

# **The Role of Curriculum in Early Childhood Special Education**

## **Overview**

### **Where We Stand on Early Learning Standards**

Across the nation, states are developing early learning standards/guidelines that describe the desired results, outcomes, or learning expectations for children below kindergarten age. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), this movement raises educational, ethical, developmental, programmatic, assessment, and policy issues. In their position statement NAEYC and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) address those issues, describing four features that are essential if early learning standards are to be developmentally effective. The recommendations in this brief can be used to understand and guide the implementation of standards for young children. The executive summary and the complete position statement can be found at: [http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/learning\\_standards.asp](http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/learning_standards.asp)

**Kansas Early Learning Guidelines and Standards:** These standards can be downloaded at <http://kskits.org/publications/KSEarlyLngGuide.shtml>

### **Where We Stand on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation**

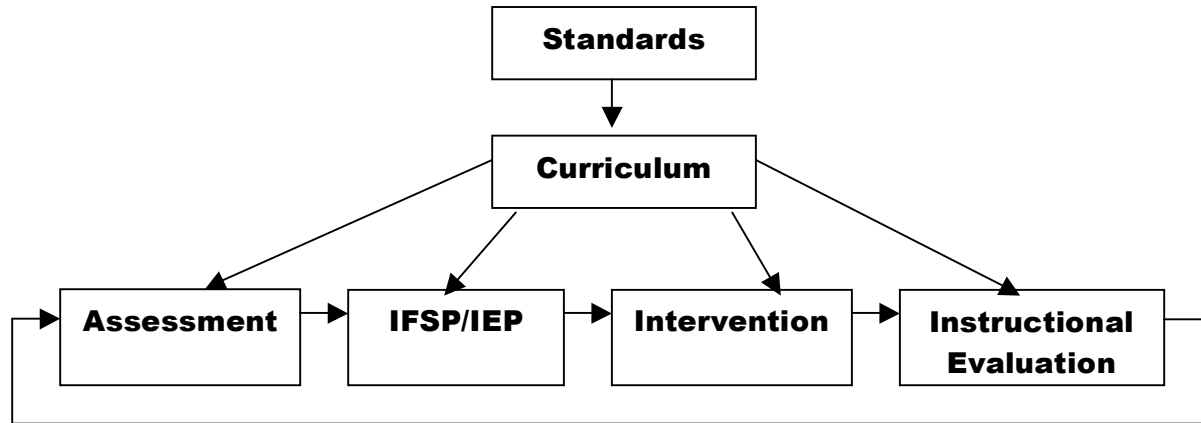
Research has demonstrated that high-quality early childhood experiences produce lifelong benefits for children. This position brief from NAEYC and NAECS/SDE introduces and describes indicators of effective early childhood curriculum, assessment and evaluation. Programs and individuals may use these indicators to guide decisions and reflection of current early childhood practices related to curriculum, assessment and evaluation. The executive summary and the complete position statement can be found at: <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/cape.asp>

### **High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like**

This issue of the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) *Preschool Policy Matters* highlights research findings and best practice recommendations for high-quality preschool programs. The information in this document addresses dimensions of preschool quality, including how we define and measure quality in early education. Summarizing research in the area of early childhood quality measures and outcomes, Espinosa (2002) describes aspects of both process (children's actual experiences) and structural (program and teacher characteristics) quality that are believed to be related to better outcomes for young children. This document concludes by describing features of high quality preschool programs that are considered critical in relation to children, families, teachers, curriculum, and classrooms. The recommendations in this document can be used to understand and guide the implementation of high quality programs for young children. See <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=58>

Chelie Nelson, Ph.D., CCC-SLP  
David P. Lindeman, Ph.D.  
University of Kansas Center on Developmental Disabilities  
Kansas Inservice Training System  
2601 Gabriel, Parsons, Kansas 67357  
620-421-6550 ext. 1618  
<http://kskits.org>

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Quality early childhood programs are built on standards and curriculum. **Standards** are broad statements that describe expectations for learning and development. Early learning standards or guidelines are meant to inform teachers/caregivers, programs and schools, parents, and the community about what children are expected to learn and what teachers/caregivers are expected to guide them to learn (ECEA, 2005). **Curriculum** differs from standards in that it is the framework that delineates the content that children are to learn, the processes through which children achieve the identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help children achieve these goals, and the context in which teaching and learning occur (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995).

Standards and Curriculum are integral to the linked system of assessment, **Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)/Individual Education Plan (IEP)** development, intervention and instructional evaluation. **Assessment**, or the systematic collection of information (e.g., observation, interviews, portfolios, projects, tests), provides the basis for judgments about children's characteristics and abilities and facilitates the development of functional and meaningful IFSPs/IEPs. Assessment tells the teacher/caregiver not only what a child needs to learn, but where that child is developing within the standards/curricular framework and how a child's disability might be impacting their ability to have access to, and make progress in, the general curriculum (ECEA, 2005). **Interventions** are developed from children's outcomes/goals and are designed to enhance and support children's participation and progress in the classroom curriculum. Through regular **instructional evaluation**, teachers/families are able to gauge children's progress on IFSP outcomes/IEP goals, as well as the general curriculum. When children are found not to be making expected progress, adjustments can be made quickly to ensure children's continued development within the general education curriculum.

## References:

- Bredekamp, S., & Rosegrant, T. (1995). *Reaching potentials: Transforming early childhood curriculum and assessment* (Vol. 2). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- ECEA, Early Childhood Education Standards and Assessment. (2005). *The words we use: A glossary of terms for early childhood education standards and assessment*. Retrieved March 9, 2007, from [http://www.ccsso.org/projects/scass/projects/early\\_childhood\\_education\\_assessment\\_consortium/publications\\_and\\_products/2838.cfm](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/scass/projects/early_childhood_education_assessment_consortium/publications_and_products/2838.cfm)
- Espinosa, L. M. (2002). High-quality preschool: Why we need it and what it looks like. *Preschool Policy Matters*. Retrieved March 9, 2007, from <http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=58>



## **Questions for Reflection: Quality**

*These questions can be used for personal study and/or as questions to guide study group discussions.*

1. What does research tell us about the quality of America's preschool programs?
2. How is quality defined and measured in early education?
3. What are some aspects of process quality?
4. What are some aspects of structural quality?
5. What does the research tell us about the impact process and structure quality have on the educational experiences of young children?
6. What are the critical elements of quality for children?
7. What are the critical elements of quality for families?