

CAMBRIDGE
Preschool Program

Quality Benchmarks

THE CAMBRIDGE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Quality Matters

The impact of preschool quality on children's learning and well-being has been extensively researched and well-documented. Decades of evidence show that children who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to succeed, with benefits that extend throughout their school years and, in some cases, well into adulthood. Research has not only established the long-term positive outcomes associated with preschool participation but also identified the key quality elements most critical to supporting children's learning, development, and overall well-being.

The Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC) has leveraged the broad research base within the field to create the Quality Benchmarks. These Benchmarks reflect the national research consensus and are intended not only to clearly describe the quality expectations for all Cambridge Preschool Program (CPP) providers, but more broadly, to create a shared language for the educators and early childhood professionals of the City to use to facilitate and promote professional learning and continuous quality improvement. The Benchmarks are based on research on best practices in early education and on locally and nationally recognized resources from NAEYC, Teachstone CLASS, Massachusetts EEC, and others, and were created with input from stakeholders across the City, including preschool providers, program leaders, and early learning experts. They define the characteristics that early childhood programs should demonstrate to ensure that children experience high-quality preschool environments that set them up for success not only in preschool but also throughout their schooling. The Benchmarks focus primarily on process aspects of program quality (interactions, teacher sensitivity, instructional support, etc.), rather than on elements of structural quality (class size, adult: child ratio, facilities, etc.), as we know that while structural preschool program elements establish the foundation for quality, it is the process elements of quality that actually drive children's social-emotional, cognitive, and linguistic growth.

There are five Quality Benchmarks: Adult-Child Interactions; Physical Environment; Responsive Curriculum & Assessment; Family Engagement; and Professionalism. All five Benchmark areas are critical, and taken together they reflect the research consensus of the most important and impactful elements of quality early childhood programs. OEC will use these Benchmarks to guide our professional development programming and to inform our CPP quality monitoring efforts. We hope that the Benchmarks create a shared language that early childhood professionals and leaders across the City will use to engage in conversation about program quality and to support quality improvement efforts.

Benchmark - Adult-Child Interactions

Why is this important, and how does the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC) define this?

Young children experience their world through relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development –social, emotional, physical, intellectual, behavioral, and moral. ¹ The experiences that a child has in their earliest years shape their development, and educators play an important role in creating those experiences both in the classroom and through families by their use of positive communication and supportive partnership.

A well-trained and intentional educator tailors their interactions to fit the needs of the child, using responsive language, engaging all children in classroom activities, fostering independence, and creating a language-rich environment. ² They communicate using warm, welcoming behaviors that promote conversations that deepen understanding, recognize children's interests and needs, and know when to join play or allow for self-exploration. Educators foster a sense of belonging and support learning by providing consistency and being aware of and responsive to children's needs. All children are viewed as individuals and as part of their classroom community.

How does the OEC measure this in a program?

- Annual CLASS Ratings
- OEC classroom observations

Other ways the program may measure this:

- Observation of Educators
- Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool /Teaching Pyramid Infant Toddler Observation Scale (TPOT/TIPTOS)
- Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett, 1989)
- Curriculum Fidelity Tool
- Documentation of Program Accreditation, if applicable
- Documentation of Formal Child Progress Reports/ Observation

¹ [Young-Children-Develop-in-an-Environment-of-Relationships \(1\).pdf](#) Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships

² [Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program - Center for American Progress](#)

Adult-Child Interactions

Standard	Descriptor
Educators demonstrate warmth, respect, and understanding in their communication with children.	- Educators use smiles, laughter, and a kind and encouraging tone when speaking with children. - Educators listen attentively and respond to children's thoughts, feelings, and interests. - Educators use children's names (and/or preferred way to be addressed) during conversations. - Educators model positive and respectful ways of engaging children by being close to them, reflecting their emotions, or responding to their attempts to communicate both verbally and nonverbally. - Educators promote and expand children's learning in both the language of instruction and children's home language(s). - Educators model curiosity and excitement, showing children that learning is joyful and engaging. <i>CLASS Dimensions: Positive Climate; Quality of Feedback; Instructional Learning Format</i>
Educators intentionally build strong relationships with children.	- Educators engage in meaningful, back-and-forth conversations that respond to children's cues, encourage deeper thinking, and support children in expressing their thoughts. For example, asking open-ended questions like, "Why do you think that?" or "How can we solve this problem?" - Educators build relationships with a child's family/caregiver by learning about their cultural background, values, traditions, home language(s), and caregiving practices. Educators incorporate the child's culture into classroom practices. - Educators use a variety of methods to communicate with children and families/caregivers. - Educators use their knowledge of children and families to plan and provide pertinent learning opportunities. - Educators use children's names when addressing them. - Educators and children engage in close physical proximity to each other (ie, at a child-height table or chairs, on the floor, etc). - Educators and families/caregivers work together to create a supportive and inclusive classroom community. <i>CLASS Dimensions: Language modeling; Educator Sensitivity</i>
Interactions foster a sense of comfort, trust, and belonging.	- Children seek out educators for social-emotional comfort, knowledge, and help (e.g., to negotiate with a peer, how to complete a task, when upset). - Educators use every opportunity, including care routines, to gather information about who the child is and respond to the child's needs. - Educators demonstrate awareness of children's emotions and engagement levels throughout the day. - Educators use verbal and nonverbal cues, gestures, and responses to communicate with and support children. - Educators celebrate individual strengths by recognizing children's efforts and contributions to the classroom community. - Educators acknowledge children's emotions and provide comfort when needed so that they may feel safe, seen, and heard. <i>CLASS Dimensions: Educator Sensitivity; Regard for Student Perspectives</i>

Educators use a positive and supportive tone during interactions to foster participation, motivation, and persistence.	• Educators demonstrate awareness and support of children’s interests • Educators have conversations with children about their experiences • Educators use back-and-forth exchanges with children (serve and return), taking time to pause and then respond. • Educators use specific, positive feedback throughout the day to children regarding their actions and choices (e.g, "I see you ..." statements) • Educators support children’s motivation and persistence by providing encouragement and affirmation of their efforts • Educators encourage children to engage with one another cooperatively, when appropriate, to work together, to talk and listen, and to assist one another in completing tasks. <i>Class Dimensions: Regard For Child Perspective, Concept Development, Quality Of Feedback</i>
Educators observe and respond to children’s needs, using this knowledge to provide equitable support and guidance.	• Educators facilitate experiences for children to take risks and try new explorations and opportunities. • Educators are “in-tune” with the children, anticipating when they may need support engaging in activities and/or with their peers. • Educators attentively observe children's actions, expressions, and interactions to understand their needs, interests, and emotions. • Educators adjust activities or expectations based on children's engagement levels, energy, or developmental readiness. • Educators encourage independence by allowing children to attempt tasks on their own while being available for support. • Educators extend play by offering ideas and making connections between children. • Educators communicate with families to gain insights into children's needs and development at home. (e.g., progress reports, morning and pick-up time check-ins, phone calls, email, or meetings) <i>CLASS Dimensions: Instructional Learning Format; Regard for Child Perspective</i>
Educators observe and respond to children’s needs, using this knowledge to provide equitable support and guidance.	• Educators facilitate experiences for children to take risks and try new explorations and opportunities. • Educators are “in-tune” with the children, anticipating when they may need support engaging in activities and/or with their peers. • Educators attentively observe children's actions, expressions, and interactions to understand their needs, interests, and emotions. • Educators adjust activities or expectations based on children's engagement levels, energy, or developmental readiness. • Educators encourage independence by allowing children to attempt tasks on their own while being available for support. • Educators extend play by offering ideas and making connections between children. • Educators communicate with families to gain insights into children's needs and development at home. (e.g., progress reports, morning and pick-up time check-ins, phone calls, email, or meetings) <i>CLASS Dimensions: Instructional Learning Format; Regard for Child Perspective</i>
Educators provide children with predictable guidance that matches children's developmental needs and abilities.	• Strategies and support are embedded in daily activities so children are successful in their social, emotional, and cognitive learning. • Educators encourage strong positive peer relationships and conflict resolution, or other social & emotional curricular strategies. • Classroom routines are clear and consistent yet flexible enough; educators teach children about routines using large group, small group, and individualized instruction, including visual and gestural guidance, so that children can navigate their day with confidence and independence. • Educators teach children the daily flow of activities, providing a visual schedule that is interactive, at the child’s level, and referred to throughout the day. • Educators provide a classroom community process of developing classroom rules (expectations) that are clearly stated with visual cues, posted, revisited, and referred to during the day (especially transitions). • Educators provide visual cues during transitions so that all children will know what to do and what comes next. <i>CLASS Dimensions: Behavior Management</i>

Benchmark - Physical Environment

Why is this important, and how does the OEC define this?

Children need a physical setting—both inside and outdoors—where they can safely and freely play, explore, and learn. A high-quality learning and care environment includes engaging with developmentally appropriate materials and is arranged to promote independence, inquiry, and exploration based on the children’s different stages of development. Environmental practices refer to aspects of the space, materials, equipment, routines, and activities that educators and families/caregivers can intentionally tailor to support each child’s learning across developmental domains.

A well-designed environment acts as the “Third Teacher”, where all members of the community are reflected. Its intentional design, accessible organization of materials, and wide variety of play and learning opportunities support children of varying abilities and interests. The environment offers hands-on learning opportunities for the needs and interests of individuals and groups. Materials encourage multi-sensory opportunities for children to learn through exploration, guided interactions, and peer observation.

How does the OEC measure this in a program?

- Most recent Licensing Report
- OEC classroom observations

Other ways programs can measure this?

- Licensing report
- Observations
- ACSES Tool
- ECERS/ITERS
- TPOT/TPITOS
- CLASS Environment tool



Physical Environment

Standard	Descriptor
The environment and materials are safe, clean, organized, and well-maintained.	• All spaces used by children are maintained to be safe, clean, and sanitary at all times per minimum licensing and Health Department regulations. • Indoor space features appropriately sized tables and chairs for all children and adults, with a variety of seating styles including cushions, sofas, and/or different types of chairs. • Indoor space has individual and communal spaces: one-person spaces, small and large group spaces, and spaces for personal belongings (adults and children). • Indoor space has areas where children can retreat, rest, and observe that are protected and accessible at all times (i.e., cozy corner, calm space) and include soft furnishings, emotionally supportive and visually prompting materials (mirrors, stuffed animals, books, cushions or a chair, blanket, calming breath prompts, etc). • Lighting, sound levels, and textures are considered and adapted based on children's needs • Outdoor spaces and play structures are developmentally appropriate, and include shaded areas and seating for children and adults
The environment promotes engagement, autonomy, and accessibility. It is thoughtfully arranged in response to educators' observations and knowledge of children.	• The environment is designed to support flexibility, offering multiple areas where children can engage in small or large group activities and participate in ways that meet their individual needs and interests. • Space and materials allow the opportunity for learning in multiple areas: manipulatives, science/math, writing/art, large movement, book/library, blocks, dramatic/pretend play, and sensory tables. • Indoor and outdoor spaces have enough room for all children to be active and use gross motor skills (running, climbing, jumping, balancing, swinging, sitting, sliding, etc.) • There is sufficient variety and quantity of materials for the group size and skill level. • Visuals are used throughout the day to help children navigate their environment. • Daily routine is posted at children's eye level and is referred to throughout the day. • Community agreements and expectations are visually displayed. • Guidance and prompts support children in their independence (i.e., how to serve a snack, where materials belong, steps for hand washing, etc.) • Educators use multiple strategies to teach routines, transitions, and expectations to children (visual guides, songs, verbal reminders, peer assistance, etc.) • Children are active participants in the daily care of the learning environment. (cleaning up, watering plants, setting the table, putting their coat in the cubby, washing hands, classroom jobs) • Space is set aside for children to display or hold works in progress (art rack, shelf, cubby, etc)



The environment is inclusive and reflective of the identities of children, families, educators, and the local community, as well as the broader human experience.	• Materials and visuals represent different cultures, languages, family structures, and abilities. (such as fabrics that represent different cultures, pretend play props that reflect various professions and lifestyles, figurines or dolls that represent a range of ages, races, and abilities in the block or dramatic play area) • Materials reflect the children's lived experiences (neighborhood characteristics, how children use transportation, how meals are prepared or shared, and what type of home) • Diverse images and photos are visible and used to encourage conversations about identity and belonging • Images or materials of a child's home life or families/caregivers are represented in the classroom. (Photos of children's families are posted at the child's level) • Books illustrate diverse characters showing different races, abilities, family constellations, genders in a variety of positions of power, occupations, and dynamics (Black female scientist, same sex parents, single-family home, adoption, etc). • Art materials that support the expression of diverse identities. (i.e., coloring materials in an array of skin tones, collage materials with a variety of images, patterns, and textures) • Documentation of children's work, photos, and other classroom materials and explorations is representative and reflective of the children, families, and educators
Children interact with the natural world both indoors and outdoors.	• Elements from nature are integrated into the learning environment: Examples may be: ◦ Natural elements brought in, or windows to observe the outside, ◦ Natural light or lighting adjusted to replicate natural light, ◦ Wooden or natural furniture and natural fibers (rugs, fabrics) ◦ Natural materials for exploration (clay, water, feathers, stones, shells, leaves, pinecones, branches, etc.) ◦ Greenery and/or plants • Pictures, books, and illustrations of nature are available (universe, landscape, animals, plants, weather). • The schedule includes dedicated outdoor daily time for play and walks in or to natural spaces. • Outdoor space offers multiple sensory and play opportunities for children (exploring natural materials, observing nature, being highly active, or quietly participating).
The materials promote a hands-on, inquiry-based approach to learning, featuring sensory-rich materials that encourage children to experiment, manipulate, create, and explore.	• Based on educator observations, materials are rotated to reflect children's interests, needs, and skill levels to support their growth over time. • Materials engage multiple senses (e.g., visual, smell, auditory, taste, tactile, balance, spatial reasoning) • Materials are introduced to children in a way that gives guidance for use and care. • Materials are stored and presented in containers (bins, baskets, trays, cups) that promote order and allow for ease of access and use. Labels are used to support efforts in keeping materials organized. • Emphasis for material use is focused on exploration and/or open-ended projects in multiple areas and outdoors. ◦ Sensory exploration (e.g., water, sand, clay) ◦ Constructive play (e.g., blocks, natural materials, wood, stone, cardboard, collage) ◦ Imaginative play (e.g., open-ended, role-playing, and props that spark a child's imagination)



Benchmark - Responsive Curriculum and Assessment

Why is this important, and how does the OEC define this?

A high-quality curriculum supports children's learning in a program, from arrival to departure and beyond. It is based on research, is developmentally appropriate, play-based, and designed to promote whole-child growth while incorporating ongoing assessment to inform educators' planned and facilitated learning experiences. Children are viewed as strong, capable, and competent. A thoughtful and inclusive learning environment encourages active exploration, experimentation, and participation, ensuring all children, regardless of ability, have meaningful experiences. Educators use close observation and assessments to create nurturing, caring, and responsive relationships and environments that meet children's developmental needs while fostering growth over time. "A high-quality preschool education can foster critical development and learning that promotes joy, affirmation, and enriching learning opportunities that prepare children for success in school and life."

How does OEC measure this?

- Curriculum fidelity tool or Curriculum Crosswalk
- Sample of Informal and formative assessments
- Samples of progress reports
- CPP Observation Tool



³ Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program - Center for American Progress

Responsive Curriculum & Assessment

Standard	Descriptor
Educators implement anti-bias, anti-racist practices that are respectful and responsive to the perspectives, experiences, cultures, languages, strengths, and needs of those within the learning community, as well as the broader human experience.	Educators and leaders practice self-awareness, reflecting on their own cultural values and beliefs and how these might influence the classroom environment and interactions. - Educators proactively seek out resources and engage in reflective conversations to examine their own bias (implicit and explicit). - Educators and leaders stay current with research and continue to examine how bias comes up in observations, interactions with children, and colleagues. - Educators and leaders hold each other accountable in exploring their own biases. (ex. Asking a colleague to give feedback, checking bias, or reflecting together) - Educators apply reflective questions when planning curriculum. Through my practice, is the child and family/caregiver seen, heard, and respected? If not, how do I adjust? - Leaders proactively allow physical space and time for educators to reflect on their own cultural values and beliefs, and how these might influence the classroom environment and interactions by allowing consistent planning and team meeting time. Educators actively implement anti-bias, anti-racist practices that foster positive self-identity, respect for human differences, recognize unfairness, and empower children to act against bias. - Educators nurture each child's ability to develop secure and positive personal and group identities so they have self-confidence and a sense of pride in who they are. (Identity) (NAEYC) - Educators notice, name, and/or have open discussions throughout the day with children about similarities and differences in a developmentally appropriate way. - Educators plan varied learning experiences to foster exploration of similarities and differences in their learning community (ie, art, conversation, books, noticing, song) (Diversity) (NAEYC) - Educators plan learning experiences that include opportunities for children to understand and practice skills for identifying unfair and untrue images (stereotypes), comments (teasing, name-calling), and behaviors (isolation, discrimination) directed at themselves or at others. (Justice) (NAEYC) - Educators provide children opportunities and tools for learning how to stand up to hurtful and unfair biased behavior based on any aspect of social identity. (Action) (NAEYC) - Educators reflect on how anti-bias, anti racist practices show up in their classroom when planning daily routines, learning experiences, and reflecting on teachable moments. See the Guidance Document for more information about what this looks like in practice. - Leaders support and guide educators in implementing anti-bias, anti racist practices within every aspect of the daily curriculum. - Staff, across all levels, reflect the community and children served, including race, ethnicity, and language. (NAEYC) Educators recognize that children are shaped by their family, culture, and community, as well as the world around them, and partner to foster a strong home-school connection. - Educators and leaders practice inclusive, individualized family engagement, respecting diverse preferences regarding the timing and nature of participation in the learning community. - Educators learn about family/caregivers' cultural backgrounds, values, traditions, home language(s), and caregiving practices. - Educators use family/caregiver input to co-create care routines and learning experiences that feel familiar and supportive to the child. - Children's home language(s) are valued and supported while educators facilitate English-language learning in keeping with parental goals. - Leaders have systems in place that enable educators to learn about the child's family and incorporate that knowledge into the curriculum. (intake forms, access to EEC required documents, etc.) Educators intentionally set up the space and materials to meet the needs of all children and reflect the identities of the children, families, educators, and the local community, as well as the broader human experience. (see Physical Environment benchmark for more guidance) - Educators make the environment universally accessible for each child's needs (i.e., scissors for those who are learning, seating accommodations, etc.)

Educators provide engaging and meaningful learning experiences that promote whole-child growth and development.	Educators design play-based experiences that promote whole-child growth and align with <u>the MA Early Learning Standards for Preschool</u> and the <u>MA Early Learning Standards for Infant Toddlers</u>. ‘Whole child’ includes: • Emotional Development (Emotion recognition, co-regulation, self-regulation, compassion, expressing emotions). • Social Development (ability to work with others, Sharing & Turn-Taking, Conflict Resolution, initiating play with peers, forming relationships) • Physical Development (gross and fine motor skills; sensorimotor). • Language Development (vocabulary, communication skills). • Cognitive development (Acquisition of foundational skills-early literacy, numeracy, and mathematical thinking, exploration, problem-solving concepts through child-directed play and responsive educator-planned experiences). • Approach to Play and Learning (persistence in tasks, taking initiative, creativity, curiosity) Educators support children in understanding how to care for themselves and their community through supportive relationships and social-emotional tools, frameworks, and/or curriculum • Educators embed social and emotional objectives into routines and opportunities throughout the day • Educators are aware of and supportively respond to each child, helping them to be comfortable participating in activities and seeking support. • Educators give children opportunities to be leaders in the classroom and helpers to their peers Educators plan joyful, hands-on, play-based learning experiences based on children’s interests to spark their curiosity, desire to learn, and promote learning. • Educators act as guides, providing resources, asking questions, and fostering deeper exploration. • Educators observe, listen, and ask questions to understand how children are motivated and what drives their curiosity. • Educators provide children the time they need to dive deep into projects and play experiences. Educators focus on the process of learning, rather than simply on getting the right answer or creating a product. • Educators engage in back-and-forth conversations and use follow-up questions with children: “And what do you think would happen if...” But how do you think they would feel if that happened?” • Educators provide information to children that expands on learning or clarifies understanding. ” A lamb is a baby sheep.” “A butterfly is a type of insect that flies”. • Educators employ multiple learning modalities with children to provide different pathways to the same goal. (Visuals, movement, auditory, and hands-on opportunities, etc).
Educators intentionally design and implement a curriculum that is grounded in a deep understanding of child development, how children learn, and how their skills progress over time.	Educators continuously reflect on and develop their knowledge and understanding of child growth and development. • Educators expand on their expertise by seeking out opportunities for professional growth. (Examples: collaborate with team or colleagues, join professional development opportunities or classes, engage in reflective conversations) • Educators take what they know and continually apply their understanding to their practice, recognizing that research constantly evolves. Educators develop learning experiences that follow a natural developmental progression based on developmental milestones, ensuring every learning experience has a "why," giving children the focus they need to revisit and master important skills. • Educators regularly work to deepen their understanding of how children develop concepts (ex., parallel play (playing near others) leads to cooperative play; using the "pincer grasp" (picking up a pea) leads to holding a pencil; mark marking leads to crossing the mid line and developing muscle coordination, both of which are vital for forming letters and words later on; singing songs, playing word games, and reading poems with children help develop phonological distinctions in the words, phrases, and sentences they’re using; counting objects leads to understanding of how many are in a group, etc)



Educators understand and tailor experiences to each child's unique strengths, needs, interests, cultural practices, and traditions based on research.

- Educators and Leaders practice a strengths-based view of children and families, focusing on identifying, valuing, and building upon a child's existing skills, interests, and positive traits rather than concentrating on deficits, weaknesses, or behavior issues.
- Educators recognize and honor the special rights of every child, seeking to understand and support diverse learners, with the intention of ensuring children are met where they are and challenged appropriately for future success.
- Educators scaffold experiences to meet children at their current developmental level.
- Educators and other professionals work together to make the environment and experiences inclusive. Educators utilize support services as needed.
- Educators use trauma-informed practices to structure daily routines, environments, and experiences that prioritize flexibility, predictability, emotional regulation, and security. (i.e., well-structured routines, consistency in routine, cozy/safe spaces, and guidance strategies focused on solutions and social skill building.)

Educators recognize that young children are social learners who co-construct knowledge alongside their peers and adults through meaningful interaction.

- Educators plan for learning experiences that are organized to encourage children to learn from and with each other, about themselves and the world. (Trust For Learning)
- Educators regularly seek out opportunities for extended conversations with each child, including those with whom they do not share a language, through verbal and nonverbal interactions. (NAEYC)

Educators inform their curriculum planning by observing children and using an ongoing, authentic, and formative child assessment system.

Educators notice, listen to, and document children's actions and interactions to have a deeper understanding of their unique strengths, interests, and developmental progress.

- Educators are present by turning their full attention and focus to the experiences of the children in the classroom.
- Educators recognize and understand a wide range of child behaviors. (regarding engagement levels, social interaction patterns, learning styles, temperament, and ways of being.)
- Educators observe children in self-directed play, spontaneous conversations, and interactions, as well as when children are participating in a group activity or doing an individual activity.
- Educators document their observations over time with notes, photos, reports, and work samples to use as evidence to measure and support growth.
- Educators are aware that their own perspectives will influence the observation and assessment process, such as what teachers choose to observe and document.
- Educators work to keep an open mind to multiple perspectives on a child's growth and development.

Educators and leaders use a structured, systematic approach to collect, organize, and analyze observations and assessments of children.

- Educators use formal and informal assessments to effectively shape their planning and implementation of learning experiences.
 - Formal assessment tools are standardized and research-based and embedded in an ongoing system of measuring child outcomes and progress monitoring (i.e., TSGold, High/Scope, AEPS-4, ELS, HELP).
 - Informal assessments are flexible and complementary tools used to develop a deeper understanding of how the child is developing and acquiring skills (i.e., anecdotal observations, play-based assessment, checklists, and collecting data).
- Educators use this information to guide individualized teaching practices, extend their planning, and build strong home-school connections.
- Educators use collected data to continually reflect and adjust their practice as they deepen their understanding of each child.

	Educators, individually and as a team, dedicate time to reflect on their observations of children and to collaboratively plan for the environment and learning experiences. (See Guidance Document on how this looks in implementation). • Educators utilize scheduled planning and reflection time with their teaching team, outside of classroom coverage. • Educators apply targeted support and adaptations to individual and group experiences throughout the day. Educators and Leaders view sharing information as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships with families, ensuring open, ongoing, and two-way communication and collaboration. Ongoing, two-way communication may look like: • Informal conversations at pick up and drop off; • Communication by phone or family/caregiver app • Family/caregiver surveys • Family/caregiver-educator conferences • Team meetings/ referrals for support and services (there is an interdisciplinary approach for making decisions and planning for children who need additional support)
Educators have access to a system of resources and support to implement curriculum with responsiveness, flexibility, and care.	• Leaders establish systems that provide educators with robust onboarding practices and supportive environments that utilize reflective supervision, thereby setting them up for success in implementing high-quality curriculum. • Leaders provide educators with guidance and documentation on philosophy, mission, and vision, as well as a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. • Leaders provide educators with the technical readiness, materials, and frameworks to implement the curriculum effectively. • Leaders establish consistent meeting times (check-ins, supervision, reflections, etc) to support educators in their development and implementation of curricular practices. • Educators' curriculum implementation is supported through an ongoing system of observation, reflection, and feedback. (ex. Reflective supervision model) • Educators have access to coaching and mentoring to grow their skill set, supported by leadership. ◦ Coaching and supervision are both strengths-based and inquiry-based to encourage curiosity, build resources, and increase self-awareness. (TFL) • Educators receive ongoing, research-based professional development and training that is flexible, reflects their professional goals, and adult learning style(s). • Educators and Leaders are driven by a commitment to ongoing learning and innovation, resulting in systemic reflection and revision.

Benchmark - Family / Caregiver Engagement

Why is this important, and how does the OEC define this?

Family Engagement that connects families, children, and practitioners at all levels is systemic, intentional, and reflective. Effective family engagement involves connecting with families, interacting with them as equal partners, and establishing strong two-way communication channels with them. Creating a culture of family engagement involves a primary and continuous focus on engagement rather than a series of isolated or arbitrary efforts. A strong culture of family engagement respects families and grows and evolves with the needs of children, parents, families/caregivers, and practitioners. Research⁽¹⁾ tells us that high-quality family engagement has a lasting effect on all domains of a child's growth and development (social, emotional, physical, health, cognitive, academic achievement, and later success in life. It improves child-educator relationships and helps educators discover ways to build welcoming, safe, and trusting environments.

Standards:

OEC has aligned this quality benchmark with the guiding principles in *Strengthening Partnerships: A Framework for Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement in Massachusetts*.

How does the OEC measure this?

- Family Handbook
- CPP Observation Tool
- Family Surveys and Feedback



Family / Caregiver Engagement

Standard	Descriptor
Families are the experts in their child(ren) and their family. They are the drivers of their child's growth and development.	Program leaders establish and support documented systems to welcome and learn about each child's family and intentionally integrate that knowledge into the curriculum, physical environment, and teaching practices. (e.g., intake forms, formal and informal meetings, and documentation) Educators use these systems to welcome and learn about each child's family and intentionally integrate that knowledge into the curriculum, physical environment, and teaching practices. • Educators intentionally ask each family/caregiver to share their "Hopes and Dreams" or goals for their child. This information is used to invite families to be active partners in goal-setting and educational decisions tailored to their child's individual journey. • Educators create opportunities for frequent 'check-ins' and documentation (progress reports, etc.) to discuss and reflect together on a child's progress, celebrate growth, and navigate the specific developmental challenges. • Educators use family/caregiver input to co-create care routines and learning experiences, ensuring the classroom environment feels familiar, supportive, and consistent with the child's home life. • Educators use developmental screenings (such as the ASQ-3 or ASQ-SE) as a bridge for communication, working with families to identify early support opportunities, provide resources for families/caregivers, and support families/caregivers in connecting to specialists (e.g., a physician, physical therapist, child study team) if further evaluation is needed. • Educators provide ongoing support and resources to ensure families feel confident and comfortable advocating for their child's unique developmental needs. • Program leaders actively support and monitor educators' implementation of the practices above.
Each family is unique; educators value each family's beliefs, structure, values, priorities, goals, and aspirations.	• Educators and leaders proactively learn about each family's unique background, values, traditions, and caregiving practices. • Educators and leaders ensure home languages and identities are authentically supported in classroom practices. • Educators and leaders demonstrate a deep understanding of children's backgrounds by intentionally incorporating families' unique backgrounds, family traditions, and diverse family structures into classroom conversations, curriculum, and visual materials. (eg. meaningful items from the family's country/ culture in the classroom, and use the language(s) of the family in the classroom) • Educators create learning and care spaces that provide children with opportunities and materials that reflect a variety of family structures. At a minimum, photographs of children's families are displayed at children's eye level, and there are multiple books available to children that reflect a variety of family structures found in society at large. • Program leaders actively support and monitor educators' implementation of the practices above.
Building a respectful, trusting, and reciprocal relationship is the shared responsibility of systems, organizations, practitioners, and families.	• Educators and program leaders embrace a strengths-based approach to family engagement, recognizing families as their child's first and best advocate for and expert on their child. Family engagement practices honor and draw on families' wealth of knowledge, experience, and expertise; Engage families in all decisions made concerning their child; and engage families as reciprocal partners in planning, decision-making, and problem-solving for their child. • Program leaders have established documented systems to support early relationship building with families, through home visits or individual intake meetings, allowing educators to learn about a child's multiple identities, cultural background, and family/caregiver aspirations before care begins. Educators use these systems and strategies to build relationships... • Educators initiate early relationship building through home visits or individual intake meetings, allowing educators to learn about a child's multiple identities, cultural background, and family/caregiver aspirations before care begins. • Program leaders and educators have established documented systems that support an intentional transition process that includes the child and family/caregiver. The process allows the family/caregiver to share information and ensure a seamless transition for every child.



- Educators establish robust two-way communication systems that honor individual preferences and home languages, ensuring families/caregivers can share home insights as easily as educators share school updates. Ongoing two-way communication may include informal conversations at pick up and drop off; communication by phone or family/caregiver app; Family/caregiver surveys; Family/caregiver-educator conferences; Team meetings/ referrals for support and services (there is an interdisciplinary approach for making decisions and planning for children who need additional support)
- Educators maintain regular, ongoing communication throughout the year with families/caregivers regarding their child's experiences, collaborating to connect learning between home and school.
- Educators cultivate a welcoming environment by greeting families by name and engaging in warm, reciprocal interactions that show genuine interest in their daily lives. (eg, smiling and greeting families/caregivers when they are present, asking family/caregiver to participate in a classroom activity, having adult-sized seating for family/caregiver, a welcome board or area to share something about themselves, etc.)
- Educators provide a diverse range of opportunities for families to contribute to the classroom community, intentionally including inclusive options for those who may be unable to visit the program in person.
- Educators and program leaders acknowledge that for some families, due to prior experiences, trust may need to be rebuilt and dedicate time to intentionally re-establish that trusting relationship.
- The program has documented systems to engage families/caregivers in reciprocal partnerships by co-designing engagement opportunities alongside families/caregivers. Family engagement opportunities are an intentional and important part of the program's family engagement approach.
- Program leaders actively support and monitor educators' implementation of the practices above.

Family/Caregiver Engagement is equitable, intentional, consistent, and flexible for every family.

- Educators utilize a variety of communication methods to maintain consistent and meaningful connections with children and families/caregivers. (e.g., email, handouts, texting, communication app, etc)
- Educators have conversations (formal or informal) with families/caregivers to identify their preferred communication channels and primary methods for getting information (email, phone, in-person).
- Educators provide translation support and interpretation services to ensure equitable access for all families and caregivers.
- Educators create welcoming visual representations/displays to highlight members of the learning community (educators, cooks, janitors, etc) that children interact with regularly. (highlighting the multiple identities of the adults, including pictures, personal stories, identity, etc.)
- Educators ensure community resources, including interpretation services, financial assistance, and family support programs, are clearly posted and easily accessible to all families.
- Educators actively recruit family/caregiver leadership that reflects the full diversity of the school community to ensure all voices are represented in high-level decisions.
- Leaders create varied opportunities for families to participate in decision-making (e.g., including families/caregivers on committees, interviewing/ hiring of staff, developing shared plans of care, planning engagement opportunities, access to translated surveys, etc.)
- Educators facilitate sharing opportunities, including weekly newsletters, open houses, classroom celebrations, and 1:1 meetings, to keep families/caregivers informed and involved in the classroom and program.
- Educators maintain a central, visual resource hub (such as a Family Bulletin Board) that clearly displays the daily routine, curriculum updates, calendars, and a directory of all educators, support staff, and volunteers. Information is clear, welcoming, and accessible in the primary languages spoken by the school community.
- Programs have ways to provide translation support and interpretation services to ensure equitable access for all families and caregivers.
- Program leaders actively support and monitor educators' implementation of the practices above.

Programs intentionally build organizational capacity for family engagement.	• Programs have developed systems for the whole staff to engage in ongoing activities (ex., reflective supervision, reflective practice group meetings) to identify and address conscious and unconscious biases that exist within program structures and family engagement approaches. • Educators engage in activities (ex., reflective supervision, reflective practice group meetings) to identify and address conscious and unconscious biases that exist within program structures and family engagement approaches. • Educators and leaders take part in scheduled, regular opportunities to reflect on their personal and program practices and how those impact family engagement at their program. • Educators collaborate with the person or team that leads and coordinates family engagement efforts at their site. • Educators and leaders work to ensure families play a central role in program-level decision-making through parent meetings, board representation, and surveys. • Educators and leaders use the data from surveys, feedback, and other opportunities to inform their strategic plans and to tailor engagement activities to the specific interests and needs of the community. • Program leaders actively support and monitor educators' implementation of the practices above. • Leaders ensure that educators, administrators, and other staff receive the professional development and support they need to fully engage with families/caregivers. • Programs have documented policies for Family/Caregiver Engagement in the program's Mission, Vision, and Philosophy. These policies are reflected in the program's daily practices and interactions with families/caregivers.
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Benchmark - Professionalism

Why is this important, and how does the OEC define this?

Clearly defining expectations for professionalism is an essential component for delivering high-quality education for infants and young children. The Cambridge OEC defines professionalism as principles that allow for multiple approaches and traditions, and take into account the varied contexts within which early educators and care providers work. Given the clear “linkages between the well-being of children from birth to age 8 and the well-being of adults who care for and educate them,” the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) made a forceful and compelling argument for professionalizing the early childhood education profession. IOM, in a 2017 paper, declared: “Supporting a strong and fairly compensated workforce is critical to the future health and development of children.” This benchmark establishes the importance of outlining components of professionalism that, when met, will enhance not only program environments but the experience of being an educator within those environments.

How does the OEC measure this in a program?

The CPP Structured Observation Tool.

Other ways programs can measure this?

- Licensing report
- Observations
- ACSES Tool
- ECERS/ITERS
- TPOT/TPITOS
- IPDPs/ individualized professional development plans and CQI plans/ strategic plans for programs
- CLASS Environment tool
- CDA Observations



Professionalism

Standard	Descriptor
Educators and leaders adhere to clear ethical guidelines established in program handbooks and EEC guidelines.	• Educators and leaders demonstrate the ability to manage emergencies, mandated reporting, or other safety incidents appropriately. • Educators and leaders protect privacy when making referrals, communicating with colleagues, and supporting young children with specific learning needs by following practical, ethical, and legal guidelines. • Educators and leaders use child assessments appropriately by making referrals or accessing resources when necessary. • Educators and leaders establish collaborative and professional relationships with social services and providers supporting individual children (e.g., physical, occupational, and speech therapists, early intervention visitors). • Educators and leaders follow EEC guidelines to uphold their professional obligation to report child abuse and neglect when appropriate.
Programs address professional communication expectations throughout the program.	• Educators and leaders use clear, understandable, and respectful verbal and written communication with families, colleagues, and others. • Educators and leaders are aware of a conflict resolution process presented in the center operations guidelines/employee handbooks. • Educators and leaders employ attentive listening with young children, families, and colleagues; skillful and empathetic dialogue with families about their children's development; a translator or other resources for exchanges with speakers of languages other than English; use of technology-mediated strategies for communication (video conferencing, emails, phone calls, where appropriate; and assistive technology tools with children and adults, as needed). • Educators and leaders provide equitable opportunities for communicating with all students, colleagues, and families.
Educators and leaders engage in collaborative, reflective, and continuous learning that enhances the quality of learning experiences for young children.	• Educators and leaders engage in professional learning opportunities to support their professional development goals. • Educators and leaders participate in reflective conversations to enhance teacher practice. Educators receive and act on feedback from their supervisors, seek assistance when they need it, and consistently carry out the responsibilities of their jobs. Educators engage in a continual cycle of observation and reflection with the goal of continual improvement. • Educators and leaders partner with other members of their teaching team, recognizing the importance of respectful, cooperative relationships and shared responsibilities between all members of the team when interacting with children and families and with each other. • Educators and leaders consider multiple sources of evidence and knowledge in decision-making, including new and emerging research, professional learning, experience and expertise, and the interests, values, needs, and choices of the children, families, and communities they serve. They consider how their own social and cultural contexts and implicit biases may influence their practice and equity in their early learning settings as they strive to provide effective support for every child. • As reflective practitioners, educators and leaders understand that managing their own resilience, self-efficacy, mental health, and wellness is critical to the effectiveness of their work, particularly when addressing challenging behaviors. They take responsibility for their own well-being and have strategies to manage the physical, emotional, and mental stress inherent in their profession to remain healthy and to engage effectively and empathetically with children and families. • Educators and leaders demonstrate teamwork and respect for diverse perspectives. • Educators and leaders demonstrate a positive attitude through actions and engagement with peers. • Program leaders actively support and monitor educators' implementation of the practices above.

Guiding Frameworks & Tools:

Enhancing Education with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); Improving Teacher Practice on CLASS.pdf; Serve and Return: Back-and-forth exchanges

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Teachstone. CLASS: What are observers looking for? | Teachstone.docx

NAEYC. DAP: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning | NAEYC

Virtual Lab School. Self-assessment tool. <https://www.virtuallabschool.org/preschool/professionalism/lesson-1/act/19076>

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