



# QUALITY MATTERS

*Defining Quality in Early Education*

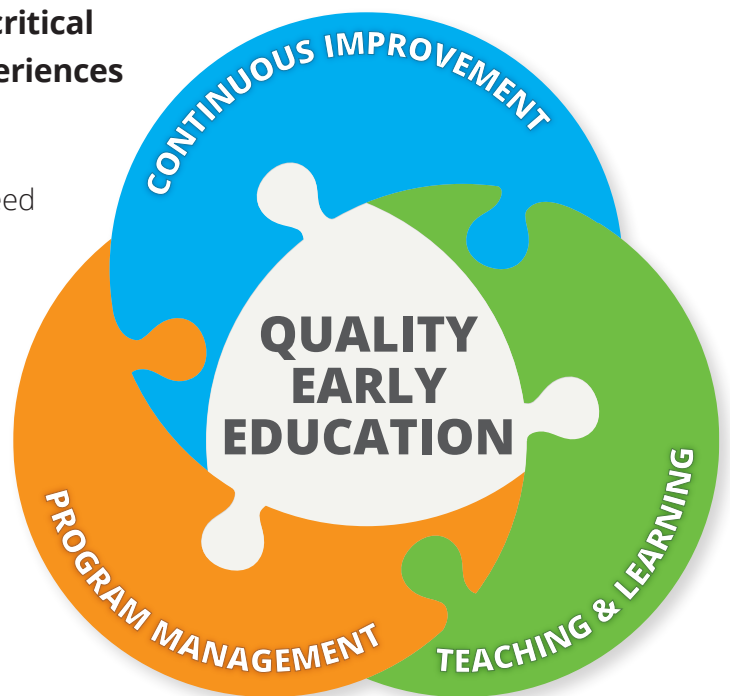


Department of  
**Education**

**Research in early childhood has shown the critical importance of high-quality educational experiences for children from birth to kindergarten.**

As Tennessee strives to ensure that all students succeed in kindergarten and beyond, the department has developed a definition of quality for early childhood programs that includes three components: **program management**, **teaching and learning**, and **continuous quality improvement**.

We believe that if programs meet the expectations included in these three components, then child outcomes will improve, and *more of our children will thrive and succeed in school.*





## PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

### Access and Attendance

- ✔ Strategically allocate funds, through layering or blending of funding sources, to serve more children who will benefit most from the program;
- ✔ Actively recruit families, including those with significant risk factors, through ongoing, coordinated, and innovative efforts;
- ✔ Ensure children attend school regularly and consistently by establishing clear policies and expectations for daily attendance; and
- ✔ Communicate regularly with families and provide parent education opportunities to build understanding of the positive correlation between regular attendance and academic success.

### Community Partnerships and Services

- ✔ Establish partnerships with community organizations to provide support services (e.g., health care, dental services, mental health counseling, job training, legal services, etc.) for children and families;
- ✔ Serve families and children with comprehensive services that may include screenings for hearing, vision, dental, health (including mental health); and
- ✔ Provide culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement opportunities.

### Structure

- ✔ Adhere to all certification and licensure requirements<sup>1</sup>;
- ✔ Meet the maximum group size and teacher-to-child ratio guidelines; and
- ✔ Staff classrooms with qualified, highly effective teachers and assistants.



## TEACHING AND LEARNING

### Classroom Environment

- ✔ Establish child-centered and intentionally organized environments to meet the expectations of the [Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards](#), and the developmental needs, interests, and cultures of the children;
- ✔ Enable and invite interactive experiences, experiential learning, independence, movement, and cooperation through distinguishable learning centers (at least five) that include literacy materials (e.g., books, paper, writing materials, and materials that encourage fine motor development) at every center;
- ✔ Provide frequently rotated, accessible materials that are varied, developmentally appropriate, open-ended, self-correcting, reflective of children's interests, and that invite higher levels of engagement, problem solving, discovery and creativity;
- ✔ Support diversity and inclusion through culturally responsive materials, and display children's work to honor individual growth and development; and
- ✔ Create instructional displays that are at children's eye level, easily accessible, interactive, and provide a resource to scaffold and support learning.

### Daily Schedule and Use of Time

- ✔ Ensure that teachers spend significant time each day listening to children, reading stories with children, and asking questions that prompt children's critical and inferential thinking;
- ✔ Maximize learning through the appropriate use of instructional time that reduces transitions between activities and supports developmentally appropriate practices;
- ✔ Use whole group activities for a clear, targeted purpose for learning that is kept at an age-appropriate length of time for pre-K children;
- ✔ Provide child-directed learning centers that follow the learning needs of children, include choice, and embed small group instruction targeted to specific learning goals aligned to content standards;
- ✔ Display a visual, movable schedule that allows flexibility with a balance of teacher- and child-directed activities; and
- ✔ Provide a sufficient, age-appropriate amount of unstructured gross motor play aligned with the developmentally appropriate practice principles set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

1. Chapter 0520-12-01, Standards for School-administered Child Care (DOE) and Chapter 1240-04-01 through -12, Standards for Child Care Licensure (DHS)



## Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment

- ✔ Use, and implement with fidelity, high-quality, evidence-based curriculum aligned to early learning standards and developmental science;
- ✔ Teach interdisciplinary conceptual units of study that are inclusive of complex, rich texts to build children's conceptual understanding and extend opportunities for children to explore and learn at deeper levels of cognitive complexity;
- ✔ Provide intentional instruction focused on oral language and literacy development, mathematics, work skills, and social and personal competencies;
- ✔ Engage children in child-initiated learning tasks and experiential learning (purposeful play) that permit time needed for higher levels of thinking, problem solving, and cooperative play;
- ✔ Support active teacher observation of children throughout the day and across contexts to assess and record children's skills, abilities, and interests to inform instructional decision making;
- ✔ Differentiate approaches to teaching standards based on the developmental needs of individual children and to support dual language learners and students with disabilities; and
- ✔ Inform families of their child's progress at school through regular and consistent communication; provide resources and learning opportunities to families about children's current learning and development, and facilitate their transition to the next early childhood setting.

## Interactions and Instruction

- ✔ Ensure that teachers listen to children, respond to their needs and questions, and engage in conversations with multiple children daily;
- ✔ Model and practice positive interactions, tone, affect, and language with children;
- ✔ Intentionally teach vocabulary by introducing and incorporating new words into meaningful activities (e.g., story dictation, self and parallel talk, and interactive read aloud) and provide opportunities for children to hear and use words in multiple contexts;
- ✔ Extend children's thinking through open-ended questions and build knowledge utilizing a planned sequence of questions;
- ✔ Model and facilitate the exploration of materials, which can include books, writing activities, cooking, constructing, and gardening activities that embed practice with counting, sorting, measuring, and categorizing;

- ✔ Support higher-order thinking through the inclusion of sequential learning activities, that are varied in modality, in which children progress through a series of steps or levels of complexity (e.g., block building, dramatic play, writing a message, putting together a puzzle);
- ✔ Provide interactive (i.e., socio-dramatic) play opportunities to support learning objectives in multiple developmental domains, including language, physical, early numeracy, self-regulation, science, and social studies; and
- ✔ Facilitate the development of skills and competencies connected to learning, such as the ability to persevere, resolve conflicts, focus, engage, and understand and regulate emotions.





## CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

- ✓ Employ school and program leaders, teachers, and instructional assistants who are:
  - knowledgeable about child development, developmentally appropriate practice, and early learning standards;
  - committed to early learning,
  - able to create a positive climate that respects all adults and children in the learning community, and
  - foster a joy for learning.
- ✓ Sustain continuous quality improvement through ongoing, personalized, job-embedded professional learning and support for leaders, teachers, and instructional assistants to improve their practice;
- ✓ Create a culture of learning through collaborative planning and use of reflective practice, frequent classroom observations, and school/program walkthroughs to assess program quality;
- ✓ Use multiple methods of data collection to inform instructional practice and improve child and program outcomes.



The expectations included in the three quality categories are based on a synthesis of national quality benchmark indicators provided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER); multiple longitudinal studies in early childhood education, including the Abecedarian Early intervention Project, the Perry Preschool Project, and the Chicago Longitudinal Study; quality indicators included in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); results and data from Peabody Research Institute's (PRI's) study of Tennessee's Voluntary Pre-K programs; results and analysis from PRI's study of Preschool Development Grant classrooms and child outcomes; and results and analysis from PRI's study correlating teaching practices with child outcomes in Metro Nashville Public School's Early Learning Centers. It is important to note that the quality definition presented in this document was created based on a synthesis of the above mentioned resources, and it does not attempt to reflect any one specific rating system or one evaluation study's findings. This definition is a proprietary creation by the office of early learning at the Tennessee Department of Education.