



Alameda County Child Care Planning Council Statement on High Quality ECE Principles and Standards

Approved by the Planning Council Steering Committee ~ September 18, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The Alameda County Child Care Planning Council has adopted the following statement on quality early care and education (ECE). The Statement is framed as a **vision of excellence** and a **process guide** to:

- *support* the ECE community and its partners as we pursue resources and paths to achieve and maintain quality care and education for all children.
- *assist* classes, workshops, center and family child care staff, and others to examine the purpose and intent of their programs and how they are reflected in practice.
- *help* create a comfortable climate for dialogue, review, and identification of changes needed in specific programs and in the ECE field

3 CORE PRINCIPLES

The 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 three interdependent principles:*** 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 educatorⁱⁱ professionalism.

ⁱThe 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, friends, 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.

Every high-quality program institutes and adheres to these interdependent principles



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 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.

Principle 1

1 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 examples*). 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 practiceⁱⁱⁱ; 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ“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.

Principle 2

2 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 1) 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.

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

Principle 3

3 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.

Principle 1

1
An articulated philosophy that addresses the needs of children, families, educators and the community

Standards:

Child

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

- 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.

- 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.
- 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

- Recognize that educators are the foundation of the program and must maintain professional standards at all times.
- Believe that strong and thoughtful leadership is vital to achieving and maintaining program quality.
- Recognize that fair and equitable employment policies, including compensation, are necessary.
- 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 3*

Community

- Articulate that our society must provide optimum opportunities to support the well being and education of all children and families in our country.
- Believe in a "good neighbor policy" and in keeping abreast of changes and needs in the community.
- Recognize that the program has a role in supporting the ECE professional community through cooperative involvement in activities and events.

Implementing Quality Standards in Centers and Family Child Care

Example 1 Tinker Bell Child Development Center

Principle 1 An Articulated Philosophy

Tinker Bell Child Development Center serves a diverse group of working families, and believes that children learn best through exploration and "hands-on" experiences. The staff studies constructivist theory and holds that a strong social-emotional developmental approach created through positive relationships among adults and children is the key to success. Tinker Bell's parents are concerned about academic preparation for their children, and worried about the "achievement gap" in our K-12 system. The director and staff must articulate their philosophy so that parents and others understand how it prepares children to develop personal and academic strength.

Tinker Bell's 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 children to share their stories and questions. We often write the stories on chart paper or in children's journals to show respect

for the children's ideas. Doing so helps us develop ways 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. Parents are our partners and we want you to feel comfortable at all times to ask questions and make suggestions."

Principle 2 Continual and Consistent 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. 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 Pat's staff who are creating a curriculum based on the children's interests in rocks. The kids are counting and describing every rock and piece of sand they see, and want to build a dam to find out how erosion works. So our emergent curriculum (constructivist theory) approach is on track. Can someone write this up so we can share it with the parents and colleagues?"

Principle 2

2

Continual and consistent program evaluation

Standards:

Child

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

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 use questions and input from the parents to analyze how to reformat information on its philosophy—or investigate whether some of their practices may need to be revised (*e.g.: ok, we’ll consistently practice letter writing in pre-k three times a week.*)

Principle 3 On-Going Learning and Support for Educators

In addition to program evaluation, each employee meets with her supervisor on a regular basis to discuss specific performance, education, and learning goals, and how the center can promote ongoing learning and problem solving (eg: book and video reviews, lunch time discussions on emergent curriculum). In-service training is held monthly, and because the center can not afford to pay tuition or books, it makes every effort to allow for release time for classes, conferences, and workshops. The over-all attitude and practice of the center is to keep questioning, learning, and sharing with the families, children, and community it serves.

Family

- Hold regular family meetings and group activities; meet with each child’s family at least twice a year.
- Conduct outreach and recruitment that ensures diversity in family and educator representation in the program.
- Consistently communicate with families in order to support families as well as children.

Educators

- Establish policies and practices that incorporate staff as reflective evaluators.
- Ensure that staff performance evaluation is based on program goals and beliefs, and includes self -reflection by staff and supervisors.
- 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

- Consider the multiple communities related to the program, including its own internal structure, the neighborhood, the larger municipal, socio-economic, and parent groups.
- 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.*)
- Annually assess the program for participation in community events, fairs, etc., to promote good child development and family support services.
- 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.

Example 2 Hilary Sam’s Family Child Care Home

Principle 1 An Articulated Philosophy

Hilary Sam manages a family child care program that serves working parents and parents moving from welfare to employment, with children ranging from infancy through pre-school age. She has ten years experience in ECE and is raising three of her own children. 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; all children need books and games and physical activities that will help prepare them for later school experiences. Some of her parents don’t want her to “spoil the child” by holding them too much, and believe that children should be taught to sit quietly and complete individual activities, such as worksheets on numbers and letters.

Hilary’s brochure explains her beliefs about children’s needs and what parents can expect in her program. She speaks individually with parents every day

Principle 3

3 Ongoing learning and support for educators

Standards:

- Ensure that the highest professional standards, as identified by research and best practices, are maintained among all staff.
 - 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.
 - Require education and experience that exceed regulatory mandates; include professional growth as part of job descriptions.
 - Institute and reinforce the practice of reflective self-evaluation techniques to be shared with colleagues or supervisors on a regular basis.
 - 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”).
 - Establish and regularly review **learning** goals (skills, techniques, specific areas of knowledge) and methods of achieving them for each educator.
 - Develop and maintain specific, individual **education** goals (training, credit bearing courses, degrees etc.) at least annually.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - Establish practices that allow individual staff to design classrooms to meet the needs of the children in their care within the developmental philosophy and guidelines of the program.
 - Promote cross-discipline learning between and among practitioners of mental health, early education, family support, and medicine, etc.
 - 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.
 - Include family support, cultural responsiveness, diversity, and societal needs in educator training and on-going learning.
 - Believe that it is vital to participate in public forums, advocacy groups, and events that support resource development, including better compensation.
 - 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.



and consistently reminds them that play, human interaction, and “fun” are valuable learning experiences, helping children become trusting and secure rather than “spoilt.” Because she wants her family child care families to feel comfortable in the neighborhood, Hilary takes the children on walks to meet the neighbors whenever possible. Hilary also gathers ideas on how to explain her philosophy through networking with other providers at meetings and informal gatherings.

Principle 2 Continual and Consistent Program Evaluation

Hilary has developed a mental checklist to ensure that each child has “special Hilary times” every day and tries to maintain an established routine so children know when different activities (story time, art, play outside, etc.) take place. During the day Hilary jots down observations on the children and how the routine and activities are working. Later she uses the notes to think about activities or games she’d like to play with the children, or something she does not want to repeat. Her notes and thoughts also help her talk to parents about their children and what they enjoy. These reflective thoughts make her feel comfortable about her work and provide ideas for enhancing it.

When Hilary has a “nagging thought” about a child’s behavior or development, she contacts a trusted colleague, 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 is able to communicate and evaluate her own ideas and make changes in her approach with children or families if that is a reasonable choice.

Principle 3 On-Going Learning and Support for Educators

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), to “keep on learning and growing.”



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