High Quality Curricula Help Young Children Learn

Effective curricula attend to the specific needs that young children who are in their early years of learning bring to the classroom. As young children move from concrete to abstract and symbolic thinking and begin to regulate their emotions, collaborate with their peers, and understand others’ perspectives, they need in all aspects of their development, integrated experiences that emphasize emotional, social, physical, and cognitive growth. Children are complex and multifaceted beings, which is why high-quality curricula strive to balance the whole child.

High Quality Curriculum in Action

A kindergarten teacher’s usual curriculum might include planning on teaching addition and subtraction in 1st grade. Based on her lesson plan, the teacher introduces the concept to her group setting, and then has the children work independently as they manipulate materials. The teacher observes from a distance as the children manipulate the concrete objects and form small groups to explain and share their work. The teacher reinforces the math concepts during math circle when she asks, “Can you explain what you did today?” and the whole class has the appropriate opportunity to encourage understanding of addition and subtraction. In this block area, a favorite choice for many of her students, includes Hunts that she has grouped in pairs of 12 so that the children can use the blocks in different creative ways. As the children build their structures, the teacher moves in the block area when she sees mathematical and social addition and subtraction problems. During this time, children have the opportunity to plan, reflect on, the math content knowledge, as well as social and emotional skills as they work with their peers. By providing a variety of learning opportunities, children who engage in math have a greater understanding of the foundational skills that are the New York State Learning Standards, and teachers are also supporting social and emotional goals for their students.

Strategies For Teachers

- Understand the sequence of learning new content and skill to appropriately scaffold instruction and the implementation of the curriculum.
- Connect curriculum with children’s interests, prior learning, family experiences, and culture.
- Integrate ideas from multiple domains and disciplines to help children gain deep content knowledge and make connections.
- Use curriculum frameworks to plan lessons that will help children master a comprehensive set of key learning goals.

Strategies For Leaders

- Select curricula that prioritize hands-on learning opportunities through a balance of whole group, small group, and independent work.
- Choose curricula that address all aspects of young children’s development.
- Verify that curricula include the natural variations in children’s development and provide guidance on differentiating instruction for small group and individual work.
- Align curricula from preschool through grade 12 so that children’s learning is cohesive and continuous.
- Ensure curricula are aligned with developmentally appropriate practices, learning standards, and assessments.
- Provide teachers with strategies at grade level and in grades sufficient time to work together to develop lesson plans, understand one another’s practice, and ensure learning.

To learn more and view the other brief in this series that address curricula, the classroom environment, instruction and interactions, and family engagement, please visit the New York Early Childhood System at www.nysecac.org or contact us at info@nysed.gov.

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The New York State Learning Standards promote college and career readiness by describing the knowledge and skills in math, reading, writing, science, and social studies that students need as they advance through the grades. Like developmentally appropriate curricula, standards support high-quality learning. Higher order thinking skills as well as the use of language and literacy skills throughout the curriculum. As educators master the standards, they plan lessons that connect curriculum to children’s knowledge and development. The effective use of curriculum supports such practice.

Effective curricula support the essential capacities of the New York State Learning Standards.

Distinguish independent

Community Playthings

Photo courtesy of Community Playthings

Evidence-based curricula with proven results share common characteristics: a “concentration on relevant and interesting content areas, combined with a deliberate and intense focus on language development through meaningful interactions among children and between children and their teachers.”

High quality curricula are comprehensive and integrate learning, creativity, and curiosity. As teachers integrate and curricula, they can adapt and individualize instruction based on children’s developmental level, and teachers’ and children’s interests and abilities and each child’s progression in reaching the learning goal.

Strategies for leaders focus on teaching addition and subtraction in 1st grade. Based on her lesson plan, the teacher introduces the concept to her group setting, and then has the children work independently as they manipulate materials. The teacher observes from a distance as the children manipulate the concrete objects and form small groups to explain and share their work. The teacher reinforces the math concepts during math circle when she asks, “Can you explain what you did today?” and the whole class has the appropriate opportunity to encourage understanding of addition and subtraction. In this block area, a favorite choice for many of her students, includes Hunts that she has grouped in pairs of 12 so that the children can use the blocks in different creative ways. As the children build their structures, the teacher moves in the block area when she sees mathematical and social addition and subtraction problems. During this time, children have the opportunity to plan, reflect on, the math content knowledge, as well as social and emotional skills as they work with their peers. By providing a variety of learning opportunities, children who engage in math have a greater understanding of the foundational skills that are the New York State Learning Standards, and teachers are also supporting social and emotional goals for their students.

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Choosing a Preschool Curriculum

Head Start National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL)
www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/preschool-curriculum.pdf

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org/DAP

Montgomery County Public Schools. Curriculum 2.0
www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/2.0/

New York State Education Department

Sources


10. This construct is conveyed in the New York State Common Core Curriculum module 1 for first grade and relates to several of the Common Core Standards, Focus Grade Level Standards for first grade math. The curriculum module was retrieved January 24, 2014 from www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/g1-m1-full-module.pdf


As members of the NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council, the NYS Head Start Collaboration Office, the NYS State Education Department, and the NYS Association for the Education of Young Children providing guidance to support our youngest students, their families, teachers, and leaders by highlighting key features of high quality early childhood teaching. We firmly believe that young students can best meet New York State Learning Standards when they have effective teachers who use intentional, experiential, and developmentally and culturally appropriate practices. This brief provides helpful strategies related to setting up a classroom environment that will help to put the State’s young learners on a path to social and intellectual success as they master the foundational skills to meet the New York State Learning Standards.

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Comprehensive Curricula in Prekindergarten through 3rd Grade: Building a Strong Foundation for the New York State Learning Standards

Guidance from
New York State Head Start Collaboration Office
New York State Association for the Education of Young Children
New York State Education Department

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