

Early Learning Program Guidance

The Department believes that all early learning programs, regardless of funding source or current requirements, should strive to meet the Early Learning Program Guidance. Some programs may aspire or be required to meet higher standards, depending on the nature of the program and funding source. However, by implementing this guidance, a program can ensure high-quality experiences for young children from birth to kindergarten entry.

Vision

Children in Missouri will have access to high-quality early learning experiences that will prepare them to succeed in school and in life.

Guiding Principles

All children, from birth to kindergarten entry, have access to high-quality early learning experiences.

- * Parents are recognized as their children’s first teachers and are an integral part of their children’s early education experiences.
- * Comprehensive services build on the strengths of families.
- * High-quality early learning programs evaluate the needs of individual children and families and provide access to comprehensive, research-based services.
- * High-quality early learning programs focus on all areas of early learning and development (social and emotional, language and literacy, math, science, motor, health and physical well-being, as well as positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning).
- * A strong, accessible system of professional development supports high quality early learning.
- * The development of high-quality early learning programs is a comprehensive and inclusive community effort.
- * Adequate and sustainable funding is necessary to ensure and expand high-quality experiences for all children and to provide flexibility for families.
- * Transition services provide a seamless system from before birth to kindergarten entry.
- * High-quality early learning programs implement culturally responsive practices and universal design for learning principles to promote the inclusion of infants, toddlers and preschoolers with learning differences, including children with disabilities and second language learners.

Program Guidance

1. Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is conducted at least every three years to identify the needs of children and families and services available in the community. The assessment is reviewed annually.

2. Qualifications for Staff

Supervisor/Administrator qualifications: baccalaureate degree with recommended competencies:

- Knowledge and experience in early learning, including curriculum, assessment, inclusive practices, and working with diverse children and families
- Demonstrated ability to lead, mentor, evaluate and support staff
- Knowledge and experience in managing funds
- Skills in community collaboration

Teacher qualifications: baccalaureate degree and certification in Early Childhood Education and/or, Early Childhood Special Education. (For infant or toddler teachers, coursework and student teaching should provide more experiences with infants and toddlers.)

Paraprofessional/Teaching Assistant qualifications:

- Child Development Associate (CDA for appropriate age group) (minimum) or AA in Early Childhood or 60 related college credit hours with a minimum of nine college credit hours in early childhood, child development, or child/family related course and experience working in a program with young children and their families (preferred), and skills and training to match responsibility

3. Professional Development

- Administrators and teaching staff participate in high-quality professional development experiences such as curriculum, assessment, child development, safety, nutrition and partnering with families.
- Professional development experiences are shared among providers in the community.

4. Staff Evaluation

Staff performance is evaluated at least annually and results are documented. Input from families, supervisors and other co-workers should be included in these evaluations.

5. Curriculum and Assessment

The curriculum is research-based, aligned with the Missouri Learning Standards, and approved by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Missouri Early Learning Goals, including social and emotional development, language and literacy, math, science, motor development, health and physical well-being, as well as positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning are used to:

- guide what children should know and be able to do
- guide professional development
- guide learning
- inform parents of how to support their children's learning

Children are assessed with authentic, reliable, and valid assessments that are used for the intended purposes.

The Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) is the recommended tool for assessing young children in the classroom.

6. Interaction and Learning Environments

Program experiences for infants, toddlers and preschoolers are developmentally appropriate and are individualized based on the needs of each child. Families play an important role in working with the staff in developing the goals for their children.

Infants:

- Staff members create a responsive environment to support, nurture, comfort, and encourage self-assurance.
- Children are provided continuity of care and appropriate educational opportunities.
- Staff members create a safe, enriching environment for exploration.
- Interactions include modeling appropriate expression of feelings.

Toddlers and Preschoolers:

- Interactions include open-ended questions such as *how*, *why*, and *what happens if*.
- Interactions are encouraged with direct, specific and positive feedback about children's actions.
- Children are helped to cope with both success and failure through encouragement and assistance in expressing feelings using acceptable words or actions.
- Interactions are promoted among all children regardless of differences/abilities.

7. Health, Safety and Nutrition

The health component of a program is carefully planned and carried out in partnership with families through comprehensive health policies and procedures developed from up-to-date information supplemented by use of community resources.

One of the roles of early learning staff is the prevention of harm to children from known risks, as well as the promotion of children's health through medical, nutrition, oral health, and mental health evidence-based practices.

Indoor space includes fifty (50) square feet of useable floor space for each child in classrooms/family child care programs.

Outdoor space includes one hundred (100) square feet of usable space for each child.

The following is conducted at least annually by authorized inspectors:

- fire and safety inspection
- health and sanitation inspection

8. Child/Adult Ratios

Ratio and group size should be based on the needs of the children and requirements of the individualized education program. (A room is defined by permanent wall structure.)

- Infants to 24 months:
 - 3/1; with no more than 6 children in one room (preferred)
 - 4/1; with no more than 8 children in one room (acceptable)
- 24 months to 36 months:
 - 4/1; with no more than 8 children in one room (preferred)
 - 6/1; with no more than 12 children in one room (acceptable)
- Age 3 to kindergarten entry:
 - 7/1; with no more than 21 children in one room (preferred)
 - 10/1; with no more than 20 children in one room (acceptable)
- Mixed age group (birth – kindergarten entry)
 - 6/1; with no more than two under age two (preferred)
 - 8/1; with no more than two under age two (acceptable)

9. Program Evaluation

The annual evaluation includes results of ongoing assessments (for example, accreditation), review of the needs assessment, and input of families, staff and community partners.

10. Partnerships and Collaborations

Partnerships and collaborations are established with stakeholders from the community, including families, to provide the work force and development of programs and services. Partners agree to implement programs and services in accordance with this guidance.