

A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum

Early Childhood Organizations and Educators

OVERVIEW

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened a committee of experts to conduct a comprehensive study of preschool curriculum for children ages three through five, with special attention to the needs of Black and Latine children, dual language learners, children with special needs, and children who experience poverty. The report, *A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, included recommendations to improve preschool curriculum.

FINDINGS

There is an urgent need to improve the quality of preschool curriculum to align it with what research has shown to work. Effective preschool curriculum that is well implemented has been shown to promote equitable outcomes in math, language, literacy, and social-emotional skills seen at kindergarten entry—particularly for Black and Latine children and for children living in poverty. High-quality curricula can help to ensure that children experience safe, healthy, affirming, and enriching learning opportunities that promote success in school and life. Early childhood organizations and educators should support efforts that ensure all children have access to high-quality curricula, including children from diverse backgrounds and those with disabilities.

TEACHERS PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM

Educators of young children are not only pedagogical leaders but also sources of nurturance and security for children.

An educator's success depends greatly on their attention to fostering reciprocal and responsive relationships, examining and checking their biases, and cultivating a positive emotional state—all foundational areas bolstered by high-quality curriculum. However, the availability of supports for educators of young children varies greatly.

AVAILABLE CURRICULUM DO NOT MEET THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S YOUNG CHILDREN

For example, nearly one-third of young children in the United States are growing up with exposure to more than one language in the home and should be considered multilingual. However, curricula are rarely developed specifically for multilingual learners, most programs do not provide dual language instruction, and there are too few bilingual early childhood educators qualified to support home language development or provide dual language instruction. Few commercially available preschool curricula are designed for family child care settings nor do they offer guidance in adapting the curriculum or sequencing content for mixed-age groups. Most preschool programs, including Head Start, use comprehensive preschool curricula that intend to address all domains of children's learning and development—and may be required to do so by their funding agencies. But the most widely used of these have been studied and found to show significantly smaller gains than domain-specific curricula in the targeted outcome domains such as math, science, literacy, and social-emotional development at kindergarten entry.

EDUCATORS CAN SMOOTH THE TRANSITION TO HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM

Strong connections between families and preschool staff are essential for understanding when and how to adapt preschool curricula to address the strengths and needs of children to create a meaningful link between home and school experiences. Furthermore, providing educators with the financial security and benefits that promote their physical and mental health are steps that could support their implementation of high-quality, equitable curriculum.

A NEW VISION FOR PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

High-quality preschool curricula must consider the learning experiences that each child has access to, the varied opportunities to experience engaging content that can spark their curiosity and desire to learn, and the ways in which teaching and learning can be adapted to support the child and their individual strengths and needs.

Research shows that a high-quality preschool curriculum should:

- Incorporate the perspectives, experiences, cultures, languages, strengths, and needs of a diverse range of children, families, and workforce settings;
- Include rich and meaningful content that centers child engagement and agency;
- Include well-designed learning experiences, intentional responsive teaching strategies, well-defined objectives and outcomes, embedded formative assessments, and differentiation based on understanding children's ability levels, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, interests, and dispositions;

- Have a scope and sequence that follows children's ways of thinking and learning with research-validated learning trajectories that are culturally and linguistically affirming and that include effective supports for children with disabilities; and
- Demonstrate effectiveness in yielding positive learning and developmental outcomes for the children they are intended to reach.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

Education organizations and educators can support the development of high-quality preschool curricula by:

- Supporting the revision of existing curricula and development of new curricula to align with the committee's vision.
- Adopting and implementing research- and evidence-validated curricula that support the learning and development of the whole child.
- Collaborating with families to co-create curricular components that are meaningful and relevant for children in the classroom.
- Authentically elevating the role of families in supporting their children's development; recognizing the diversity in and value of family practices honoring their languages, cultures, beliefs, traditions, and talents; and inviting these into the classroom.
- Ensuring that educators receive professional development, regular in-classroom coaching, and access to materials that are tied to the implementation of evidence-based curricula, including supports for delivering curricula in children's home language alongside English.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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