

STANDARDS FOR BIRTH - KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

Introduction

Scientific breakthroughs have provided the fields of early education (Child Development, Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood Special Education, and Early Intervention) an extraordinary understanding of how young children with and without disabilities develop and learn. Recent research has demonstrated that young children know more, know it sooner, and need opportunities to continue to be active learners. Advances in neuroscience and reauthorization of legislation provide greater support than ever for early education. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of:

- ❖ changes in the knowledge bases of the fields of early education;
- ❖ changes in early care and education for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergartners (*hereafter referred to in this document as “ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk”*);
- ❖ increased diversity of environments in which birth-kindergarten professionals are engaged such as natural learning environments, public school classrooms, child care centers, community agencies, homes, hospitals, crisis nurseries, and shelters (*hereafter referred to in this document as “settings”*);
- ❖ changes in early childhood demographics including family, linguistic, geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity;
- ❖ the value of essential roles family members play in their child’s development and learning; and
- ❖ increased numbers of young children at-risk for and with disabilities who are served in early education programs.

These interrelated elements impact all aspects of high quality early education practices.

Specialized knowledge and skills are required of professionals who work with children from birth through kindergarten due to the complexities of development that exist in young children during those years and to the diversity of settings in which birth-kindergarten professionals work. With the passage of recent legislation, the number of pre-kindergarten children served through the public school system has grown dramatically. In addition, young children with disabilities are optimally served in inclusive settings. Research on these settings supports the philosophy that these environments are best for ALL children. Likewise, the participation of family members is integral to each child’s development.

Developmental domains are integrated and inseparable from one another. For example, a preschool child who is mastering certain physical skills may experience a temporary lag in verbal skills. A child with a hearing impairment may experience social challenges due to differences in communication modes. Individuals who work with young children with and without disabilities must have a thorough knowledge of the development of the whole child within the context of the family and of possible variations in that development.

When teachers are competent to facilitate the learning and interaction of ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk, both the growth and development of children are optimized. Competent teachers create respectful environments where they model and affirm acceptance of differences and work in partnership with family members.

NOTE: The NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation: Initial Level was used as a reference in preparation for this document.

“Content” in the birth-kindergarten field is inseparable from current research in all areas of child development, curriculum, and learning. This content is built on knowledge of children’s cognitive, physical, social, emotional, language, and aesthetic development. Also integral to “content” is the knowledge of how play/active learning processes, and motivation are central to young children’s learning. It also includes an understanding of the variations in development and their influence upon learning. Lastly, “content” includes knowledge of observation and assessment as necessary to understand

children's current development as well as to support emerging skill development and program evaluation.

An additional part of "content" is the knowledge of how to build a caring community of learners through positive partnerships with children, families and communities. Therefore, birth-kindergarten professionals have an understanding of family development and family systems theory, acknowledging and valuing the profound influence families have on the development of their children.

"Students" in the birth-kindergarten field are young children (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergartners) with and without disabilities, including those at-risk. Learning characteristics of children birth-kindergarten are uniquely different from elementary aged children. Therefore, they must have nurturing professionals who are specifically prepared to work with this population and who understand the importance of warm, reciprocal, and sensitive interactions. The close attachments formed between children and their teachers/caregivers, the expectations and beliefs that adults have about children's capacities, and the warmth, consistency, and responsiveness of adult-child interactions are powerful influences on positive developmental and educational outcomes.

Birth-kindergarten professionals use their relationships with and understanding of young children, their understanding of specific teaching/learning strategies appropriate for young children, and their understanding of integrating curriculum, to design, implement, evaluate, and adapt learning experiences to promote positive development and learning for ALL children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk.

Birth-kindergarten professionals have an understanding of and appreciation for relevant child and family characteristics such as varying ability levels, socioeconomic conditions, family structures, relationships, stresses and supports, linguistics, ethnicity, culture and geographic locale.

Birth-kindergarten professionals identify and involve themselves as members of early education professional organizations. They uphold high ethical and legal standards that are family-centered and supportive of environments where ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk, learn. In collaboration with families, they establish individual goals and objectives for children, work as team members with other disciplines and community agencies concerned with children's welfare and, when appropriate, assume advocacy roles.

Birth-kindergarten professionals engage in critical analysis and reflective thinking in collaboration with families and community resource professionals. This enables them to evaluate their knowledge and practice in terms of theory, research, and their own experiences in and out of the classroom to better adapt and accommodate the individual needs of ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk.

Birth-kindergarten professionals respect and nurture positive, consistent attachment relationships with children and their families as a foundation for professional practices that support healthy development of ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk.

Standards and Indicators

Standard 1: Birth-Kindergarten professionals promote child development and learning for ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

- Indicator 1: Know theories and principles of human development, growth and learning, including the findings of relevant research.
- Indicator 2: Know the philosophical, historical, and legal issues in the fields of child development, early childhood education, early childhood special education, and early intervention.
- Indicator 3: Understand health and safety issues as they relate to group care settings.
- Indicator 4: Know the etiology, identifying characteristics, range and complexity of different disabilities (e.g. mild, moderate, severe, profound) and risk factors and their influences on development.
- Indicator 5: Understand how the interaction between biological and environmental factors influences children's development and learning.
- Indicator 6: Understand that learning approaches are integrated and that interconnectedness among cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and physical development influence growth, development and learning for ALL children.
- Indicator 7: Know the health, medical, and physical requirements of ALL young children and the influence on development.
- Indicator 8: Know the social and emotional needs, especially the importance of consistent, positive relationships, for the healthy development of ALL young children.
- Indicator 9: Know the range of appropriate technological applications available to children and families.
- Indicator 10: Understand the relationship between differing environmental or situational contexts and children's actions.

Standard 2: Birth-Kindergarten professionals understand assessment processes including their goals, benefits and uses.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

- Indicator 1: Are aware of a variety of appropriate assessment tools and procedures and their purposes, including on-going observation, data collection and analysis.
- Indicator 2: Are knowledgeable of informal and formal assessment procedures and the need for collaboration with families and other professionals.
- Indicator 3: Are knowledgeable of health appraisal procedures and referral processes.

Indicator 4: Understand that appropriate assessment is an embedded (rather than pull-out) process that supports children's development and learning.

Standard 3: Birth-Kindergarten professionals build family and community partnerships.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Understand that families are the first and most important teachers and key decision makers for their children.

Indicator 2: Understand the characteristics of each child's family and community while developing programs in partnership that support development and learning.

Indicator 3: Understand family systems theory, family structures, functioning styles, and stages of family and adult development.

Indicator 4: Understand the role of family as a partner in promoting the child's development, sharing information, making decisions, and implementing and evaluating program plans for their child.

Indicator 5: Are aware of resources, range of services, and program options available to families and procedures for guiding families in choice making or decision-making.

Indicator 6: Understand the characteristics of effective team functioning and various team models such as multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary, especially as they impact interagency relationships and service coordination.

Standard 4: Birth-Kindergarten professionals prepare for teaching and learning by connecting with ALL young children with and without disabilities including those at-risk and their families.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Use positive, consistent relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with families and ALL young children.

Indicator 2: Guide and foster interactions (child-child, child-adult, adult-adult) that facilitate inquiry and discovery.

Indicator 3: Establish principles for guiding ALL young children's behavior, problem solving with children and fostering independence.

Indicator 4: Display warm, nurturing, respectful, and reciprocal interactions with families and ALL young children.

Indicator 5: Use responsive techniques to enhance social interaction among adults and ALL young children to create a caring community of learners.

Standard 5: Birth-Kindergarten professionals prepare for teaching and learning by conducting appropriate, on-going formal and informal assessments.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Collect and synthesize relevant assessment information that informs practice.

Indicator 2: Share assessment information results with appropriate family members and professionals.

Indicator 3: Link assessment information to practice, including appropriate implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs).

Indicator 4: Use assessment information, including observation, to plan, implement, and evaluate program(s).

Standard 6: Birth-Kindergarten professionals prepare for teaching and learning by creating an integrated curriculum and responsive environment.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Use play/active learning processes as a foundation for ALL young children's learning.

Indicator 2: Plan a suitable balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated activities.

Indicator 3: Create and adapt integrated, meaningful, challenging, and engaging developmentally supportive learning experiences.

Indicator 4: Implement and adapt developmental and functional curricula across all domains (including cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language) in response to ALL young children's strengths, interests, needs and differing ability levels.

Indicator 5: Integrate content from disciplines that set the stage for subsequent academic development to include emergent reading, writing, mathematics the arts (visual art, music, movement, drama, dance), science, and social studies.

Indicator 6: Create and adapt developmentally supportive environments with attention to curriculum, interactions, teaching practices, and learning materials.

Indicator 7: Create, manage, and adapt environments with developmentally appropriate interpersonal, spatial, and temporal organization.

Standard 7: Birth-Kindergarten professionals support the learning of ALL young children with and without disabilities, including those at-risk.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Accommodate individual learning styles, needs, and interests of ALL young children.

Indicator 2: Use strategies and tools that encourage ALL young children's problem solving, thinking skills, and developmental and social competence.

Indicator 3: Use appropriate technology, including software, multimedia, and assistive technology, to support and enhance the learning of ALL young children.

Indicator 4: Use a variety of naturally occurring routines and activities, and responsive and incidental teaching techniques to promote emergent skill development.

Indicator 5: Develop, implement and evaluate IFSPs and IEPs in partnership with families and other professionals.

Indicator 6: Facilitate effective transitions throughout the day.

Indicator 7: Use strengths-based practices as a focus for teaching and learning.

Standard 8: Birth-Kindergarten professionals recognize and respect individual differences in program planning and implementation.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Create an environment that is reflective of the children in the classroom setting that honors diversity.

Indicator 2: Integrate cultural diversity and an anti-bias perspective throughout all instructional activities.

Indicator 3: Are sensitive to and meet the individual needs of children and families with differing backgrounds, i.e. linguistic, culture, geographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic.

Indicator 4: Are sensitive to, and meet the needs of children with different ability levels including those with disabilities and their families.

Indicator 5: Integrate IEP or IFSP goals throughout the daily routines and activities in a developmentally appropriate way.

Standard 9: Birth-Kindergarten professionals demonstrate respectful, reciprocal relationships with families and communities.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Support families as the primary developmental context for their children's learning and development.

Indicator 2: Respect cultural preferences and socioeconomic influences when identifying family

resources, concerns, and priorities.

Indicator 3: Respect diverse cultural values and family structures.

Indicator 4: Communicate effectively with families from diverse backgrounds.

Standard 10: Birth-Kindergarten professionals function professionally.

Birth-Kindergarten professionals:

Indicator 1: Identify with and actively involve themselves in birth-kindergarten professional organizations.

Indicator 2: Respect confidentiality and informed consent.

Indicator 3: Articulate the philosophies of the professional organizations that provide the guiding framework for birth-kindergarten practice (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children).

Indicator 4: Know and follow legal and ethical mandates, policies, and procedures related to services for young children and families.

Indicator 5: Serve in the roles as advocate, consultant, collaborator, and team member.

Indicator 6: Integrate knowledge and strategies from other professionals in designing and implementing learning activities.

Indicator 7: Facilitate effective transitions between programs and services for children and their families.

Indicator 8: Use strategies such as reflective teaching, cooperative planning, problem solving, and collaboration with others, including therapists, assistant teachers, volunteers, and families, in order to advocate for recommended practices.

Indicator 9: Use a consultative model of service delivery and integrated therapies when appropriate.

Indicator 10: Function in a variety of settings such as natural learning environments, public school classrooms, child care centers, community agencies, homes, hospitals, crisis nurseries, and shelters.

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