be shared internally within the program as well as externally with families. When sharing data internally, it is communicated with other educators and leaders within the program. Each type of early childhood assessment yields different data and implications. Assessment data will always provide educators with a deeper understanding of strengths of children in the classroom and the areas of development that may need more support.

With a thoughtful approach to collecting data in an authentic way, following by organizing, reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting data, educators will better understand the ways that they can:

- **Adapt their practice** to keep children's needs at the forefront of all decision-making; while certain methods may be tried and true – the needs of children change across groups and time; educators will also need to be mindful of child development research and any new recommended best practices that can be integrated into their curriculum and instruction.

- **Modify curriculum** to plan learning activities that are aligned with both the interests and needs of the children in the classroom.
- **Identify instructional strategies** that can be used to strengthen children's development in areas that are below developmental expectations, keeping in mind principles of universal design and high-quality instructional practices shared in Section III.
- **Adjust their environment** to increase engagement and be more responsive to child needs, keeping in mind the considerations of a high-quality environment in Section III.

The conclusions drawn from assessment data are not only impactful to educators but are informative at the program and district level as well. Administrators of a program or district may use assessment data to impact decisions at a higher-level to:

- **Identify areas in which more professional development is needed**, either in curriculum, instruction, or assessment
- **Determine whether staff feel supported** through existing methods of supervision and if the program/district environment promotes an environment where staff feel supported.
- **Enhance a classroom environment** through the investment of classroom furniture and materials in areas where there are patterns in developmental gaps *(e.g., Programs may invest in puppets, felt boards, and other materials to be used in the library center to make this more engaging to children in response to data that highlighted language and literacy development as an area of need for supported growth).*
- **Choose or switch to a high-quality curriculum** that is aligned with the program/district philosophy, the needs of the staff that will use the curriculum, and the needs of the children in the community being served.

Results from summative assessments, for example, can support program leaders with understanding the areas in which the program may need to strengthen curricular and instructional supports (e.g., smaller growth in language and literacy may suggest more need for educator professional learning, or more materials in this area). Formative and interim data may be communicated to other educators to provider a bigger picture of a child's strengths and needs, and to support their smooth transition across classrooms within a program (e.g., toddler to preschool) or to a new program (e.g., pre-k to kindergarten). These are some examples among many other types of implications that child assessment data can offer, as discussed previously in this framework.

Likewise, meaningful engagement with families for the purposes of communicating assessment data is critical for identifying children's strengths, needs, and for making informed decisions for priorities and next steps for support growth and learning (ECTA, 2017). Educators may use a myriad of strategies to build a system of two-way communication when sharing assessment data with families, such as through informal day-to-day conversations at pick-up or drop-off, or through more formal conferences. Specific strategies for sharing assessment information with families can be found within the Assessment Team – Families as Partners section below.

Assessment Considerations for Special Populations

Assessing Multilingual Learners

ECE settings are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse and assessing young multilingual learners (MLLs) requires some key considerations, especially when the educator/assessor and the child do not share the same culture and language. Assessments of young MLLs are expected to meet all the hallmarks of high-quality assessment listed above. Assessments must be purposeful, aimed at supporting the child's development and learning across the domains of the RIELDS, and developmentally appropriate. Teachers who utilize authentic assessment

practices of MLLs in the classroom must be culturally competent, knowledgeable about the language learning process, and aware of key considerations for collecting and interpreting assessment data when it comes to MLLs.

Cultural Competence

When authentically assessing multilingual children, it is important that the teacher be culturally competent – meaning that they understand how culture influences a child's development and learning. This includes understanding that:

- **Language is just one aspect of a person's cultural identity, and many families are multilingual and/or multicultural**. Children and families who speak the same language may exhibit a wide range of values, traditions, and expectations for children's behavior and learning. It is critically important that educators who assess MLLs avoid making assumptions about children based on the language(s) they speak.
- **The culture a person is exposed to during their formative years influences their worldview, including how they approach different tasks and activities, how they respond to new and novel situations, what they view as appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior, and how they interact with others**. This is true for both children and their educators. All educators must be on the alert for any implicit biases that may affect their ability to collect a full range of assessment data and interpret it.
- **Ideally, children would be assessed by educators who share their language and culture, but this can be extremely challenging in increasingly diverse early learning settings.** Educators should have access to bilingual, bicultural colleagues who can assist with interpreting assessment data.

Knowledge of Sequential English Language Learning

Multilingualism and the process of becoming multilingual are associated with benefits to a child's academic learning. Multilingualism supports children's abilities to view things from different perspectives, reason and think logically, problem solve, and learn additional languages (Espinosa, 2013).

Despite this, the process of sequential English language learning can be challenging for MLLs in settings where only one language (English) is spoken. It is important for educators who conduct assessments with MLLs to be aware of, and challenge, common myths about MLLs' language learning with research-based information such as:

Myth	Reality
× Learning of multiple languages during the early childhood years will overwhelm, confuse, and/or delay acquisition of English	✓ The learning of multiple languages does not overwhelm, confuse, or delay children's learning of English. It is a fact that most young children throughout the world successfully learn multiple languages in their earliest years, as this time is ideal for developing a mastery of sounds, structure, and functions of language.
× The language development of multilingual learners looks the same as monolingual language development.	✓ MLL children may require more time to respond to word retrieval tasks and may know fewer words in a second language than their monolingual peers. However, phonological awareness and decoding skills may be comparable. MLLs may also exhibit enhanced executive function skills. Socio-cultural factors also influence

	children's language development and should be taken into consideration when interpreting assessment data.
✗ Total English immersion from prekindergarten through third grade is the best way for a young MLL to acquire English.	✓ Young MLLs need ongoing support to develop their primary home language as they are also learning English. Replacing the home language with English can create communication problems within families and decrease children's long-term academic achievement in English.
✗ Because schools don't have the capacity to provide instruction in all the languages represented by MLL children, programs should provide instruction in one common language – English.	✓ Monolingual English-speaking teachers can support MLLs development of the home language, by for example, learning and using anchor vocabulary in children's home languages, leveraging the knowledge and skills of bilingual colleagues and family members, and partnering with MLLs families to bring children's languages and cultures into the classroom.

Adapted from Espinosa & López, M. L. (2007).

In addition to distinguishing reality from myth when it comes to MLLs' language learning, it is important for educators to be knowledgeable about the process of multilingual language development when engaging in assessment The pathway to multilingualism may vary by child; this process is partly dependent on whether they are learning multiple languages simultaneously or sequentially. **Simultaneous language learning** is when young MLLs learn two languages at the same time. During **sequential language learning**, young MLLs may be exposed to a second language later than the first language (e.g., introduced to the second language at age 3 or later). There is no evidence to suggest that either way of learning multiple languages is preferable. Young MLLs who are learning multiple languages sequentially may go through the following developmental stages (Tabors, 1997):

1. **Home language use:** Children try to communicate with educators and peers using their primary home language, not realizing that they are not being understood.
2. **Nonverbal period:** Once children realize that their home language is not working, they may go through a nonverbal phase, especially when first exposed to a new language. Although the child is not speaking, they continue to communicate using body language, gestures, facial expressions, and sounds. They are actively observing and learning the sounds and rhythms of the new language. The nonverbal period may last from several weeks to several months.
3. **Telegraphic and formulaic language**: Children communicate using key words such as names for people and objects and/or standard phrases they have memorized (e.g., OK, Bye Bye, "What's going on?")
4. **Productive language:** Children begin to combine words and terms to produce short sentences that describe or explain what they are doing or what they want. It may seem like the child's language use is decreasing because these sentences include many grammatical errors, but the child is actually beginning to create their own sentences based on their growing understanding of how the language works.

Collecting and Interpreting Assessment Data with MLLs

Assessing MLLs requires the same attention to planning, collecting, reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting data described above with particular attention to language, among some additional considerations.

When collecting and interpreting assessment data with MLLs, teachers must consider:

- ✓ **Using multiple data sources and methods to ensure that you provide opportunities for MLL children to show what they know and can do in ways that are not language dependent.** For example, pay close attention to their actions, gestures, facial expressions, and body language as they interact with classroom materials and their peers. Notice, for example, how a child engages with manipulatives can provide a window into their knowledge of mathematics concepts and skills.

- ✓ **Knowing the individual MLLs in your class well, develop strong positive relationships with them, and scaffold their interactions with peers so they are full participants in all aspects of the classroom.** This will ensure that they feel confident and comfortable to exhibit their knowledge and skills during classroom learning experiences and while you are utilizing authentic assessment practices.

- ✓ **Recruiting colleagues who share the children's languages and cultures to assist you with collecting and interpreting assessment data.** They can help you, for example, identify and correctly interpret social behaviors that reflect cultural expectations around interacting with adults.

- ✓ **Assessing the language development of MLLs frequently in both English and their primary languages.**

- ✓ **Assessing MLLs' learning and development across all the domains of the RIELDS**, not only their language development and learning.

Partnering with families is key to ensuring that you have a thorough knowledge of the child's day-to-day life at home, the languages they are exposed to and with whom, and their primary caregivers' expectations for their learning and behavior. Ways of partnering with MLLs' families around assessment will be further described in the section below.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting assessment data in the early learning context.

Resource	Description
Where We Stand on Assessing Young English Language Learners	This **position statement** offers recommendations from NAEYC that are intended to help policy makers, program administrators, teachers, and others improve screening and assessment practices for young English Language Learners.
PreK-3rd: Challenging Common Myths About Dual Language Learners	This **brief** presents new and updated research on the development and learning of young children who are learning English as their second language and presents current research evidence that can strengthen policy.
Five Tips for Engaging Multilingual Children in Conversation	This **article** offers several ideas for engaging with multilingual children, based on observations and interviews with experienced educators.

One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Early Childhood Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language	This book provides a wealth of information about the process of learning multiple languages as well as research-based strategies for supporting young multilingual learners derived from evidence collected during a longitudinal study she conducted while at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Assessing Children that are Differently Abled

Assessing children that are differently-abled requires the same attention to planning, collecting, reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting data described above with particular attention to creating an environment that provides multiple and varied formats for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As with the assessment of multilingual learners, assessments of children that are differently abled are expected to meet all of the hallmarks of high-quality assessment. Assessments must be purposeful, aimed at supporting the child's development and learning across the domains of the RIELDS, and developmentally appropriate.

Children that are differently abled are best supported when general and special educators use a Universal Design for Learning framework to collaboratively plan for activities and opportunities for assessment that are aligned to their assessment questions and to children's development and learning goals. Flexibility in assessment options support children in demonstrating their knowledge in a variety of ways. Below are some considerations that teachers much keep in mind while assessing children that are differently abled.

When collecting and interpreting assessment data with children that are differently abled, teachers must consider:

- ✓ **Making accommodations to toys/materials, procedures, and items to obtain accurate information about what a child knows, can do, and is starting to do.** The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) suggests that extending wait or performance time, presenting information verbally and/or visually, increasing the size of print/pictures, and presenting toys/materials that are adjustable and flexible in how they are used are a few of the ways that educators may make accommodations during the assessment process (Rous & Hyson, 2007). By offering a child accommodation for assessment, they are given more opportunity to demonstrate what they know and are able to do without being penalized for having a disability.

- ✓ **Utilizing authentic assessment practices to collect assessment data in early learning settings.** As is the case with assessing mono or multilingual children that are not differently abled, it is important that educators collect assessment data on children that are differently abled through an authentic approach. Data collected from a child within the context of their natural environment and everyday routines and activities coupled with information obtained through standardized developmental assessments provide a more accurate and holistic view of the child (Rous & Hyson, 2007).

- ✓ **Following a Universal Design for Learning framework (UDL), use multiple data sources and methods to ensure that children that are differently abled have different opportunities to show what they know and can do.** Educators will

need to consider offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and action & expression within planned activities. Consider the different ways that a child may demonstrate a skill or behavior by closely examining their actions, gestures, facial expressions, and body language as they interact with classroom materials and their peers.

- ✓ **Offering classroom materials and using assessment strategies that are appropriate for infants and preschoolers, match their ages, and accommodate for their individual characteristics.** According to Gargiulo & Kilgo (2018), *"this may be interpreted to mean that materials and activities should be carefully selected to match children's chronological age so that the materials and activities focused on during the assessment process are congruent with those of their peers that are not differently abled. However, this also means that the selected materials and strategies must meet the individual needs of each child."*

- ✓ **Collecting assessment data from a multidisciplinary team.** Depending on the nature of the IEP, a child may receive services from speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists, special educators, or from other specialized disciplines. It is important to partner with all personnel related to the development and learning of a specific child in the assessment collection process. The Division for Early Childhood emphasizes a team approach in which educators work with a multidisciplinary team to gather comprehensive, holistic data through authentic methods.

- ✓ **Analyzing data through a nonbiased and culturally competent lens.** As with the assessment of multilingual children, it is important for teachers to be culturally competent – meaning that they understand how culture influences a child's development and learning. Many problems that arise in collecting assessment data that is of quality and accuracy are due to an assessor's cultural bias. By assessing the child through authentic processes, recognizing the different language(s) and ways that a child may communicate, and using a multidisciplinary team of assessors are a few ways to combat cultural bias in assessment.

- ✓ **Approaching assessment through a family-centered and team-based process.** Assessment activities should involve different members of the child's families, as they are able to observe their child at home - potentially observing different behaviors, skills, and concerns than an educator may observe when the child is in the classroom. Facilitating the inclusion of families in the assessment process ensures that these practices are sensitive to family values, needs, language, and culture (Rous & Hyson, 2007). Providing families with different opportunities to participate in the assessment activities supports a collaborative home and school relationship and may enhance the child's educational support system. More information on partnering with families is described below.

Adapted from Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2018 and Rous & Hyson, 2007.

Evaluating Outcomes for Differently Abled children

For children that are differently abled, measuring and reporting outcomes is vital to promoting high-quality Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education Services (ECSE). The process of gathering information and using data to analyze programs effectively is key to understanding whether children that are differently abled have benefitted from the services provided to them. Providers, teachers, and program administrators are encouraged to use child outcomes data to improve the quality of services at the program level. Additionally, educators may use this data to help parents understand how their child is developing and participating in activities at home, school, and/or in the community. The Office of Special Education (OSEP), within the U.S Department of Education requires that outcomes are reported annually for all children receiving EI and ECSE services.

There are three child outcomes measurements intended to measure children's "functional outcomes" or the child's ability to take meaningful actions within the context of their everyday living along a 7-point scale. The three outcomes measured are as follows:

1. Gaining positive social emotional skills, including social relationships.
2. Learning and using new knowledge and skills.
3. Using appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), states are required to report Child Outcomes Measurements across 17 Indicators on a State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report. Indicator 7 measures outcomes for preschoolers with disabilities within the three outcomes measures listed above between their entry and exit from early childhood special education. For more information on Child Outcomes, please visit the Measuring Child Outcomes webpage on the RIDE website.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about assessment considerations for children with disabilities.

Resource	Description
An Introduction to Young Children with Special Needs: Birth through Eight	This **book** is a comprehensive introduction to educational policies, programs, practices, and services for future practitioners serving young children with delays or disabilities in early intervention or early childhood special education. Chapter 5 highlights important considerations for assessment and planning for young children with delays or disabilities. This book edition includes the latest developments in and influences on the field of early intervention and early childhood special education, including the Division for Early Childhood's Recommended Practices.
DEC Recommended Practices & Interactive Glossary	This **Interactive resource** defines key terms, as they appear in the DEC Recommended Practices. **Page 8** of this resource defines assessment and lists additional recommended practices for assessing children who have or are at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities. The DEC Recommended practices are used as guidance for practitioners and families about the most effective ways to improve learning outcomes and promote the

	development of young children, ages B-5, who have or are at risk for developmental delays or disabilities.
DAP: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning	This **excerpt** from NAEYC's DAP position statement highlights practices for observation, documentation, and assessment that are developmentally appropriate for *all* children from birth through the primary grades.
Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation	These **recommendations** are intended to create conditions that will allow children to experience joyful, nurturing environments that product positive outcomes in all aspects of their development and learning. Recommendations for implementing assessments for young children with disabilities can be found on pages 10-18.
Measuring Child Outcomes	This **webpage** on the RIDE website provides educators and program administrators with information on measuring and reporting outcomes for children with disabilities to promote high-quality Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services.

The Assessment Team – Families as Partners

Engaging families in data collection

Families are a child's first and most important teacher thus making them a critical part of the assessment team. Just as early learning educators use authentic assessment practices to gather meaningful data about the children in their classroom, families are also involved in the data collection process because they are able to provide valuable insights into the child's development that educators may not be able to observe directly. As families engage in conversations, play, daily routines, and other experiences with their children outside of the classroom, they gather important data on their child's development and learning. This information layered with the data that educators collect in the classroom provide a greater understanding of the child's developmental and learning strengths, areas of growth, and needs. Furthermore, the inclusion of family in the data collection process characterizes them as a collaborating partner in the education space, thus enhancing a child's support system at school and at home.

Educators can guide families on what to look for in their child's development and learning in relation to the RIELDS and ask families for specific types of information (e.g., "Does your child make letter sounds when you read books at night?") to ensure that the overall interpretation of assessment data is accurate.

Families may collect and share their assessment data on their child with educators by:

- ✓ Completing a program-developed developmental history survey that includes important contextual information about the child and the members of their family.
- ✓ Sharing observations of their child through brief informal conversations at drop-off or pick-up times.
- ✓ Scheduling multiple opportunities for an educator and family to gather for a longer period that is more structured for formal discussions and check-ins (e.g., family conference, home-visit).
- ✓ Taking a picture of their child demonstrating a new skill and share it on a parent-teacher communication app.

- ✓ Recording a video or audio sample of a conversation between the family member and child that had multiple turns.
- ✓ Bringing in samples of children's work (e.g., drawing, writing) created at home.

Families are valuable members of the team whose involvement in the assessment and planning process is essential and indispensable. They should feel comfortable during the process so they can share crucial information about their children and easily express concerns and needs. It is important to remember that all information provided by families to educators is important regardless of whether it is related to academics and development, or the child's background and context. Families may provide information on their child's temperament and health, or even their culturally rooted beliefs on child-rearing, authority, education, and other family influences, which can provide educators with a more comprehensive view of a child's development and learning. Building positive, trusting relationships with families is imperative for this collaboration to be successful.

Establishing and maintaining strong bidirectional relationships with families of MLL children is critical but it can be challenging, particularly when the teacher does not share the family's language or culture. Family members may not feel comfortable in the school environment or interacting with teachers for a range of reasons. These may include negative past experiences with schools and/or differing views on appropriate roles for teachers and parents. In fact, many parents may not view themselves as their child's "first teacher" and might even consider that as an impertinent stance. Following are some strategies for partnering with families in ways that will contribute to authentic assessment and inform planning:

Educators may create and maintain a strong bidirectional relationship with families of MLL children to help inform authentic assessment and planning by:

- ✓ Learning about your families' routines, typical experiences, and languages early in the school year through one-on-one meetings at the school or ideally in their homes. For example, find out what language(s) the child is typically exposed to, when and how the family typically spends time together. and the primary caregivers' expectations and goals for their child's behavior and learning.
- ✓ Encouraging families to use their primary language at home and provide family-friendly resources that describe the benefits of bilingualism, how home language learning contributes to children's learning of English and serves to maintain close family bonds.
- ✓ Leveraging co-teachers' or assistants' knowledge of families' cultures and skills but don't assign them responsibility for all teacher/parent interactions as that will not serve to create a true home/school partnership.
- ✓ Maintaining eye contact with the family member, not the interpreter when communicating with family members that are using an interpreter.
- ✓ Continuously learning about the child's home language experiences and if and how they are progressing in their primary language.
- ✓ Never recruiting family members to translate assessments or to interpret the data.

<u>To Learn More</u>

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about engaging families with the data collection process in assessment:

Resource	Description

Engaging Families as Assessment Partners	This **practitioner guide** includes methods and strategies for gathering information from families and promoting their participation during assessment.
Engaging Families as Partners in Their Child's Assessment Checklist	This **checklist** includes practices that programs may use for engaging families throughout the assessment process.
Gathering and Giving Information with Families	This **article** describes a framework and five strategies that support a reciprocal process for providing and receiving information from families for assessment and intervention purposes. While this article is focused on Early Intervention, these strategies may be used to increase meaningful family engagement across all early learning settings.
Partnering with Families	This **in-service suite** describes the ways to work in partnership with families in order to facilitate ongoing child assessment.

Sharing assessment information with families

Families engaged in their child's development and learning continuously want to know how their child is doing and how they can help to support them at home. It is the responsibility of educators to share assessment information about each child with their respective families as the last step in the assessment cycle. In communicating children's milestones, growth, and other data interpretations, the child's learning and development become shared responsibilities of the educators and families alike. With a relationship built on two-way communication and trust, educators and families are given more opportunity to work together to support children as they grow and develop at home and at school to support children's transition to the next step in their educational journey.

Sharing information with families involves ongoing reciprocal conversations. These conversations can be in response to a question or concern by the educator or family, scheduled meetings that occur at specific times during the school year, or spontaneous conversations happening at drop off or pick up celebrating small and large achievements. Think of meaningful partnership with families for the purposes of assessment as a spider web: the most strands, the stronger it is, much like how the more opportunities there are for teachers and families to share information, the stronger the partnership will be.

There are three elements to consider to effectively engage in sharing information about children's learning and development with families:

1: Accessibility

Families should have access to their child's individual learning and development information. While staff-conducted assessments provide families with a comprehensive picture of their child's progress, families also have expert knowledge of their child, and it is important to continuously maintain a strong relationship to gather the most accurate information about a child. Educators can support the accessibility and reciprocal nature of data sharing by:

- ✓ Using multiple approaches to communicate with families (e.g., home visits, parent-teacher meetings, telephone calls, secure online platforms).
- ✓ Sharing all information in a family-friendly format, avoiding jargon, acronyms, or terminology that families may not understand; consider the needs of families whose first language may not be English. Photographs, short videos, and samples of their children's work contribute greatly to these conversations, even if an interpreter is present.
- ✓ Scheduling periodic (2-3) formal conferences to meet to discuss child's learning and development at different checkpoints during the school year.
- ✓ Keeping families informed by regularly sharing key findings from day-to-day happenings, work samples, photographs, during pick-up/drop-off, or through a digital family communication application.
- ✓ Storing assessment data in secure portfolios to share with families during conferences, or other meetings.
- ✓ Inviting family members to share their observations about how their child learns and their thoughts and insights about child behavior.

2: Understandability & Importance

Child assessment information must be made clear and meaningful to families. Teachers need to help families understand what the assessment reports mean about their child's learning development, and how this information is important in informing future curricular, instructional, and home supports. Likewise, families need to help educators better understand assessment data through observations of their child at home and in other settings. Some ways to ensure that the child assessment data is clear and meaningful to families include:

- ✓ Discussing the classroom's end-of-year goals and learning objectives with families as a group at the beginning of the school year. Remember to reference families' goals for their children's learning and show how their experiences in the classroom are contributing to meeting those.
- ✓ Clarifying what assessment is and intended to do, what it looks like in the context of an early learning classroom, and how it is related to the RIELDS.
- ✓ Posting goals and objectives along with lesson plans for the week in a location that is accessible for families to learn more about what their child will be learning.
- ✓ Communicating how assessment data reveals information on a child's, strengths, areas of growth, and anticipated next stage of learning (e.g., baby is almost ready to walk, preschooler is about to write her name).
- ✓ Listening to families' hopes, concerns, and questions about their child's development, and providing clear guidance on next steps rooted in assessment data.
- ✓ Reviewing assessment data with families.
- ✓ Offering strategies and supports for enhancing their child's learning and development outside of the classroom, based on the assessment data.

3: Actionability

Children benefit when educators and families share information in a reciprocal nature and co-design activities that can be done at home to support learning. Some ways to support child's development and learning at home include:

- ✓ Translating assessment data from different areas of learning into everyday activities (e.g., Encouraging use of conversations to strengthen language development; sorting through socks to practice matching and classification in mathematics).
    - Utilize the Fun Family Activity Cards as guidance.

- ✓ Sharing information with families about resources within the community that can support their child's learning and interests (e.g., library, community center).
- ✓ Supporting transitions within early childhood programs and from preschool to school by helping families feel comfortable in communicating and describing their child's accomplishments, strengths, and challenges.

To Learn More

Below are a variety of links to resources to learn more about sharing assessment data with families:

Resource	Description
Family Engagement and Ongoing Child Assessment	This **guide** describes how to share information effectively with parents through genuine partnerships.
Taking With Families About Their Child's Development	This **guide** provides helpful tips for having meaningful, strengths-based, and mindful conversations with families about their child's development.
Sharing Assessment Data with Preschool Families in Preparation for Kindergarten	This **article** shares a process of data sharing with families from an in-service teacher.

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