

***School Leaders Supporting Early Learning Programs and Teachers:  
Top Ten Components of a High-Quality Early Learning Program***

New Teacher Center

**A Matter of Equity**

Each year, about 4 million children enter kindergarten in the United States. All parents hope their child will start school ready for success. And many parents turn that hope into action, seeking out supportive and high-quality early learning opportunities. Unfortunately, not every parent finds those opportunities, and access differs based on geography, race and income. As a result, too many children enter kindergarten a year or more behind their classmates in academic and social-emotional skills. For some children, starting out school from behind can trap them in a cycle of continuous catch-up in their learning. As a nation, we must ensure that all children, regardless of income or race have access to **high-quality** preschool opportunities.

U.S. Department of Education

**#1: CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

**5 Numbers: Harvard's Center for the Developing Child**

**700:** The early years matter because, in the first few years of life, 700 new neural connections are formed every second. These are the connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior, and health depend.

**18:** Differences in the size of children's vocabulary first appear at 18 months of age, based on whether they were born into a family with high education and income or low education and income. By age 3, children with college-educated parents or primary caregivers had vocabularies 2 to 3 times larger than those whose parents had not completed high school.

**90-100:** Indeed, risk factors such as poverty, caregiver mental illness, child maltreatment, single parent, and low maternal education have a cumulative impact: in this study, maltreated children exposed to as many as 6 additional risks face a 90-100% likelihood of having one or more delays in their cognitive, language, or emotional development.

**3:1:** adults who recall having 7 or 8 serious adverse experiences in childhood are 3 times more likely to have cardiovascular disease as an adult.

**4-9:** Three of the most rigorous long-term studies found a range of returns between \$4 and \$9 for every dollar invested in early learning programs for low-income children. Program participants followed into adulthood benefited from increased earnings while the public saw returns in the form of reduced special education, welfare, and crime costs, and increased tax revenues from program participants later in life.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practices**

- Knowing the Child
- Knowing child development
- Knowing what is culturally important

From ages 3 through 8, children acquire 3 types of skills and knowledge:

- Foundational cognitive skills in literacy and math

- Social and emotional competence
- Engagement in school and learning

NAEYC

### Developmentally Appropriate Practices:

**Environment** – Teacher sets up the classroom space to create the best learning environment possible, allowing students to be engaged and more independent from the teacher.

**Materials** – Teacher thoughtfully plans materials that best support student engagement, from books about building in the block area to open-ended props to inspire creativity.

**Teacher-Child Interactions** – Because much of the learning children do stems from these interactions, teacher plans for both teacher-guided interactions with thoughtful language to promote thinking as well as teachable moments following the child’s lead.

**Daily Schedule** – Teacher plans their days to reflect the learning needs of young children, balancing both student- and teacher-guided activities, small group vs. whole group, high activity and lower activity parts of the day.

**Connected to Learning Standards** – Teacher plans how they’ll teach and assess students on the learning standards.

**Relationships** – Students learn in the context of relationships with peers and the adults in the room. Teacher is always working to support and nurture this skill.

**Variety of Teaching and Learning Strategies** – Teacher plans for whole group morning circle lessons, small group lessons, read aloud, math exploration, etc., always considering the best way for students to learn and explore.

**Learning Through Play** – Teacher creates ways to maximize what children learn during play, from problem-solving skills and vocabulary to academic content.

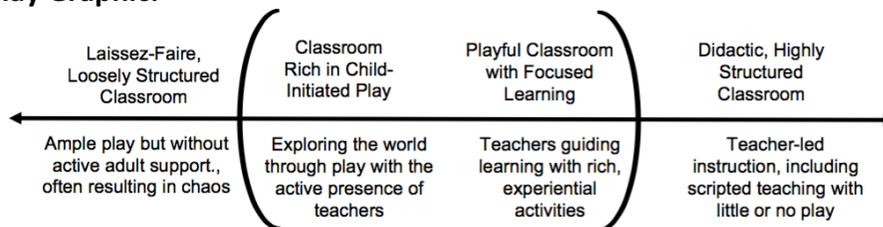
**Opportunities for Support and Challenge** – Teacher is always thinking about each child's Zone of Proximal Development and finding ways to support their growth.

## #2: PLAY

**Play** is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence. Active learning through purposeful play is important to the development of the child’s brain.

*Transitional Kindergarten Implementation Guide. (2013).*

### Play Graphic:



Crisis in the Kindergarten

### **Teachers' Role in Play**

- Design the Environment
- Set the Stage: Routines, Schedule, selection/Introduction of new materials, Behavioral expectations
- Meaningfully Interact with Students
- Observe and Assess

### **Benefits**

- Social and Emotional
- Cognitive (includes math)
- Language and Literacy
- Physical

## **#3: CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

### **Environment Influences Child Development and Learning**

- Social Emotional
- Literacy & Language
- Problem-solving
- Logical Thought

### **Considerations**

- Layout/furniture/organization
- Home cultures evident
- Aesthetics
- Management systems
- Books and writing materials everywhere.
- Wall Display

## **#4: TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS**

Interactions between adults and children are the key mechanism through which instructional support is provided to children in the early years of schooling.

Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. *Classroom Assessment Scoring System*. Charlottesville, VA: Teachstone.

A child's ability to develop metacognitive skills is contingent on the opportunities that adults provide to express existing skills and scaffold complex ones.

Credited Lev Vygotsky

### **Powerful Interactions (Judy Jablon)**

- Be present
- Connect
- Extend

### Video Recording Chart

<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Being present	
Connecting	
Extending	

## #5: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

CASEL has identified five core groups of social and emotional competencies:

- **Self-awareness**—accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence
- **Self-management**—regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately
- **Social awareness**—being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources
- **Relationship skills**—establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help
- **Responsible decision-making**—making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community

## #6: PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

### Components of a Day

- Greeting
- Large Group Times:
  - Circle
  - Instructional
- Outdoor
- Small Group Time
- Choice/Play time
- Routines/Transitions

## #7: EMERGENT LITERACY AND EARLY MATH

### Components of Early Literacy

- Phonological Awareness
- Oral Language
- Print Awareness/ Motivation
- Listening comprehension
- Phonics (Letter/sound knowledge)
- Emergent Writing

### Components of Early Math

- Sets and Sorting
- Numbers
- Patterns
- Counting
- Operations
- Data Analysis

## #8: AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

### **Authentic Assessment Cycle**

1. Observe and Collect Facts
2. Analyze and Respond
3. Evaluate
4. Summarize, Plan, and Communicate

## **#9: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

### **Family Engagement**

- a shared responsibility
- continuous across a child's life
- cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn

Harvard Family Research Project, 2010, p.2

### **Messages:**

- You are always welcome here.
- You are invited to contribute to the program.
- You are competent, and we can learn from you.
- Your ideas are valuable, and you have an important role to play.
- You are entitled to understand what is happening in the program.

## **#10: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

**Professional development** is a continuum of learning and support activities designed to prepare individuals for work with and on behalf of young children and their families, as well as ongoing experiences to enhance this work. NAEYC