

Guiding Principles

All children benefit from rich learning environments in homes, communities and early care and education settings. Connecticut's Early Learning and Development Standards provide the basis for supporting children's growth and development across settings. The following principles guided the work on the early learning and development standards.

The guiding principles are grouped into four broad categories: Young Children, Families, Early Learning Environments and Communities. The first category, Young Children, addresses what is known about young children's learning and development. The other categories address the roles and responsibilities of families, early childhood environments and communities in supporting children's health, learning and development.

These principles must be considered when this document is used to support children in any early learning environment. Although this document articulates learning standards for children from birth to age 5, these same principles apply throughout the early elementary years.

Young Children:

- **Are capable and competent.** All children are capable of achieving positive early learning and developmental outcomes. There should be high expectations for all young children, regardless of their background, experience, language or developmental status.
- **Learn best when their basic needs are met.** Basic needs of young children include health (physical, mental and oral), safe and nurturing environments, positive social relationships, a sense of belonging and sound nutrition. If these basic needs are not met, a child's growth and development will be affected.
- **Are unique in their growth and development.** Each child will demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities within a broad

range at any point in time. All children within an age range should not be expected to gain a particular skill at the same time. Variation in the growth and development of skills and competencies applies to all young children regardless of age, ability, developmental status or special health care needs. Respect and support for individual differences in achieving learning outcomes should be a cornerstone of early learning.

- **Develop and learn within the context of their family and culture.** Each child's family and culture lays the foundation of who they are and how they learn and grow.



Families:

- **Are the primary caregivers and educators of young children.** Families lay the foundation for their children's success, through their relationship with their children and by providing experiences that are critical for their children's growth and development.
- **Are critical partners in all early learning environments.** It is important for families to be actively engaged with their child's early care and education. Ongoing communication and an active partnership are necessary to ensure positive outcomes; therefore, families must be supported as partners in all early learning environments.



Early Learning Environments:

- **Support young children to learn in the context of relationships.** Positive interactions and sustained relationships with family members, caregivers, teachers and other children provide the foundation for learning. Every child, including those with social, emotional or behavioral challenges, should be provided the supports and services necessary to promote ongoing positive relationships with peers and adults.
- **Reinforce the importance of the cultural context of young children, families and communities.** Cultural context influences behavioral expectations, personal preferences, relationships and sense of self. It is imperative that each child's culture be respected and honored.
- **Provide opportunities for active exploration.** Young children construct their own understanding of the world around them through exploration and engagement with a variety of materials, experiences and interactions with both peers and adults. Every child should be provided the opportunity to actively explore, engage and interact by providing the supports necessary to ensure a child's full and active participation within an environment.
- **Provide meaningful inclusion of children with special needs.** Participation in these inclusive settings may require individualized modifications, adaptations and/or support services designed to provide each child with opportunities to benefit from inclusion in an early learning environment.

- **Provide experiences that are relevant and integrated across domains of development.** Developmental domains and content areas are highly interrelated. Children learn best when experiences incorporate multiple domains. Children with special health care needs, delays or disabilities should be provided the individualized supports needed to promote positive developmental outcomes in all areas.
- **Intentionally promote the development of skills and knowledge.** Planning and decision-making should be based upon research and best practices related to how young children grow and develop.
- **Provide opportunities for children to benefit from diversity.** Diversity (e.g., culture, ability, socioeconomic status, family constellation) provides opportunities for children to learn about the broader world.
- **Support children's language development in their primary language.** Children's success in their primary language supports their growth and development across all domains, including acquisition of a second language. Early learning environments may provide opportunities for children to use their primary language and should support families in speaking and reading to their children in the language(s) they prefer.

Communities:

- **Believe that all children deserve high-quality early learning experiences.** They value families and invest in systems that support young children, families and early learning environments.
- **Offer a variety of resources that support early growth and development.** Thriving communities provide supports for children and families, including medical, social and educational opportunities for children, families and caregivers.
- **Strategically plan to meet the needs of children and families.** They plan together using information relevant to the unique circumstances in their community. This includes facilitating smooth transitions within and between programs and settings.