CAMBRIDGE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

NEWSLETTER

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CAMBRIDGE
Office of Early Childhood

The mission of the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood is to **connect** the city's early childhood ecosystem, **align** early childhood services and information, and **advocate** for and **advance** the needs of all young children, their families, and the early childhood workforce.

The Cambridge Office of Early Childhood is a collaboration supported by the **City of Cambridge** and **Cambridge Public Schools**.

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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www.earlychildhoodcambridge.org



A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DR. CHERYL OHLSON

Dear Cambridge Early Childhood Community,

Happy Fall! As the autumn leaves settle and we welcome the crisp November air, we want to take a moment to express our deep gratitude for our vibrant early childhood community. November is a season of reflection and connection, and here at the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood, we are fully focused on supporting the City's young children, families, and early childhood professionals, and we are thankful to be part of this amazing community.

As you may have seen in our last Newsletter, this year we are dedicating a portion of each Newsletter issue to one of the OEC Quality Benchmarks that were finalized and introduced over the summer. These Benchmarks reflect the national research consensus on the key quality characteristics of early childhood programming and are intended to provide an accessible way to understand these quality characteristics and to create a shared language that will facilitate and promote professional learning and continuous quality improvement. This Newsletter issue will focus on the Adult-Child Interactions Benchmark. As you might imagine, this is the first Benchmark because adult-child interactions are truly at the core of healthy child development and learning. Decades of research have shown that during children's first five years of life, adult-child interactions are the primary driver of children's development and learning. Specifically, interactions that are characterized as warm, supportive, and responsive, and that demonstrate the "serve and return" pattern of back-and-forth exchanges, help to develop children's brain architecture, language, communication, and thinking skills, and their trust in the world around them. As you review the Adult-Child Interaction Benchmark, which can be found here on our website, you'll see that the language closely reflects the language and concepts from the Teachstone CLASS tool, from NAEYC, and from other leading resources in the field. You may also note that the interactions described in the Benchmark are important not just for educators, but for all adults in children's lives!

We are also excited to share that the City of Cambridge has launched the new Childcare Access Joint Task Force. Appointed by the City Council, this 14-member coalition brings together city leaders, early childhood professionals, and childcare experts. Throughout this school year, the task force will be meeting monthly to analyze our local early childhood landscape and to design strategic policy proposals, specifically focusing on expanding access and reducing the rising costs of childcare for infant and toddler care across our City. This is such important work, and we look forward to sharing opportunities for you to weigh in on this work in the coming months as we work to build a more affordable and equitable care network for our youngest residents.

Thank you for your continued partnership in making early education accessible, inclusive, and joyful for every child in our city. We wish you and your loved ones a warm, safe, and wonderful month ahead.

Cheryl Ohlson

Dr. Cheryl Ohlson

ADULT-CHILD INTERACTION QUALITY BENCHMARK

EACH DAY, YOU INTERACT WITH CHILDREN IN COUNTLESS WAYS, BOTH IN GROUPS AND ONE-ON-ONE.

There are times when you make comments, ask questions, provide information, or give instructions. At other times, you might acknowledge a child's effort or ask for something. You may give hugs or pats on the back. You likely smile, frown, point, or wave. You interact when you greet children in the morning or say good-bye at the end of the day, during whole-group experiences and small-group activities, and as children work and play, both inside and outdoors. Even during transitions and daily routines, you are interacting with children.[1]



Radcliffe Child Care Center, Campus Child Care | Preschool 1

The Cambridge Office of Early Childhood has developed a set of Adult-Child Interaction standards. **Why?** In early care and education, research, and everyday experience show how important positive adult-child interactions are to ensuring the best outcomes for children. The following standards demonstrate specific aspects of high-quality adult-child interactions. **We acknowledge that each standard is interconnected and complex. When fully put into practice, children, families, and educators thrive.**

OEC ADULT-CHILD INTERACTION STANDARDS:

- **Standard 1:** Educators communicate with children with warmth, respect, and understanding.
- **Standard 2:** Educators intentionally build strong relationships with children.
- **Standard 3:** Interactions foster comfort, trust, and belonging.
- **Standard 4:** Educators use a positive and supportive tone during interactions to foster participation, motivation, and persistence.
- **Standard 5:** Educators observe and respond to children's needs, using this knowledge to provide equitable support and guidance.
- **Standard 6:** Educators provide children with predictable guidance that matches children's developmental needs and abilities.

[1] https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/pi2e-first-look.pdf

WAYS EDUCATORS AND LEADERS CAN EXPLORE THE STANDARDS, REFLECT ON THEIR PRACTICE, AND APPLY THEIR LEARNING:

Standard 1: Educators demonstrate warmth, respect, and understanding in their communication with children.

Reflect:
How do you show warmth and respect to children and families? How do you like to receive warmth and respect from others?

SOME DESCRIPTORS:

- Smiles, laughter, and a kind and encouraging tone when speaking with children.
- Listening attentively and responding to children's thoughts, feelings, and interests.
- Using children's names (and/or preferred way to be addressed) during conversations.
- Modeling positive and respectful ways of engaging children by being close to them, reflecting their emotions, or by responding to their attempts to communicate both verbally and nonverbally.
- Promoting and expanding on children's learning in both the language of instruction and children's home language(s).
- Modeling curiosity and excitement, showing children that learning is joyful and engaging.



Cambridge YMCA | Blue Room

Standard 2: Educators intentionally build strong relationships with children.

Reflect:
How do you get to know the children in your care? How does the child see themselves reflected in the learning space?

SOME DESCRIPTORS:

- Engaging 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?
- Building 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.
- Using a variety of methods to communicate with children and families/caregivers.
- Using your knowledge of children and families to plan and provide pertinent learning opportunities.
- 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.



Beech Street Littles | Emily Winston

Standard 3: Interactions foster a sense of comfort, trust, and belonging.

Reflect:
Simple questions that can help you, as the adult, slow down and refocus on what matters most: safety, connection, and belonging.
► Am I connecting with this child? Do they feel safe, seen, and valued in this moment?
► Am I honoring what they feel? Do they know their emotions are okay and that I'm here to help them?
► Am I paying attention to what might be hard for them right now? Are there any needs, stressors, or other things I should consider to help this child feel safe and connected?[2]



Radcliffe Child Care Center, Campus Child Care | Preschool 1

SOME DESCRIPTORS:

- Children seeking out educators for social-emotional comfort, knowledge, and help (e.g., to negotiate with a peer, how to complete a task, when upset).
- Using every opportunity, including care routines, to gather information about who the child is and respond to children's needs.
- Demonstrating awareness of children's emotions and engagement levels throughout the day.
- Using verbal and nonverbal cues, gestures, and responses to communicate with and support children.
- Celebrating individual strengths by recognizing children's efforts and contributions to the classroom community.
- Acknowledging children's emotions and providing comfort when needed so that they may feel safe, seen, and heard.

Standard 4: Educators use a positive and supportive tone during interactions to foster participation, motivation, and persistence.

Reflect:
How do you intentionally slow down to create space for true back-and-forth interactions, listen closely to children's interests and experiences, and give them time to process before you respond?

Cambridge YMCA | Red Room



SOME DESCRIPTORS:

- Demonstrating awareness of and supporting children's interests
- Engaging children in conversations about their experiences
- Using back-and-forth exchanges ("serve and return" interactions), taking time to pause, listen, and respond
- Providing specific, positive feedback throughout the day about children's actions and choices (e.g., "I see you..." statements)
- Supporting children's motivation and persistence by encouraging and affirming their efforts
- Encouraging children to engage cooperatively with one another, including working together, talking and listening, and assisting one another in completing tasks

[2] https://www.challengingbehavior.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/spporting_behavior_through_connection.pdf

Standard 5: Educators observe and respond to children's needs, using this knowledge to provide equitable support and guidance.

Reflect:
How do you take time to observe children in your space? How do you share your observations with families? How does that information inform what you set up for children to engage with?

SOME DESCRIPTORS:



Al Bustan Child Care | Preschool

- Facilitating experiences for children to take risks, try new explorations, and take opportunities.
- Being "in tune" with the children, anticipating when they may need support engaging in activities and/or with their peers.
- Attentively observing children's actions, expressions, and interactions to understand their needs, interests, and emotions.
- Adjusting activities or expectations based on children's engagement levels, energy, or developmental readiness.
- Encouraging independence by allowing children to attempt tasks on their own while being available for support.
- Extending play by offering ideas and making connections between children.
- Communicating 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).

Standard 6: Educators provide children with predictable guidance that matches children's developmental needs and abilities.

Reflect:
How do you invite children to be decision-makers in the organization of their daily experiences, routines, and rituals? What visuals do you use so that children can navigate their day with confidence and independence?

Soldier's Field Child Care Campus Child Care



SOME DESCRIPTORS:

- Strategies and support are embedded in daily activities so children are successful in their social, emotional, and cognitive learning.
- Encouraging 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.
- Teaching 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.

Want to dig deeper?

The Office of Early Childhood developed more ways you can extend your understanding of these standards.
Extend _ Adult Child Interaction.pdf

Resources and Research from the Field:

Why Relationships Really Matter in Our Earliest Years
https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/23/09/why-relationships-really-matter-our-earliest-years

Building Positive Relationships with Young Children
https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/building-positive-relationships-with-young-children.pdf

Using Observations to Guide Your Teaching. “Observations as a guide to interactions”
https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/fall2022/observation-guides-teaching

Providing Positive Feedback and Encouragement
https://challengingbehavior.org/docs/ToolsBuildingRelationships_starters-for-giving-positive-feedback_Home.pdf

Provider Spotlight!

Newtowne School | www.newtowneschool.org
Submitted by Caitlin Malloy



The teachers in this classroom created a cozy corner with comfy chairs and books for children who weren't quite ready to join the morning gathering, intentionally positioning it so they could still see the group. One child has been consistently using this space rather than joining the circle. **Instead of insisting he participate, the teachers have respected his need for space, avoiding a potential daily power struggle.** On the day I visited, the teachers began a mindfulness activity, where an audio recording played gentle dings and invited children to breathe deeply and shrug their shoulders to relax. From his cozy corner, without a single teacher prompt, this child began following along, taking deep breaths and shrugging his shoulders right along with his classmates.

He was participating—just from a different spot! It was a lovely reminder that positive adult-child interactions aren't always about what teachers do in the moment, but sometimes about the environments they create, the demands they choose not to make, and the opportunities they give children to engage on their own terms. My prediction? By the end of the year, he'll find his way into the circle. But until then, he has the perfect spot to be part of the group, just as he is. *Special credit to the Newtowne staff for designing such an inclusive environment: Maggie Oliver, Vaidehi Desai, Kanako Katsumi, Sam Bates, and Holly Janssen*

News & Updates

CHANGES TO MASSHEALTH AND SNAP BENEFITS



Thousands of Cambridge residents are losing or at risk of losing their SNAP (formerly food stamps) benefits and MassHealth insurance because of federal policy changes. These changes introduce new immigration and work requirements for people to be eligible for SNAP and MassHealth. If you are impacted by these changes or you have questions about them, you are not alone!

The City of Cambridge, Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC), the Cambridge Community Foundation, and more than 30 other community-based organizations created a coordinated system to help Cambridge residents understand these changes, re-enroll in benefits if they are still eligible, and access important resources.

Download flyers here:
https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/files/humanserviceprograms/snapmasshealth/snapmasshealth_combined.pdf

How To Get Help / Assist Those In Need:

- Email SnapMassHealth@ceoccambridge.org or call 617-868-2900.
- Visit CEOC at 11 Inman St. in Cambridge.
  - Walk-in support may be available on a limited basis.
  - CEOC staff speak 10 languages and have access to remote interpreters.

For more information, visit:
https://www.cambridgema.gov/departments/humanserviceprograms/snapandmasshealthsupport

News & Updates



Register this January for the

Cambridge Public Schools Kindergarten Lottery!

The Kindergarten Lottery for the 2027-2028 school year will open on January 2 and close on January 29 at 4PM.

Look for updates on the **CPS Kindergarten Registration Page**



K LOTTERY INFO SESSIONS - VIRTUAL

Wednesday, November 18 | 6-7PM Zoom link >>

Saturday, December 5 | 10-11AM Zoom link >>

News & Updates



BABY UNIVERSITY

Coming to The Port/East Cambridge in January 2027!

Are you a parent with a child 3 years old or younger?
Baby U offers weekly :

- Parenting workshops
- Free books
- Giveaways
- Childcare
- Light breakfast
- Transportation

Parenting is hard work. At Baby U you will find support, information, and opportunities to connect and share parenting ideas.







← Scan QR code to sign up for more info

Saturdays @ The King Open School
850 Cambridge St, Cambridge, MA 02141

617-349-6385 - babyu@cambridgema.gov

Baby University is a program of the Center for Families/Cambridge DHSP

ABOUT US

The Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is a collaborative office whose work and team are shared jointly by the City of Cambridge and Cambridge Public Schools.

Our Mission

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Our Vision

Every child and family in Cambridge has access to high-quality early care and education experiences. As a result, all children enter school ready to thrive academically, physically, socially, and emotionally, and continue to do so through third grade and beyond.

Our Commitment To Equity

All children have the right to equitable early childhood experiences that enable them to achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, all early childhood educators and family support staff have a professional obligation to advance equity. They can do this best when they are effectively supported by the settings in which they work and when they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable opportunities for children and their families. (Adapted from NAEYC's Position Statement on Advancing Equity)

CAMBRIDGE
Office of Early Childhood

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