Alameda County Child Care Planning Council
Statement on High Quality ECE Principles and Standards
Approved by the Planning Council Steering Committee
September 18, 2009

Core Principles

The Alameda County Child Care Planning Council (the Council) has adopted the following statement on quality early care and education (ECE). Our statement is framed as a **vision of excellence** and a **process guide** for ECE programs and the ECE community to use as we pursue resources and paths to serve our community. Achieving and maintaining quality is an on-going quest and it must be continually emphasized, despite political or economic challenges.   The Planning Council believes that all families have the right to the highest quality ECE for their infants through school age children, regardless of where they choose to send their children for out of home care[i]. The Council also believes that high quality programs can be (and are) delivered through every type, size, setting, and pedagogical practice. *However, every high quality program institutes and adheres to the interdependent principles below:*

    I.   **An articulated philosophy that addresses the needs of children, families, educators and the community**

    II.   **Continual and consistent program evaluation**

    III.   **Ongoing learning and support for educators**

> The principles build an interdependent and interrelated cycle, guiding us toward achieving and maintaining ECE quality

These principles draw from research, evidence-based best practice, parent opinion, and practitioner knowledge and experiences with a diverse and multi-cultural community. They are identified as crucial for building positive environments that lead to optimal child outcomes and contribute to family support and educator[ii] professionalism. It is the responsibility of the Planning Council members and the entire ECE community[iii] to support programs and educators to attain the highest quality of service.

Core Principle I
An Articulated Philosophy That Addresses the Needs of Children, Families, Educators and the Community

Program philosophy is not an academic or abstract concept. It is the belief system that programs use to develop and implement practice; it provides the foundation and rationale for how programs work with children, families, educators, and the community.

Research and experience shows that quality ECE programs are founded on a clear set of beliefs (*philosophy*) that include a mission (purpose or intentionality of the program) and goals (what the program wants to accomplish). *Articulation* clarifies the philosophy in understandable language (*see Appendix B*). Quality programs create an internal community that: 1) ensures that children receive care and education that is based on sound developmental theory and current, culturally responsive best practice[iv]; 2) develops nurturing relationships that respect the family and community structures in which their children are being raised, and supports those structures that help children and families flourish; and, 3) respects, supports, and appropriately compensates educators in order for them to maintain the energy, dedication, and knowledge needed to provide quality services.

Core Principle II
Continual and Consistent Program Evaluation

Quality programs consistently implement reflective methods to evaluate whether they practice their program philosophy and strive to meet the needs of the children, families, staff, and community.

Quality Programs consistently monitor themselves on whether they "practice what they preach" (see Principle I) and if their philosophy and practice are accomplishing their goals and mission. Program evaluation is a reflective review of "what's working and what requires improvement" and is **more than child assessment or staff evaluation.** High quality programs incorporate thoughtful observation and appraisal as part of their regular operation, and not as a judgmental task to be employed only by supervisors. *See Appendix A and B.*

Core Principle III
Ongoing Learning and Support for Educators

Quality programs compensate staff appropriately and coordinate with the ECE professional infrastructure to ensure that educators acquire the skills needed to implement and improve program philosophy and practices.

This principle encapsulates the vital role that educators and other adults play in making certain that program practices and philosophy are evaluated and improvements are continuously made. The principle also reinforces the importance of support for ECE professionals, which is necessary to improve respect and compensation of the field. Often, programs provide support for everyone except staff; family child care providers "forget" themselves in their service to children and families. As a result, we have a continuous drain on ECE human capital with a high risk of practitioner burn-out, turn-over, and mediocre performance. The Council maintains that all educators need planned, ongoing education toward specific goals, with content that reinforces and builds on previous learning, and encourages reflection of daily work. The Council also maintains that a quality program and professional standards are dependent upon significant financial support and a strong education and training infrastructure. *See Appendix A and B.*

APPENDIX A
High Quality Standards

High quality ECE services can be (and are) delivered through a variety of settings, program types, and pedagogical theories when programs institute standards that reflect our core principles. The Council recognizes that programs always display a continuum of characteristics, with areas of strengths and areas needing improvement. The crucial point is that **quality it is not a static condition**; it is an on-going process that requires educators to constantly learn, reflect, and dialogue on how to better meet the needs of families, children, educators, and the community. Minimum standards are below; examples of how the standards can be implemented are included in *Appendix B.*

Articulated Philosophy (Principle I)

Child

1. Understand and articulate that relationships which foster and model respect and mutual regard among educators, families, and children are essential for the emotional well being of the child and his/her ability to learn.

2. Develop philosophy, policies, and curricula that are based on culturally responsive and respected research, systems, and experiences that have gained the status of best practices.

3. Recognize that the program's responsibility is to meet the child's health, safety, nurturance, and developmental needs while promoting children's socialization skills and a love of learning.

4. Recognize that educators' accurate understanding of typical and atypical child development is crucial for healthy cognitive and emotional development of children.

5. Understand that the physical environment, including quality of the facility, influences our daily lives, and that cleanliness, low toxicity, order, and design provide security, comfort, and support for learning (for adults and children).

Family

6. Recognize that families are the children's first and most important teachers and that their child rearing beliefs will be incorporated into the program's developmentally appropriate practices whenever possible.

7. Believe that families are to be honored through involvement in daily routines and in program planning; and that family confidentiality is to be respected at all times.

8. Recognize that a major role of the program is to engage families with culturally and linguistically respectful information and dialogue on the educational philosophy of the program, and with resources on parenting and community support systems.

Educators

9. Recognize that educators are the foundation of the program and must maintain professional standards at all times.

10. Believe that strong and thoughtful leadership is vital to achieving and maintaining program quality.

11. Recognize that fair and equitable employment policies, including compensation, are necessary.

12. Recognize that the program leader's role is to ensure that education and professional growth opportunities are made available to staff to the fullest extent possible. *See Principle III*

Community

13. Articulate that our society must provide optimum opportunities to support the well being and education of all children and families in our country.

14. Believe in a "good neighbor policy" and in keeping abreast of changes and needs in the community.

15. Recognize the program has a role in supporting the ECE professional community through cooperative involvement in activities and events.

Continuous, Reflective Program Evaluation (Principle II)

Child

1. Consistently discuss and solicit questions on how program practices are related to beliefs and philosophy (e.g. *the scribbles that the two year olds are doing help their coordination and is a pre-writing experience appropriate for their age and developmental level.)*

2. Use reflective discussion and observation (not just "check lists") to informally and formally evaluate program (e.g. *solicit feed-back and input on activities, meetings, etc.).*

3. Consistently use appropriate assessment tools and methodology (ECERS, CLASS, DRDP-R, ELCO, PAS, BASS, etc.) to improve quality through follow-up actions.

4. Always practice non-intrusive and validated child observation techniques to record each child's adjustment, behavior patterns, developmental progress, interests, and relationships with peers and adults.

5. Consistently use observation and information to analyze how the program environment and activities address children's emotional and developmental needs, as well as how to adjust the adult-child interactions and relationships, physical environment, curriculum, and activities to foster the growth of individuals and groups of children.

6. Ensure that a child mental health or development specialist is available for consultation; have a well developed list of child development resources to help measure goals and practices.

Family

7. Hold regular family meetings and group activities; meet with each child's family at least twice a year.

8. Conduct outreach and recruitment that ensures diversity in family and educator representation in the program.

9. Consistently communicate with families in order to support families as well as children.

Educators

10. Establish policies and practices that incorporate staff as reflective evaluators.

11. Ensure that staff performance evaluation is based on program goals and beliefs, and includes self - reflection by staff and supervisors.

12. Encourage educator self-reflection as a part of the daily routine; build relationships among staff that are respectful of multiple approaches to meet the program vision and goals.

Community

13. Consider the multiple communities related to the program, including its own internal structure, the neighborhood, the larger municipal, socio-economic, and government, and ECE professional communities, and the parent community.

14. Monitor the impact of surrounding neighborhood on families, children, and educators (*e.g.*: do families in the community need assistance in a changing economy; is it harder for families to feel safe bringing their children to the program).

15. Annually assess the program for participation in community events, fairs, etc., to promote good child development and family support services.

16. Monitor how the program is fostering partnerships with ECE and other professional groups in order to keep up to date and improve services for families, educators, and community.

On-Going Learning, Education, and Support for Educators (Principle III)

1. Ensure that the highest professional standards, as identified by research and best practices, are maintained among all staff.

2. Maintain and comply with equitable, transparent personnel policies and compensation systems; ensure that all federal and state employment laws are followed; provide appropriate information on budget to staff.

3. Require education and experience that exceed regulatory mandates; include professional growth as part of job descriptions.

4. Institute and reinforce the practice of reflective self-evaluation techniques to be shared with colleagues or supervisors on a regular basis.

5. Develop practices that help educators to become critical thinkers (*e.g.: examine "challenging behaviors" from developmental, environmental, adult-child relationship perspectives, etc., not from "what is wrong with the child"*).

6. Establish and regularly review **learning** goals (skills, techniques, specific areas of knowledge) for each educator, and methods of achieving them.

7. Develop and maintain specific, individual **education** goals (training, credit bearing courses, degrees etc.) at least annually.

8. Keep educators up to date on child development research (including neuro-science) and instructional methods through discussions with colleagues and attendance at conferences, workshops, etc.

9. Incorporate release time and incentives for attending courses, classes, workshops, and conferences (include it in family child care policy and parent information); conduct in-service trainings on a regular basis with topics requested by staff.

10. Establish practices that allow staff to design classrooms to meet the needs of the children in their care within the developmental philosophy and guidelines of the program.

11. Promote cross-discipline learning between and among practitioners of mental health, early education, family support, and medicine, etc.

12. Collaborate with all possible partners (colleges, community based agencies, family child care and other professional associations, etc.) to promote education and learning for all educators in the community.

13. Include family support, cultural responsiveness, diversity, and societal needs in educator training and on-going learning.

14. Believe that it is vital to participate in public forums, advocacy groups, and events that support resource development, including better compensation.

15. Consistently promote and encourage professionalism and leadership through respect for, and attention to, research on the value and importance of quality ECE in a young child's life.

APPENDIX B

Implementing Quality Standards in Center & FCC – Examples

EXAMPLE 1 – TINKER BELL CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Principle I: Articulated Philosophy

Tinker Bell Child Development Center serves a diverse group of working families from low, middle, and upper middle income neighborhoods. It believes that children learn best through exploration and "hands-on" experiences, and the staff has studied constructivist theory and emergent curriculum. Tinker Bell holds that a strong social-emotional developmental approach is necessary for young children to succeed, and that building positive relationships with adults and peers is a primary goal. Many of Tinker Bell's parents are concerned about academic preparation for their children, and the community that Tinker Bell serves is worried about the "achievement gap" in our K-12 system. The director and staff must articulate and "show" their philosophy so that parents and others understand it and gain trust in their work by explaining how the philosophy prepares children to succeed academically.

The Tinker Bell director provides a parent handbook and conducts a thorough orientation on its philosophy with new staff and family, using many examples. *e.g.:* "*We encourage all children to share their stories and questions, and often write the stories on chart paper or in children's journals. This shows respect for the children's ideas, and develops ways for us to build activities and curriculum around children's interests.* **We make sure that letters, words, and numerical and science concepts are naturally built into whatever the children are learning about.** *We also believe that parents are our partners and we ask that you participate in our dinners and other activities. We want you to feel comfortable at all times and will strive to answer your questions as best we can.*"

Principle II: Reflective, On-Going Program Evaluation

A part of each staff meeting is reserved to discuss recent successes and challenges – *e.g.:* "*I can't get the two-year olds to nap even though they are really exhausted. Because of our emphasis on meeting the physical and emotional needs of children, I'm worried about stressing the children and myself out, and making things worse. I'd like a consultation with a mental health or developmental specialist to see if we may be missing cues and what we might want to do differently.*"…."*The four-year old group is very excited and learning so much about geology, thanks to Teacher Pitty Pat and her staff who are creating a curriculum based on the children's interests in rocks. The kids are counting and describing every rock and root they see, and want to build a dam to find out how erosion (or 'rosin' as Camille calls it) works. So our emergent curriculum approach is on track. Can someone write this up so we can share it with the parents and interested colleagues?*"

Tinker Bell's parents are invited to bi-monthly dinner meetings (child care provided!) to talk about the program and enjoy experiences that their children participate in. Staff members solicit questions and input from the parents, and this information is used to analyze how staff may reformat information on its philosophy–or investigate whether some of their beliefs and practices may need to be revised (*e.g.*: ok, *maybe it would be appropriate for the older four and five year olds to experience letter writing practice on a regular basis).*

Principle III: On-Going Education and Learning

In addition to program evaluation, each employee meets with her supervisor on a regular basis to discuss specific performance, education, and learning goals. A review of accomplishments and challenges is included, with an emphasis on how the staff person and the center can promote ongoing learning and problem solving. In-service training is held monthly. The center can not afford to pay tuition or books, but makes every effort to allow for release time. The over-all attitude and practice of the center is to keep questioning, learning, and sharing with the families, children, and community it serves.

EXAMPLE 2: HILARY SAM'S FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME

Principle I: Articulated Philosophy

Hilary Sam manages a family child care program that serves working parents and parents moving from CalWORKS to employment, many with infants and toddlers. Her beliefs and practices, including her reflective attention to program evaluation, are described below:

Hilary has ten years experience working with young children and raising three of her own. She attends workshops on child development and early education, and takes classes at the local college. From her experience, instincts, and education, Hilary believes that children, especially babies and toddlers, need an abundance of attention, nurturing, (holding, carrying, hugging, etc.), and verbal interaction. She believes that her older kids also need exposure to books and games and activities that will help prepare them for kindergarten. Some of her parents don't want her to "spoil the child" by holding him or her too much, and believe that children should be taught to sit quietly and complete individual activities, such as worksheets on numbers and letters.

Hilary has a brochure that explains her beliefs about children's needs and what parents can expect in her program. She speaks individually with parents every day (even if it's brief) and consistently reminds them that play, human interaction, and "fun" are valuable learning experiences, helping children become trusting and secure rather than "spoilt". Hilary makes sure that parents understand they can come to her with problems and questions, and that she recognizes that family members are the most important people in the child's life. Because she wants her family child care families to feel comfortable in the neighborhood, Hilary makes a point of visiting with her neighbors and takes the children on walks whenever possible. Hilary also tries to go to at least one workshop or course every year (see principle #3), and networks with other providers through meetings and more informal gatherings that she regularly fits into her busy schedule..

Principle II: Reflective, On-Going Program Evaluation

Hilary has developed a mental checklist to ensure that each child has a "special Hilary time" at least X number of times a day, whether or not he or she is demanding attention. Hilary has established a routine so children know when different activities (story time, art, play outside, etc.) take place, and tells the parents what children enjoy or what books are favorites. During the day Hilary jots down observations on the children and how the routine and activities are working. Later she will read her notes and think about activities or games she'd like to play with the children, or something she does not want to repeat. These reflective thoughts make her feel comfortable about her work and provide ideas for enhancing it.

When Hilary has one of her "nagging thoughts" about a child's behavior or development, she calls or emails a trusted colleague or the local R&R, or a workshop leader she has met. She keeps the child and family situation confidential, but has found that it's better to talk situations through with someone before approaching the parent. In this way, Hilary feels that she is following through with her own ideas of what she wants for children and parents, and can make changes in her approach if that is a reasonable choice.

Principle III: On-Going Education and Learning

Hilary's involvement in her community, attending workshops, taking college courses, and networking with other providers keep her abreast of new issues that impact her work. She also tries to learn something new about each of her families every year (e.g. what is your favorite meal? What movies do you like?), and uses the information to engage with children and family members. Hilary takes time to read articles and watch TV shows about child development and takes advantage of all kinds of information (recently learning Spanish), and "keep on learning".

ENDNOTES

[i] The principles address licensed and license-exempt group care outside of the family's home. The Council supports quality care by individuals such as nannies or "family, friend, and neighbors", and believes it needs its own unique statement.

[ii] "Educator" is the term used in this document to identify adults who care for and educate children in their role as family child care providers, teachers, directors, assistants, or any other paid capacity.

[iii] The terms "ECE community" and "ECE professional infrastructure" include agencies that support professional development and quality services in ECE and related fields, such as R&R's, colleges, training agencies, research institutions, mental health consultation, and medical and dental systems, cultural and neighborhood groups, parent support agencies, advocacy and professional associations, etc.

[iv] "Best practices" refer to organizational, administrative, instructional, or support activities engaged in by highly successful programs, as validated by research and organizational or program evidence; John Gardner; interview at Maryville College TN. 2006.