

A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum

Curriculum Developers and Publishers

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. Curriculum developers and publishers should include efforts to identify and reject long-held beliefs, deficit framings, and/or stereotyped assumptions about children from historically underserved communities.

RESEARCH PROVIDES EVIDENCE ON WHAT MAKES PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM HIGH QUALITY

High-quality curricula are coherent, equitable, culturally relevant, linguistically supportive, affirming, flexible,

and adaptable—while also demonstrating effectiveness in yielding positive life outcomes for children and families. High-quality curricula should assist teachers with building on children’s individual strengths and cultural assets to promote positive self-identity, resilience, and growth and achievement in all content and developmental domains. Essential features of evidence-validated curricula include developmentally appropriate learning goals, a scope and sequence, coherent alignment with specific domains, and rich content.

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.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS CAN HELP LEAD THE WAY

Significant research and investment are needed to develop and evaluate high-quality curricula. Curriculum developers should work with researchers, policymakers, and others to create evidence-validated curricula that support the learning and development of the whole child—as well as appropriate measures to assess their effectiveness.

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 CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS

Curriculum developers and publishers can support the development of high-quality preschool curricula by:

- Supporting the development and transition to new curricula that replace or update existing curricula to be aligned with the new vision.
- Working with researchers to develop and evaluate appropriate criteria and metrics for assessing racial, cultural, linguistic, and ability bias in curriculum.
- Partnering with researchers and teacher educators to develop curricula and supporting materials from inception in Spanish, English, and other languages commonly spoken by children with a home language other than English.
- Incorporating resources and structures that help teachers gain knowledge about effective teaching strategies and practices, including bolstering content knowledge and understanding of how children's thinking and learning can be best supported.
- Working with researchers and teacher educators to provide scaffolded supports that increase opportunities for the effective integration of children with disabilities in general education early childhood settings while effectively meeting their unique developmental needs and fostering healthy peer relationships.
- Collecting and providing rigorous and meaningful evidence of improved short- and long-term academic and developmental outcomes for all children, with particular attention to historically underserved children.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This issue brief was prepared by the Committee on a New Vision for High-Quality Pre-K Curriculum based on the report *A New Vision for High Quality Preschool Curriculum (2024)*. The study was sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National Academy of Sciences W.K. Kellogg Foundation Fund. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization or agency that provided support for the project. This Consensus Study Report is available from the National Academies Press | (800) 624-6242 | <http://www.nap.edu>.

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