



**New Mexico's
PreK Program Standards
For
2008-2009**

Approved by the New Mexico Child Development Board

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New Mexico PreK Program Standards

Introduction

New Mexico has joined more than 36 states to become part of a movement toward standards-based early childhood education. Nation-wide, standards are used to describe desired results, outcomes, or learning expectations for children below kindergarten age. In addition, standards are used to describe desired qualifications for personnel and facilities where early learning takes place. According to a joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Children Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SKE) there are four essential features in the design of standards:

1. significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes;
2. informed and inclusive processes are used in the development and review;
3. ethical and appropriate implementation and assessment strategies and;
4. strong supports for early childhood programs, professionals, and families.

Essential feature number one -- significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes -- will be conceptualized in New Mexico's PreK Learning Outcomes. The recommended essential element number two -- informed and inclusive processes -- has been used in the development and review of this project. The last two elements, presented in this document, reflect features three and four. Typically called program standards, these will serve as expectations for the characteristics or quality of schools, child-care and Head Start centers, and other educational settings where children receive PreK services.

According to Schumacher, Irish and Lombardi (2003), most recent Congressional policy has pointed toward setting high learning or outcome standards, which focus on what children, are expected to learn. At the federal level, little attention has been given to improving the standards for the type, intensity and quality of early childhood programs. This document attempts to do just that. Specifically, program standards are requirements that early childhood programs must meet in order to ensure conditions in which children are more likely to learn. These include child group size, staff-child ratio, teacher education, and collaboration with families, required curriculum, and comprehensive services.

For the purpose of this document, we use the term "essential elements" to frame the quality standards for programs serving young children and their families. Quality standards are associated with better early learning opportunities because they help promote the conditions conducive to the positive teacher – child relationships so crucial for early development and learning (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). As stated in New Mexico's *Best Practices* (1999) document,

These essential elements of quality reflect current research on quality and philosophy statements of a variety of professional organizations, including but not limited to Zero to Three, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Head Start, and the Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Method

This work began with ongoing information and brainstorming from the Early Childhood Interagency Action Team and representatives from New Mexico Child Development Board. In addition, the Program Standards Task Force, established during the summer of 2004, assisted in jump-starting the framework and writing the standards presented here. As these New Mexico standards were being developed and implemented, it has been imperative that our standards of quality programs:

- Expand upon early learning experiences
- Avoid pressuring children
- Honor the individual strengths and needs of young children
- Encourage young children to value the process of learning
- Do not pressure teachers to abandon their mission of teaching in favor of accelerated achievement goals
- Support early childhood teachers in their roles as professional decision makers and,
- Value diversity.

In addition to reviewing literature on the standards movement, the existing New Mexico program standards from the five major early education systems were reviewed: child care, public school, early intervention, child development, and Head Start. Standards from other states and were also reviewed. Policy statements from early childhood and special education advocacy groups informed the work as well. These included the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children, National Center for Children in Poverty, and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. The program standards for New Mexico proposed in this document represent the best ideas found, reworked and rewritten by the task force.

Framework for the standards

The framework for the presentation of these early childhood program standards is: 1) a rationale for each essential element, 2) the standard, 3) indicators of the standard, and 4) recommended quality indicators.

A **rationale** is an explanation of the fundamental reasons why each standard is important. It provides a connection to research in the field.

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A **standard** is a descriptive statement established by experts in a field. It is used as a model of qualitative or quantitative characteristics for assessment of existing programs and for the development of new programs.

An **indicator** is a component of the standard such as an outcome, condition, process, role, function, etc., which can be observed and measured, and used to determine the extent to which standards are met.

A **recommended quality indicator** is reflective of research-based best practice.

Each standard is in bold with indicators and recommended quality indicators following. The outline is:

- I. Family and Community Collaboration
- II. Professionalism
- III. Health, Safety and Nutrition
- IV. Child Growth, Development and Learning
- V. Developmentally Appropriate Content and Learning Environment and Curriculum Implementation
- VI. Assessment of Children
- VII. Evaluation of Programs

Program Standards for New Mexico's PreK Program

Essential Element I: Family and Community Collaboration

RATIONALE: *Children live in the context of community, dependent upon the “adults who touch their lives directly through relationships, and indirectly through the decisions they make” (Gestwicki, 2004). Successful programs, according to Schorr (1997), work with families as parts of neighborhoods and communities; have a long-term, preventative orientation; and provide high quality, responsive, comprehensive services. Any institution interested in effectively serving the educational needs of young children should have teachers who hold deep understandings of child development and learning processes, use developmentally appropriate, inclusive instructional approaches, and provide comprehensive services to families and their children.*

I-a. PreK programs collaborate to support the establishment of a seamless continuum of quality early care and education programs in the community.

Indicators:

- PreK program staff meets quarterly with early care and education programs in the community to coordinate and strengthen existing early childhood programs and initiatives.

I-b. PreK programs collaborate to share expertise and support the early care and education infrastructure in the community.

Indicators:

- PreK programs open in-service training to early care and education teachers in the community.

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- PreK programs support communication among early care and education and public elementary schools in the community.

I-c. PreK programs are knowledgeable of and link with systems within communities that provide all children with access to comprehensive services that are predictive of school success.

Indicators:

- PreK programs disseminate information about family support services. This includes parenting education and making appropriate choices regarding early learning and intervention services.
- PreK programs disseminate information regarding Adult Basic Education services to parents without a high school diploma.

- PreK programs disseminate information regarding family access to medical and dental services.

I-d. Each PreK program has a family-centered philosophy that guides all aspects of program planning and implementation.

Indicators:

- PreK programs solicit input from families on a continuing basis and are responsive to cultural, linguistic and other family characteristics.
- PreK programs have an open-door policy.
- Families are provided with a family handbook that offers specific information about the program. Every effort should be made to provide information in the home language of the family.
- Programs establish, publish and adhere to guidelines of confidentiality.
- Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) /Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) are developed for all children with special needs by a team of family members and multidisciplinary professionals consistent with federal and state regulations.
- Families are supported in understanding the developmental strengths and needs of their children and in developing strategies to support development in the context of natural routines and activities.

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- PreK programs provide meaningful opportunities for families and teachers to build trusting relationships.
- Supports and services promote family well-being, are flexible, culturally and linguistically relevant, and responsive to family-identified preferences and styles.
- Family members are welcome participants in all aspects of program development and implementation including screening, assessment, evaluation, and designing services for themselves and their children.

I-e. PreK program staff and families collaborate to ensure smooth transitions for children as they move between settings, between levels or grades, or from program to program.

Indicators:

- Written transition policies and procedures are required for families of children moving into the program, exiting the program, and/or transitioning into kindergarten. The procedures reflect the diversity and uniqueness of the children and community in which they reside.
- Transition procedures include a series of transition activities (e.g. home visits) that will prepare the child and family for the changes and help to make for a positive transition.
- PreK program staff collaborates with Kindergarten teachers receiving children to ensure that their curricula provide for smooth transitions from PreK to kindergarten.

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- All the adults who are responsible for a child's care and/or education develop transition procedures and activities jointly.

I-f. PreK program staff and administration are culturally and linguistically responsive.

Indicators:

- Administrators recruit staff from diverse cultures and genders; diversity of staff is consistent with the cultural diversity of the community and the families the program serves.
- Staff supports families in accessing and successfully using community resources.
- Programs staff and family members communicate regularly.

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- Interactions with children and family members are responsive to the language and uniqueness of each child and family.
- Program staff honor and respect differing beliefs and traditions of child rearing and development, wellness and disability, and family systems.
- Staff is knowledgeable about the characteristics, assets, and needs of the community and is knowledgeable regarding community resources, both formal and informal.

Essential Element II: Professionalism

RATIONALE: The professional training and formal education of teachers is linked to higher quality teacher-child interactions. A strong connection has been found between the number of years of formal early childhood teacher education and program quality (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). Administrators of early childhood programs need managerial and leadership skills and knowledge specific to the education of young children and their families.

II-a. Professional staff are qualified to work with young children and families by education, training, and experience.

Indicators:

- The lead teacher in each PreK program classroom must hold a valid New Mexico *Early Childhood Teacher License: Birth through Third Grade*.
- Educational assistants must have an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education as well as either a valid Educational Assistant License from the Public Education Department or the Associate of Early Education Certificate from the Office of Child Development, whichever is most appropriate for their place of employment.

- Programs serving children and families who do not speak English or are English language learners must have adults working in the classroom that speak the language of the child and family.
- All program staff must have a current professional development plan with specific professional goals and timelines. They must document their on-going activities to increase their knowledge, specialization and qualifications in early childhood education, individualization, and family support.

(Note: If programs are not able to recruit and hire teachers with the above qualifications, teachers and educational assistants not meeting the above Standards will be expected to include work toward meeting these requirements in their professional development plan and make continuous progress toward meeting these requirements within five years of employment.)

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- Professional staff are members of professional organizations, advocacy groups, and/or mentoring programs that assist them through supervision and support.
- Professional staff follow the National Association for the Education of Young Children Code of Ethics.
- Teaching staff are knowledgeable about working with children who have varying abilities and work in partnership with special education and related service providers.

II-b. Professional staff are compensated with salaries and benefits that are comparable with other professional positions that have similar qualifications and responsibilities.

Indicators:

- PreK programs outside the public schools will make efforts to compensate teachers comparably to teachers in local public schools with comparable licensure, education and experience.
- PreK programs outside the public schools will make efforts to compensate educational assistants comparably to educational assistants in local public schools with comparable education and experience.
- PreK programs outside the public schools will make efforts to provide teachers and educational assistants with paid leave time, medical and dental insurance, retirement and educational opportunities.

II-c. Administrators must have early childhood knowledge and experience or have on-site administrative personnel with early childhood knowledge and experience. Administrators will support quality early childhood practices.

Indicators:

- PreK program administrators have knowledge and experience in early childhood education, early intervention, early childhood special education, and supervision.

- PreK programs outside the public schools have a Program Director with a valid New Mexico *Early Childhood Teacher License: Birth through Third Grade* and the *New Mexico Early Childhood Program Administrator Certificate* within the first 5 years of operation. PreK programs not meeting this standard must demonstrate continual progress toward meeting a Professional Development Plan with approved timelines.
- Site administrators ensure that program staff are able to access professional development opportunities (e.g., distance education/audio conferences release time).

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- Administrators support ongoing professional development plans for all staff.
- Site administrators provide a supportive work environment (e.g., hiring and retention policies, compensation and benefits, safety, workspace).
- Programs are culturally responsive.
- Program policies and site administrators promote interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Program policies and site administrators promote continuous program evaluation and system change efforts.

Essential Element III: Health, Safety and Nutrition

RATIONALE: *All children deserve to be in healthy and safe early care and education settings. There are risk factors associated with cognitive and emotional delay in young children – inadequate nutrition, environmental toxins, diminished familial interactions, trauma and abuse, and parental substance abuse (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2003). Many families need assistance in accessing health care, nutrition and social services.*

III-a. All local, state, and federal regulations pertaining to health, safety, and nutrition for young children in out-of-home care are met, including but not limited to buildings and grounds, equipment, sanitation, water quality, fire protection, storage and handling of food.

Indicators for Health:

- Programs refer PreK participants to community health providers able to provide assessments for each child prior to the beginning of PreK or within the first month of attendance. These are:
 1. Physical examination
 2. Current immunizations
 3. Vision screenings
 4. Hearing screenings
 5. Dental screenings
- Developmental Screening for each child is conducted prior to the 3rd month of attendance. Programs will work for early detection of children at risk for

developmental delay. Where possible the dominant language of the child will be used during screening. Appropriate referrals and services are made available to address all identified concerns.

- Program staff promotes mental health with positive child guidance approaches.
- Program sites develop policies and procedures to promote healthy behavior and reduce the risk of physical disease, mental illness and nutritional problems. (i.e., daily child health checks).
- Staff is knowledgeable about each child's special health needs.
- Program staff is knowledgeable of the indicators of stress in young children.
- Program sites develop policies and procedures that address meeting the needs of children who are medically fragile.
- Children and staff follow universal health procedures.
- Program staff provides access to community resources and make appropriate referrals as necessary.

Indicators for Safety:

- Program is in compliance with all New Mexico Child Care licensing regulations for safety.
- The facility is smoke-free, alcohol-free, and free of illegal substances.
- Environment is physically and emotionally safe.
- Staff share current safety information and resources with families.

Indicators for Nutrition:

- Programs must participate in the Child Care Food/School Lunch Program and must organize their schedule in order to provide at least one meal per day meeting USDA requirements.
- Healthful eating habits are encouraged through the provision of nutritious and culturally relevant foods eaten in a positive social atmosphere such as family style dining.
- Special dietary requests and needs for children are accommodated (allergies, medical, religious, vegetarian) to the extent possible.
- Information on nutrition and healthy food preparation is available for families.
- All staff is knowledgeable about each child's special nutritional needs and parental requests for dietary restrictions.

Essential Element IV: Child Growth, Development, and Learning

RATIONALE: Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the cognitive and social development of young children is strongly influenced by the quality of interaction and relationship between a teacher and child. A teacher can provide more warmth and responsive attention with a small group size and lower staff-child ratio (NAEYC, National Health and Safety Performance Standards).

IV-a. Each program implements research-based early childhood education practice based upon child, family, and community needs at no cost to the child or parents.

Indicators:

- PreK programs must provide a minimum of 540 hours of services for children/families including a minimum of 450 hours of classroom-based instruction and 90 hours for the following:
 - at least one home visit early in the year;
 - at least three parent conferences;
 - at least two opportunities for parent group meetings for interaction, information and transition activities, and
 - professional development, transition, or other activities required by NM PreK Program Standards.

- Because all New Mexico communities are unique, providers are encouraged to establish programs that best meet the needs of children and families in their particular community. Therefore, programs are encouraged to structure programs that are equivalent to the standards above. For example, these programs might integrate a home-based component, integrate parent-education/participation activities. Transition from half-day to full-day programming, etc.

IV-b. Each program builds upon the child-adult relationship and promotes children's growth, development and learning:

- **The maximum group size is 20 children.**
- **The teacher-child ratio is 1:10 with one lead teacher and one assistant if the group size is 11 or more.**

Indicators:

- All classrooms will provide inclusive settings for children with disabilities. Depending on the group of children served, and the nature and severity of the disabilities of children served, the adult to child ratio might be smaller.

IV-c. Program staff understands and commit to practices that build on each child's culture, language, experiences and abilities.

Indicators:

- Programs will respect and provide classroom supports for each family's experiences, languages, values and patterns of interaction.
- Staff and families promote understanding of diversity and disability.
- Diversity is reflected in the physical environment, the social/emotional environment, interpersonal relationships, personnel selection, and strategies, which support learning.
- Staff uses a culturally responsive approach to learning.
- Staff respect each child's language and demonstrate knowledge and skill related to second language acquisition.

- Staff recognizes and understands differences in children such as temperament, preferences, development and interaction.
- Children with disabilities and developmental delays are integrated into groups of peers of the same age, with supports from appropriate service providers.
- Modifications are made in the physical and learning environment to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities and developmental delays, with supports from appropriate service providers.
- Ancillary services (e.g. Occupational, Speech/Language, and/or Physical Therapy) are integrated within regular program activities and routines to the maximum extent appropriate to the child.
- Professional in-service training is provided that is specific to inclusionary practices.
- Children with special/behavioral needs may not be dismissed from the PreK Program solely because of their special/behavioral needs without approval.

***Essential Element V: Developmentally Appropriate Content
and Learning Environment and Curriculum Implementation***

RATIONALE: Young children's learning is dependent on the development of language and cognitive and socio-emotional skills (Thompson & Happold, 2002). In early childhood, the development of these foundational skills lays the foundation for later learning. A developmentally appropriate setting for young children and families is positive, responsive, stimulating and supportive. The classroom climate is inclusive, accommodating and accessible to all children. Teachers facilitate the development of attitudes and behaviors that prepare children for school success including compassion, trust, creativity, self-control and perseverance.

V-a. The physical environment and furnishings are planned to support active engagement, learning, participation and membership of all children. The atmosphere of each classroom is child-oriented, inclusive, and comfortable for all children.

Indicators:

- All PreK classrooms will score at least a 5 on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale –Revised (ECERS-R).
- Materials and equipment, such as books, dolls, toys, and wall displays represent diverse cultures, ethnic groups, gender roles, family configurations, and abilities.
- The physical environment includes an adequate amount of space for indoor and outdoor activities, for adult planning and management activities, and adult privacy.
- Classroom environments have identifiable learning centers that are flexible and designed for child self-selection.
- Accommodations, modifications, and adaptations are evident as needed for individual children.

V-b. Each program has curricula based upon sound child development/early childhood principles; the needs, interests, desires, and relevant life experiences of the children and families served; the language, home experiences, and cultural values of the children served; and the program's goals and objectives.

Indicators:

- Content is designed to achieve long-range goals for children in all domains – physical, motor, social, emotional, language, and cognitive – and to help children prepare to function as fully contributing members of a democratic society.
- The PreK curriculum is to be determined by each program based on the following criteria:
 - 1) research-based,
 - 2) developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate,
 - 3) inclusive of children with disabilities
 - 4) materials/experiences are linked to appropriate assessment,
 - 5) includes both child and teacher initiated experiences,
 - 6) input of families, and
 - 7) linked to the community.
- Curricula build upon what children already know, are able to do, and show evidence of being ready to do.
- Content provides opportunities for each child to develop feelings of competence and a positive attitude toward learning.

Recommended Quality Indicators:

- Examples of appropriate published curricula are The Creative Curriculum, Bank Street Curriculum, and High Scope Curriculum.

V-c. Learning experiences are carefully planned and flexible with selection of materials and experiences reflecting diversity, individual differences, and the unique interests and preferences of the group. Play is a valued context for learning.

Indicators:

- Curricula plans are based on observed and documented interests and needs of the children.
- Planned experiences provide for the development of cognitive skills, encouraging each child to understand concepts and to develop language fluency, literacy, numeracy, problem solving, and decision-making skills.
- Curricula planning time for staff is built into the program schedule.
- Written plans describe teacher-initiated and child-initiated experiences; individual, small and whole group activities; alternating periods of active and quiet play.

Essential Element VI: Assessment of Children

RATIONALE: *Assessment of individual development and learning is necessary for planning and implementing curriculum. Yet accurate assessment of young children is challenging because their development and learning are rapid, uneven, and embedded within specific cultural and linguistic contexts (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997). Assessment of young children relies heavily on the results of observations, descriptive data, collection of work by children, and demonstrated performance over time (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1992).*

VI-a. Assessment of children’s educational needs is an ongoing process of collecting information from multiple sources using varied approaches and should be used to plan for and modify program curricula and to address specific needs of individual children.

Indicators:

- Program staff monitors children’s developmental progress, strengths and needs using a variety of appropriate methods.
- Any assessment instruments used are valid, reliable, non-biased, linguistically and culturally appropriate, and individually administered by trained personnel.
- Results of assessment are used to inform teachers thereby enabling them to plan and modify curricula for all children.
- Families are informed of the assessment process and their legal rights toward consent and refusal.
- Assessment is an on-going, dynamic process in which results are used to develop, with family members, the Individualized Educational Plan or Family Service Plan, service coordination, and transition into programs.
- Program staff and other professionals maintain discretion and confidentiality when sharing information about children and their families.
- The NM PreK checklist of selected indicators of Learning Outcomes will be administered for each child as an initial- and post-assessment.
- *The New Mexico PreK Focused Portfolio* (with 4-7 authentic anecdotal work samples) will be used as an ongoing assessment of children’s progress.

Essential Element VII: Evaluation and Continual Improvement of Programs

RATIONALE: *Systematic and comprehensive program evaluation is essential to ensure quality care and education. Program evaluation is guided by program goals, using varied, appropriate, conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).*

VII-a. Program sites have specific goals and objectives within a management plan that is evaluated annually by the state. All program components will be evaluated, including staff/professional development, family satisfaction, and children's progress using both formative and summative approaches.

Indicators:

- Multiple measures are used to evaluate site programs including program data, child demographic and assessment data, and information about staff qualifications, administrative practices, classroom quality assessments, and implementation data.
- Programs use multiple indicators of children's progress in all developmental areas to evaluate the effect of the program on children's development and learning. Children's gains over time are emphasized, not just upon exiting the program.
- Sites seek parental perception of program's strengths and weaknesses.
- Results of program, staff, and family evaluation are used to identify areas in need of improvement, support, additional resources and professional development.
- Evaluation results will be publicly shared.
- Within 3 years of initial funding, sites will begin the process to gain approved national accreditation specific to early childhood education. Once received, site programs will renew accreditation as required.

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State Standards Reviewed

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Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education - *Early Childhood Education Framework*.

Childhood Care and Education Community of Oregon – *Essential Elements of Programs for Children: Quality Standards*.

Connecticut State Board of Education – *Preschool Curricula Goals and Benchmarks*.

Georgia Office of School Readiness – *PreK Program Content Standards*.

Illinois State Board of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education – *Early Learning Standards*.

Kentucky's Early Childhood Standards - *Building a Foundation for School Success*

Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education - *Standards for Programs Serving Four Year Olds*.

Massachusetts Department of Education – *Early Childhood Program Standards for Three and Four Year Olds*.

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Nebraska: Good Start, Grow Smart.

New Jersey State Department of Education – *Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality.*

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Wisconsin Model of Early Learning Standards- *Think Big, Start Small.*