



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

Office of Early Learning
89 Washington Avenue, Room 319 EB
Albany, New York 12234
Tel. (518) 474-5807 / Fax: (518) 473-7737
OEL@nysed.gov

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To: Superintendents of Schools with Prekindergarten Programs
Prekindergarten Program Contacts

From: The Office of Early Learning

Subject: Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidance

The Office of Early Learning receives many questions from school districts and community-based organizations on curriculum for prekindergarten programs. This memo will provide an overview of the instructional cycle, define evidence-based curriculum, and provide criteria that may be considered when selecting or developing curriculum for prekindergarten programs.

Education Law

The Part 100 Regulations of the Commissioner of Education require that every public school student in New York State (NYS), prekindergarten through grade 12, be provided an opportunity to receive instruction in order to achieve the NYS Learning Standards. All students should receive an engaging and developmentally appropriate education. It is the State's responsibility to establish student learning expectations for what all students should know and be able to do as the result of skilled instruction. It is the responsibility of each local school district to develop or select curricula that is aligned to the NYS Learning Standards and responsive to the cultural and linguistic contexts of the students and local community.

Components of the Instructional Cycle

Standards are the "where are we going" or destination of the instructional cycle. NYS Standards articulate a progression of what students can learn and do at various stages along a continuum because of instruction and learning experiences. They provide a framework for districts and local programs to develop local curricula and plan instruction that is individualized, differentiated, culturally and linguistically relevant, and context-based. While the NYS Standards articulate learning goals for children, they are not designed to prescribe a lockstep progression of lessons or curricula for all children since each child's pace of development is not expected to be uniform.

Curriculum is the "what" of the instructional cycle. Districts are encouraged to use an evidence-based curriculum. An evidence-based curriculum is designed to facilitate the acquisition of skills and knowledge that align with the Standards, is developmentally appropriate, and differentiates instructional practices based on the age and needs of the children. An evidence-based curriculum consists of practices that have been vetted through research, and includes an outline of the content, concepts, and skills to be taught. An evidence-based curriculum should have a flexible design to meet the diverse needs of individual students, allowing them to work at different levels on different activities. Curriculum planning should reflect the views, experiences, and cultures of the students and follow a developmental sequence within content areas. Curriculum should emphasize robust, interactive and integrated learning experiences that build students' academic language and skills. To facilitate

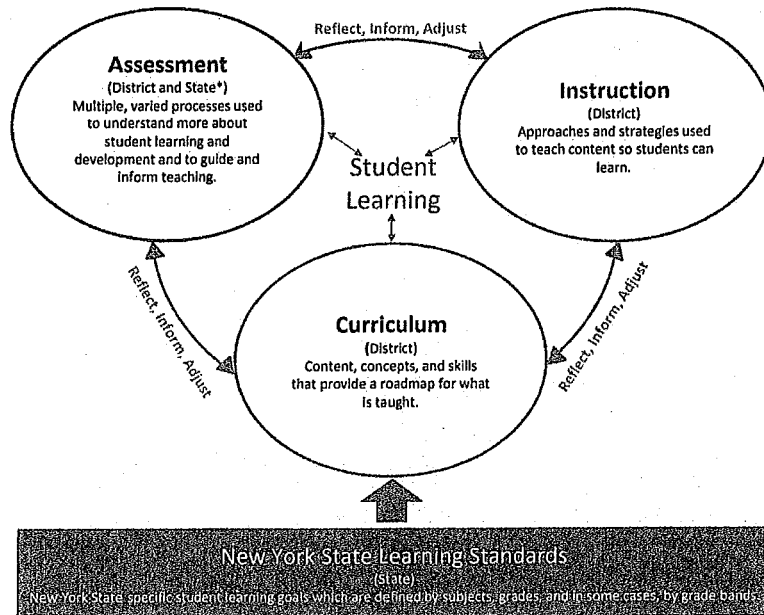
advanced literacy development and academic skills students should be provided with opportunities to utilize their home language knowledge and competencies in the context of the learning environment.

A curriculum should address all domains of learning and development as presented in the NYS Learning Standards since they are intrinsically linked and mutually supportive. Social and emotional development, physical development, and approaches to learning play critical roles in supporting young children’s learning across all academic areas. Curriculum that narrowly focuses on basic skills or relies on drills or worksheets should be avoided, especially in the early grades, as tasks such as these are not engaging or relevant to the way young children learn.

Instruction is the “how” of the instructional cycle. It includes the action of teaching to promote student learning outlined by curriculum and guided by the needs of individual students. Instruction includes culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies and approaches, scaffolding, direct and indirect instruction, grouping, individualization, differentiation, modifications, and adaptations used while teaching to improve student learning. It also includes utilizing learning environments, interacting with students, creating a classroom culture, fostering student engagement, and embedding social and emotional supports. When planning for instruction, educators should consider factors, such as age, literacy development, existing language(s) and linguistic experiences of students, as well as culture and background knowledge.

Assessment is the “where are we now” and “where should we go next” of the instructional cycle. There are multiple types of assessment, each with different functions. Screening and diagnostic assessments determine if a student has a specific learning or developmental need and how to best support the individual student need. Formative assessment is ongoing and used to inform instruction and individualize goals and learning experiences. Summative assessment is used to report information about the acquisition of knowledge and skills, typically at the end of a prescribed period of instruction and is often used to evaluate effectiveness. Summative assessments are not typically used in the early grades due to the nature of how very young children learn. Assessments should be developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, and offered in the home language to the extent possible.

Below is a diagram for understanding the relationships between the NYS Learning Standards and the components of the Prekindergarten-3rd Grade instructional cycle:



More information on the components of the instructional cycle is available online at [NYSED’s website](http://www.nysed.gov).

Selecting or Developing Prekindergarten Curriculum

The research-base that has examined the effectiveness of curricula is expansive, and proven results share common characteristics: “a concentration on interesting and relevant content across subject areas, combined with a deliberate and intense focus on language development through meaningful interactions among children and between children and their teachers.”ⁱ

The below-listed criteria serve as guidance to ensure the curriculum selected or developed is evidence-based, meets the needs of students, and provides developmentally appropriate experiences.

- Alignment with the NYS Prekindergarten Learning Standards which address all the domains of learning (Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development and Health, Communication, Language and Literacy, and Cognition and Knowledge of the World)
- Content of curriculum should be based on the research of how young children learn, ensuring the use of linguistically relevant and developmentally appropriate strategies for teaching
- Curriculum should include content to be taught with intentionality and be integrated across the academic content areas and developmental domains
- Curriculum should provide for learning experiences that are initiated by the child
- The role of the teacher should be clear, with the emphasis on child centered learning experiences
- Curriculum should demonstrate consideration of the wide range of children’s abilities, including those of children with Individualized Education Plans
- Curriculum should allow for consideration of children’s linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including strategies for supporting Emergent Multilingual Learners

Questions?

Additional questions about selecting or developing an appropriate curriculum for students in prekindergarten or the early grades should be directed to the Office of Early Learning: oel@nysed.gov, or by calling (518) 474-5807.

Online Additional Resource:

[Briefs on Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Prekindergarten – Grade 3](#)

ⁱ Frede, E. & Ackerman, D. (2007) Preschool curriculum decision-making: Dimensions to consider Retrieved online from the [Illinois State Board of Education’s Early Learning and Development Standards](#)