

New Mexico
Early Childhood
Education & Care Department

# NEW MEXICO
# EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS
## FOR CHILDREN BIRTH THROUGH FIVE



*A comprehensive guide designed to support educators, families, and caregivers in fostering high-quality early learning experiences that build strong foundations for every child's growth and success.*

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# INTRODUCTION

The Early Learning Standards (ELS) describe what children should know and be able to do at different ages. They help everyone who works with young children—teachers, caregivers, home visitors, development specialists, and family members—understand child development and recognize how children show what they're learning. The standards connect expectations across different ages, programs, and settings, providing a shared language for supporting children's growth from birth through age five. They guide adults in creating developmentally and culturally appropriate experiences that scaffold children's learning as they transition to kindergarten. While there are universal aspects of child development, these standards recognize that children learn within the context of their families, communities, and cultures. The New Mexico ELS represent research on child development and integrate the state's diverse cultures and geography, representing the values and priorities of numerous partners across the state's early childhood system. This engagement was crucial to developing standards that are contextually relevant, culturally affirming, and community owned.

## EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

These standards revise the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten (New Mexico State Child, Youth and Families Department, et al., 2014) and the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines; Essential Indicators with Rubrics: Preschool to Kindergarten (New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department, 2020). This revision provides a seamless set of standards for children from birth to age five, informed by the most recent research while simplifying and increasing accessibility for practitioners across all early childhood settings.

When referring to children's learning and development, the terms 'guidelines' and 'standards' are used interchangeably across states. New Mexico uses 'standards' to align with our quality standards for programs and professional preparation standards for teachers, creating consistent language across our early childhood system.

Standards inherently reflect the values and priorities of the communities they serve, articulating what we believe children have the right to know and be able to do. In this way, they provide a powerful platform for advocacy on behalf of young children, establishing a shared understanding of children's growth and development and thus creating accountability for the essential experiences we must provide to both nurture and celebrate the incredible capabilities of New Mexico's young children.

To support effective implementation, one of the biggest changes to the revised ELS from previous versions is the distinction between standards and assessment. The ELS provide benchmarks for understanding children's learning and development which can inform the use of curriculum, assessment, and shared vision of child development. It is not just important to understand what standards are but also what they are not.

## Crucially, the ELS are not:

1. An assessment. Standards do not measure children's development and learning; they describe developmental progression and what adults may observe as evidence of children's growth.
2. A curriculum. Curricula provide experiences and materials used to support young children's learning and development. Standards can inform and guide learning experiences beneficial to children's development, but they are not a curriculum.
3. A checklist or rigid timeline. Children develop at different rates, and standards acknowledge this natural variation in developmental progression.

Using the ELS as a complementary tool alongside child assessment, curriculum, other system standards, and as a shared language for all adults who work on behalf of young children strengthens the ECEC system. These standards further enhance New Mexico's "cohesive, equitable, and responsive prenatal to five system that supports families, strengthens communities, and enhances child health, development, and well-being" (Early Childhood Education and Care Department [ECECD], 2023).

## NEW MEXICO

All 50 states have established early learning standards, and New Mexico has long been a national leader in early childhood innovation. In 1997, the state was the first to establish tiered reimbursement rates to incentivize and support quality in child care settings. The state went on in 2005 to establish a mixed-delivery PreK system grounded in play-based practices that address children's full range of developmental needs (Bell et al., 2016; The Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2016). New Mexico then became one of the first to create a cabinet-level Early Childhood Education and Care Department in 2020, secured dedicated constitutional funding for early childhood through voter-approved amendments, and most recently achieved universal child care for all families in 2025. New Mexico's early childhood system includes diverse program types—public PreK, private child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start programs, early intervention, and home visiting—all of which serve important roles in supporting children and families across the state. New Mexico remains the first—and only—state in the nation to formally establish an Office of Native American Early Education & Care within state government. This includes the creation of an Assistant Secretary–level position dedicated exclusively to working in partnership with the 23 Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes of New Mexico to advance early childhood education and care systems.

New Mexico's rich multicultural heritage creates a distinctive foundation for early childhood learning that honors diverse ways of knowing and being. The state's history as a crossroads of Indigenous, Hispanic, and Anglo cultures has fostered educational approaches that value multiple languages, cultural practices, and learning traditions. This legacy includes centuries-old Indigenous educational practices that emphasize experiential learning, community connections, and holistic child development (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2025), alongside Hispanic traditions of family-centered learning and storytelling.

The state's commitment to multilingual education was formalized through the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act of 1973, which made New Mexico the first state in the U.S. to adopt such a law and which reflects the historical understanding that children's home languages and cultural knowledge are assets to be celebrated and built upon (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2025). This commitment has deep constitutional roots: the 1911 New Mexico Constitution outlined several provisions to protect bilingual residents and students, including a mandate that students of "Spanish descent" shall "forever enjoy perfect equality" with other students in public education (Salkin, 2025). This historical context informs ELS that recognize families and communities as children's first teachers and honor the diverse pathways through which children demonstrate learning and growth.



## NEW MEXICO'S CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

New Mexico's population reflects rich diversity, including Indigenous Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes; Hispanic and Spanish-heritage communities; Anglo communities; and growing communities of African Americans, Asian Americans, and other cultural groups (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee, 2021). Each community contributes to the state's educational landscape and brings valuable perspectives on how children learn and develop. The sections that follow highlight educational traditions deeply connected to New Mexico's specific geography, languages, and multi-generational presence in the state.

## FAMILY AND INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

Early childhood learning in New Mexico is rooted in strong family and community relationships. A child's development is shaped by their family environment and societal factors they experience (Coll et al., 1996; Iruka et al., 2016; Mistry et al., 2016). Children are guided by parents, grandparents, elders, and other community members who collectively share responsibility for teaching and nurturing their growth. Learning occurs through observation, participation, and daily interaction. This intergenerational approach emphasizes core values including, but not limited to, respect, patience, generosity, and cooperation, ensuring that knowledge and traditions are passed down in a supportive and culturally meaningful way.

## LEARNING BY DOING AND STORYTELLING

Learning by doing is central across New Mexico's cultural communities. Children gain knowledge and skills through hands-on experiences—cooking traditional foods, farming, crafting, and participating in cultural celebrations. Each of New Mexico's 23 sovereign Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes has their own traditional calendar that shapes how children and families engage with community. Hispanic families pass down traditions through participation in celebrations like Las Posadas and Día de los Muertos, and through traditional arts like making luminarias or dancing folklórico.

Storytelling plays an essential role in transmitting cultural teachings, moral lessons, and community history across generations. In Indigenous communities, traditional stories, oral histories, and legends serve as tools for teaching values like kindness, humility, and courage while strengthening cultural identity and community connection (Beasley, 2022). Similarly, in Hispanic traditions, cuentos (stories) and dichos (proverbs) teach children about relationships, behavior, and life wisdom in memorable ways (Reese et al., 2012). Through these experiences, children develop not only practical skills but also emotional grounding.



## CONNECTION TO LAND, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Connection to the land and community responsibility are central to early learning across New Mexico. Outdoor learning through gathering, gardening, or observing nature builds ecological knowledge and connection to place. Language preservation—whether through Indigenous language immersion or supporting Spanish and other home languages alongside English—sustains cultural heritage and identity. For many families, maintaining home languages preserves connection to heritage and supports children in becoming confident, multilingual learners. This connection to land and place-based learning finds rich expression across New Mexico's landscapes.

New Mexico's varied geography shapes how young children experience and learn about their world. The standards recognize that meaningful learning emerges from children's direct experiences with their local environment, whether exploring arroyos, observing seasonal changes in high alpine settings, or engaging with desert ecosystems.

New Mexico's vast geography also influences how early childhood programs are delivered across the state, from urban centers to rural and frontier communities.

This reinforces the importance of standards that can be meaningfully implemented across diverse settings while maintaining high expectations for all children, regardless of where they live. Building on this rich foundation of cultural diversity, family engagement, and systemic innovation, the New Mexico Early Learning Standards are grounded in six core principles that reflect both universal understandings about how children learn and the specific values of our communities.



## PRINCIPLES FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

These principles affirm that all children—regardless of their community, economic circumstances, abilities, or backgrounds—have the right to access and achieve these learning standards. We hold equally high expectations for every child while honoring their unique paths to growth.

1. Children's learning begins with families and extends to all settings where they grow and develop.
2. Children are respected as unique, competent, and active participants in their learning.
3. Children's language and cultural context matter and must be recognized and celebrated in learning.
4. Children's social-emotional relationships are at the heart of their learning and development and must be nurtured as they interact with and contribute to their learning communities.
5. Children's development is holistic, occurs at varying rates, and their diversities are honored across a range of abilities and disabilities.
6. Children learn through a continuum of playful learning experiences that extend their knowledge and skills.

These principles come to life through a carefully designed framework that organizes children's learning and development.

## PURPOSES OF THE EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

Early Learning Standards provide clear, concise language and shared expectations for children's learning and development for families and all adults who are in the lives of children, thus enhancing communication and partnerships. The standards are intended to:

1. Support all adults, across contexts, in designing intentional experiences for joyful learning.
2. Show how adults can support young children's learning with examples and provide resources for further exploration.
3. Work with the multiple tools that exist (curriculum, assessment, program quality, etc.) to support young children's education and care across the NM early learning landscape.

The ELS are a tool to be used across the variety of programs educating young children in New Mexico. The following are some ideas on how varying users may use the ELS to complement their work.

## HOW TO USE THE EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

***For Educators/Caregivers:*** **Use standards as a framework for thinking about how children learn and develop, not a script.**

Let early learning standards inform your work with young children, and your planning of engaging learning experiences while staying responsive to children's culture, interests, and development. Focus on relationships, play, and curiosity—this is where deep learning lives.

***For Administrators and Coaches:*** **Support standards as a foundation, not a ceiling.**

Encourage teachers and caregivers to use early learning standards to inform intentional design and planning for meaningful learning, while also honoring professional judgment, children's agency, and the power of play. Provide time, trust, and resources for reflective practice including inquiry, dialogue, and collaboration.

***For Home Visitors and Development Specialists (Early Intervention):*** **Use standards as a bridge to connect your specialized work with the broader community of adults supporting each child.**

While you have various tools and frameworks, early learning standards provide a common language for collaboration with other professionals in a child's life. Use these standards to facilitate smooth transitions between services and settings, ensure continuity in supporting development, and help families navigate the full ecosystem of early childhood supports.

***For Families:*** **Standards help guide what children may learn—but every child grows in their own way.**

While some families may choose to engage with this standards document, others may resonate more with tools created specifically for use with families. Partnering with families and caregivers to support their child's joy, curiosity, and development is an opportunity to introduce the ELS as a resource for understanding children's growth and development.

## PROGRESSIONS AND **AGE RANGES**

Children grow and learn at different rates. While these standards describe typical development, every child is unique. Some children may reach milestones earlier or later than the age ranges shown, and that's expected. Children with disabilities may develop on different timelines, as do children learning multiple languages. Cultural values may also influence when and how skills develop.

Therefore, we organize the standards by developmental stages rather than strict ages. This approach:

- Recognizes that children develop at different rates
- Supports all children, including those with diverse abilities
- Allows adults to meet children where they are
- Helps children through important transitions (like moving from infant care to preschool, or from preschool to kindergarten)

These developmental transitions are significant for children and families, requiring coordination across agencies, educators, and service providers to ensure continuity of care and equitable access to early learning experiences.

Viewing development as a progression helps adults observe children and understand what they're ready to learn next. Used alongside curriculum and assessment, these standards help adults scaffold learning and support each child's individual growth. The progressions emphasize the natural flow of development rather than rigid age expectations. Age ranges are included as a reference point, and if there are concerns about a child's development, there are other tools to support screening, assessment, and intervention.

The following four progression bands, with approximate age ranges from birth through age five, describe typical characteristics of early childhood development:

| | |
|---|---|
| BEGINNING AWARENESS **AND CONNECTIONS** (infancy through young toddler: 0-18 months) | Within this band, children develop their senses to become aware and make connections. Children use their emerging curiosity to explore their environment and the people in their lives. Caring adults scaffold their learning responsively and through interactions with peers and caregivers; children form secure attachments, develop early language and communication and confidence in their abilities as learners. |
| BUILDING COMPETENCE **WITH PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT** (older toddlers through 2-year-olds:16-30 months) | Within this band, children build extensive motor skills that support their competence with people and explore their environment in new ways. Less dependent on adults, children more actively initiate, problem-solve, and learn to reason through situations and to achieve goals. They express emotions and communicate with words, gestures, and other forms of expression. |
| DEEPENING AND **STRETCHING** (preschool: 28 through 45 months) | Within this band, the child's learning deepens and stretches as they rapidly gain more language, persist in problem-solving, make sense of their world, and develop additional executive functioning skills. These are expressed within their interactions with adults and increasingly with peers. Their motor capabilities increase so they can now move through their environment more confidently. They draw and begin to write as their interest in early and emergent literacy, and creative expression more deeply develops. |
| APPLYING AND **EXTENDING** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42 to 60 months) | Within this band, learning is applied across new opportunities and contexts. Peer interaction becomes more central to language development as well as time devoted to further developing problem-solving skills. Children's executive functioning skills continue to develop as they encounter new challenges not only emotionally, but in the domains of mathematics where they count, sort, measure, and problem-solve.<br>Children become more capable of knowing when to reach out to adults for support and as learning collaborators. |

# PROGRESSIONS **IN ACTION**

The following table provides an overview of how learning unfolds across the four progression bands, illustrating both what children typically do at each stage and how adults can intentionally design environments and experiences to support their growth.

| PROGRESSION **BAND** | WHAT **CHILDREN DO** | WHAT **ADULTS DO** |
|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy through young toddler: 0-18 months) | • Use their senses and emerging curiosity<br>• Form secure attachments<br>• Develop early language and communication<br>• Gain confidence in abilities as a learner | • Create environments filled with sensory materials and inspire children to move and explore<br>• Provide opportunities by introducing new objects, events, and people<br>• Scaffold responsively through interactions with peers and with caregivers |
| **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers through 2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | • Develop extensive motor skills<br>• Actively initiate and problem-solve<br>• Reason through situations to achieve goals<br>• Express emotions with words, gestures, and other forms of communication | • Provide opportunities for active exploration and those that invite movement and motor skill development<br>• Ask open-ended questions, “What else could you do?”<br>• Respect children’s thinking and rule systems and allow for constructive error<br>• Describe children’s behaviors, their approaches to learning, and their emotional expression<br>• Extend play and language |
| **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28 through 45 months) | • Rapidly gain more language and communication<br>• Persist in problem-solving, making sense of the world, and develop additional executive functioning skills<br>• Add to repertoire of interactions with adults and increasingly with peers<br>• Develop motor capabilities and move through environment more confidently<br>• Draw, begin to write, and express creatively through multiple modalities | • Help children make connections<br>• Help children refine understanding by guiding and focusing attention<br>• Ask more focused questions, “What else works like this?” “What happens if…?”<br>• Design small learning groups to support peer interaction and collaborative learning<br>• Increase challenges for motor capabilities<br>• Provide diverse materials for writing, drawing, and creative expression |
| **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42 to 60 months) | • Learn across new opportunities and contexts<br>• Peer interaction becomes more central to language development<br>• Develop problem-solving skills across situations<br>• Executive functioning skills support new challenges emotionally and with the domains of learning<br>• Become more capable, knowing when to reach out to adults for support and collaboration in learning | • Create opportunities for authentic application of learning and provide meaningful situations where learning takes place and contributes to the learning community<br>• Guide children in deepening their collaborative skills and support group projects<br>• Provide information and support when requested, “How do you spell…?”<br>• Support children in developing a more expansive repertoire of emotional expression and language use |



# **DOMAINS** AND SUBDOMAINS

Domains provide an organizing framework that reflects what the young child knows and is learning in key areas of development. Subdomains are components under each domain that reflect unique aspects of development within that domain. While organized separately for clarity, all domains and subdomains are deeply interconnected, representing overlapping concepts that support integrated learning and development. Each domain and indicator is grounded in research, with supporting evidence documented in the accompanying reference list. When using an individual standard for observation, consider it through the lens of its domain and subdomain, while also recognizing how children's actions may illustrate standards from other areas.

The New Mexico Early Learning Standards are organized into five domains describing areas of learning and development that are essential for school readiness:

- **Approaches to Learning**
- **Physical Development and Health**
- **Thinking, Reasoning, and Knowledge**
- **Communication, Language, and Literacy**
- **Relationships and Social Emotional Development**

## 1. APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Approaches to learning focus on how children engage with learning, rather than what they know. It includes key dispositions such as persistence, creative expression, problem-solving, and executive functioning. This domain supports the development of positive attitudes toward learning by encouraging initiative and engagement—supporting all other domains and laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

1.1. Creative Expression
1.2. Curiosity, Initiative, and Problem-Solving
1.3. Executive Functioning

## 2. COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE, AND LITERACY

Communication, language, and literacy as a domain emphasizes young children's ability to understand and use language to express thoughts, ideas, and needs. It includes listening, understanding, speaking and communication skills, vocabulary growth, comprehension, early reading and writing, and the use of multiple forms of communication. This domain supports children in building relationships, participating in their social contexts, and becoming confident, capable communicators and emergent readers and writers. Furthermore, this domain supports the development of multilingualism and recognizes the valuable linguistic resources that children from diverse language backgrounds bring to their learning environments while supporting communication, language, and literacy in multiple languages and modes.

- 2.1. Listening and Communicating
- 2.2. Foundational Literacy
- 2.3. Foundational Reading
- 2.4. Foundational Writing

## 3. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Physical development and health focuses on children's growing ability to move their bodies, care for themselves, and make healthy choices. It includes large and fine motor skills, sensory development and integration, self-care routines, nutrition, safety, and physical activity. This domain supports overall well-being by promoting strength, coordination, independence, and skills that contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

- 3.1. Daily Routines, Health, and Nutrition
- 3.2. Fine Motor
- 3.3. Large Motor
- 3.4. Sensory Integration



## 4. RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Relationships and social emotional development center on how children understand and manage emotions, form secure relationships, and navigate social interactions. It includes self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, and the ability to build positive connections with adults and other children. The skills developed in this domain promote identity formation, mental health and resilience, as well as a sense of belonging in family and community.

- 4.1. Emotional Self-Regulation
- 4.2. Identity, Belonging, and Community
- 4.3. Relationships with Adults
- 4.4. Relationships with Children

## 5. THINKING, REASONING, AND KNOWLEDGE

Thinking, reasoning, and knowledge emphasize how young children make sense of the world through exploration, inquiry, and problem-solving. It includes cognitive skills such as memory, attention, reasoning, and early concepts in math, science, technology, and engineering. Skills within this domain support children in developing curiosity, critical thinking, and a foundation for later learning by encouraging them to ask questions, make connections, and construct knowledge through active engagement.

- 5.1. Mathematical Thinking
- 5.2. Science, Technology, and Engineering

## STANDARDS

Standards start with "The child" and articulate the overarching expectation for learning within a subdomain.

## INDICATORS

Organized by four age bands, indicators offer specific descriptions of development as a progression and are labeled with letters.

## EXAMPLES

Indicators include examples that illustrate the ways the child may demonstrate their abilities within the indicator. There are multiple ways skills may be developed, and users are encouraged to identify the unique ways a child demonstrates their knowledge and abilities. Generally, the examples provided illustrate development at the higher end of the progression range. This is intended to support teachers in scaffolding children's learning by understanding what may come next in a progression of skills or knowledge. Remember that these are simply examples—users are encouraged to develop their own examples and engage with others in dialogue to expand understanding of how children's learning may be demonstrated.



## CRITICAL CROSSCUTTING CONCEPTS

Critical Crosscutting Concepts offer brief, research-informed overviews of essential ideas that appear throughout the Early Learning Standards. These concepts highlight cultural, linguistic, developmental, and contextual factors that support adults in interpreting and applying the standards in inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and responsive ways.

## VIGNETTES

Vignettes illuminate how ELS can inspire learning experiences in various contexts across the diversity of New Mexico's young children and their learning environments. These examples illustrate how children may demonstrate learning across multiple standards during a single learning experience, and how early childhood coaches and administrators may leverage the ELS as they support the conditions for teaching and learning.

Throughout this document, you will encounter examples and vignettes that reflect New Mexican traditions, languages, and cultures—including those of the state's diverse Indigenous communities. These are intentionally included to emphasize learning in context and to honor the rich heritage of New Mexico. While these examples may resonate and offer meaningful snapshots, they represent only a fraction of the state's diverse history and communities. We recognize that some readers may perceive these examples as symbolically limited or not fully representative. This reflects a natural tension: designing a resource that is inclusive of all children while also highlighting culturally specific illustrations. Our intent is to spark meaningful reflection and encourage locally grounded applications of the standards.

We encourage all those who work on behalf of young children to engage with the examples—not as fixed models, but as prompts to explore and identify unique, locally relevant illustrations of the standards in action, drawn from the diverse families and children they serve.

GUIDING MAP

# HOW TO READ THE STANDARDS

This map will help guide you through how to read the standards within the domain, subdomain, standards, and the indicators.

DOMAIN NAME AND DESCRIPTION

## 1. APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Approaches to learning focus on how children engage with learning, rather than what they know. It includes key dispositions such as persistence, creative expression, problem-solving, and executive functioning. This domain supports the development of positive attitudes toward learning by encouraging initiative and engagement—supporting all other domains and laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

*(Example of standard)*

SUBDOMAIN

STANDARD

INDICATORS

Indicators are organized by four bands that show the development of children related to their age, reinforcing that there is overlap from one band to the next.

**Band 1:** Beginning Awareness and Connections

**Band 2:** Building Competence with People and Environment

**Band 3:** Deepening and Stretching

**Band 4:** Applying and Extending

**Bands sharing age range:**
16-18 months between bands 1 and 2,
28-30 months between bands 2 and 3,
42-45 months between bands 3 and 4.

### Subdomain 1.1 Creative Expression

**Standard 1.1.A The child exhibits imagination and creativity.**

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) Band 1 | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) Band 2 | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) Band 3 | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) Band 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shows interest in and curiosity about objects in their environment, manipulating objects and imitating actions observed (e.g., brings hands to face for teacher to play peek-a-boo). | Uses objects for imagined purposes (e.g., combines different art materials in novel ways, such as pressing leaves into playdough). | Creates novel scenarios and designs integrating a variety of materials (e.g., creates a working ranch using blocks for barns, sticks for fences, and small toys as cattle and horses). | Uses a wide variety of objects to represent imaginary scenarios based on things they've experienced or seen (e.g., uses battery-powered LED tea lights, paper bags, and sand to experiment with different ways to make luminaria light patterns, discovering how different sized holes create various light effects). |

EXAMPLES

Indicators include examples that illustrate the ways the child may demonstrate their abilities within the indicator.

*Continued* →

# 1. APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Approaches to learning focus on how children engage with learning, rather than what they know. It includes key dispositions such as persistence, creative expression, problem-solving, and executive functioning. This domain supports the development of positive attitudes toward learning by encouraging initiative and engagement—supporting all other domains and laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

| **Subdomain 1.1 Creative Expression** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Standard 1.1.A The child exhibits imagination and creativity.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Shows interest in and curiosity about objects in their environment, manipulating objects and imitating actions observed (e.g., brings hands to face for teacher to play peek-a- boo). | Uses objects for imagined purposes (e.g., combines different art materials in novel ways, such as pressing leaves into playdough). | Creates novel scenarios and designs integrating a variety of materials (e.g., creates a working ranch using blocks for barns, sticks for fences, and small toys as cattle and horses). | Uses a wide variety of objects to represent imaginary scenarios based on things they've experienced or seen (e.g., uses battery-powered LED tea lights, paper bags, and sand to experiment with different ways to make luminaria light patterns, discovering how different sized holes create various light effects). |
| **1.1.B The child engages in the dramatic arts.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Shows interest in and curiosity about objects and people in their environment (e.g., watches another child cradle a doll). | Watches others engage in simple pretend actions and sometimes imitates them (e.g., puts a basket on their head like a hat after seeing another child do this). | Engages in pretend play with others, collaborating to create a shared imaginative experience that may reflect family routines, home language, or cultural traditions (e.g., working with a peer to make playdough tortillas). | Role-plays to express feelings, to dramatize stories, to try out social behaviors observed in adults, and to reenact roles and experiences (e.g., sets up a 'quinceañera': one child plays the role of the birthday girl, dressing in a fancy dress costume, while others act as party guests eating a variety of party foods using props). |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* **STEAM**

Science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, referred to as STEAM, is an approach to learning that integrates each of these five disciplines in investigations that support both knowledge and skill development (Bertrand & Namukasa, 2020). This type of learning requires children to engage in hands-on activities that challenge them to solve problems and create novel solutions. In STEAM learning experiences children might build structures (engineering), count and sort materials (math), observe what works and doesn't work (science), document their process through drawing (arts), and use various tools in their exploration (technology). This integrated approach helps children develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills while building foundational knowledge across multiple domains. STEAM learning is often featured as a strategy for preparing children to thrive in an unknown future that will require innovative solutions and a disposition for persistence.

| 1.1.C The child engages in the musical arts. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Responds to a variety of sounds, vocalizations, and vibrations (e.g., sways to familiar music and sounds from cultural context). | Engages with a variety of sounds, vocalizations, and vibrations using their voice, body, or objects (e.g., engages in storytelling that integrates sounds and tempo like in the book Going on a Bear Hunt). | Engages with the tempo (speed) and dynamics (loudness) of sounds and music using voice, body and objects (e.g., experiments with sticks and varying spoons as batons to create different drumbeats on varying containers). | Creates and experiments with sounds, vocalizations, and vibrations to express ideas and emotions (e.g., makes storm sounds by combining voice (whoooosh), drums (thunder), and shakers (rain) while telling peers 'this is a scary storm'). |
| **1.1.D The child engages in the visual and tactile arts.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Views and shows preference to visual and/or tactile art (e.g., photos, or sculptures in a local park). | Explores art materials and experiments making art with a variety of materials and adult support (e.g., fabrics, natural objects like pinecones, as well as paints and other mediums). | Creates a sculpture with a variety of materials that represent a real or imagined object (e.g., glues a variety of recycled cardboard tubes and boxes together and then paints the sculpture identifying it as their computer). | Creates paintings, drawings, and sculptures that include a variety of details (e.g., works with peers over time to depict the Balloon Fiesta by creating papier-mâché hot air balloons in bright colors and drawing a detailed map on chart paper showing where the balloons launch and land around Albuquerque). |
| **1.2. Curiosity, Initiative, and Problem-Solving** | | | |
| **1.2.A The child shows curiosity and initiative in interactions and experiences.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Actively explores and manipulates familiar and new objects (e.g., mouths, pats, grasps, moves objects), discovering new ways to manipulate them (e.g., throws different items into a metal bowl or a basket, drives a toy truck). | Shows curiosity and interest in new objects, experiences, and people, using senses (e.g., sight, smell, touch) to explore the world, taking risks, reacting both physically and verbally (e.g., touching a shiny object and saying/signing 'shiny'). | Demonstrates curiosity and appropriate risk-taking when investigating their surroundings, using multiple senses to observe, explore, test ideas, and gather information about their world (e.g., experimenting with cause-and-effect, comparing objects, trying different approaches). | Uses multiple senses to explore materials and persists in investigations even when results aren't immediately clear (e.g., investigates different herbs by looking, touching, smelling, and tasting to compare mint, basil, and rosemary). |

| 1.2.B The child displays persistence and pursues challenges through problem-solving. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Participates in interactions and explores objects, often repeating actions to observe the cause and effect, or further investigation (e.g., drops objects repeatedly to test emerging theories and as a game). | Persistently repeats actions to accomplish a goal, despite facing obstacles (e.g., works with a shape sorter). | Confidently focuses on goals and experiments with different strategies to achieve a goal, overcoming challenges, at times with the support of an adult (e.g., while responding to an adult prompt, the child has a hard time finding the right word on their AAC device, pauses and then finds and points to the word by scanning a printed picture card). | Persists on goals and experiments by using multiple strategies and sometimes relies on an adult's support, demonstrating increasing confidence (e.g., when writing a card for mom asks a friend or adult how to write a specific word). |

## 1.3. Executive Functioning

| 1.3.A The child builds their capacity to retain and use information immediately (working memory). | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Begins to understand that familiar people and objects continue to exist even when out of sight (e.g., goes to the door and says/signs 'Mama' when hearing a car in the driveway). | Actively searches for hidden objects or people and follows simple directions (e.g., brings shoes when adult asks). | Engages in play and activities that require holding a rule or concept in mind and follows simple two-step directions (e.g., washes hands with soap and dries them before sitting down for snack). | Retains complex directions or concepts and uses this information for multistep play, planning/organizing task completion, and following more intricate directions (e.g., remembers to line up for the door to go to the playground, asks for sunscreen, and takes their water bottle before going out to play). |

| 1.3.B The child enhances their ability to regulate impulses and responses (inhibitory control). | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Responds to adult guidance to stop or slow down actions (e.g., stops reaching for a forbidden object when adult says 'no' and redirects their attention). | Shows beginning ability to control impulses with adult reminders (e.g., waits for adult to open snack container instead of grabbing it, stops at the edge of the rug when reminded during movement time). | Shows emerging control in regulating impulsive behaviors by pausing before reacting (e.g., asks another child if they can play with the toy next). | Consistently regulates impulses independently across different situations (e.g., stops running when entering a quiet area without reminders, waits for everyone to sit before starting to eat snack). |

## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* **FAMILIES**

Families are children's first teachers and know their children best (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). Children are shaped by their cultural environment, especially the unique traditions and values of their own families (Coll et al., 1996; Iruka et al., 2016; Mistry et al., 2016). Culture, defined as the complex blend of language, knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, traditions, customs, and ways of being and knowing passed down through generations, forms the social framework within which children grow, learn, and develop. Cultural transmission occurs through families, communities, religious groups, and ethnic communities, all of which consciously or unconsciously instill their traditions, values, and ethical principles in children. From the moment they are born, children are guided by their families to become part of a bigger social group. As children grow, they engage with cultural influences and participate in social practices around them, gradually shaping their own unique identity.



To support every child's growth and learning effectively, it is essential for those working with children to learn about, honor, and uphold the cultural values, beliefs, and languages of each family (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). The active, meaningful partnership between educators and families is central to the learning process. While some families may choose to engage with this standards document, others may resonate more with tools created specifically for use with families, such as family-friendly learning activities or community-based resources.

| **1.3.C The child enhances their ability to adapt attention, actions, and behaviors (cognitive flexibility).** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Repeats actions and behaviors, maybe trying multiple approaches to reach a goal (e.g., reaches for a toy, and when it rolls away, tries crawling toward it instead). | Shifts focus, attending to new information or participating in new activities, exploring new ways of using objects (e.g., arranges small manipulatives in a long curvy line and says 'Look! Snake!!'). | Adjusts actions and behaviors to solve a problem or adapt to changes in routines, with the assistance of an adult (e.g., uses a clip board when suggested by an adult when paper keeps tearing as they draw on the carpeted floor; when given two visual problem solving cards, child takes one to a friend and points to it). | Demonstrates flexibility in thinking and behavior, considers alternatives to solving a problem, and switches approaches (e.g., when gluing colored paper on a cardboard creation and the glue keeps dripping off, switches to tape). |

## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* **TECHNOLOGY**



Technology-based tools can be a valuable support for educators as they strive to create individualized learning experiences for young children. When used intentionally and in developmentally appropriate ways, technology can enhance learning and development—especially when children over the age of two engage with active digital media collaboratively with peers or adults.

However, it is critically important that technology usage in early learning environments be guided by research. Passive technology use (e.g., watching videos without interaction) is not appropriate. And according to the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (Caring for Our Children, Standard 2.2.0.3), children under the age of two should not be exposed to any digital media in early care and education settings (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2002).

As technology continues to evolve, adults must regularly evaluate the digital media children are exposed to and ensure it supports meaningful learning and development. Thoughtful integration of technology should always prioritize children's developmental needs, relationships, and active engagement.

# VIGNETTE 1: COCINA DE RIO

Therese Baca-Radler, PhD, Director of Early Childhood Programs, School of Education, Central New Mexico Community College

The sun is warming the air and burning off the last bit of morning dew as the four-year-olds in Ms. Sara's class begin taking off their coats, settling into their outdoor learning day in the neighborhood bosque along the Rio Grande. They place their coats on hangers strung between two cottonwood trees, and they dart off towards their favorite muddy spot along the river.

"Mira, ¿es perfecto?" yells Mateo, sitting at the edge of the mud patch, his hands already covered in thick, cool mud. "Let's make a restaurant! A muddy one." Maria grabs a stick and begins tracing lines in the earth. "This is the parking lot. The cars come here." She gestures dramatically, as she shows her friends where the cars are expected to park. She then draws a large circle around the pretend parking lot and declares, "This is the drive through." Nearby, Mateo carefully pats a mound of mud into a shape. "This is pastel de chocolate," he says, showing it to his friends and Ms. Sara. "But you can't eat it. It's just pretend." Roman, who wears a small foot brace, navigates uneven terrain with the help of a walking stick that his father made for him. Ms. Emi, Ms. Sara's teaching assistant, kneels beside him and tells him: "Roman, you are the head chef today!" She hands him a flat river stone and explains: "This can be your cutting board. Now, what will be on the menu?"

Roman's eyes light up. "Muddy Mole!" he states with pride.

With guidance from Ms. Sara, who often switches between English and Spanish, the group of children collaborate making a menu for their restaurant by etching symbols and pretend words into large slabs of dried mud using sticks and rocks. "¿Cómo se dice 'menu' en español?" asks Leo. "Es 'menu' en español también," replies Ms. Sara. "Algunas palabras son iguales en inglés y en español".

*Continued* →



The children organize seats by flattening large stones and placing logs in a semicircle. Maria arranges the seats under the large cottonwood tree and says, "This is for abuelita when she visits." Ms. Emi leans in. "Is your abuelita coming soon?" Maria nods, "She's coming from Española. We will make tortillas together. She makes the best tortillas." Mateo has created a host stand and announces, "¡Necesita una reserva!" He hands Ms. Sara a small stone to represent a pretend pager. Ms. Sara, playing along, asks, "¿Cuánto es el tiempo de espera?" Mateo looks up at her, pauses, and then replies, "10 minutos." As Ms. Sara pretends to wait, Roman calls out, "Order up! One muddy mole and two chocolate tamales!"

Maria rushes over holding a large flat piece of bark that she is pretending to be a serving tray. She assertively places the muddy food creations on the stone in front of Ms. Sara. "Here you go. Careful, it's hot!" Everyone bursts into laughter.
When it was time to go back to school, Ms. Emi shared with the children, "Okay, restaurant crew, let's close it up for the day. It is time to head back to the school."

The children scurry around. Mateo tells Roman, "We will hide the food so that animals don't eat it and we can open it again tomorrow". Ms. Emi reminds them that they only come to the bosque on Wednesdays.

The group finalizes putting everything as they found it, practicing their Leave No Trace rule, and they gather under the cottonwood's shade where the bus is parked waiting to take them back to the school for the day.

## Connection to Early Learning Standards

This learning experience provides children an opportunity to share about their families while also eliciting rich vocabulary in two languages. It demonstrates children's curiosity, communication skills, and identity and belonging.

## VIGNETTE 1: COCINA DE RIO, CONTINUED

**Domain: Approaches to Learning**
Standard 1.2.A The child shows curiosity and initiative in interactions and experiences.

**Domain: Communication, Language, and Literacy**
Standard 2.1.D The child understands and uses an expanding vocabulary.
Standard 2.1.E The child engages in conversation in their native language, English and/or sign language.

**Domain: Physical Development and Health**
Standard 3.1.C The child develops an understanding of healthy lifestyle choices.

**Domain: Relationships and Social Emotional Development**
Standard 4.2.A The child develops an understanding of their identity and belonging in relation to their family, culture, and community.
Standard 4.2.B The child develops a sense of social awareness and inclusion of others in their learning community.
Standard 4.2.C The child demonstrates knowledge of their community.
Standard 4.4.A The child engages and interacts with other children.
Standard 4.4.C The child works cooperatively with other children.



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* LITERACY

Early language and literacy skills developed during the preschool years lay the foundation for future reading and writing success. Children strengthen these skills through meaningful, playful interactions with adults and peers as they explore sounds, language structure, books, storytelling, and drawing. Grounded in the Science of Reading, developmentally appropriate practices focus on building vocabulary, oral language, letter-sound knowledge, and print awareness in preschool (National Early Literacy Panel, 2010; Burchinal et al., 2022), supporting the development of foundational reading skills—phonological awareness, decoding, and connected text reading—in kindergarten through third grade (Foorman et al., 2016). These early skills are essential precursors to proficient reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Adults must design and implement research-based learning experiences that are culturally and linguistically responsive, meeting all children where they are with special considerations for multilingual learners and children with disabilities and exceptionalities. Effective early literacy instruction contextually blends literacy practices with culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), honoring the multiple languages and literacies (Muhammad, 2018) present throughout New Mexico communities.



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Executive functioning is the set of cognitive skills that support children in managing their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to successfully plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and achieve goals in their daily lives. These skills are learned, beginning in early childhood, contribute to the ability to learn across domains, and are used throughout a child's life. Development of executive functioning skills during early childhood serves as the foundation for sustained impacts of early childhood experiences and facilitates future academic success (Zelazo & Carlson, 2020).

Executive function develops through three interconnected core skills that emerge and strengthen from birth through age five. Working memory allows children to hold information in mind while using it, such as remembering the steps to wash hands while actually doing them. Flexible thinking helps children adapt when situations change, like switching from outdoor to indoor play when it rains or finding a new solution when their first idea doesn't work. Inhibitory control enables children to manage impulses and focus attention, such as waiting for their turn or resisting the urge to grab a toy from a friend. Providing children with opportunities to problem solve through play is one of the best strategies for supporting children to develop these critical skills.

# 2. COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE, AND LITERACY

Communication, language, and literacy emphasizes the development of young children's ability to understand and use language to express thoughts, ideas, and needs. It includes listening, understanding, speaking and communication skills, vocabulary growth, comprehension, early reading and writing, and the use of multiple forms of communication. This domain supports children in building relationships, participating in their social contexts, and becoming confident, capable communicators and emergent readers and writers. Furthermore, this domain supports the development of multilingualism and recognizes the valuable linguistic resources that children from diverse language backgrounds bring to their learning environments while supporting communication, language, and literacy in multiple languages and modes.

## Subdomain 2.1. Listening and Communicating

### 2.1.A The child attends and responds to others in joint attention.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Attends to familiar adults through eye contact. Facial expressions and/or glances in direction of familiar adult touch and bodily movements (e.g., smiles to the adult when they invite them to eat in parentese).<br><br>Note: Parentese is a style of speaking where adults use a higher pitch, slower tempo, and exaggerated intonation. | Understands an increasing variety of communication including gestures, signs, words, and phrases (e.g., points to the stuffed fish on the shelf when an adult sings 'slippery fish'). | Engages in shared communication (e.g., responds to a peer's discovery of an insect on the playground by getting a bug catcher). | Participates in extended reciprocal interactions that include turn-taking and shared conversations with various adults and children, showing a depth of understanding on a variety of complex topics (e.g., works with a peer to recreate a story using animal figures). |

### 2.1.B The child listens and/or attends demonstrating understanding of language.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shows recognition of familiar sounds, words, and/or signs in a social context through facial expressions, gestures, sounds, AAC device, or words.<br><br>Note: Children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing have the ability to engage and attend to the various methods of communication around them including a variety of sign languages. | Understands an increasing number of words, simple directions, questions, and conversations (e.g., reaches for a book when the caregiver says, 'it's story time!'). | Understands and follows multi-step directions, even when some parts are related to things outside the immediate surroundings (e.g., 'Get your coat from your cubby, then meet me by the door'). | Demonstrates understanding of more complex language structures, by responding appropriately to multi-part questions and making connections between related ideas (e.g., when asked why their favorite book is 'Lucia the Luchadora,' the child responds, 'because she wears a cool mask!'). |

| 2.1.C The child develops the capacity to communicate using speech (in English and/or their native language), nonverbal gestures, and/or sign language. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Imitates, says or signs at least a few words or approximation of words that familiar adults understand (e.g., says 'wawa' for water).<br><br>Note: Babbling is a stage of language development where they produce strings of sounds or approximations that sound like adult speech, but are not actual words. | Begins to communicate more clearly and consistently through sound combinations, words that more closely resemble adult pronunciations, signs, and/or gestures (e.g., says in Spanish 'perro guau guau' when looking at a dog). | Uses clearer speech and/or signs so that familiar adults understand although may have some difficulty with some sounds in words (e.g., 'My brudder is at school'). | Communicates using more complex speech in their home language, English, and/or sign language for a variety of purposes related to real experiences and different members of their family and community. |
| **2.1.D The child understands and uses an expanding vocabulary.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Understands a few familiar words or signs and shows understanding by looking at the person or object when named (e.g., signs water and milk when an adult asks if they are thirsty). | Refers to people or objects with simple words and/or signs, sometimes reusing familiar terms in one or more languages for new things (e.g., calls a horse a cow or says 'moo'). | Understands and uses words frequently used in their context in one or more languages (e.g., the cactus is pokey and green). | Uses an increasing variety of words in one or more languages or signs to talk about familiar experiences (like ideas and actions) and to describe interests or sort items (e.g., categorizes and states that hawks and eagles are animals that fly and coyotes and black bears are animals that live on land). |
| **2.1.E The child engages in conversation in their native language, English, and/or sign language.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Coos, babbles, uses sounds and/or signs in social situations to express needs (e.g., screeches or says 'mamama' to get attention from caregivers; signs 'more' for food or drink).<br><br>Note: Children learning multiple languages may unintentionally blend words from different languages (also known as 'translanguaging'). | Uses one or two words, signs, and/or utterances to communicate wants, needs, and interests (e.g., combines Diné and English to say Yá'át'ééh morning). | Engages in increasingly complex back-and-forth exchanges during interactions by combining vocalizations, words or signs to communicate needs, wants, ideas, information, and interests. | Actively participates in more complex conversation through initiating, responding and elaborating with meaningful questions and responses (e.g., a child using an assistive technology device can respond to multiple questions asked by a teacher by navigating to different pages on their talker or another child says 'Quiero más arroz por favor'). |

| 2.1.F The child uses conventions of language in one or more languages (grammar). | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Combines babbles, coos, and verbal approximations with body movements and facial expressions. | Communicates using simple words or signs sometimes combining two words, often accompanied by gestures or pictures (e.g., 'Me jump'). | Combines several words into short phrases or sentences, correctly using basic grammar like plurals, pronouns, and regular verbs (e.g., says 'My cats are at home'). | Constructs more complex sentences that include multiple clauses, and makes references to future and past events (e.g., says 'I went to my cousin's birthday party at the farm and saw sheep and horses'). |

## 2.2. Foundational Literacy

| 2.2.A The child demonstrates an understanding of print awareness. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Shows an interest in books by mouthing, patting, and touching.<br><br>Note: Multilingual children may show stronger print understanding in their most familiar language. | Begins to recognize familiar symbols and pictures (e.g., sees corn and says/signs 'yum' and pretends to eat) and shows a strong interest in familiar stories by requesting them frequently. | Develops the ability to recognize familiar symbols, images, and text and understands that stories and pictures convey meaning (e.g., makes the connections that a green triangle made out of arrows means 'recycle'). | Understands that symbols, pictures, signs, and printed words convey meaning and develops an increasing understanding of the meaning carried by each, including differentiating types of script for different languages if the child is a multilingual learner (e.g., can identify different Pashto characters and begins to understand what they mean). |

| 2.2.B The child understands print conventions. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Explores pictures, images in the environment, and books as objects (e.g., looks and points to or pats the illustrations). | Engages with books by turning pages (e.g., turning multiple pages at a time or lifting the flaps or claps and makes noises as the book is read). | Shows awareness of how books work by pointing to the illustrations and words (or running fingers over braille), holds the book in the correct orientation, and responds to familiar patterns and rhymes in stories in the language(s) they speak. | Demonstrates knowledge of print conventions and book use by orienting books properly, identifies key features like the title page, and shows understanding of directionality by tracking print from left to right and top to bottom, navigates pages in order (e.g., says 'read 'Hungry Caterpillar' please' and turns to the strawberry page of the book). |

| 2.2.C The child develops phonological awareness (an understanding that words are made up of sounds). | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Experiments with simple sounds by cooing and babbling and begins to recognize sounds that pertain to their native language. | Demonstrates a range of reactions to spoken words, phrases, stories, and songs (e.g., including following along with an adult singing Apples and Bananas by approximating 'eee' and 'aye' and 'oh'). | Indicates awareness that spoken language is made up of individual sounds, begins to recognize similarities and differences between them (e.g., can identify the beginning sound in their name). | Displays an understanding that spoken language can be analyzed, manipulated and blended using words, syllables and individual sounds (e.g., can identify and clap out the syllables such as 'di-no-saur' or 'yel-low' or 'go'). |
| **2.2.D The child participates in rhyming and word play.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Responds to rhythmic language in rhymes and songs (e.g., bounces up and down when hearing 'The Wheels on the Bus' song). | Follows along with and repeats rhyming words and alliterative phrases from familiar books, songs, and nursery rhymes (e.g., the book 'Chicka Chicka Boom Boom' by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault). | Distinguishes between words that rhyme and words that do not rhyme. | Recognizes and produces rhyming sounds and words. |
| **2.2.E The child can identify letters in English and other alphabetic languages.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Attends to adults when read to. | Begins to understand the difference between pictures and printed text. | Recognizes letters and familiar words or text and can match some letter names to their printed form (e.g., recognizes the first letter of their name). | Correctly matches many letter names (some in uppercase and lowercase) to their printed form. |
| **2.2.F The child learns letter-sound correspondence in English and other alphabetic languages.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Attends to adults when they are spoken or signed to (e.g., child babbles dadada and the adult responds by saying 'Are you saying daddy? Duh-duh-duh-Daddy!'). | Notices the sounds that some letters make (e.g., attends to an adult while they emphasize the /b/ sound when reading the book 'Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?' and tries to imitate the adult's mouth movements). | Begins to connect letters with their corresponding sounds by producing several letter sounds and can identify multiple words that start with the same sound. | Accurately identifies and/or produces sounds associated with several letters or characters. |

## 2.3. Foundational Reading

### 2.3.A The child demonstrates an interest in literacy activities (e.g., community and cultural knowledge experiences, storytelling, read-alouds, chanting, singing, engaging with books, and writing).

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shows an interest in and attends to literacy activities (e.g., knows when a chant or song ends). | Follows along in literacy activities modeled by adults (e.g., gestures with 'la araña pequeñita' and watches for the next part of the song). | Participates in literacy activities in a variety of ways (e.g., requests favorite books and then repeats common phrases in the story). | Shows growing interest and participation in literacy activities for longer periods and with increasing independence (e.g., shows initiative during block play by bringing paper and pencils to sketch out a building plan). |

### 2.3.B The child demonstrates story comprehension.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Engages with books during shared reading by looking at pictures and/or touching tactile elements in adapted books with an adult (e.g., nodding and smiling). | Joins in storytelling, reading, and/or singing by pointing at illustrations, touching tactile features, and saying or signing a few familiar words. | Recognizes and recalls basic details about characters or events after engaging with the story more than once. | Demonstrates comprehension of key story elements, such as characters, events, and their sequence, and applies this understanding to anticipate what might happen next. |

### 2.3.C The child demonstrates emergent reading behaviors.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Begins to vocalize when looking at a book (e.g., uttering when seeing a picture of a puppy). | Imitates reading using tone, volume, approximations, and simple words and/or signs (e.g., follows along with the tone that the adult uses and signs 'please' when reading the book 'Please, Baby, Please' by Spike Lee). | Identifies the first letters and/or their own name in print or braille. | Recognizes more familiar symbols and/or print and may be able to 'read' (identify) simple words, predictable text, environmental print, and signs adjusting the tone and volume to follow along (e.g., uses different voices for different characters in the book 'How Do You Hug a Porcupine?' by Laurie Isop or can identify peer names when printed). |

## 2.4. Foundational Writing

### 2.4.A The child understands writing as a form of communication and recording information.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Engages in early mark-making by producing spontaneous scribbles. | Begins to make more deliberate marks to draw lines, circle-like shapes, and/or other intentional marks (e.g. make back-and-forth marks with fat crayons and says 'I'm writing'). | Uses early writing forms, such as scribbles, drawing, letter-like forms, and letter strings to communicate with intention to represent ideas (e.g., scribbling food orders while playing restaurant). | Expresses ideas and thoughts and can add details in their drawing and writing for the purposes of communication or recording information (e.g., creates a book about their pet with drawings on each page and dictates text for an adult to write, then 'reads' it back to friends).<br><br>Note: With support, children can also engage with and leverage various appropriate digital tools to create and share early writing. |

### 2.4.B The child develops awareness and representation of their own identity through name recognition and writing.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shows recognition when hearing their name spoken (e.g., turns head, makes eye contact, smiles when caregiver says their name). | Identifies self in photographs or mirrors; begins to show interest when their written name is pointed out (e.g., on cubby, artwork, or belongings). | Recognizes own written name in various contexts; attempts to write or make marks representing their name; identifies first letter of their name in environmental print; may begin to write the first letter of own name. | Writes first name independently (may still be developing proper letter formation); recognizes and identifies first letters of family members' and friends' names. |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* BENEFITS OF MULTILINGUALISM

Research reinforces what multilingual communities have long demonstrated: speaking multiple languages provides substantial cognitive and social benefits. Learning more than one language is a pathway for social and cultural connections, and language is a pathway for social and cultural connections that strengthen the child and family's identity. In communities where native speaker populations are declining, language revitalization can be a key aspect of keeping close ties to generational traditions, knowledge, and bonds.

Early childhood is an optimal time when the brain is most receptive for language learning (Espinosa, 2013). Care and attention should be taken to support multilingual development by centering the child's home languages, exposing children to language-rich environments, and highlighting multilingualism as an asset for the child and the family. It is also important to recognize that young bilingual or multilingual children will demonstrate development in different ways than monolingual children. Educators should become familiar with the characteristics of each language to help understand children's development and support the development of multiple languages being learned. Collaboration with families increases a child's multilingual learning across the contexts of home and school.

# VIGNETTE 2: LEO'S LIGHT PATTERNS

Alisha Walls, Director and Childcare provider, State of the Arts LLC
It's a rainy Wednesday morning in the cozy in-home early learning environment. The room is filled with the gentle hum of quiet play. Soft, ambient light fills the space, complemented by the glow of a wooden lightboard set up in one corner. A small group of children, aged 3 to 4 years, explore different play areas, but Leo, a curious and observant four-year-old, is particularly drawn to the lightboard today.

Leo picks up a handful of colorful translucent pegs—reds, blues, and yellows—and begins carefully placing them into the holes on the light board. He arranges them with intense focus, slowly building what seems to be a pattern. As he works, he softly narrates to himself, "Red, blue, yellow. Red, blue... hmm, what comes next?" His brow furrows in thought before he triumphantly adds a yellow peg. He picks up a flashlight and shines it through the peg boards. Ms. Alisha, the early learning educator, crouches nearby, observing quietly. She documents Leo's actions on paper, making notes on his problem-solving approach and pattern recognition. She gently prompts, "Leo, I noticed you're making a pattern. Can you tell me about the colors that you used?" Leo nods enthusiastically. "It's like a rainbow, but not all the colors. Just the ones I like best." "That's a great pattern," Ms. Alisha responds. "What colors do you like best?" Leo pointed and said, "You see red, blue, red, blue". As Leo continues his pattern, he glances over at the nearby reptile habitat, where the class gecko, Spike, is basking under a heat lamp. "Do you think Spike sees the lights?" Leo asks. "That's an interesting question," Ms. Alisha replies. "What do you think?"

Maya, another child, joined in and said, "He has eyes, so he can, see?" She begins to join Leo's play by putting pegs on the board one by one using multiple colors. Maya carefully placed a red peg next to Leo's. "Red and blue make purple," she says softly, recalling color-mixing from the previous day. A third child gently taps the pegs, watching the way they catch the light. Ms. Alisha approaches quietly and asks, "What happens if we put two colors next to each other?" The children begin rearranging the pegs, giggling as they test their ideas. Leo tilts his head, considering. "Maybe. But he likes his warm light better. This one's more for seeing colors." Together, they begin filling the board with their combined pattern, negotiating which colors to use and where to put them. Occasionally, they swap ideas, laugh, or even disagree, but with gentle redirection from Ms. Alisha, they problem-solve and continue their collaboration.

*Continued* →

**Connections to Early Learning Standards**
This learning experience touches on multiple domains of early childhood development as outlined in Early Learning Standards (ELS). Here's how Leo's lightboard play supports and reflects his growth.

**Domain: Approaches to Learning**
Standard 1.1.A The child exhibits imagination and creativity.
Standard 1.2.A The child shows curiosity and initiative in interactions and experiences.
Standard 1.2.B The child displays persistence and pursues challenges through problem-solving.

**Domain: Communication, Language and Literacy**
Standard 2.1.A The child attends and responds to others in joint attention.
Standard 2.1.D The child understands and uses an expanding vocabulary.
Standard 2.1.E The child engages in conversation in their native language, English, or sign language.

**Domain: Physical Development and Health**
Standard 3.2.A The child develops fine motor control and coordination.

**Domain: Relationships and Social Emotional Development**
Standard 4.4.A The child engages and interacts with other children.
Standard 4.4.C The child works cooperatively with other children.

**Domain: Thinking, Reasoning, and Knowledge**
Standard 5.1.E The child sorts, compares, and creates patterns with objects.
Standard 5.2.A The child investigates the physical and natural worlds.
Standard 5.2.D The child develops an understanding of cause and effect.

# 3. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Physical health and development focuses on children's growing ability to move their bodies, care for themselves, and make healthy choices. It includes large and fine motor skills, sensory development and integration, self-care routines, nutrition, safety, and physical activity. This domain supports overall well-being by promoting strength, coordination, independence, and skills that contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

## 3.1. Daily Routines, Health and Nutrition

### 3.1.A The child displays self-help skills in daily routines.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participates in daily routines and communicates basic needs to adults (e.g., lifts arms during dressing, shakes hands when they need to be wiped clean). | Actively demonstrates interest in and willingness to participate in daily routines (e.g., gets diaper bag, helps put toys away when asked). | Demonstrates some initiative with daily self-care routines (e.g., washes hands at sink, uses visual schedule to point to what is next in routine). | Engages in a variety of behaviors outside in the cold, cleans up without being prompted, gets white cane before lining up to go outside, finds a fidget toy to use before joining large group. |

### 3.1.B The child explores a variety of healthy foods.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tries a range of solid foods and begins to self-feed with small, soft finger foods (e.g., pieces of banana, may begin to vocalize tastes they like and dislike). | Demonstrates feeding skills and chewing foods of various textures and tastes (e.g., stew with vegetables and meat, uses a spoon or other utensil). | Exhibits food preferences, including favorites, and chooses between two options when offered (e.g., selects red or green chile, talks about foods eaten at home). | Eats a diverse variety of foods and understands that different types of food contribute to growth and health (e.g., jerky, watermelon, talks/signs/uses speech generating device about building strong bones.) |

### 3.1.C The child develops an understanding of healthy lifestyle choices.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Recognizes and responds to basic health routines (e.g., smiles or becomes alert when it's time to eat, helps to find their special comfort object when it is time to sleep). | Engages in healthy habits as part of daily routines or when prompted (e.g., gets excited to participate in morning movement activity). | Demonstrates knowledge of their need for healthy habits (e.g., finds a quiet spot when tired, uses noise canceling headphones in loud environments). | Demonstrates an understanding of healthy lifestyle choices (e.g., talks about vegetables being good for the body, communicates a need for rest). |

| 3.1.D The child develops an understanding of safe behaviors. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Shows awareness of safety through basic reactions (e.g., stays close to caregivers in new environments). | Identifies safe and unsafe situations with support (e.g., avoids touching hot food, follows adult guidance when crossing the street). | Participates in safety routines and begins to explain why they are important (e.g., joins fire drills, says 'fire is dangerous,' maneuvers body intentionally on outdoor equipment). | Independently applies safety knowledge across settings (e.g., moves obstacles from walkways, reminds peers to walk indoors, uses scissors safely). |
| **3.2. Fine Motor** | | | |
| **3.2.A The child develops fine motor control and coordination.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Uses hands or feet (children with some physical disabilities may adapt and use their feet and toes for fine motor activities) to move objects or make contact with people. | Uses hands to explore objects with a variety of actions (e.g., rolls a ball, opens and closes a latch on a toy, uses crayons). | Uses hands and fingers in more complex and refined ways (e.g., zipping, draws with markers, uses paint brushes). | Uses tools that require eye hand coordination (e.g., uses writing tools in pincer grasp to draw, write and make letter-like shapes and/or letters, strings beads). |
| **3.2.B The child develops fine motor skills for writing.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Reaches for and manipulates objects with eye-hand coordination. | Makes marks with greater control by using a variety of writing tools using a full-fist grasp. | Shows growing coordination when drawing or making marks by using thumb and fingers of one hand to hold writing tools. | Draws with a variety of mark making materials on surfaces. |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework to support and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn (CAST, 2024). It also acknowledges the idea of learner variability in every group of children. While children with disabilities may especially benefit from learning environments and explorations that rely on the principles of UDL, these practices enhance learning opportunities for all children by providing multiple means of engagement (why of learning), representation (what of learning), and expression (how of learning). By designing learning experiences that are accessible and flexible from the start, educators create inclusive environments where every child can participate meaningfully, demonstrate their understanding in various ways, and develop to their fullest potential.

## 3.3. Large Motor

### 3.3.A The child uses gross motor control independently, including balance, spatial awareness, and stability.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gains control of head and trunk; stabilizes arms and legs to support sitting and early movement, such as pulling to stand or walking. | Coordinates arms and legs to move independently within the environment such as crawling and walking. | Demonstrates strength and coordination in purposeful movement (e.g., climbs outdoor equipment, walks up and down stairs without support, uses wheelchair or walker to move from table to the sink). | Uses large muscle coordination to engage in complex and varied motor tasks (e.g., balances on a beam, kicks a ball while running, hops on one foot, is able to steer wheelchair up and down the accessibility ramp). |

## 3.4. Sensory Integration

### 3.4.A The child uses sensory information to guide movements and explore.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Uses sensory input to explore and understand objects and people in their surroundings, seeks or avoids certain textures, sounds, or movements based on sensory preferences (e.g., puts objects in mouth, a child with tactile sensitivity may pull hands away from finger paint, while another child may seek out soft textures by repeatedly touching a stuffed animal). | Adapts movements and actions based on sensory and perceptual information and adapts movements based on individual sensory needs (e.g., navigates varying surfaces like cement to dirt, walks slowly on uneven surfaces, a child averse to messy or sticky hands plays with slime through a plastic bag). | Coordinates sensory information to adjust interactions with objects and materials, uses sensory strategies to successfully complete tasks (e.g., a child with auditory sensitivity wears headphones during music time but still participates by feeling drum vibrations, a child with proprioceptive needs pushes heavy blocks to help organize their body before sitting for circle time, puts lids on different size containers, notices a ball rolling under a table and crawls under to retrieve it). | Integrates sensory information using perceptual cues about objects and body positioning to solve problems and perform increasingly complex activities, independently uses learned sensory strategies across different activities (e.g., a child who needs movement breaks takes walking breaks during tabletop activities, adjusts body position to fit through a tunnel). |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* KINDERGARTEN TRANSITIONS

The transition to kindergarten is a critical period for children and their families and provides an opportunity to establish strong connections that can have a positive long-term impact on their full school experience (Jiang et al. 2021; Kauerz & Schaper, 2021). Early Learning Standards are an important tool for creating shared understandings between a child's PreK setting, their families, and their kindergarten teacher. The standards are a bridge for supporting a child's current skills and knowledge to their next steps in their learning progression.

# VIGNETTE 3: CURIOSITY IN ACTION: SCIENCE LAB ADVENTURES

Brandi Holding, Owner and Teacher, Little Learners

The morning light filters through the classroom windows, laying gentle stripes of gold across the science lab table. Small clear jars catch the sun, their contents being vinegar, baking soda, and food coloring shimmering like secret ingredients in a magician's workshop. The air is already alive with low humming chatter. You can feel the anticipation ripple through the room as children drift closer, eyes wide, fingertips twitching in readiness.

Madeleine claims the first spot at the tray of wet cornstarch. She pinches the dropper bulb, releasing a bead of blue food coloring that blooms outward in slow, silky tendrils. "I'm making a rainbow!" she announces, her voice carrying equal parts pride and wonder. Before anyone can respond, Journey leans in, adding her own drop of red. The colors delicately swirl together, then explode outward the moment Madeleine places the cotton swab dipped in dish soap. "It's running away from me," Journey whispers, tracking with her eyes the sudden retreat of the colors. Her words are part observation, part quiet astonishment.

Kneeling beside them, the educator doesn't rush to explain. Instead, she asks, "What do you think makes the colors move like that?" The question hovers in the air, inviting possibility. The children pause, brows furrowed, each turning the mystery over in their minds.

Across the room, another group huddles around small cups that have been dubbed 'The Volcanoes'. Vinegar in tiny pitchers and food coloring pooled in plastic caps await like liquid jewels. Nolan pours with slow precision until a froth of red bubbles rises, spills over the edges, and snakes down the sides in curling rivulets. "My lava's faster than yesterday's," he notes, comparing today's outcome to their colorless test run the day before. Scarlett grins

*Continued* →



and tips in extra vinegar, gasping as the foam surges. They trade theories in animated bursts, maybe more vinegar makes the "lava" stronger, maybe the color changes it, maybe the volcano itself is "deciding" how big the eruption should be. No idea is dismissed; each is met with nods, smiles, or another test to see what might happen next.

The air is lively with giggles, overlapping questions, careful "oohs" and "ahhs" when something unexpected occurs. Words like "reaction" and "chemical change" slip easily into conversation, grounding their play in scientific investigations and discoveries. Even children who usually linger at the edges are drawn in, compelled by the movement, the color, the fizzing sound that punctuates the room.

Documentation quietly happens alongside the learning processes: quick photos of tiny hands gripping droppers, quotes scribbled on sticky notes, snapshots of concentrated faces mid-experiment. These artifacts capture not just the experiences, but the thinking, the collaboration, and the joy that powers them.



## Connection to Early Learning Standards

What unfolded in the Science Lab was more than two neat experiments. It was an intricate dance of curiosity, trial and error, and social connection. These experiences illustrate multiple domains of early childhood development as outlined in Early Learning Standards (ELS).

**Domain: Approaches to Learning**
Standard 1.2. The children demonstrated

## VIGNETTE 3: CURIOSITY IN ACTION: SCIENCE LAB ADVENTURES, CONTINUED

persistence while pursuing challenges through problem-solving; returning to ideas, making small adjustments, and testing again.
Standard 1.3.C The children also showed their ability to adapt attention, actions and behaviors (cognitive flexibility) as they considered alternatives to solving problems and at times switching approaches.
Standard 1.3.B The children enhanced their ability to regulate impulses and responses by waiting for the chemical reaction to take place and by waiting their turns.

**Domain: Physical Development and Health**
Standard 3.2. The children's use of precise tools (droppers, measuring cups) and manipulations of materials strengthened their fine motor skills and eye hand coordination.

**Domain: Communication, Language, and Literacy**
Standard 2.1.D The environment encouraged the use of emerging vocabulary in meaningful context. Words like "mix," "separate," and "reaction" were not just repeated, they were applied to explain, compare, and predict.

**Domain: Relationships and Social Emotional Development**
Standard 4.2.B The peer-to-peer interactions included negotiating turns, listening actively to one another's hypotheses, and celebrating each other's successes often without adult prompting, as the children developed a sense of social awareness and inclusion within their learning community.

**Domain: Thinking, Reasoning, and Knowledge**
Standard 5.2.A The children engaged in inquiry, predicting outcomes, observing changes, and drawing connections between actions and results as they investigated their physical world.
Standards 5.2.C and 5.2.D. The children also recognized their actions as it impacts their environment and applied their understanding of cause and effect as they added substances and saw the effect of their additions.



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES

Children develop at their own pace and in their own unique ways. While early learning standards describe typical developmental progressions, individual children may reach milestones earlier or later, and some may follow different pathways altogether (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). Children with disabilities, including those with developmental delays, sensory differences, physical disabilities, or other diverse learning characteristics, bring valuable strengths and contributions to early learning environments.

Supportive and responsive early childhood programs recognize and celebrate this natural variation by providing flexible, individualized and differentiated supports that honor each child's abilities and potential. Rather than expecting all children to demonstrate skills in the same way or at the same time, educators and caregivers design environments and experiences that ensure every child can participate meaningfully in learning.
Examples of inclusive practices include:

- Visual supports: Picture schedules, visual timers, and labeled spaces help all children understand routines and transitions
- Communication supports: Sign language, picture communication systems, and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices ensure all children can express themselves
- Sensory accommodations: Quiet spaces, fidget tools, and varied seating options support different sensory needs
- Physical access: Adapted materials, positioning supports, and accessible play spaces ensure all children can participate
- Individualized instruction: Small group, peer partnerships, and flexible pacing are structures designed to meet diverse learning needs
- Specialized materials: Braille books, large-print materials, and tactile learning tools support children with vision differences
- Assistive technology: Switch-adapted toys, tablets with accessibility features, and adapted writing tools expand participation opportunities

# 4. RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Relationships and social emotional development centers on how children understand and manage emotions, form secure relationships, and navigate social interactions. It includes self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, cooperation, and the ability to build positive connections with adults and other children. The skills developed in this domain promote identity formation, mental health and resilience, as well as a sense of belonging in family and community.

## 4.1. Emotional Self-Regulation

### Standard 4.1.A The child demonstrates self-awareness.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shows beginning awareness of own body and their own abilities (e.g., stretches their arms and legs excitedly after rolling on their stomach). | Shows awareness of self as an individual in relationship with those around them (e.g., points at themselves in the family photo and then points and says 'my dama!' (dad in Tiwa). | Identifies physical sensations and emotions while developing a deeper understanding of their own emotional experiences (e.g., can identify what they are feeling in the moment by either pointing to a chart or naming the emotion). | Demonstrates confidence by making decisions, sharing preferences, and showing belief in their ability to complete tasks and embrace new challenges (e.g., excited to volunteer as lunch helper by helping to set the table). |

### 4.1.B The child demonstrates emotional development and expression.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Begins to communicate basic needs and foundational emotions to others (e.g., coos and brings hands to mouth when hungry or squeals happily when their adult blows bubbles). | Displays an increasing variety of emotions and moods with more clear and direct expressions and begins to recognize those feelings in self and others (e.g., smiles when the adult says they are going for a walk and gets upset when they are not ready to come back inside). | Becomes more skilled at expressing emotions through appropriate movements, behaviors, and words (e.g., claps and cheers when excited and says or signs 'happy' or folds arms and turns around when frustrated and says or signs 'I'm mad'). | Adjusts to different socially and culturally accepted situations and unfamiliar environments by responding with appropriate emotions and behaviors (e.g., uses an inside voice when visiting the museum on a field trip). |

### 4.1.C The child develops emotional regulation.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Seeks out comfort and support from caregivers when upset, tired, hungry and when wanting to play (e.g., raises arms to be picked up and held). | Uses simple strategies to manage emotions with adult support (e.g., signs or says 'help' when getting frustrated). | Adjusts actions and becomes more flexible in managing daily routines, transitions, and different social or cultural expectations (e.g., waits for elders to finish speaking). | Demonstrates the ability to regulate and express emotions appropriately across different settings, including coping with separations and transitions (e.g., can choose tools and strategies such as deep breathing, looking at family photos, or sensory input to help process their emotions and return to a regulated state). |

| 4.1.D The child demonstrates personal responsibility. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Recognizes and responds to the emotional cues of others (e.g., can mirror smiles, clapping, and even tears). | Responds with care and concern toward others (e.g., pats the back of a child who is crying, attempting to comfort them). | Takes responsibility for personal belongings and shared materials (e.g., can help put away toys and materials when it's time to clean up). | Understands and accepts the results of their own behavior and actions (e.g., says or signs 'I'm sorry' and gives back a toy after taking it from another child). |

## 4.2. Identity, Belonging, and Community

| 4.2.A The child develops an understanding of their identity and belonging in relation to their family, culture, and community. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Develops a sense of self in connection with others and their social environment (e.g., points to different family members when prompted). | Acknowledges and accepts family and trusted people into their circle of relationships, while learning about different family roles and how families and people can be alike or different (e.g., signs and says 'hi Nana!' to their elderly neighbor who is hard of hearing when they visit on the porch). | Builds a sense of self by recognizing their family and cultural background, expressing pride in their identity, and appreciating themselves as unique, capable, and socially connected individuals (e.g., is excited to eat culturally specific foods and recognizes the unique context the food is prepared in. The child says 'Grandma makes blue corn mush for me when I visit her'). | Expresses cultural influences from home, neighborhood, and broader community (e.g., speaks proudly about attending their community's ceremony and the regalia that they wore). |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* INFANTS

Children experience an incredible amount of growth and development during their earliest years, forming more than 1 million new neural connections every second (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). Infancy is a critical time for children and adults that care for them. We acknowledge that this early phase of development can be full of both joyful and challenging moments for caregivers. Special considerations to highlight the importance of secure and responsive relationships as the bedrock for all other aspects of learning and development must be taken. These foundational experiences are the springboard for all future development, behavior, and health (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). Creating a supportive network for children and families is critical to reinforce the development and learning that happens in the early years, particularly for sensitive periods in vision, hearing, language, and developing responses to social cues (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

The infant progression in the ELS is intentionally broad as this time in development is highly variable, with significant individual differences in timing and expression of developmental milestones, making narrow age bands for standards inappropriate and potentially misleading for understanding typical infant development. As described in this progression, the focus should be on providing strong, secure relationships and engaging environments that support children's natural curiosity and exploration.

| 4.2.B The child develops a sense of social awareness and inclusion of others in their learning community. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Shows growing responsiveness in social interactions by engaging differently with familiar and unfamiliar adults, and forming consistent, reciprocal interactions with caregivers (e.g., engages in back-and-forth 'conversations' with familiar adults, taking turns making sounds and waiting for responses). | Develops awareness of similarities and differences among people while showing increasing sensitivity to peers' feelings (e.g., notices when a friend is sad and offers comfort). | Shows appreciation and ease with human diversity, uses inclusive language to describe differences, and builds meaningful, caring relationships with individuals across diverse backgrounds with different characteristics including gender, race, ethnicity, disability, culture, language, and family structures (e.g., a child says 'that's how he talks' when another child approaches to watch a peer use an assistive technology device, welcomes a new friend by learning how to say hello in their home language). | Communicates personal needs and stands up for their and others' rights, shows confidence and ability to take action—independently or with others—against bias and discrimination (e.g., after reading the book 'We Are Water Protectors' by Carole Lindstrom, children want to make signs advocating for water rights or stands up for a peer who is being excluded from play). |
| **4.2.C The child demonstrates knowledge of their community.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Feels secure and comfortable in familiar routines and daily activities, while relying on the emotional support of a trusted adult as a foundation for exploring their surroundings (e.g., begins to crawl off the blanket onto the grass and looks back to the adult before reaching for the flowers and tall grass nearby). | Develops trusting relationships with familiar adults and begins to recognize routine sounds and sights in their environment (e.g., recognizes the sound of the jets flying out of the nearby military base, gets excited when hearing the familiar sound of trash trucks on collection day). | Identifies and describes the physical characteristics of familiar spaces such as the home, learning environment, and community (e.g., points out they cross the railroad tracks and pass the grain elevators to get to auntie's farm). | Understands how their community functions, identifies different community roles, seeing themselves as active members (e.g., asks about the farrier and the veterinarian coming down to see the horses on the neighbor's ranch and wants to help feed the horses when the veterinarian visits). |
| **4.2.D The child develops a sense of rights and responsibilities within a democratic society (civics).** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Shows distress when experiencing unfair treatment and responds positively to fair treatment (e.g., cries when a toy is taken unexpectedly, calms when adults explain turn-taking). | Demonstrates an emerging understanding of fairness in daily interactions (e.g., may briefly wait when told 'wait, then your turn'). | Begins to understand the reasons for rules in the home and learning environment (e.g., can describe classroom expectations like walking feet and gentle touch). | Identifies and describes fairness and unfairness, helps make collaborative group choices, and can explain why the group choice is fair (e.g., 'everyone got to vote' on what book to read at closing circle). |

## 4.3. Relationships with Adults

### 4.3.A The child engages and interacts with adults

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Demonstrates strong attachment to primary caregivers while remaining cautious around unfamiliar adults. | Seeks security by initiating communication and engaging with familiar adults, while also accepting guidance and requesting support as needed (e.g., seeks comfort from familiar teachers when upset and shows excitement when favorite adults arrive, while remaining cautious with new visitors). | Engages in interactions and communication with an increasing number of adults, both familiar and new (e.g., a child smiles when she hears the librarian speak Spanish and asks, '¿Hablas español?' or a child says 'it's braille' when they pick up a book from the library). | Seeks support from familiar and unfamiliar adults and responds positively to their guidance and direction (e.g., when visiting the local bakery with their family, the child can point out or verbalize to the baker what they would like and follows directions from community helpers like librarians or store clerks). |

### 4.3.B The child develops relationships of mutual trust and respect with adults.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Forms strong bonds with familiar adults who offer consistent and responsive care (e.g., shows excitement when favorite caregiver enters the room, reaching toward them and smiling). | Displays trust and emotional closeness through comfortable and positive interactions with adults (e.g., shares toys or food with trusted adults and seeks them out for comfort when hurt or tired). | Takes initiative and engages in more complex back-and-forth interactions with familiar adults (e.g., seeks help when stuck on a board game, then asks the adult to play with them and takes turns). | Demonstrates ability to engage in reciprocal interactions and builds meaningful connections with various adults, including family, extended family, and community members (e.g., engages in conversations with family friends during community events, sharing stories and asking questions). |

## 4.4. Relationships with Children

### 4.4.A The child engages and interacts with other children.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Develops an awareness of, initiates, and engages in social interactions with other children (e.g., shows interest in other children by watching them play and occasionally reaching toward or touching them gently). | Demonstrates growing social skills by observing and engaging in play, beginning to use language in peer interactions, and participates in group activities with an increasing number of children (e.g., children use scoops and trowels to mix up the soil together while in the garden). | Engages in social play maintaining positive relationships with peers (e.g., hands a visual to a friend that says, 'Want to play?' and proceeds to engage in a turn-taking game in the dramatic play area). | Initiates and engages in play and social interaction with a diverse group of peers, exchanging ideas and shared experiences (e.g., cooperatively participates in creating a group mural at the local community center exchanging ideas about colors, designs, and shared experiences while working together). |

| 4.4.B The child develops relationships of mutual trust and respect with other children. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Expresses concern and care toward others (e.g., shows care for other children by offering comfort when they see someone crying or bringing a toy to share). | Builds peer relationships over time through ongoing interactions and shows growing awareness and responsiveness to the emotions of others (e.g., makes space for other children to sit nearby, calling their friend by name and patting the open space next to them signaling them to sit). | Develops friendships by identifying others' emotions and becoming more aware of how their actions impact those around them (e.g., points to a picture of a happy face when asked how sharing a toy made a friend feel and adjusts their behavior based on friends' reactions). | Demonstrates growing respect by acknowledging others' feelings and responding with kindness and consideration (e.g., makes a card and asks a teacher to write, 'Happy Birthday!' for their friend or reports to an adult when a peer is in distress). |
| **4.4.C The child works cooperatively with other children.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Enjoys peers and develops interaction skills during play (e.g., hands blocks to another child or plays alongside others with similar toys). | Socializes with peers and develops cooperative skills during play, routines, and group activities (e.g., signs or says 'my turn' when going down the slide on the playground 'you go after me'). | Develops the skills to work through minor conflicts with peers using discussion, compromise, and negotiation (e.g., during clean-up time, children negotiate who will put away which toys, with one saying 'I'll do blocks, you do dress-up clothes, okay?'). | Demonstrates communication and problem-solving skills by expressing preferences, resolving conflicts constructively, and working cooperatively within a peer group (e.g., when building with magnetic tiles, two children both want to place the final piece and decide to each hold one end and place it together). |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* TRAUMA AND RESILIENCY INFORMED PRACTICE

Trauma-informed practices that support resiliency in early childhood education are approaches in which adults recognize the trauma that a child and their family may be experiencing, understand how trauma affects development and behavior, and develop strategies to create safe, supportive environments that promote healing. The period of early childhood provides a unique opportunity to support children in overcoming difficulties that could otherwise persist throughout their lives (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Trauma can include experiences such as abuse, neglect, domestic violence, community violence, natural disasters, family separation, poverty, discrimination, or medical trauma. Additionally, historical and intergenerational trauma may affect children and families from marginalized communities. Early childhood education is an opportunity to support resilience by providing developmentally appropriate experiences for active learning.

Trauma-informed practices emphasize building trusting relationships, creating predictable routines, teaching emotional regulation skills, and recognizing that challenging behaviors may be adaptive responses to difficult experiences. These approaches focus on what happened to a child rather than what is wrong with the child. By implementing trauma-informed strategies, early childhood educators can help children develop resilience, strengthen their capacity for learning, and build foundations for healthy development across all domains.

# VIGNETTE 4: CONCENTRATION IN THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE

The room hums with the quiet sounds of concentration: the soft clink of wooden rings being placed on a dowel, the quiet click-click of locks opening and closing on a lock box, the contented babbling of an infant reaching for a mobile overhead. Soft rugs mark individual workspaces on the polished wood floor. Along the walls, child-height shelves hold purposefully arranged materials—each basket, each tray positioned with intention.

Eight-month-old Ava lies on her back beneath a wooden mobile, her eyes tracking the gentle dance of geometric shapes suspended above her. Her hand reaches up—once, twice—fingers grasping at air before making contact. The mobile shifts. Her whole body stills, eyes widening. She reaches again, more deliberately this time, her hand closing around a wooden octagon. A smile spreads across her face as she brings it toward her mouth, exploring its smooth edges with lips and tongue.

Nearby, 16-month-old Josiah navigates his way to the practical life shelf with determined steps. He's been watching the older children work with the ball drop activity all week. Now, reaching the low shelf, he carefully lifts a small wooden box with a round hole in the top and three brightly colored fabric balls resting beside it. He carries the box to an empty rug, settling down with a soft plop.
Josiah picks up a red ball, studies the hole in the box, then carefully pushes it through. Thunk. His eyes widen at the sound. He lifts the hinged lid, retrieves the ball, and the process begins again. Pushes the ball. Open the lid. Take it out. His movements become more confident with each repetition, his small hands growing surer. "Ball!" he announces, pointing. "In!"

At a low table, 28-month-old Amara is deeply engaged with a lock box. The wooden box has four different locks across its front—a simple latch, a hook-and-eye, a small bolt, and a barrel bolt. She's been working on this for several minutes, her tongue peeking out in concentration as she slides the bolt to the left. Click. The satisfaction

*Continued* →



to reveal the small treasure hidden inside—a smooth wooden egg. She holds it up to the light, admiring it, then closes the lid and begins working the locks again, this time locking them all closed.
"I locked it," she announces softly, testing each lock to make sure it's secure. Her fingers move with growing confidence from one lock to the next, her problem-solving visible in the way she pauses, examines each mechanism, and adjusts her approach.

### Connection to Early Learning Standards

The Children's House reveals learning through purposeful, self-directed activities. Each child, at their own developmental stage, demonstrates the natural unfolding of skills and understanding as outlined in the Early Learning Standards.

**Domain: Approaches to Learning**

Standard 1.2.B The children displayed persistence and pursued challenges through problem-solving—Josiah returning repeatedly to the ball drop, Amara working through each lock mechanism, and Ava persistently reaching for the mobile until achieving success.
Standard 1.3.A Each child built their capacity to retain and use information immediately (working memory) as they remembered the sequence of actions needed—Josiah recalling the steps of posting and retrieving, Amara remembering which direction each lock moves.
Standard 1.3.C The children enhanced their ability to adapt attention, actions, and behaviors (cognitive flexibility) as Ava adjusted her reaching strategy and Amara modified her approach for each different lock mechanism.

**Domain: Physical Development and Health**

Standard 3.2.A The children developed fine motor control through purposeful manipulation—Ava grasping the geometric shapes, Josiah's precise posting of balls through the hole, and Amara's intricate work with various lock mechanisms.

## VIGNETTE 4: CONCENTRATION IN THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE, CONTINUED

**Domain: Communication, Language, and Literacy**
Standard 2.1.C The children developed capacity to communicate using speech and gestures—Ava's contented babbling during exploration, Josiah's triumphant announcements of "Ball!" and "In!", and Amara's quiet self-narration "I locked it."
Standard 2.1.A All three children demonstrated joint attention by engaging with materials while remaining aware of others in their environment, showing the foundation of shared communication experiences.

**Domain: Relationships and Social-Emotional Development**
Standard 4.1.A Each child demonstrated self-awareness through their selection of appropriately challenging materials—Josiah choosing an activity he'd been observing, Amara selecting work that matched her emerging abilities.
Standard 4.1.B The children showed emotional expression through their visible satisfaction—Ava's spreading smile, Josiah's widening eyes of delight, and Amara's immediate expression of satisfaction with each successful lock.
Standard 4.1.D The children demonstrated personal responsibility through their careful handling of materials and respect for others' work spaces on individual rugs.

**Domain: Thinking, Reasoning, and Knowledge**
Standard 5.2.A Each child engaged in scientific inquiry through systematic exploration—Ava discovering cause and effect with the mobile, Josiah investigating object permanence with the ball drop, and Amara experimenting with mechanical operations.
Standard 5.1.C The children demonstrated spatial reasoning—understanding how objects move through space (Ava reaching for suspended objects), how objects fit through openings (Josiah with the ball drop), and how mechanisms operate in different directions (Amara with locks).



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION

The two processes of observation and documentation work together as early educators and caregivers facilitate children's learning and development across domains and standards (Jablon et al., 2007; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022). Observation is the intentional and ongoing process of watching, listening, and reflecting on children's actions, expressions, and interactions to understand their development, interests, and learning. Documentation is the practice of recording and organizing observations of children's experiences through written notes, photographs, videos, or work samples/artifacts to make learning visible and inform the process of scaffolding learning and development. Observation and documentation work together to create a meaningful picture of each child's learning and development. Through careful observation, educators, caregivers and family members gather insights into children's learning, and by documenting these moments, they make learning visible, support reflection, and communication with one another to inform intentional practices to further scaffold development.

In addition, systematic data collection is essential for identifying children who may need further evaluation or support:

- Child Find referrals must be informed by ongoing observations and documented data across settings.
- Behavioral data collection helps educators understand patterns of behavior and determine when further supports are needed.
- When concerns arise, programs may use Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) to analyze the function of a child's behavior and develop Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) that outline proactive strategies and supports.

By embedding observation, documentation, and data tracking into daily practice, early childhood programs ensure that concerns are identified early, supports are individualized, and referrals are made in accordance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] (2004) requirements.

# 5. THINKING, REASONING, AND KNOWLEDGE

Thinking, reasoning, and knowledge emphasize how young children make sense of the world through exploration, inquiry, and problem-solving. It includes cognitive skills such as memory, attention, reasoning, and early concepts in math, science, technology, and engineering. Skills within this domain support children in developing curiosity, critical thinking, and a foundation for later learning by encouraging them to ask questions, make connections, and construct knowledge through active engagement.

## 5.1. Mathematical Thinking

### 5.1.A The child develops a sense of numbers and demonstrates early knowledge of counting.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explores objects and attends to quantity (e.g., puts hands in a container of blocks and moves them around, gets excited when more toys are added to play area). | Attends to changes in quantity and uses basic words to refer to amounts (e.g., points to a pile of crackers and says 'more,' holds up fingers when asked how old they are). | Uses number words and begins counting small sets of objects, though may skip numbers (e.g., counts toys 'one, two, four, five' while pointing to each one). | Creates small sets using one-to-one correspondence and shows understanding that numbers represent 'how many' (cardinality) (e.g., counts and correctly states/signs 'I have three carrots' at snack time). |

### 5.1.B The child recognizes and names basic shapes.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explores size and shape (e.g., handles different shapes and turns them in their hands; observes shapes within environment). | Explores how objects of different shapes fit together (e.g., tries to put different shaped blocks through holes in a shape sorter). | Recognizes and matches simple shapes like circles, squares, and triangles, especially when they are the same size (e.g., correctly places circle piece in circle-shaped puzzle slot). | Recognizes, matches, and names/signs simple shapes varying in size (e.g., points to triangles in a picture book and says/signs 'triangle—big triangle and little triangle'). |

### 5.1.C The child recognizes spatial concepts.

| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Explores how their body and objects move through space (e.g., crawls under a table to retrieve a toy, reaches over a barrier for an object) | Accurately responds to spatial instructions (e.g., gets a book and sits by teacher when prompted 'go get the book from under the pillow and come sit next to me'). | Understands and uses simple spatial vocabulary to describe position (e.g., looks 'under' the table when told 'the ball rolled under there'). | Uses spatial vocabulary to describe relative positions and follows spatial directions involving their body (e.g., 'sit next to Sarah' or 'put the book on top of the shelf'). |

| 5.1.D The child demonstrates an understanding of measurement. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Identifies objects as big or small (e.g., responds 'big' to a picture of an elephant). | Identifies objects that are similar in size or length (e.g., lines up toy cars by size or points to two blocks saying 'same big'). | Demonstrates knowledge of several measurement properties (e.g., helps measure ingredients for Pueblo Feast Day cooking and notices 'this bowl holds more than that one' and 'my bucket is bigger and heavier than yours'). | Demonstrates knowledge of measurement (e.g., uses different objects or parts of the body to 'measure' the length of an object 'this tower is as tall as my shoulder'). |
| **5.1.E The child sorts, compares, and creates patterns with objects.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Explores objects and notices differences (e.g., holds and shakes a new rattle). | Matches objects that are the same and groups objects with similar characteristics (e.g., puts all the red blocks together, collects all the toy cars in one basket). | Sorts objects into groups based on one characteristic like color, shape, or size (e.g., sorts buttons into piles—'all the big ones here, little ones there'). | Recognizes and creates simple alternating patterns (e.g., 'I put two blue blocks, then three red blocks, then two blue blocks, and three red blocks—I am making a pattern!'). |
| **5.2. Science, Technology, and Engineering** | | | |
| **5.2.A The child investigates the physical and natural worlds.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** (infancy-young toddler: 0-18 months) | **Building Competence with People and Environment** (older toddlers-2-year-olds: 16-30 months) | **Deepening and Stretching** (preschool: 28-45 months) | **Applying and Extending** (PreK turning 4 to age 5: 42-60 months) |
| Focuses attention on lights, sounds, or movement in their environment (e.g., studies a mobile above the changing table, enjoys sitting on the grass and feeling the texture). | Observes living objects and identifies characteristics (e.g., movements, needs food and water to grow). | Explores and observes physical phenomena (e.g., watches water flow through acequias and connects it to recent rainfall, notices how clouds change shape and discusses where the water goes). | Explores, observes, and describes a variety of living things and how they change over time (e.g., investigates leaves as they decompose). |
| **5.2.B The child recognizes their actions impact the environment.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Focuses on natural objects and uses senses to explore the environment (e.g., watches leaves blowing in the wind, splashes hands in water). | Recognizes objects that do not belong in the environment (e.g., notices litter while walking and communicates dirty). | Investigates natural phenomena and recognizes their actions could impact it (e.g., sees a spider on its web and repeats, 'careful we do not want to hurt the spider's web'). | Recognizes the importance of conserving resources like water (e.g., does not leave water running). |

| 5.2.C The child uses senses and tools to investigate objects and identify solutions. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Observes to learn about the environment (e.g., watches bubbles pop). | Explores how objects work (e.g., floats materials at the water table and differentiates them from those that sink). | Uses senses to investigate characteristics and behaviors in the physical and natural worlds and begins to make predictions and form explanations of observations and explorations (e.g., communicates about ice block melting while spraying it with water in the sensory table). | Uses various tools to gather information (e.g., uses a magnifying glass to view lines in a rock). |
| **5.2.D The child develops an understanding of cause and effect.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Uses simple actions to make things happen (e.g., shakes a rattle to hear the sound). | Repeats actions and begins to anticipate outcomes based on experience (e.g., uses a button switch to make a toy turn on and switches it to make it light up again). | Expresses understanding of cause and effect (e.g., when I pour water on the dirt it gets wet). | Predicts actions based on cause and effect, engaging in the scientific method (e.g., when I put the ball on a ramp it rolls). |
| **5.2.E The child designs, builds, and tests solutions to solve problems.** | | | |
| **Beginning Awareness and Connections** | **Building Competence with People and Environment** | **Deepening and Stretching** | **Applying and Extending** |
| Uses simple actions and objects as tools to accomplish immediate goals (e.g., uses a container to carry multiple toys at once instead of making several trips). | Explores how objects can be combined or used as tools to solve simple problems (e.g., uses a wooden spoon to retrieve a toy from behind the bookshelf, uses a container as a scoop to gather sand). | Plans and builds simple solutions to problems using available materials (e.g., builds a ramp with blocks to roll cars down, creates a bridge with planks to help toy animals cross a pretend river). | Designs, tests, and modifies solutions through multiple attempts and collaboration with peers (e.g., works with friends to build a fort using blankets and chairs, tries different configurations when the first design doesn't work). |



## *SPECIAL TOPIC:* PLAYFUL LEARNING

Playful learning in early childhood refers to an educational approach that blends the joy and engagement of play with intentional learning goals (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022; Zosh et al., 2022). Play is considered a powerful context for learning processes across all ELS domains. In playful learning environments, children are active participants in constructing knowledge through engaging and meaningful experiences that are guided by curiosity and supported by responsive educators. This approach fosters learning and development while honoring the natural ways young children learn.

## Terms and Definitions

| | |
|---|---|
| Acequia | A water source; irrigation canal. |
| Adult | An adult who cares for a young child; may include an educator or a family member.<br><br>Children have many people in their lives that guide and support their learning and development. We will use 'adults' to define all individuals involved in caring for and educating young children, including parents, guardians, family members, teachers, informal caregivers, early intervention specialists, home visitors, etc. |
| Alliterative phrases | A series of words that repeat the same initial consonant sound. |
| Approaches to Learning | The skills and behaviors children use to engage with learning, such as how to organize their work, think critically, and interact with others. |
| Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) | Mechanisms used to assist individuals who have difficulty speaking or understanding spoken language communicate. |
| Authentic Assessment | Assessment of children involving two processes: 1. The gathering of information (through educator observation and documentation of children engaged in everyday routines and activities, play, projects, and through parent interviews). 2. The interpretation of the information gathered. |
| Babbling | A stage of language development where children produce strings of sounds or approximations that sound like adult speech but are not actual words. |
| Cardinality | Understanding the quantity of things a number represents. |
| Cognitive Flexibility | Ability to adapt attention, actions, and behaviors. |
| Communication | ASL, communication devices, not just speaking. |
| Component | One aspect of learning and development within a domain. |
| Co-Regulation | The process where one person assists another person in calming their emotions and behaviors. |
| Domain | A broad category of children's learning and development. |
| Early Learning Standards | Expectations about what typically developing children should know (understand) and do (competencies and skills) across different domains of learning. (National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative and National Child Care Information Center 2005). |
| Foundational Literacy | The skills young children develop from birth to age five that will support future reading and writing. Skills encompass language, communication, and understanding letters, their sounds, and those letters form words to make meaning. |

## Terms and Definitions, Continued

| | |
|---|---|
| Educator | An early childhood professional working with young children in any early childhood setting (for example, Family Child Care, Center-Based Child Care, Home Visiting, Early Intervention, Early Head Start, Head Start, PreK, Early Childhood Special Education, Preschool, and Kindergarten). |
| Executive Function | The network of abilities that allow children to manage their thoughts, emotions, and behavior as they pursue goals. These include attention, working memory, self-regulation, reasoning, problem solving, and approaches to learning. |
| Indicator | Observable behaviors or skills of children in relation to a specific outcome. |
| Inhibitory Control | An executive functioning skill that provides someone with the ability to control impulses or urges for a more desired behavior. |
| Milestones | Developmental accomplishments of children. |
| One to One Correspondence | A beginning math skill used in counting that helps children understand that each item in a group is counted only once and represents a specific quantity. |
| Outcome | What we would reasonably expect a typically developing child to know, be able to do, and the dispositions we would expect that child to have by a particular age. |
| Parentese | A style of speaking where adults use a higher pitch, slower tempo, and exaggerated intonation. |
| Phonological awareness | The child's ability to understand words are made up of sounds. |
| Proprioceptive | The body's natural ability to sense its own position and movement. |
| Program Standards | Requirements established by entities such as child care licensing, Early Head Start, and NAEYC that focus primarily on environment, adult behaviors, and program administration. |
| Scientific method | The process used to investigate and learn about the world. Aspects of the scientific method include asking questions, observing, predicting, experimenting, and discussing. |
| Strategies & Supports | Some ways adults can interact with children to nurture their learning and development. |
| Translanguaging | A multilingual's ability to move fluidly between languages and use everything they already know to make meaning. |

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