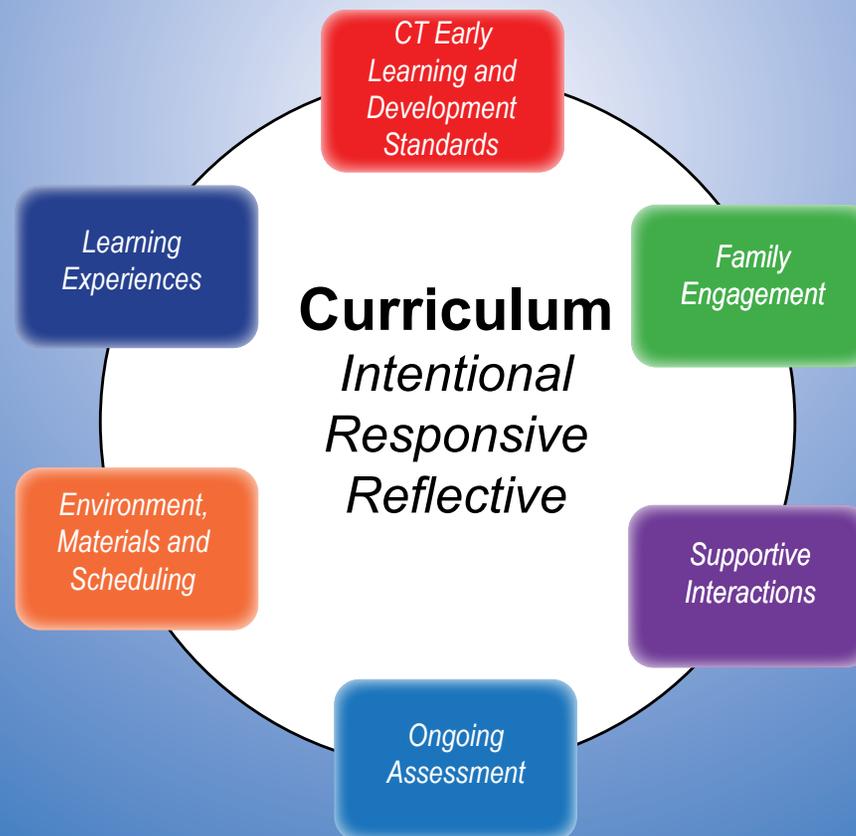
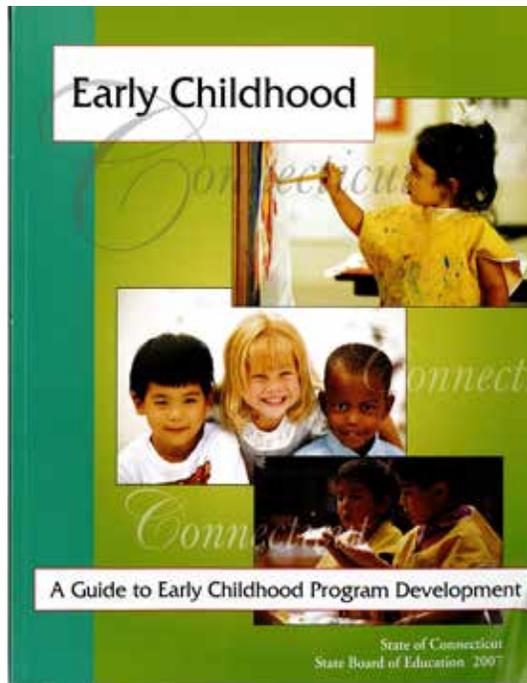


Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards: Building Meaningful Curriculum





This document serves as an update to Chapter 2 of the State of Connecticut Guide to Early Childhood Program Development (2007).

December 2015

*CT ELDS logo design by Andrea Wadowski, Connecticut State Department of Education.
Document design and layout by EASTCONN Communications, Hampton, Connecticut*



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Intentional Teaching.....	5
Components of Curriculum.....	7
CT ELDS and Content.....	7
Planning Meaningful Learning Experiences.....	7
The Importance of Play.....	8
Ongoing Assessment.....	11
The Importance of Formative Assessment.....	11
Supportive Interactions.....	13
Environment, Materials and Scheduling.....	15
Family Engagement.....	17
Ensuring a Comprehensive Approach to Curriculum.....	19
Curriculum Planning—Developing Learning Experience Plans.....	21
Conclusion.....	24
References.....	25
Appendix A.....	26

Introduction

Curriculum includes the many components of early learning environments that support children’s growth and development. It involves the materials and learning experiences that are planned to support children’s learning. In addition, curriculum addresses the adult’s role in supporting children’s growth, the needs and interests of individual children and how families will be engaged. The skills, knowledge and concepts to be addressed are also an integral component and inform the decisions about all other aspects of the curriculum. The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) set forth the skills, knowledge and concepts that should be supported in all early care and education programs. When considering the specific children in any setting, additional skills, knowledge or concepts should also be introduced based upon culture, interests, school focus, funding requirements and individual needs. The CT ELDS are NOT a curriculum but rather are an important component of the curriculum. Specifically, the CT ELDS are learning and developmental outcomes to be intentionally addressed through planned experiences, materials and interactions.

High-quality curriculum is:

1. **Intentional:** All aspects of the curriculum are purposeful and planned with specific learning and developmental outcomes of children and families in mind.
2. **Responsive:** Programs and staff respond to the changing social-emotional, academic, physical and/or cultural needs of the children and families they serve.
3. **Reflective:** Staff engage in ongoing, thoughtful consideration and make changes in order to best meet the needs of the children and families they serve.

Whether the individual components of any early childhood curriculum appear as part of a broader yearly plan or as part of an ongoing weekly/daily planning process, the curriculum may vary from one setting to another. For example, written documents may articulate an approach to planning and a process to ensure that the breadth of the CT ELDS are addressed throughout the year, leaving most of the ongoing planning for specific learning experiences to individual teachers. Other programs may rely on a curriculum document that includes plans for specific learning experiences, allowing teachers to focus on making adjustments to incorporate child interests and meeting the unique learning needs of a particular group. Despite these variations, the essential components to promote intentionality remain the same.

This document explores the components of a rich, challenging and achievable curriculum. While this document is primarily designed for center- or school-based programs, much of the information may be valuable for other settings. While the term “teacher” is used throughout the document, this term may refer to any adult in a role supporting young children. In addition to the role of teacher, librarians, family child care providers, family resource center staff, and many others support the growth and development of young children and may benefit from the considerations in this document.

The Connecticut Early Childhood Workforce Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for Teachers represents the core competencies that early childhood professionals should possess in order to take advantage of this formative period in a child’s life. It outlines seven domains, including a domain specific to building meaningful curriculum. The framework should be used to guide professional learning choices through a self-assessment of skills and knowledge, as a framework for designing professional learning, and as a tool for technical assistance providers to co-develop learning goals with teachers. *The Connecticut Early Childhood Core Knowledge and Competency Framework for Teachers* is connected to the practices outlined in the document.

In addition to considering the role of the adults who interact with the children, the policies, procedures and administrative supports provided in an early care and education setting are crucial in ensuring quality curriculum. While not addressed at length in this document, these supports should include: a clear mission and/or philosophy, documents and resources to guide curriculum planning, a clear curriculum development and review process, adequate planning time and effective professional development.

Additional resources (available at www.ct.gov/oec/elds) to support the implementation of a strong curricular approach include:

- The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Curriculum Self-Assessment Tool (formerly known as the CT Office of Early Childhood Curriculum Development Guide), available in Appendix A
- *Supporting All Children Using the CT ELDS:*
 - *A Guide to the Domains and Strands*
 - *Meeting the Needs of Dual Language Learners*
 - *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*
 - *A Guide for Families*

Intentional Teaching

Teachers use curriculum to intentionally plan ways for children to construct knowledge by engaging them in a variety of learning experiences. Appropriate curriculum incorporates the following components:

- Early learning and development standards which provide the foundation for developing curriculum.
- Engaging and meaningful learning experiences that integrate standards and meaningful content.
- Ongoing assessment processes that inform curriculum, teaching and learning goals.
- Supportive interactions that use intentional teaching strategies with a varying degree of involvement in the learning experience and ways to support individual children.
- Well-organized environments with appropriate materials and carefully planned scheduling of experiences and routines.
- Meaningful family engagement in the curriculum.

A report from the National Research Council (2000) describes three principles of learning that influence intentional teaching:

- Children develop ideas and concepts early on. Therefore, curriculum should be planned to expose children to rich content, address important ideas and skills and include teaching strategies that foster connections between new learning and existing ideas.
- The learning environment must foster both skills and conceptual understanding to make knowledge usable. Planning must take early learning and development standards into account and should include content knowledge and experiences that help children apply skills and deepen their knowledge. Providing a meaningful context for applying knowledge and skills may build from standards in areas such as science or social studies, or may emerge from children's interests.
- Children need guidance to learn how to monitor their thinking and understand what it means to learn and how to develop strategies to do it. Planning must include strategies that promote the development

Intentional teaching does not happen by chance. It is planful, thoughtful and purposeful. Intentional teachers use their knowledge, judgment, and expertise to organize learning experiences for children; when an unplanned situation arises (as it always does), they can recognize a teaching opportunity and take advantage of it, too.

(Epstein, 2014)

of thinking skills, attitudes and dispositions. The CT ELDS includes many skills that support learning within the cognition domain and also includes essential dispositions that support children to become competent lifelong learners.

Early childhood teachers know that young children need environments that are active and social and that include caring and responsive teachers. Time for exploration and play is not enough. Teachers must intentionally support children's growth and learning

to help them reach new levels of competence (Bredenkamp, 1995). Keeping in mind Vygotsky's theory of teaching and learning, the teacher plays an integral role in scaffolding a child's learning using varied teaching behaviors and strategies to nudge the child towards discovery and understanding. No one teacher behavior or strategy is best. Piaget points out that the context of the experience and an environment with many opportunities to explore materials is fundamental to the learning process. These considerations are interrelated. All are essential in creating a curriculum plan that is dynamic, engaging and successful.

■ Examples of Intentional Teaching in Practice

Below are two examples of rich integrated learning experiences in different settings that are intentionally planned and incorporate all components of curriculum. They incorporate both learning goals from the CT ELDS and topics of study that emerged from children's interests. In both cases, the early care and education programs use a curriculum approach that outlines a clear process for building on children's interests and incorporating standards and assessment information into the plans. These experiences engage the children, further their knowledge, build rich vocabulary and help them to think critically.

In an infant and toddler classroom, the teacher has observed that many children are interested in putting items into containers and then dumping them out. He plans for an investigation of containers and asks families to send in a variety of containers that are safe for young children to explore. The following day, during floor play time, he introduces a variety of containers with and without lids, providing both soft and hard objects that children can put into the containers and dump out. He has thought through several things he might say to the children (e.g., "Did you put the toy in the box?

INTENTIONAL TEACHING



Can you take it out now?”) and actions he might demonstrate (e.g., shaking a closed container with soft and hard objects to hear the different sounds) to further their explorations and build new understandings. At snack time, he incorporates containers as appropriate to the family cultural practices around eating routines, food choices and children’s developmental needs (plastic containers, bento boxes, tortilla warmers, tiffin boxes, etc.). When the children go outside, he provides big boxes to put balls in and smaller containers for use during sensory explorations with sand and water. During these learning experiences, he and the other caregivers watch for children’s skills and intentionally support the development of social relationships (social and emotional development); their problem solving and understanding of attributes, sorting and patterns (cognition); vocabulary development (early language, communication and literacy); and their fine and gross motor skills (physical health and development). They also introduce mathematics language by counting objects as they are placed into containers and science concepts by talking with toddlers about hard and soft materials.

A new preschool classroom is being built next to an existing room. The preschoolers in the class have been hearing a lot of noise and are intrigued by what is going on. The teacher arranges for them to safely see the construction zone and, after following all protocols about engaging adults in the classroom, has worked with the plumber to plan a brief explanation for the children of what is being done. The children return to the classroom

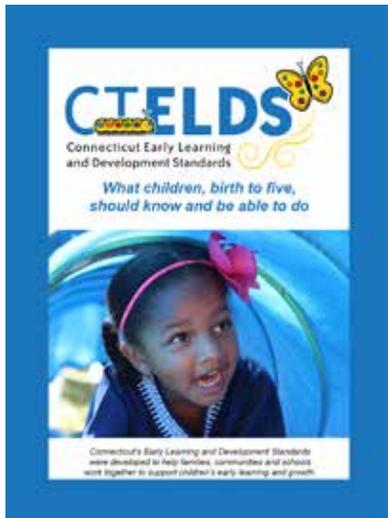
and begin an investigation related to water moving through pipes. They incorporate pipes and connectors into the water table and the block area, plan investigations and learn words such as flow, elbow, drainage, clog and control valve. They take on the challenge of designing a way to move water from one place to another. Families are informed about the investigation and are asked to work with their children to draw or take a picture of the pipes under their sink at home to bring into class. Children draw and write about their experiences, read books on the topic and watch a video that provides information to guide their problem solving. During this unit of study or exploration, the teacher is observing children’s skills and incorporating strategies to support progress along several learning progressions in the following domains: language and literacy, science, math, social and emotional development, physical health and development, cognition and social studies.



Components of Curriculum

The following sections, which provide more information about the practices associated with intentional teaching, are organized around the components of curriculum.

CT ELDS and Content



The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) outline what all children should know and be able to do across eight domains: cognition, social and emotional development, physical health and development, language and literacy, creative arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Curriculum should incorporate these important goals for children and a system should be in place to ensure that all children have experiences to support their development across the learning progressions in the CT ELDS. However, it is critical to remember that the learning progressions within the CT ELDS are intended as guides

for supporting growth and development along a continuum. Age bands are included for reference; however, curriculum must be responsive to the unique developmental needs of individual children. Children arrive at the desired level of understanding, knowledge or skill as a result of carefully selected and planned curriculum experiences that are appropriate to their individual level of development. In planning curriculum, the full range of abilities, including those of children with disabilities and differing abilities, must be considered. In addition, specific strategies and supports may need to be planned for children with disabilities or children who are dual language learners.

When developing curriculum or planning learning experiences, the continuum of indicators along a learning progression should be addressed. Specific indicators from the CT ELDS should generally not be considered in isolation when planning curriculum for children, but instead must be viewed in the context of the domain, strand and learning progression (including in relation to the other indicators in that progression).

Other goals or objectives may also be incorporated into the curriculum, depending upon a program's focus. For example, Head Start programs must address the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five*. A science-themed program will need to address all areas of development, but is likely to incorporate additional science content.

While the CT ELDS do set forth what all children should know and be able to do, there is also a great deal of general knowledge and vocabulary appropriate for young children to learn that is not included in the CT ELDS. This information is often referred to as content. Some content may emerge from the CT ELDS, particularly in the areas of science and social studies. Children's interests or curriculum resources may also provide the basis for developing curriculum and/or units of study. Within these units of study, many different areas of development included in the CT ELDS can then be intentionally supported.

Planning Meaningful Learning Experiences

In an integrated curricular approach, the content and experiences intentionally address and support several developmental domains. Learning standards are not considered in isolation. Instead, learning experiences are built with knowledge of the child's abilities and interests across several domains and often involve more than one learning goal. While it may be appropriate to plan experiences that focus on a particular strand or learning progression for the CT ELDS, meaningful learning experiences usually cut across multiple domains, strands and learning progressions. A meaningful curriculum is integrated so that learning experiences encompass many developmental domains and/or content areas.

Content to be included in integrated learning experiences may stem from specific CT ELDS in the areas of science or social studies, but must also incorporate children's interests and be presented in a context that stimulates children to become actively and purposefully engaged in their work. A curriculum that is implemented in a responsive manner incorporates the interests of the particular children in a group and is flexible about the length of time spent on projects or units of study. When children continue to be engaged and interested, units of study may last for weeks or months, with adults introducing new materials and/or prompts to extend learning and exploration. Children need to interact with the curriculum – to explore it, question it and evaluate it in their own way of learning. Children's active engagement ensures purposeful and sustained learning. Learning takes time!

■ The Importance of Play



Play is the most important defining behavior of a young child. Research shows that it cannot be replaced by any other activity (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Play contributes to and enhances all areas of development in young children. When children are working in play-based learning centers, they play with materials and ideas, and interact with peers. Through play, children construct their understanding of the world, recreate their knowledge, employ their own rules, make ideas part of their reality and discover solutions to complex problems. Children learn cooperation, problem-solving, language, mathematics and scientific concepts. They also learn to express and control emotions. Children need opportunities for extended, self-directed, imaginative and uninterrupted play, both indoors and outdoors. The environment should be intentionally prepared by a teacher who is able to guide and support each child's learning.

*"Play is the highest form of research."
Albert Einstein*

Play is a key strategy for fostering competent learners by promoting the Essential Dispositions from the CT ELDS.

Across all ages and domains, early learning experiences will support children to:

- BE CREATIVE
- BE INQUISITIVE
- BE FLEXIBLE
- BE CRITICAL THINKERS
- BE PURPOSEFUL AND REFLECTIVE
- BE SOCIAL LEARNERS

Play also supports:

- COOPERATION
- SHARING OF IDEAS
- COMMUNICATION
- LISTENING
- PROBLEM SOLVING
- RISK TAKING
- CONCENTRATION
- PERSEVERANCE
- QUESTIONING
- IMAGINING
- INNOVATION
- INDEPENDENCE
- GATHERING OF INFORMATION

As we watch an infant explore the sound they can make with a shaker, see a three-year-old climb a jungle gym or use a magnifying glass to see a pollywog, or observe a four-year-old count out the number of crackers for snack or create a sign for her latest block building, we understand the value of the time, energy and skill involved in each activity. Vygotsky pointed out that children develop through play (Berk & Wasserman, 1995), thus teachers must be prepared to follow each child's lead.

Children's ability to construct meaning from their play should not be underestimated. Infants often squeal with delight as they discover that banging on a toy makes a loud noise, building their sense of cause and effect. Older children may become excited when they first discover how to make purple by mixing other colors. They may show intense engagement when they work with friends to construct a "plane" out of cardboard and take on the roles of pilot and passenger. Playing alone and with others contributes to development of self, and provides a forum for the development of independence, self-confidence and problem-solving (Wassermann, 1990).

■ The Many Ways Play Contributes to Development



Play is vital in cognitive development. Children who play freely with designated materials exhibit more thinking skills and problem-solving abilities than those not given the opportunity to play. They are also more goal-directed and persistent (Sylva, Bruner, et al., 1976). Children who have opportunities to “recreate stories among themselves” during play have greater ability to understand and retell stories. These children answer subjective questions about a story more easily than their counterparts who have had less opportunity for this type of play (Pellegrini & Galdi, 1982).

Play also fosters executive functioning, creativity and imaginative thinking. As children mature, their thinking and actions grow in flexibility. Materials and objects are used in many ways. The symbolic play of children lays the foundation for their understanding of the written symbols of language and mathematics. Play lays a foundation for reading success (Gentile, 1983). In play, children use visual perception, eye-hand coordination and symbolic representation. Additionally, play develops the power to analyze, make judgments, synthesize, formulate and see causal relationships.

Play also has an important role in developing physical and perceptual skills (Sponseller, 1974). Complex learning tasks depend upon well-integrated

neurological development, which is supported by playful activity. Sensory motor skills must be developed before the activities of reading, writing and mathematics can be mastered.

Play is the principal activity through which social interaction is facilitated in the early childhood classroom (Gullo, 1992). Erikson (1963) suggests that play is of prime importance in the mastery of emotional needs. Through play, children gain confidence and learn to trust others. They learn to give, receive, share, express ideas and feelings, make choices, express friendship, see the perspectives of others and include others. Through dramatic play, children plan cooperatively with others, use language to shape their interactions, solve problems and identify with a variety of societal roles.

Finally, children who play are more flexible and versatile (Sutton-Smith, 1974). Versatile people are easier to work with and make more competent leaders. Teachers and parents who provide plenty of opportunity for children to play are cultivating adults who are more likely to respect themselves and make positive contributions to the lives of others.

Young children engage in many different types of play. It can be helpful to consider the many types of play when setting up a learning environment or planning activities. The types of play listed below may be combined and children’s play may shift from one type of play to another (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007).

“There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that high-quality pretend play is an important facilitator of perspective taking, and later abstract thought that it may facilitate higher-level cognition, and that there are clear links between pretend play and social and linguistic competence.”

Bergen (2002)

Free Self-Directed Play: Playing with materials or ideas alone or with others, with adult support offered only if needed by the children engaged in the activity.

Sensorimotor Play: Exploring the properties of objects using both senses and physical activity, for example, banging or rolling clay, pouring sand or water or making sculptures from paper mache.

Constructive Play: Making structures and creations using various objects and materials that can be assembled in an infinite variety of ways, for example, building a garage for toy cars and trucks out of a set of wooden blocks or interconnecting blocks.

Dramatic Play: Assuming pretend roles, imitating and acting out situations about feelings, events, people and animals for example, using language and gestures while pretending to be a father, a salesperson in a store or a doctor in the hospital.

Symbolic Play: Representing concrete objects, actions and events mentally or symbolically. As children mature, they are able to use objects such as blocks or cardboard boxes that are increasingly less realistic in form and function from the object the child wishes to symbolize. Symbolic play incorporates constructive and dramatic play.

Gross-Motor Play: Engaging in activities that require children to use their large muscles. Most typically outside, this type of play may involve dramatic play within the running, climbing and/or riding of vehicles.



▣ Stages of Play

In addition to the types of play listed above, Mildred Parten (1932) described developmental stages of play, which increase in complexity as children mature. Children who have reached the later developmental stages of play, may alternate or combine the forms of play described below. Children's development along the stages of play impacts plans for learning experiences. With young children at the stages of parallel or associative play, setting up the experiences so that children can play with similar materials in the same vicinity may be appropriate. With children who are able to engage in cooperative play, materials and experiences that promote social interaction are appropriate.

Solitary Play: Playing alone with materials and ideas.

Parallel Play: Playing side-by-side, sometimes mirroring each other, sometimes doing very different activities with the same materials.

Associative Play: Playing together with common materials, but without a common purpose, showing interest in what others are doing, and sometimes communicating, exchanging materials or imitating

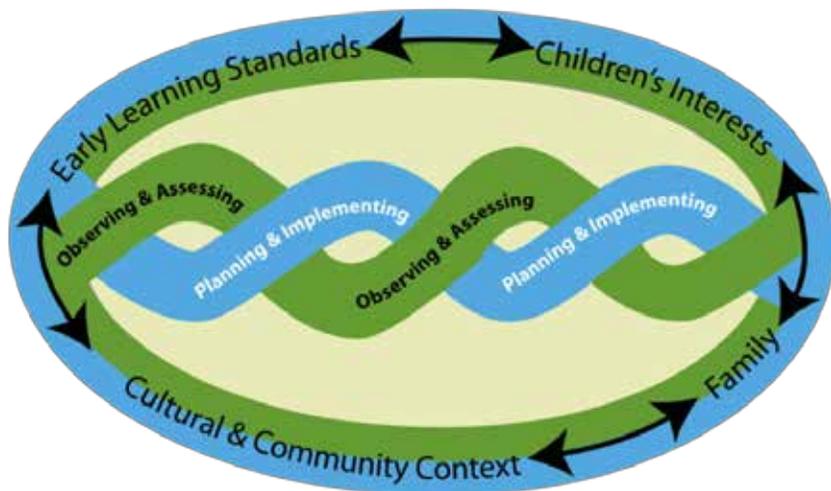
Cooperative Play: Playing in collaboration with another or a group with a common goal or problem to solve, sharing ideas, materials and roles.

Furthering these stages in the development of play, Elena Bodrova and Deborah Leong (2003) describe mature play. Mature play involves imaginary scenarios that include multiple roles and extended verbal exchanges. There are clearly defined rules for this play; however, there may be flexible themes, and the play may take place over the course of many days. In their article, "The Importance of Being Playful", Bodrova & Leong (2003) describe their work with teachers in supporting mature play. During this work, they observed that children "mastered literacy skills and concepts at a high rate" and "also developed better language and social skills and learned how to regulate their physical and cognitive behaviors."

Ongoing Assessment

Assessment is a broad term, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as, “The evaluation or estimation of the nature, quality or ability of someone or something” (Oxford university Press, 2014). When used in the context of early care and education programs, assessment is most often associated with an examination of children’s skills, knowledge and abilities, although there are also tools that assess the environment or program quality.

Teaching staff should engage in an ongoing cycle of intentional teaching to support children’s growth and development over time and assessment provides information about children’s progress so teachers can plan effectively. As depicted in the graphic pictured, the process of planning, implementing, observing and assessing is braided through the context of early learning standards, child interests, cultural and community context and family. The use of early learning and development standards is balanced with child interests and in the contexts in which children live and learn. Teachers cannot do this alone and require the support and involvement of administrators and the input and partnerships with families to successfully engage in a cycle of intentional teaching.



■ The Importance of Formative Assessment

While there are many purposes and types of assessment, the formative assessment process is most relevant to curriculum. A formative assessment

Over the course of several days, the teacher will be asking each child to count out materials to help set up for a class activity. This will provide her with information about each child’s counting skills. When Julie is counting out papers to put on the tables for children to paint, the teacher notices that Julie is saying the numbers in the correct order, but is not pairing each word with one paper. The teacher asks Julie to count as she puts a paper at each chair. This learning experience has provided the teacher with valuable information about Julie’s counting skills and has also helped her to immediately use a strategy to further Julie’s skills.

process is ongoing and is designed to provide information that is useful in planning and adjusting curriculum and instruction. Key to any ongoing formative assessment process is that it takes place as a part of the learning experience and provides immediate information that can inform a teacher’s actions. Information should be gathered through observations of children during their daily routines and play. Information may also be gathered during learning experiences planned to gather information about particular skills.

Different published or structured systems (e.g., *The Connecticut Preschool Assessment Framework*) may be used to plan and organize the information gathered during a formative assessment process. Organizing and summarizing the information gathered through formative assessment can provide valuable information to share with families, inform curriculum decisions and help in planning program improvement efforts.

Other types of assessments are also available for use in early childhood programs (e.g., standardized, norm-referenced tools) and may be used for other important purposes (e.g., determining eligibility for specific services, reporting to funding sources on

Important Things to Remember about Assessment

- The CT ELDS are not an assessment tool.
- A formative assessment process happens as a part of learning and provides information for teachers to use immediately.
- Any assessment tools must have evidence of validity related to purpose for which they are being used.
- Selecting assessment tools that are aligned to the CT ELDS will help teachers and families make connections between assessment information and the standards.

COMPONENTS OF CURRICULUM

child outcomes). These types of assessment measures will not be discussed in length in this document as they generally do not have evidence of validity for the purpose of informing curriculum and instruction on an ongoing basis. **It is critical that any assessment has evidence of validity related to purpose for which it is being used.**

No matter what systems or assessment tools are used by a program, ongoing daily interactions where teachers observe and assess children's thinking and progress help teachers set learning goals and plan instruction. Observation, reflection and assessment provide information for adjusting the teaching environment to individual as well as group needs. When observations focus on the skills and concepts outlined in the CT ELDS, the teacher can provide a scaffold within each learning experience appropriate to the child's emerging abilities.

When planning for curriculum, the manner in which children's skills and abilities will be assessed should be included. A plan for assessment includes documentation of:

- Observation plans (how and where you expect to observe children's behaviors associated with the CT ELDS and your assessment tools, and how this will be documented/recorded).



Examples:

- Record a short video clip of a toddler engaging in an imitation game.
- Observe peer interactions during an activity designed to support associative or cooperative play.
- Document children's use of numbers and comparison words during an activity that involves counting and/or grouping of objects.
- Collect drawings with notes about small muscle movement and control.
- Data Analysis (when and how will you analyze your data).

Examples:

- Review children's writing to develop plans for supporting development in this area.
- Organize all observations and work samples related to Mathematics on Thursday and discuss the information on Friday to develop plans for future learning experiences.

■ Using Assessment Information to Support All Children

High-quality curriculum supports learning for all children, regardless of their range of experience or current skills, abilities and interests. It is important that regular consideration is paid to how well the current curriculum is meeting the needs of the children. The core curriculum should meet the needs and support learning of most children. The best way to determine if curriculum is effective is to examine information about children's learning and growth. When you assess children's skills over time, you should see growth in the areas you have addressed through your curriculum. If a large number of children are not making progress in an area, such as mathematics or social and emotional skills, you need to examine how your core curriculum supports learning in these areas.

Even with a strong core curriculum, some children may need additional, tiered supports or interventions in addition to the core curriculum. Children grow and learn at very different rates when they are young; however, it is important to help all children progress beyond their current skill level. If assessment information indicates that some children are making less progress than expected, providing additional support can give them the extra boost they need to achieve a new skill. In early childhood, these supports can often happen right in their early learning environment. For instance, a teacher may provide a child who is struggling to understand one-on-one correspondence extra opportunities for matching items in pairs and counting by having them pass out one napkin to each child at snack time. A child who has difficulty following routines may benefit from a caregiver reviewing the transition steps or using visual cues.



When supports are provided, it is important to gather information about a child's progress on targeted skills so that the success of the chosen strategy can be determined. This information will guide decisions about whether to fade or intensify support or whether to add or change strategies. Working with other early childhood professionals helps in making decisions and learning new ways of supporting children. Whenever possible, decisions about curriculum and supports should be made as a part of a collaborative team.

Supportive Interactions

Teacher Behavior

When teachers decide in advance which teaching behaviors are most appropriate to the learning setting, the abilities of the children and the content, then planning is intentional and rich. When planning a learning experience, a teacher should consider the role they will play in the experience. However, an early childhood teacher must also be flexible, and respond to children's emerging needs capitalizing on teachable moments. The chart on the next page highlights many of the roles that teachers might take during an interaction.

While it is important to be intentional and plan learning experiences in advance, responding in the moment and paying attention to children's cues are crucial to promoting learning and development. The teacher may observe, intervene, support with questions or listen in an ongoing, dynamic effort to enhance children's learning. In fact, responding to teachable moments within the context of a relationship is the foundation to supporting infants and toddlers, since the curriculum is more focused on daily routines, the environment and materials. A knowledgeable and prepared teacher will be able to choose from a range of strategies in the moment. Keep in mind that learning opportunities may be brief and that a teacher's role may shift during the interaction.

A key factor in outcomes that lead to children's future success is the ability of teaching staff to engage in intentional practice in the use of early learning and development standards to plan, implement, observe and assess children's progress.

Teacher Roles During Interactions	
Responder	Most of the toddlers at the water table want to use cups to pour and are having trouble sharing. The teacher finds more items from the dramatic play area which can be used for pouring.
Risk-Taker	The teacher encourages children to experiment with ideas by verbalizing a risky decision. "I'm not sure if it will work if I add this color, but I think I will try."
Documenter	The teacher observes two children wishing to use the same swing. One of the children is especially verbal in articulating how they could solve this problem. The teacher takes a moment to write this down to store later in the respective child's file.
Researcher	During a discussion, the teacher models how to locate information in resource books.
Interpreter	The teacher observes a young child who is not yet comfortable with sharing her feelings become upset over a toy she wanted to use. The teacher steps in and says to the other children, "I think that Gabrielle would really like a turn, wouldn't you, Gabrielle?"
Provoker	The teacher is watching a child sorting objects gathered on a nature walk by color. He joins the child in the activity and then suggests another way to sort. He sorts a few by size and waits to see the child's reaction.
Scribe	A child tells a story of a home event that upset or worried them. The teacher suggests that the child draw a picture and then tell the teacher the ideas that she wants to put down on the paper.
Learning Partner	The teacher joins a child who is trying to get a ball to go down a ramp and into a cup. They work together to solve the problem.
Problem Solver	The writing area is not big enough for all the children interested in writing. The teacher sits with those who want to write and helps brainstorm the fairest way to ensure everyone gets a turn.
Observer	The teacher notices children in the library area role-playing the reading of a story. She watches and documents it for their files.
Questioner	Following a story, the teacher uses three pictures from the story to ask the children what happened first, next and last.
Listener	The teacher engages a child in conversation, attending thoughtfully to what the child is saying.
Creator	The teacher moves about on the playground conversing and suggesting to children they try certain equipment.
Evaluator	The teacher initiates a game with 2- and 3-step directions noticing which of the children can handle as many as three steps.
Communicator	The teacher converses and shares with each child as they enter in the morning, demonstrating that all children are recognized and accepted as part of the group.

Dombro, Jablon and Stetson (2011) describe what they refer to as "powerful interactions" in which "the teacher intentionally connects with a particular child in order to extend that child's learning." They further describe the three steps to achieving these types of interactions:

1. **Be Present:** Teachers who are present are attuned to what is happening with themselves and the children around them and therefore notice the opportunities that arise for initiating these "powerful interactions".
2. **Connect:** Letting children know that you see and hear them, showing interest in what they are doing and thinking, and responding in ways that promote trust and mutual respect all help to make a strong

connection that allow for the powerful interaction to occur.

3. **Extend Learning:** Once you have connected with children, there are many roles teachers can take in order to extend children's learning (see below for teacher roles during interactions). Continuing to be present and maintaining a connection help to ensure the strategies are appropriate to the child and the moment.

Bredenkamp & Rosengrant (1995) described the teaching strategies found below. These strategies provide a range of options for connecting and extending learning that range from more directive to facilitative in nature. As one considers the various strategies, it is important to consider where in this range the strategy falls and how it fits with the child's needs and temperament.

Acknowledge: The teacher recognizes the child's efforts and work. By acknowledging, the teacher is accepting and supporting the child to continue his task.

Model: The teacher provides an example for the child. For example, the teacher may model how children can go to the writing area, locate supplies and begin making a book of their own. This does not suggest teachers should provide models for children to copy.

Facilitate: The teacher assists the child in a task by making it easier to complete. Often facilitation is brief with the hope that the child will be able to continue independently with the task. For example, a teacher may facilitate an experience in the block area by assisting a child who is trying to balance a long block across two others to create a bridge. The child then continues to build without further assistance.

Support: The teacher assists a child, yet provides more time and help in achieving the goal. For example, a young three-year-old child using scissors may need the teacher's support in holding her hand to create the correct scissor grip for the entire time cutting the paper.

Scaffold: The teacher provides support while also challenging the child to try something a little more difficult by breaking it down into smaller components. For example, a child is trying to tell a story using puppets. The teacher is listening and providing ideas and questions. "So why is the monster angry? What will he do next? How will you end this story?"

Co-Construct: The teacher and child together work towards a goal. For example, the teacher and child complete a large pattern of shapes and colors. The teacher should follow the child's lead and provide encouragement.

Demonstrate: The teacher takes the opportunity to present a skill in progressive steps to the child. For example, the teacher demonstrates the safest way to pick up a class pet.

Direct: The teacher gives specific information to the children. For example, while working on a shared writing experience, the teacher points out where we start writing on the paper and what the mark, a period, is that we put on the paper when our thought is finished.



Environment, Materials and Scheduling

■ Planning the Environment

Children's learning environments take many forms and may include family child care settings, libraries or center-based early care and education programs. No matter where children are, intentionally planning the environment to facilitate growth and learning is necessary. Children's learning environments should be safe, allow for quiet and active play, provide daily opportunities for planned outdoor activity, and involve displays or materials that are of interest to children, including work created by them.

Many children are enrolled in early care and education programs where center-based learning is a cornerstone of planning the environment. Play-based learning centers provide opportunities for problem-solving with materials, interaction with peers and addressing multiple areas of development in an integrated curriculum approach. Many early childhood environments, especially those designed for preschoolers, use learning centers as a vehicle for prompting play.

All learning centers should be planned to intentionally include materials that promote learning and development. When planning learning centers, the arrangement should match the types of experience that will be encouraged (e.g., a table with two chairs will promote learning in pairs; a big dramatic play center will promote interactions with larger groups of children).

Centers should be planned with the following features in consideration:

- Manipulatives and materials to foster development in motor skills, cognition, mathematics, language and literacy, social studies, and/or science.
- Materials and experiences that focus on children's natural inclination to explore and investigate such as drama, blocks, sensory integration (sand/water), science and creative arts.
- Materials that promote social interaction with adults and/or children.
- Areas that provide opportunities for different types of play and varying activity or noise levels.
- Displays showing children's work and learning in a variety of areas.
- Places to save and continue work or play over time.
- Storage that provides children with access to a variety of materials and promotes participation in putting materials away.

No matter how a setting is arranged, it should be intentionally planned to meet the needs of the ages and developmental levels of the children. For



example, infant and toddler setting may have a more home-like appearance with comfortable furniture designed to promote adult-child interactions (e.g., couches and rocking chairs) and plenty of space for floor-time and exploration. These settings should be prepared in advance by the classroom teacher and designed in response to children's interests and abilities. Effective early care and education settings:

- Provoke interest
- Encourage exploration and inquiry
- Change throughout the year depending on interests
- Provide for independent thought and activity.

Programs should consider a reflective process using a tool for assessing the early learning environment. Using such a tool helps to determine strengths and potential areas for improvement.

Materials

Materials in an early learning environment should be carefully selected to promote exploration and learning. Intentionally selecting materials that are open-ended and reflect the diversity of children in the setting and the community will promote children's sense of belonging and engagement. It is important to consider when and how materials are introduced or rotated and how many materials are available. These considerations are dependent upon the age of the children. Mixed-age groups offer many benefits to young children but may require additional planning to ensure that the materials are appropriate across the age spans represented. For children who are dual language learners, materials in their home language should also be made available.

For infants and toddlers, the materials available in the environment are a significant part of intentional planning. Planning for infants and toddlers involves ensuring that they can safely explore a variety of materials that promote their development in all domains. Zero to Three offers suggestions to families for choosing toys for toddlers. While early care and education providers may have additional factors to consider (durability, ability to clean items, etc.), these tips offer a good lens for considering appropriate materials for young children (Zero to Three, 2014).

Look for materials that:

- **Can be used in a variety of ways.** Blocks, cups, containers, balls and boxes are examples of open-ended materials that can all be used in a variety of ways. They can be used to pour, build, make many different things, put in, take apart, etc. They can support learning of a variety of concepts and can promote physical development and social interaction.
- **Are engaging for children at a variety of developmental stages.** Children across developmental stages can use cars, dolls, toy animals or figures, etc.
- **Encourage exploration and problem-solving.** Puzzles, shape-sorters, nesting blocks, art and sensory materials encourage children to explore and manipulate objects in a variety of ways. When they encounter a problem, they can work with the items in a variety of ways to come up with a solution.
- **Spark children's imagination.** Toys that allow children to pretend and be innovative include dress-up clothing, cars and trucks, blocks, toy food and plastic plates, art materials, action figures and dolls. Be inventive. Using

safe, clean recycled materials, such as appliance boxes and wrapping paper tubes, can provide children with opportunities to be creative.

- **Match what they see in real life.** Young children need opportunities to explore what they see every day. They like to figure out objects work and become capable at the actions they see adults doing.
- **Build a love of language and books.** Books and real-life objects with print and pictures (e.g., menus, catalogs) can build an interest in books, letters and language. Opportunities to experiment with drawing and painting help motor skills and allow children to actively engage with “writing”.
- **Encourage children to be active.** Children need opportunities to move and interact with materials in physical ways. Look for materials that allow children to control movement and noises.

■ Scheduling

“The intentional teacher’s goal here is to offer children a rich and varied mix of learning opportunities within a supportive framework of routine.”

(Epstein, 2014, p. 15)

The daily schedule is an important part of intentional teaching. Routines can provide a secure foundation for children’s growth and development if they address children’s physical, emotional and learning needs. A daily schedule should:

- Establish a consistent, yet flexible, daily routine
- Allow for a variety of types of activities
- Use a variety of groupings
- Allow just enough time for each type of activity

(Epstein, 2014, pp. 15-17)

It is also important to consider the balance that occurs across the day.



Research has shown that children in preschool spend a great deal of time engaged in meals or routines that are not intentionally supporting learning (Early, et. al 2010). This research highlights the importance of carefully planning the day in order to maximize learning opportunities. Planning the schedule to incorporate extended periods of time for small group interactions and collaborative projects will provide opportunities for children to engage in hands-on, meaningful learning experiences. Daily routines such as dressing, toileting and eating can be structured in a manner that makes them a learning experience as well. Such daily routines offer many rich opportunities for learning.

Providing a consistent schedule may prove more challenging in early learning environments designed for infants and toddlers. For these younger children, the schedule must be much more flexible, to address their changing physical needs. For the youngest children an even greater portion of their learning takes place during daily routines such as feeding, dressing and diapering. Planning ways to promote development during daily routines is an important part of intentional teaching with infants and toddlers. Consistency of the adults that infants and toddlers interact with during these daily routines is very important. A primary caregiving model provides a staffing plan that allows young children to spend most of their time interacting with a consistent primary caregiver. This model is ideal for supporting young children’s growth and development as it provides an opportunity to develop trusting relationships and supports development and learning in all areas.

“The intentional teacher’s goal here is to offer children a rich and varied mix of learning opportunities within a supportive framework of routine.”

(Epstein, 2014, p. 15)

Family Engagement

Family engagement is an important component of high-quality curriculum. When families are engaged in meaningful ways, children have an opportunity to explore who they are within the context of their family life and culture (Curtis & Carter, 1996). When families are regularly involved in the early care and education program and there is a respect and appreciation for the value of the home culture, children’s self-esteem is enhanced and positive relationships with families are built.



The family and the home environment provide a key context for learning and development. Early childhood teachers play an especially important family support role. By partnering with families, safe and healthy learning environments are supported both at home and in the early care and education setting.

In a partnership, all participants share rights and responsibilities, power and decision making, as well as mutual trust and respect.

The term “partnership” rather than “involvement” captures the idea that responsibility for children is shared across all three contexts of home, school and community. Not all partnerships look the same. Successful partnerships vary as much as the people or groups that create them. Partnerships work best when they recognize, acknowledge and accommodate differences among families, communities and cultures.

Families are the most important people in children’s lives. They are also their first and primary teachers. Early childhood programs are far more effective when they engage parents in meaningful ways so that children’s education and the family contributes personal knowledge about their child. Early childhood educators must recognize and respect families’ dreams and expectations for their children’s success.

■ Principles of Family Engagement

As a part of their Engaging Diverse Families Project, the National Association of Young Children (NAEYC) outlines six principles of family engagement. When put in action, the principles encourage partnerships and support families to be engaged in early care and education programs in meaningful ways. Below each principle are examples of specific actions or strategies that early care and education programs can use. It is important to consider how all six principles are being addressed and to use a variety of strategies that are tailored to meet the needs of specific families, programs and communities.

Principle 1: Programs invite families to participate in decision-making and goal setting for their child.

Actions:

- Develop an intake process that allows families to share information about their children and priorities. This can begin a goal-setting process.
- Use questionnaires, meetings, home visiting and/or conferences to communicate about common goals for children on an ongoing basis.
- Make time for everyone to come together to make decisions.
- Assign primary caregivers so that families can communicate consistently with the same person about mutual goals.

Principle 2: Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication.

Actions:

- Use multiple means of communication: verbal, written and face-to-face communication.
- Use technology to enhance communication. Social media, texting and other online tools can be powerful strategies for promoting on-going, reciprocal communication.
- Ask families about their preferences for communication.
- Communicate in families’ first language.

Principle 3: Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal.

Actions:

- Make sure to gather information from families about their children, family life and culture.
- Share information with families about their individual child as well as about a variety of other topics including the early care and education program, child development and community resources or events.
- Provide opportunities for families to participate in the program in structured ways.
- Provide opportunities for more social exchanges such as picnics, park trips or special events.

Principle 4: Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community.

Actions:

- Provide supplemental learning activities for children and/or families.
- Share information about learning opportunities in the community, such as museums or special events.
- Connect families with resources to further their own learning about parenting, learning English or furthering their own education.

Principle 5: Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts.

Actions:

- Offer families opportunities to serve on boards or committees that make decisions about program functions.
- Provide families with information that allows them to advocate for policies and practices that will impact their family or children.

Principle 6: Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system.

Actions:

- Provide staff with professional development around engaging families and diversity.

- Promote diversity in staffing and leadership.
- Review curriculum and program practices regularly to ensure they are free of bias and reflect a match with the community and families served.

Achieving a strong family-program partnership requires a culture that supports and honors reciprocal relationships, commitment from program leadership, a vision shared by staff and families, opportunities to develop the skills needed to engage in reciprocal relationships, and practices and policies that support meaningful family engagement.

Halgunseth, Peterson (2009) NAEYC

Ensuring a Comprehensive Approach to Curriculum

There are many different approaches to planning curriculum for early learning environments. Some early care and education programs engage in an ongoing process of planning, with only a basic structure or framework outlining their approach. Other programs may rely heavily on specific plans or curriculum documents and make adjustments for the specific group of children. In addition, special consideration must be made about what to include as curriculum for infants and toddlers. Despite these variations the essential components to promote intentionality, responsiveness and reflection remain the same. No matter which approach or model is used, it is critical that there be careful consideration in selecting, developing and/or implementing any curriculum. Any curriculum that is implemented in an early care and education setting should be grounded in evidence. An evidence-based approach to early childhood curriculum involves strategies, experiences, materials and goals that are based on research about child development and effective ways to promote children's long-term growth.

■ Making Curriculum Decisions

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Curriculum Self-Assessment Tool (Appendix A) was developed to be used by early care and education programs when making decisions related to curriculum. This self-assessment may be used to review existing curriculum, to help in the development of curriculum policies and documents or for reviewing a commercially available curriculum. While reviewing policies and documents, it is likely that not every component listed in the guide will be evident. This document may serve as a resource in making program improvements, considering ways to supplement and/or improve implementation of purchased curriculum or as a guide for programs engaging the process of curriculum development.

The sections below highlight specific considerations when developing or selecting curriculum. The first section addresses infants and toddlers; the following sections highlight different approaches to curriculum and important considerations, and the last section addresses planning for learning experience on an ongoing basis.

■ Developing Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers

Curriculum for infants and toddlers must take into consideration the unique characteristics of young children. Lally and Mangione (2006) describe four main ways in which infants and toddlers differ from older children:



1. The intensity of infants' inborn inclination to learn and develop in particular areas (genetic wiring).
2. The holistic nature of infant learning.
3. Infants' rapid move through three major developmental stages in their first two years.
4. Development of a first sense of self.

Therefore the role of the adult is different when planning to support learning and growth for infants and toddlers. Consider the infant and toddler curriculum within our framework of intentionality, responsiveness and reflection. While these three characteristics should be evident across all ages, for infants and toddlers

responsiveness and reflection are at the forefront. As stated by Lally and Mangione (2006), "...the role of the adult in supporting learning is one of respect for and responsiveness to the child's lessons rather than generating lessons for the child." They further state that adults must be especially sensitive to their role in the infant's shaping of their first sense of self.

This unique developmental period calls for infant and toddler curriculum that generally focuses on providing:

- A safe, nurturing environment that supports exploration and discovery
- Materials that match children's interests and developmental levels
- Consistent, but flexible daily routines that adjust to children's physical needs
- Responsive adult-child interactions that support trusting relationships and an emerging sense of self
- Experiences that build on children's interest and curiosity to support development and learning.

■ Curricular Approaches that Draw Upon Children's Interests

Several approaches to curriculum, such as a project or inquiry based approach, draw heavily on children's interests. These types of curricular approaches have the advantage of offering the opportunity for deep involvement in topics that the children are interested in, promoting exploration, inquiry and self-directed learning. However, these types of approaches take a great deal of planning once a topic of study or project is identified to ensure that a wide range of skills and areas of development are intentionally addressed. It is important to have a clearly identified approach to determining appropriate topics of study, planning related experiences, ensuring that learning standards and assessment are integrated in meaningful ways and reflecting upon the process.

"In this instance, the critical assumption is that the experiences planned for children are uniquely tied to each child's developmental profile. For this to occur, teacher-caregivers must be continually observant and aware of the child's development across domains."

(National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative @ ZERO TO THREE, 2010)

Curricular Approaches with a Defined Scope and Sequence

Some approaches to curriculum involve a more defined scope and sequence of activity or experience associated with specific learning outcomes (sometimes referred to as a curriculum model). This approach to curriculum has the advantage of being highly intentional for the broad base of children in a particular setting, for having specific materials and for ensuring that children across multiple classrooms have similar experiences. However, great effort must be made to tailor the planned experiences to the particular children in any setting to ensure that the learning goals and activities are appropriate for their skills level and learning style. In addition, children may not be interested in some pre-selected topics and may be less likely to engage in deep inquiry-based learning and higher-order thinking.

Curriculum Planning—Developing Learning Experience Plans

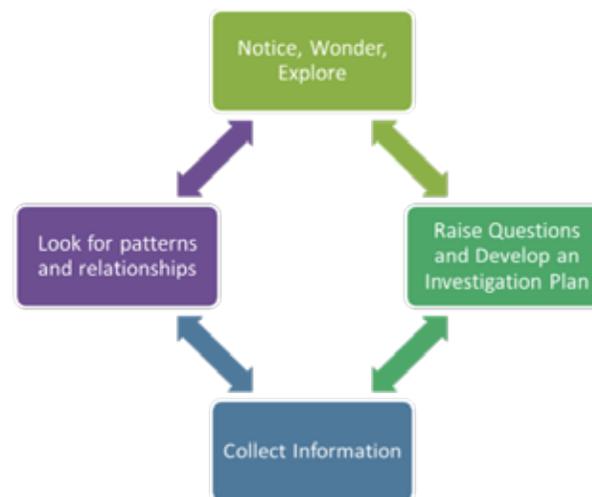
Learning experience plans (sometimes referred to as lesson or activity plans) are a common component of planning and implementing a curriculum that is intentional, responsive and reflective. In many settings, learning experience plans are used as a tool for communicating with families and those responsible for monitoring curriculum. For those using a purchased or developed curriculum, learning experience plans may be developed in advance while the ongoing planning reflects how the curriculum will be adjusted to fit particular children in a group. This planning includes considerations of developmental needs, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and interests. For those using a project-based approach, the learning experience plan allows them to follow the children's interests while intentionally addressing specific learning and development goals.

The document, *Supporting All Children Using the CT ELDS: Guidance on the Domains and Strands*, includes an Inquiry Process which can be used to develop a unit of study based on a variety of topics and content areas. The process involves four steps which may be repeated to more deeply explore topics.

Inquiry Process

Notice, Wonder, Explore

Adults provide children with opportunities to explore a topic through a variety of means: observing, wondering, exploring and asking questions.



Teachers draw upon children's interests to promote curiosity by commenting on things children notice and asking probing questions to expand upon their wonder.

Raise Questions and Develop an Investigation Plan

Teachers encourage children to ask questions and ask children open-ended questions that do not require a single right answer to promote guessing and prediction. They encourage children to think of ways to investigate or experiment to discover answers to their questions. They support children to make predictions.

Collect Information

Teachers support children to carry out their inquiries and document the results of their investigations. There are many ways to document information including using physical objects, drawing, writing and taking photographs. Teachers can provide paper, journals, pencils and crayons for children to record their own observations as their inquiry process progresses.

Look for patterns and relationships

Teachers work with children to make meaning of the information they have collected. They look for patterns in their observations and explore relationships within this information. Teachers continue to use questions that encourage children to discuss their own thinking and use higher order thinking skills such as comparing, analyzing and drawing conclusions. The process of reflecting upon observations will often lead to more questions and further cycles of inquiry.

Documenting Your Plans

In early childhood settings, a great deal of learning takes place during play-based learning opportunities. Clearly documenting plans for learning experiences illustrates how specific experiences intentionally promote children's growth and development. Documenting plans can also help others support children's learning:

- **Early Care and Education Staff:** Documenting plans for learning experiences helps in being prepared. Reviewing plans after a planned experience can also help in reflecting on modifications to make the experience more effective.
- **Families:** Sharing how children are learning in early care and education settings lets families know that their children's growth and development is at the forefront. Such plans will also help them know how they can support their child at home.
- **Administrators:** Documenting plans to support children may be required by a funding source or administrator. This information shows others strategies for intentionally promoting children's growth and development.
- **Substitutes:** When you have a clearly articulated plan, substitutes will be able to implement this plan in meaningful ways.

Quality learning experience plans involve a combination of documents that include:

- A daily schedule with estimated time allotments
- Descriptions of what will be offered and supported in a variety of learning centers
- Early learning and development standards, including specific strands and learning progressions
- Experiences connected to the early learning and development standards that are based upon child interests
- The structure for various experiences (e.g., facilitated play, small group, large group, individual), how learning will be facilitated, including strategies for individualization/differentiation for children at differing developmental levels
- Plans for supporting children who are dual language learners
- Evidence of promoting higher order thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge)
- A plan for assessment processes and documentation
- Family engagement
- Staff reflections



Further guidance to support learning experience plan development:

- The CT ELDS articulate what young children from birth to age five should know and be able to do. Planned learning experiences should focus on specific strands or learning progressions from the CT ELDS, focusing on promoting children's development across the indicators appropriate for their age and/or developmental level.
- Relevant and meaningful experiences for young children typically involve learning across more than one domain. Therefore, it is most appropriate to plan experiences that address multiple strands or learning progressions across domains.
- **Assessment:** The information gained from assessment tools may support planning in two ways:
 - To target particular strands or learning progressions for which a group of children or individual children need more support.
 - To individualize strategies/differentiate support for specific children
- Plans should include how you will observe and document children's progress. When using an authentic assessment tool (such as the CT Preschool Assessment Framework or Teaching Strategies GOLD™), plans should include the assessment standards that will be observed. Over time, there will need to be sufficient time and opportunities to complete several observations. Crosswalks to specific assessment tools may be helpful in planning for learning experiences that address the CT ELDS, incorporate assessment information and include a plan for additional observation and documentation.

- Briefly describe planned experiences directly connected to the CT ELDS. These experiences should clearly relate to the selected strands and learning progressions, be appropriate for the children in the group and provide sufficient detail. Other experiences in the plan should also be well thought out and descriptive, but may not necessarily focus on specific CT ELDS or include a plan for observation. For infants and toddlers, plans may focus on individual children, materials and routines.
- Plans to support higher order thinking should be evident. This could be done by highlighting questions that facilitate the levels from Bloom’s Taxonomy or Webb’s Depth of Knowledge. These considerations should be across all experiences and should be embedded in daily routines.
- Dual language learners may need support so they can fully participate and benefit from the learning involved in a particular experience, especially when learning experiences involve a great deal of language. Experiences that involve a great deal of oral language offer opportunities to support children in developing language skills in their own language or in English. Learning experiences that do not involve as much language may provide rich opportunities for building on strengths and supporting children language skills. Planning specific strategies to support dual language learners will ensure that all of these opportunities are capitalized upon.

Examples of questions to ask preschoolers that address various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy:

- Remembering/Recall: What happened first...?
- Understanding: Can you explain what happened to...?
- Applying: How can you change this building so that more will fit?
- Analyzing: If...happened, what might the ending have been?
- Evaluating: How have the plants changed since...?
- Creating: What do you need so you can act out the story of ...?

- Evidence of opportunities for early literacy and mathematical experiences throughout the day should be identified in the plan (e.g., counting, examining geometric shapes, listening, speaking, reading and writing).
- Include plans for family engagement. Opportunities for family engagement should reflect a variety of ways for families to be involved, promote interactions between families and their children and support communication and understanding of children’s development. Plans should be culturally relevant, easy for them to engage in during the context of their ongoing routines and should not incur a cost to them.

Developing a Learning Experience Plan: Questions for Reflection



- What information do we have to help us decide on which strands or learning progressions within the CT ELDS to choose for planning?
- Examples include documented observations of teaching staff, parents and others; work samples from children; child interests; assessment information
- What assessment information is relevant to the selected CT ELDS strands or learning progressions?
- Which areas and developmental levels should be targeted based on the assessment information we have gathered (for the group as a whole; for small groups; for individual children)?
- How are the experiences we are planning developmentally appropriate and actively engaging the children in developing their skills, knowledge and dispositions? How are these experiences linked to child interests?
- What are the cultural considerations we should be aware of as we plan for each learning experience?
- How are we supporting children who are dual language learners?
- Which areas of interest or topics offer opportunities for addressing important questions, introducing rich vocabulary, engaging in inquiry and using critical thinking?

CONCLUSION

- Which teaching strategies will we use to differentiate the experience for children across targeted strands or learning progressions?
- How will we observe and document children's progress? Will the observations and documentation provide data for the assessment tool we are using?
- What accommodations or modifications will we make or implement related to our findings from our assessments?

Administrator Best Practices

- Support teachers by providing training on the value and importance of play and strategies to engage children and prepare the environment.
- Schedule regular times for planning.
- Create a professional learning community by scheduling time for teachers to share planning successes and challenges, engage in reflective practices and provide collegial support and suggestions.
- Model questioning, scaffolding and supportive strategies in the classroom.
- Plan time to be available on a regular basis to provide support for teachers and children.
- Provide resources and materials that support learning centers and children's interests.
- Provide resources and information to help parents understand the curriculum and teacher strategies during play and daily routines.
- Provide ongoing information and education on curriculum development, evaluation and decision-making.
- Implement a thorough review process to make decisions about curriculum development and/or purchasing.
- Offer opportunities for teachers to visit other classrooms and programs to view various approaches to curriculum and teaching.
- Support teachers and reorganize time schedules to avoid learning experiences that are controlled by rigid schedules.
- Review staff schedules so that programming is not at risk due to lunch breaks and organizational duties and tasks.
- Review plans regularly and participate in planning sessions to provide support and guidance.
- Provide encouragement and support for daily planning that promotes reflection and sharing.



- Avoid thinking that curriculum units, themes or projects must have set time limits.
- Promote training to develop teacher understanding of diversity and inclusion.
- Enlist the support of a transdisciplinary team in efforts to create achievable goals and provide recommendations for supports, accommodations and modifications that address all children's needs.

Conclusion

Ensuring a strong curriculum that is appropriate for the group of children and for each individual child is a complex and challenging process. This document is designed to provide a foundation for considering curriculum in early childhood. It is designed to support early care and education programs to make decisions and work toward a comprehensive approach that involves ongoing intentionality, responsiveness and reflection. The companion documents in the *Supporting All Children Using the CT ELDS* series provides further guidance around using the CT ELDS in early care and education programs.

- Berk, L. E. & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
- Bodrova, E. & Leong, D. J. (1996). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education*. Columbus, OH: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Bredenkamp, S. & Rosegrant, T. (1995). Reaching Potentials Through Appropriate Curriculum: Conceptual Frameworks for Applying the Guidelines. In *Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children: Volume I*. Edited by S. Bredenkamp and T. Rosegrant. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Curriculum Chapter 2 25 Connecticut State Department of Education. The Guide to Using the Position Statement on Early Childhood Programs. (2000). Hartford, CT: Connecticut State Department of Education.
- Curtis, D. & Carter, M. (2006). *Reflecting children's lives*. Beltsville, MD: Red-leaf Press.
- Dodge, D.; Colker, Laura & Heroman, Cate. (2002). *The creative curriculum for preschool*. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc.
- Domboro, Amy; Jablon, Judy & Stetson; Charlotte. (2011). *Powerful interactions: How to connect with children to extend their learning*. Washington DC: NAEYC.
- Early, D., Iruka, et al. (2010). How do prekindergarteners spend their time? Gender, ethnicity, and income as predictors of experiences in pre-kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25 (2).
- Edelman, Marian Wright. (1992). *The measure of our success*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1964). *Childhood and Society*, 2nd Ed. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Gentile, L. & Hoot, J. (1983, January). Kindergarten play: The foundation of reading. *The Reading Teacher*.
- Gandini, L. (1997). Foundations of the Reggio Emilia approach. First Steps Toward Teaching the Reggio Way. J. Hendricks (Ed.). (pp. 14 – 25). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Gullo, Dominic. (1992). *Developmentally appropriate teaching in early childhood: Curriculum, implementation, evaluation*. Washington, DC: National Education Association of the United States.
- Halgunseth, Linda C.; Peterson, Amy; Stark, Deborah R; and Moodie; Shannon. (2009). *Family engagement, diverse families, and early childhood education programs: An integrated review of the literature*. National Association for the Education of Young Children and Pre-K Now
- Hohmann, M. & Weikart, D. (1995). *Educating young children: Active learning practices for preschool and child care programs*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.
- Katz, L. G. & Chard, S. C. (1989). *Engaging children's minds: The project approach*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Katz, L. G. & Chard, S. C. (2000). *Engaging children's minds: The project approach*. 2nd Edition. Stamford, CT: Ablex.
- Mitchell, Ann & David, Judy. (1992). *Explorations with young children*. New York: Gryphon House.
- Montessori, M. Dr. (1965). *Montessori's own handbook*. New York: Schocken Books.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (nd) *Engaging diverse families: Effective family engagement principles*. Retrieved from: <https://www.naeyc.org/familyengagement>.
- National Research Council. *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. (2001). Barbara T. Bowman; M. Suzanne Donovan and M. Susan Burns, editors, and Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Oxford dictionaries. (2014). Oxford University Press Retrieved on 2/11/2015, from: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/assessment?
- Parten, M.B. (1932). Social participation among pre-school children. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 27(3), 243-269..
- Sponseller, D. (ed.). (1974). *Play as a learning medium*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Sutton-Smith, B. & Sutton-Smith, S. (1974). *How to play with your children (and when not to)*. New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc.
- Sylva, K. & Bruner, J. et. al. (1976). The role of play in the problem solving of children 3-5 years old. *Play: Its Role in Development and Evolution*. J.S. Bruner, A. Jolly and K. Sylva, eds. New York Basic Books.
- Trepanier-Street, M.; Hong, S. & Donegan, M. (2001). Constructing the image of the teacher in a Reggio inspired teacher preparation program. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 22, 47-52.
- Wasserman, S. (1990). *Serious players in the primary classroom: Empowering children through active learning experiences*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families. (2014). Tips for Choosing Toys for Toddlers. Retrieved from: <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/play/tips-for-choosing-toys-for.html>.

Appendix A:

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC)
Curriculum Self-Assessment Tool
(Formerly known as the *CT OEC Curriculum Development Guide*)

The attached document is designed to be used by early care and education programs when making decisions related to curriculum. This document may be used to review existing curriculum, to help in the development of curriculum policies and documents or for reviewing a commercially available curricular product. While reviewing policies and documents, it is likely that not every component listed in this document will be evident. This document is intended to serve as a guide to best practices and as a resource in making program improvements, considering ways to supplement and/or improve implementation of purchased curriculum or may serve as a guide for programs engaging the process of curriculum development.

Curriculum includes the skills, knowledge and concepts to be addressed and the plans for learning experiences through which progress will occur. In addition to planning for the materials and activities to support children's learning, intentional teaching includes consideration of the teacher's role in supporting children's growth, the needs and interests of individual children and how families will be engaged.

The OEC Curriculum Guide includes two sections:

1. Program policies, procedures and administrative supports critical for the quality implementation of curriculum.
2. Components to be included in written curriculum documents

Each of these sections includes specific criteria that support the following characteristics of a high-quality curriculum

- **Intentional:** All aspects of the curriculum are purposeful and planned with specific goals and knowledge of children and families in mind
- **Responsive:** Programs and staff react or respond to the changing social-emotional, academic, physical and/or cultural needs of the children and families they serve
- **Reflective:** Staff engage in ongoing, thoughtful consideration and change in order to best meet the needs of the children and families they serve

Key to Acronyms within the document:

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children
(accreditation criteria)

ECERS-R: Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised Edition

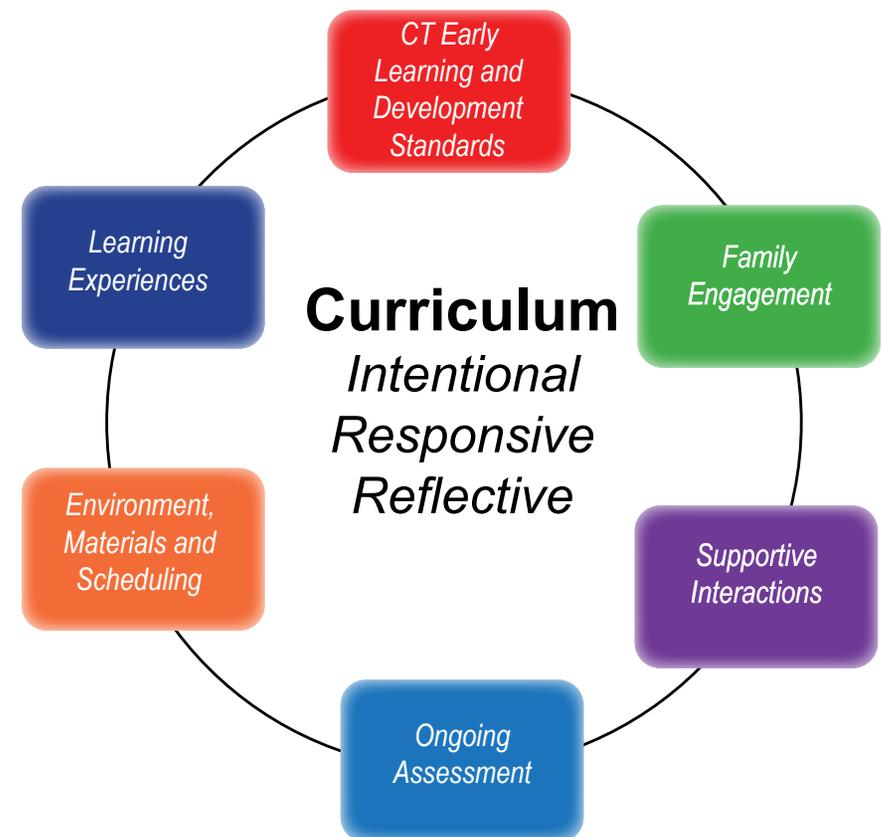
ITERS-R: Infant /Toddler Environmental Rating Scale-Revised Edition

CLASS: Classroom Assessment Scoring System

NACCP: National Association of Child Care Professionals

DEC: Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

IRA: International Reading Association



Program Policies, Procedures, and Administrative Support	Indicators of Quality	Comments/Next Steps	Alignment to program accreditation, evaluation and improvement tools *
Promote curriculum decisions that are intentional	Mission/philosophy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A written philosophy statement exists • A written mission statement exists 		NAEYC: 2.A.01 , 10.A.01
	Guiding Documents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum decisions adhere to the written philosophy and/or mission statement of an organization • Curriculum decisions adhere to ethic statements and best practices promoted by nationally recognized professional organizations, (e.g., NAEYC, NACCP, DEC, Zero to Three, Head Start, IRA) • Curriculum decisions meet the requirements of funding sources • Current research/references guide decisions related to curriculum 		NAEYC: 10.A.01, 10.A.01 Head Start Performance Standard: 1304.21 (a)
	Curriculum Development and Review Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a written process for reviewing and revising curriculum • There is a timeline for reviewing and revising curriculum • Key stakeholders are involved in making decisions related to curriculum • A process exists to ensure alignment between infant/toddler curriculum, and/or programming and preschool curriculum and/or programming • A process exists to ensure alignment to curriculum, standards and/or programming in subsequent grades 		NAEYC: 10.B.02, 10.B.08
	Ongoing Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrators ensure that teaching teams have a minimum of one hour per week devoted to planning, preparation and reflection • Professional development is provided for tools and materials to be included as part of curriculum, assessment or planning • Staff is provided opportunities for onsite, job embedded support • Responsibilities of classroom staff in relation to planning, implementing and assessing are clearly written 		NAEYC: 10.B.01, 4.D.02, 10.E.12 ECERS-R: 40-43 ITERS-R: 35-36, 38-39
Promote curriculum decisions that are responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a plan for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum that considers information about children’s learning and skill development 		NAEYC: 10.F.01, 10.F.02
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum decisions take into account the cultural backgrounds of the families served and the community in which the program resides 		NAEYC: 2.A.04, 7.A.09 ECERS-R: 28 Head Start Performance Standard: 1304.21(a)1 ITERS-R: 24

Program Policies, Procedures, and Administrative Support	Indicators of Quality	Comments/Next Steps	Alignment to program accreditation, evaluation and improvement tools *
	<p>Professional Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for professional development related to curriculum are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – aligned with program goals, current best practices and research – based upon the individual needs of teachers – considerate of the needs of children and families 		NAEYC: 2.A.04, 10.E.12 ECERS-R: 38, 43 ITERS-R: 39
Promote reflection as a valuable practice in making curriculum decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have time to reflect upon classroom implementation of curriculum on a regular basis • Teachers have time to collaborate with other early childhood professionals on a regular basis • Teachers have the time and professional development that allows them to reflect upon assessment results in order to inform short and longer term adjustments to curriculum and planning • There is a process for teachers to provide feedback on curriculum 		NAEYC: 10.A.07, 3.G.02, 4.D.04 ECERS-R: 41-43 ITERS-R: 35-36
<p>*Note: The following components are considered important to include when planning or reviewing early childhood curricula. Whether the individual components appear as part of a broader yearly plan or as part of an ongoing weekly/daily planning process may vary from one program to another. For example, written documents may articulate a yearly plan for addressing all standards with sample teaching strategies, leaving most of the planning for specific learning experiences to individual teacher plans. Other programs may rely more heavily on a curriculum document that includes plans for specific learning experiences, allowing teachers to focus their time on making adjustments to incorporate child interest and meeting the unique learning needs of a particular group. Despite these variations as to whether these components appear as part of the ongoing planning process or as part of a larger curriculum document, the essential components to promote intentionality remain the same.</p>			
Curriculum document(s) include components that promote intentionality	<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written documents address the basic components of an early childhood classroom, including centers and outdoor environments • Materials reflect a balance between open-ended and problem-solving materials, familiar and novel items, and materials that promote both social and individual learning • Written documents address research-based principles for the arrangement of classroom space and learning centers, appropriate to the ages and developmental levels of the children served • Written documents address how the components of an early childhood classroom may be adjusted based on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – child interest – individual children’s needs – the learning standards to be addressed 		NAEYC: 2.A.02, 2.A.08, 3.A.04, 3.B.02, 3.E.08, 9.A.04 ECERS-R: 1-5, 15, 19-27, 37 ITERS-R: 1-5, 14-23, 29-32 CLASS: Regard for Student Perspectives, Productivity, Instructional Learning Formats: Variety of Modalities and Materials, Head Start Performance Standard: 1304.21a)1

Program Policies, Procedures, and Administrative Support	Indicators of Quality	Comments/Next Steps	Alignment to program accreditation, evaluation and improvement tools *
	<p>Scheduling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written documents address the basic components and requirements of the daily schedule • Children have ample time for making choices, extending play and continuing projects over time • Plans exist for transitions from one activity or area to another • Plans address the physical and health needs of children and provide opportunities for learning as a part of the daily care routine 		<p>NAEYC: 2.A.07, 2.A.11, 3.D.03, 3.D.09, 3.E. 02 ECERS-R: 34,35,36 ITERS-R: 6-9. 29-31 CLASS: Regard for Student Perspectives, Productivity: Maximizing Learning Time, Transitions, Routines</p>
	<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources for teachers are provided, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – research base for standards, assessments, teaching strategies and/or learning experiences. – suggested materials – related readings 		<p>NAEYC: 10.C.03 ECERS-R: 43 ITERS-R: 35,39</p>
	<p>Ongoing Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrators ensure that teaching teams have a minimum of one hour per week devoted to planning, preparation and reflection • Professional development is provided for tools and materials to be included as part of curriculum, assessment or planning • Staff is provided opportunities for onsite, job embedded support • Responsibilities of classroom staff in relation to planning, implementing and assessing are clearly written 		<p>NAEYC: 10.B.01, 4.D.02, 10.E.12 ECERS-R: 40-43 ITERS-R: 35-36, 38-39</p>
Curriculum Document	<p>Integrated Curricular Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning experiences incorporate skills across multiple domains of development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social and Emotional Development – Physical Development and Health – Early Language, Communication & Literacy/Language & Literacy – Creative Arts – Early Mathematical Discovery/Mathematics – Early Scientific Inquiry/Science – Cognition – Social Studies • Learning centers incorporate materials and experiences that promote skill development across multiple domains of development, (e.g., writing implements are available in dramatic play and block centers, three dimensional geometric shapes are used in the sensory table) 		<p>NAEYC: 2.A.10, 2.A.12 ECERS-R: 15, 19-27 ITERS-R: 14-23. 31 CLASS: Instructional Learning Formats: Variety of Modalities and Materials Concept Development: Integration Language Modeling: Advanced Language</p>

Program Policies, Procedures, and Administrative Support	Indicators of Quality	Comments/Next Steps	Alignment to program accreditation, evaluation and improvement tools *
Curriculum Document	<p>Planning</p> <p>Written documents clearly articulate the following components in learning plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards addressed by learning experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the learning standards addressed are the state standards or are aligned to state standards – teachers are intentional in their selection of standards, based upon the unique needs of individuals and groups of children • Description of the learning experience setting and/or grouping of children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – materials – ways in which materials may be changed or modified to accommodate the needs of individual children • Teaching strategies, including teacher behaviors, (e.g., modeling, questioning) are intentionally planned to address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – varying skill levels based upon classroom assessment data – additional support in mastering specific skills – special needs, including those addressed by IEPs. – Dual Language or English Language Learners – individualized strategies for children of differing abilities, needs and/or learning styles • Plan for assessment of skills and/or knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – plans include specific learning standards to be observed during learning experiences or the daily routine. – plans include a variety of methods for observing, documenting, and evaluating the development and learning of individual children. • Roles of adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – implementing planned learning experiences – facilitation of learning during child-initiated play experiences – observing and documenting – preparing materials and/or cleaning up • Guidance for family involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – plans include options for family involvement in sharing observations, planning classroom curriculum and assisting with implementation of learning experiences 		<p>NAEYC: 2.A.02, 2.A.05, 2.A.06, 3.E.02, 3.E.04, 3.F.06, 3.G.01, 4.C.03, 4.D.03</p> <p>ECERS-R: 37, 38, 41</p> <p>ITERS-R: 6,25,27,31,33</p> <p>CLASS: Concept Development, Instructional Learning Format: Clarity of learning objectives, Variety of modalities and Materials, Quality of Feedback, Language Modeling</p> <p>Head Start Performance Standard: 1204.21(a)2, 1304.21(a)1, 1304.20(f) (2), 1308.19</p>

Program Policies, Procedures, and Administrative Support	Indicators of Quality	Comments/Next Steps	Alignment to program accreditation, evaluation and improvement tools *
The curriculum document includes components that promote responsiveness	<p>Written documents articulate how the following components will be incorporated into the curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – child interest – children’s physical and health needs – family input – cultural contexts of individuals and specific groups of children and their families – diversity of individuals and specific groups of children and their families (differing abilities, family structure, gender identity, etc.) – assessment information 		<p>NAEYC: 4.A.03 ECERS-R: 38 ITERS-R: 7-9,12-13, 27-29 CLASS: Regard for Student Perspectives: Concept Development: Integration and Connections to the Real World</p>
The curriculum document includes components that promote reflection.	When appropriate for their age and developmental level, children have opportunities to reflect upon previous learning and experiences and to anticipate and plan new directions in their play and learning.		CLASS: Regard for Student Perspectives: Student Expression

Documents in this series include:

Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards

- *A Guide to Domains and Strands*
- *Building Meaningful Curriculum*
- *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*
- *Dual Language Learners*
- *A Guide for Families*

April 2016

This series of documents was developed by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, in collaboration with partners at The University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service and EASTCONN.

