

WEST VIRGINIA

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# EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDER

QUARTERLY

**Holding Your  
Programs  
Accountable**

**What Makes a  
“Curriculum” a  
Curriculum?**



**Harnessing the Power of Technology  
for Early Childhood Assessment**

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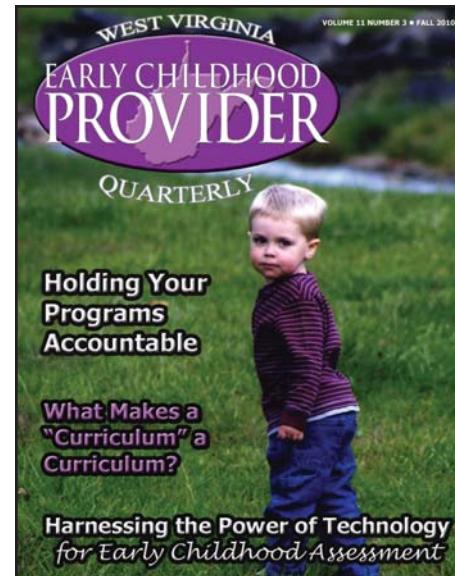
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# Resources and Relationships: TRAILS Delivers Both

Submitted by Jennifer Conkle, Link CCR&R TRAILS; Janet Thompson, Mountainheart South TRAILS; Todd Fromhart, Child Care Resource Center TRAILS; and Missy Smith, ECE Specialist, WVDHHR

“The TRAILS van is a great resource for any provider just starting out. It lets you borrow things to get your program going. It helps when you have mixed age groups so that you can borrow the age appropriate items for each child,” said Rose, a family child care provider in Wayne County

The Traveling Resource and Information Library System (TRAILS) program in West Virginia first became available for use by early childhood professionals in February 2001, with visits beginning in May of that year. Since that time, TRAILS has continued with its original goal of providing services and resources to all early childhood providers throughout the state, including those located in rural areas. Maxanne, director of Mountain Cap Child Care Center in Webster County, explains, “TRAILS is helpful because we are so rural. It is sometimes difficult to access what we need.”

The vision of the TRAILS program is that by reaching out to all early childhood programs, it is assisting in making quality child care available to every child in West Virginia. All early childhood programs, including Head Starts, Pre-Ks, child care centers, family child care providers, and school age pro-



grams are eligible to receive services by TRAILS.

There are six different agencies within the state that support TRAILS programs, for a total of eight operating vans. Each TRAILS program is staffed by an early childhood specialist and an associate. Both members of the team receive on-going training in the field of early childhood education. The services provided by TRAILS include early childhood trainings, technical assistance, provider resource materials, assistive technology, and children’s materials and supplies. “Each time we get new TRAILS items, the children devour them. We are so excited to try new things,” said Virginia from Fayette County.

Specific materials may vary from pro-

gram to program, but each offers the same type of services. Materials are borrowed from the TRAILS programs, used by the providers, and returned at a time designated by each program. The length of time a provider may keep materials depends upon several factors, including the number of providers within a specific region, and the demand for a particular item.

TRAILS is free for providers to access. Providers are only asked to sign a contract stating that they will care for the items borrowed and return them in the same condition as they were borrowed (normal wear and tear is expected). If items are lost or destroyed, a replacement fee may be required. This is only to help the TRAILS program continue to purchase and provide quality materials for all providers. Linda, a family

child care provider from Taylor County, shares that her children “learn they must respect the TRAILS resources so that others may use them later.”

In addition to visiting counties and programs throughout the state, the TRAILS program also joins in local events that support early childhood education. Such events include conferences, early childhood parades, resource fairs for families and professionals, among others. By participating in such events, the TRAILS program creates opportunities for the community as a whole to learn more about the services provided and how all children may benefit from the program. The material and equipment available through TRAILS may be useful to

other professionals as well as child care providers. As mentioned, TRAILS has an inventory of assistive technology that can be loaned to other professionals, such as Birth to Three practitioners, to be used with children with special needs.

“The resources are very helpful in the classroom setting and suggestions offered from the very helpful TRAILS staff are very much appreciated,” said Karen, director of St. Joseph’s Child Care Center in Martinsburg.

If the TRAILS program is a service that you are interested in learning more about but are not yet utilizing, you may contact the program in your area for further questions and assistance.

## TRAILS Programs in West Virginia

### **Child Care Resource Center, 1-800-585-1603**

Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall, Tyler, Wetzel, Marion & Monongalia counties

### **Choices CCR&R 1-866-622-6528**

Wood, Ritchie, Wirt, Calhoun, Gilmer, Doddridge, Harrison & Pleasants counties

### **Connect CCR&R, 1-888-595-8290**

Kanawha, Jackson, Roane & Clay counties

### **Link CCR&R, 1-800-894-9540**

Cabell, Wayne, Mingo, Logan, Boone, Lincoln, Putnam & Mason counties

### **Mountainheart North (Grafton), 1-877-811-5437**

Taylor, Barbour, Preston, Lewis, Tucker, Randolph & Upshur counties

### **Mountainheart North (Martinsburg), 1-888-915-7653**

Pendleton, Grant, Hardy, Hampshire, Mineral, Morgan, Berkeley & Jefferson counties

### **Mountainheart South (Lewisburg), 1-866-223-7127**

Greenbrier, Summers, Monroe, Pocahontas, Fayette, Braxton, Webster & Nichols counties

### **Mountainheart South (Beckley), 1-888-799-9217**

Raleigh, Wyoming, McDowell, & Mercer counties

## Why TRAILS?

**“Great opportunity to ‘test drive’ things we are thinking about getting for our center.”**

-Melissa, *The Tree House, Hancock, WV*

**“Our babies really enjoy the variety of music we get from the TRAILS van. Thank you for making the babies’ smile.”**

-Denise, *Home Times, Randolph Co.*

**“Being an in-home provider, TRAILS is a wonderful resource. Changing out different things is great. Todd and Michelle are two great people.”**

-Ina Jo, *Ohio Co.*

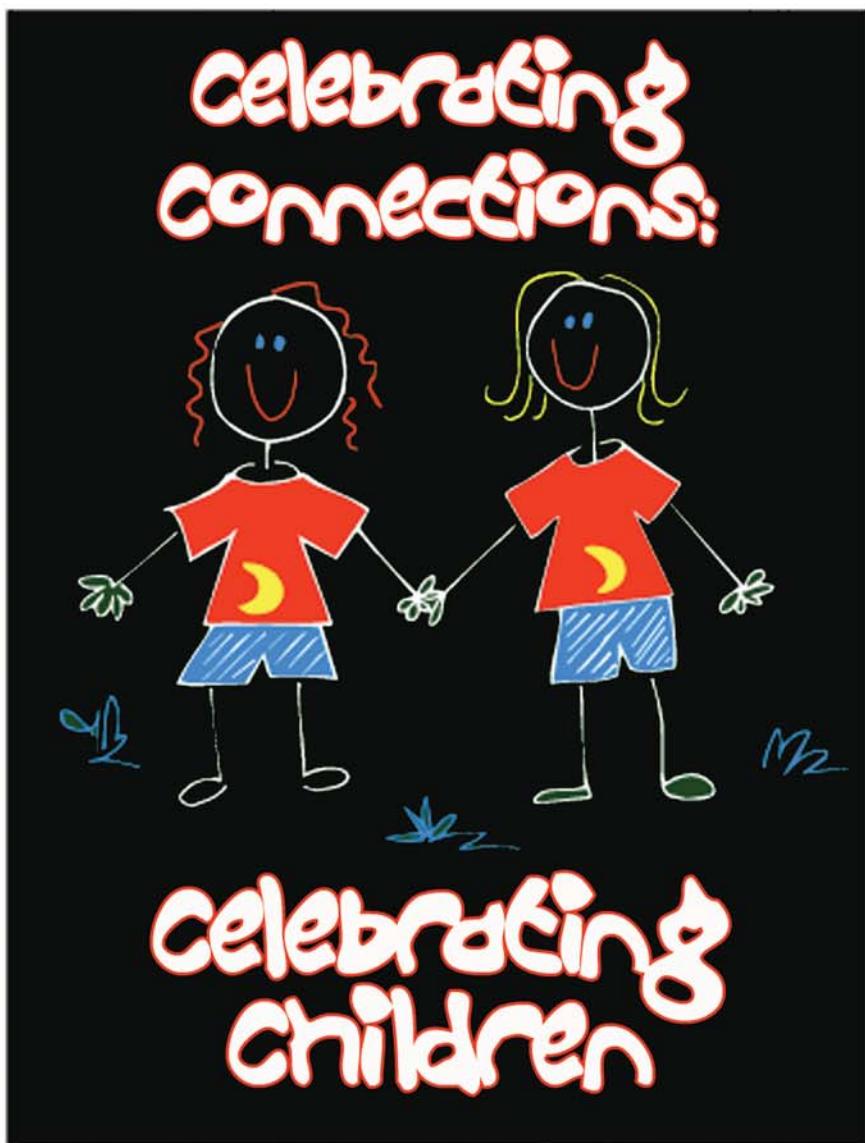
**“I can’t imagine anyone not using TRAILS! They have been invaluable to us. If someone has never used the TRAILS van they need to call and see what all is available.”**

-Iva, *Kanawha Co.*

**“The TRAILS van has been a great resource for me to use with my children. I have found the materials helpful and useful, and the TRAILS team is encouraging to me.”**

-Betty, *Harrison Co.*

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# Harnessing the Power of Technology for Early Childhood Assessment

Submitted by Cate Heroman, Teaching Strategies, Inc.

High-quality early childhood programs can provide children with the skills they need to be socially competent, successful learners. In the United States, millions of dollars in federal, state, and local government funds, as well as private sector funds, have been invested in early childhood education. Educators need to be accountable and ensure that this money is spent well. Ongoing, authentic assessment is a means for measuring outcomes. It answers these questions:

- How can I track this child's learning and development?
- Is this child making progress?
- How can I use assessment information for planning?
- How does this child's progress compare to others in the same age range?
- How can information about what children know and can do be shared with families?
- How can I summarize children's progress and report findings to others?

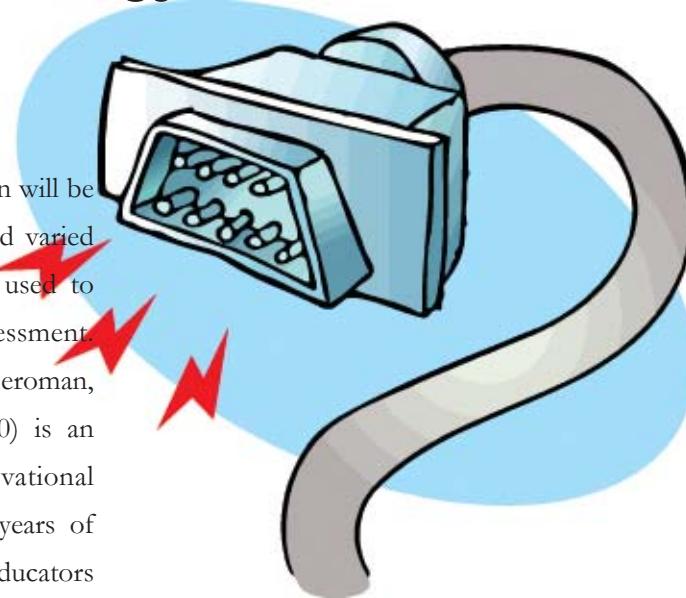
## **Teaching Strategies GOLD™ Assessment System: Birth Through Kindergarten**

For the purposes of this article, a new, innovative assessment system for chil-

dren birth through kindergarten will be used to illustrate the many and varied ways that technology can be used to streamline and enhance assessment. *Teaching Strategies GOLD™* (Heroman, Burts, Berke, & Bickart, 2010) is an ongoing, authentic, observational assessment system based on years of feedback from thousands of educators and important new research about how children develop and learn. It helps teachers be intentional in their teaching by accurately pinpointing where children are in their development and learning.

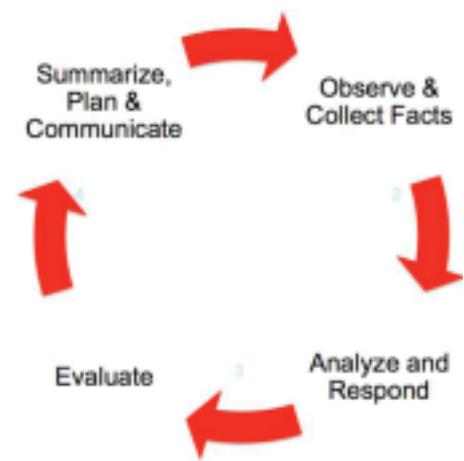
These are the primary purposes for which teachers use *Teaching Strategies GOLD™*:

- Observe and document children's development and learning over time
- Support, guide, and inform planning and instruction
- Provide reports to administrators to guide program planning and professional development opportunities
- Report and communicate with family members and others
- Identify children who might benefit from special help or further evaluation
- Collect and gather child outcome information as part of a larger accountability system



## **Using Technology Throughout the Assessment Cycle**

Assessment is a continuous cycle of observing and collecting facts; analyzing and responding; evaluating; and summarizing, planning, and communicating with others. Following this assessment cycle helps teachers put the pieces together into a seamless, systematic assessment system that helps them guide children's development and learning. Technology is used to streamline and enhance each step of the assessment process.



### **Step 1: Observe and Collect Facts**

The first step in the assessment process is to learn about the children, to find out what they know and can do in relation to each of the curricular objectives. Ongoing observation is therefore an essential part of connecting assessment and curriculum.

To help them remember and use what they learn from their observations, teachers set up systems for taking notes and organizing their documentation for each child. They observe children in the context of everyday playful activities in the classroom and collect documentation in many forms: observation notes, photographs, video and audio clips, samples of children's work, diagrams or sketches, checklists, participation lists, and frequency counts.

#### **Technology Enhancements for Observing and Collecting Facts**

- **Electronic portfolios** are created online to store children's work and to keep other records. Observation notes are entered online, and teachers can attach photos and video or audio clips.

- **Digital pens** can be used to record observation notes on specially designed digital paper. The pen, with as much as 8g of memory, can record children's voices as well as teachers' notes. The digital pen saves time at the computer because handwritten notes can be transferred directly to the children's portfolios.

- **Digital video and still cameras** are important for capturing factual information. Photos and video clips can be stored in the children's electronic portfolios and linked to curricular objectives. Many teachers are finding the new, high-definition mini-cameras such as the Flip™ video camera especially handy and easy to use.

- **Scanners** are sometimes used to copy children's writing and artwork. Scans are saved in a digital format. However, many teachers find it easier just to take photographs of children's work.

- **Digital voice recorders** enable teachers to capture children's conversations or monologues and analyze them later. Some digital voice recorders have voice-to-text conversions that can be copied and placed in the children's portfolios.

### **Step 2: Analyze and Respond**

The next stage in the assessment cycle involves organizing documentation and making informed judgments about what this information tells teachers about each child's progress in relation to the objectives.

To analyze and respond, teachers ask themselves, "What does this mean?" as they observe children. Teachers often respond immediately. They use their knowledge and understanding of the development and learning progressions included in Teaching Strategies

GOLD™ to choose just the right strategy, material, or other support to scaffold children's learning. At other times, teachers step back and reflect on the information they have collected.

#### **Technology Enhancements for Analyzing and Responding**

- Online documentation is linked to related objectives. After entering any form of documentation, teachers select the related objectives. When teachers are ready to make evaluations, this assists them in making informed decisions.

- **Online collaboration tools** support professional development. Teachers can review assessment information with their colleagues and discuss it online. For example, a free Web site called *VoiceThread* enables teachers to upload video clips and describe what they are seeing. Using this tool, groups of teachers can insert text and audio comments next to the video clip to create an online discussion centered on a particular piece of documentation.

### **Step 3: Evaluate**

Evaluating children's progress means deciding what levels each child has reached on the curricular objectives. Three or four times a year, teachers review all of the collected documentation and make informed decisions about how each child is progressing in comparison with other children of the same age.

## Technology Enhancements for Evaluating

- **Online development and learning progressions** describe the learning path, or trajectory, for each objective. Teachers select “view observations” to see all of the documentation associated with a learning objective.
- “**Learn More**” options enables teachers to gain a better understanding of what they are assessing by reading the explanation of and research behind each objective.
- **Video examples** can be viewed so teachers can see what an objective looks like in action.
- **Audio explanations** of each objective describes in a conversational tone what the objective is all about and what to notice. These explanations go beyond what is included in the written text and give the teacher additional insights so her assessment is more accurate.

### Step 4: Summarize, Plan and Communicate

The final step of the assessment cycle is very important but often neglected. It involves summarizing what teachers know, making plans for individual children and whole groups on the basis of that knowledge, and communicating with those outside the classroom. At this point, teachers make a clear link between curriculum and assessment.

## Technology Enhancements for Summarizing, Planning, and Communicating

- **Class profiles** show teachers the names of the children at each level of the development and learning progressions. This helps the teachers plan small-group experiences and otherwise support children’s learning.
- **Online activities** are suggested for both home and school on the basis of each child’s current developmental levels. The online activities are personalized by inserting the child’s name throughout the instructions.
- **Online planning form** enables teachers to create customized instructional plans and insert activities from the online collection. Plans can be submitted to administrators electronically. Administrators can review, give feedback, and return the plans to teachers.
- **Family communication** is also supported through online tools. Family members are invited to view portions of their own child’s online portfolio. They are also invited to share some of their observations about the child. Family members can contribute photos and video clips, so the child’s portfolio can be a collaborative effort of both teachers and family members.
- **Family conference forms** are generated electronically, saving teachers considerable effort.

● **Online reports** for administrators are created easily after teachers have entered in their assessment information. Data can be aggregated and disaggregated instantly. With the touch of a button, an administrator anywhere in the world can gather data and create a wide variety of reports about the children in his or her program. These reports can then be sent to those officials or administrators who need to see the data about how children are progressing.

### Using Technology to Enhance Professional Development

To use Teaching Strategies GOLD™ effectively and accurately, training is necessary. Teaching Strategies will offer multiple formats for professional development. In addition to face-to-face training, online training will be offered. Given the present economy, basic online professional development that is included with the online system is not only a cost-saving measure, but also a way to assure that all teachers are receiving the same message about the process and procedures for assessing children’s learning. In addition, with high staff turnover, a teacher who misses a training event is not at a loss of what to do. The training is available 24/7 and administrators are notified when the teacher has completed the training.

Part of the online training will include an inter-rater reliability protocol. This

protocol helps ensure that teachers are marking the assessment instrument accurately. Model electronic portfolios—complete with observation notes, photos, audio and video clips, and writing samples—were created for each age-group of children. The developers completed an assessment on the basis of model portfolios, then formed teams of three, and came to consensus on a “master rating.” During the assessment training, teachers practice using the tool in a computer lab with these model portfolios. After completing the assessment, each teacher receives a score that reflects the percentage of items that matched those of the developers. The goal is to be in agreement with the developers at least 80 percent of the time.

Another emerging technology for large trainings is the use of cell phone technology through the Web site polleverywhere.com. Trainers show video clips of children engaged in learning experi-

ences. Participants examine the development and learning progressions and determine a rating for the child. The presenter prompts them to send text messages with their responses to a designated number. Immediately after the messages are received, a chart of the participants’ responses appears on the screen. At a glance, the trainer can see whether the participants understood the content and method of the assessment system. The trainer can then spend more time discussing the clips or move on.

### Summary

Harnessing the power of technology enables teachers to streamline the assessment process and to be more accurate and efficient in their assessment of young children. When teachers are more accurate in their assessments, they are able to provide the appropriate interactions and interventions necessary to helping children succeed.

### Reference:

Heroman, C., Burts, D. C., Berke, K., & Bickart, T. (2010). *Teaching Strategies GOLD™ Objectives for Development & Learning: Birth Through Kindergarten*. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc.

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# Assessment and Curriculum for Early Childhood

Submitted by Kay DeWitt, Preston County Starting Points

When a child is first enrolled in an early childhood program, the screening process should begin. Interview parents or have them complete a parent questionnaire. Specific questions will give you important information on the child's development. Questions should include:

- child's birth history and health (vision, hearing, allergies)
- self-help skills (depending on age of child) including feeding and dressing himself or herself
- temperament (cries easily, over active, easy to anger, quiet)
- language and communication skills including following directions, speaking clearly according to age, and recognizing emotions
- skills that use small and large muscles including drawing, catching and throwing a ball, walking up and down stairs, and jumping.

Parental input is essential to the screening process. Once you have the information from the parents, you can add additional information from observations in your classroom. How does the child interact with his or her peers, interact with adults, choose which activities to enjoy in the classroom, or handle conflict? Because you see the child in relation to other children their age,

you can observe differences that may be important indicators of developmental delays or potential problems.

Most programs use screening instruments as part of the screening process. Screening tools are very useful in identifying problems that are not immediately evident or have been overlooked. The screening assessment has four major areas of development a teacher will look at including social and emotional skills, visual and fine motor skills, gross motor and body awareness skills, and cognitive and language skills.

Engaged teachers are observing children on a regular basis to look for signs of problems in a child's development. The purpose of a screening is to identify any child who may be in need of special needs services because of a developmental delay or health problem.

A developmental screening helps identify a child who may need a referral to be evaluated in greater depth. By identifying a child's delay early, teachers can design or refer for corrective measures so that the child will be more likely to succeed in school.

If your program is using a screening instrument, it should be one with estab-

lished reliability (consistent) and validity (accurate). Find an assessment tool that is age appropriate for your age group and the child's primary language. Children who are identified "at risk" should be referred to specialists for an in-depth evaluation. Make sure the child's parent or guardian is involved in the entire process so you and the experts can determine a course of action to best meet the needs of the child.

After the first assessment, observing and recording a child's progress is an ongoing process. Because the Creative Curriculum addresses all these areas of development, most Head Start, Pre-k, and Starting Points Centers use this curriculum. The Creative Curriculum can serve as a foundation for any program because its theory is that "children learn best through interactions." Structuring physical and social environments, changing and enriching that environment, and supporting the learning and creativity of children is an important part of setting up your classroom. This curriculum gives teachers the freedom to adapt and expand their classroom for children to explore and create a wonderful and exciting learning environment.

# Holding Your Program Accountable

## *HighScope's Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA)*

From *Holding Your Program Accountable* by Ann S. Epstein, Ph.D. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press. 2003 High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Used with permission.

A large, stylized yellow flame graphic occupies the left side of the page, rising from the bottom and curving upwards towards the top right.

The first educational reform principle in the K-12 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is “stronger accountability for results.” As this initiative takes effect, states will have to develop standards for education, and children will be tested to see whether those standards are met. This pressure for accountability is also being felt in early childhood programs such as Head Start, where funding may be contingent on the results of literacy and numeracy tests administered to four year olds as they enter and leave the program. Standards being developed for state-funded pre-kindergarten programs may result in comparable demands for accountability in those initiatives. With funding for early care and education facing budget cuts in these times of economic belt-tightening, it is understandable that public investors and private citizens want evidence that scarce dollars are being well spent.

### **Accountability and Quality**

We cannot hold children accountable for their performance without also holding programs accountable for educating them. Yet an emphasis on testing young children runs the risk of diverting us from focusing on the quality of the early childhood program they attend. Quality comes to be defined by children’s preacademic performance alone. The primary purpose of early childhood programs, however, must be to promote healthy development in all domains of children’s growth—physical, intellectual, and socio-emotional. Concerns about having a narrow focus on preacademics have appeared in a series of papers from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), most notably *Eager to Learn* (NAS, 2000a) and *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (NAS, 2000b). Quality advocates, drawing on studies such as *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes* (Cost, Quality, & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995), further emphasize that early development is affected by a program’s structural and process elements, including staff qualifications, relationships with families, coordination with other community services, and overall program management. In other words, program quality, like child development, is complex and multidimensional. It cannot be defined by a single narrow goal.

Every dedicated early childhood professional cares about program quality. But how do we know when we’ve achieved it? How do we define and measure quality without waiting for—or depending on—children’s test scores to tell us if we’re providing the right learning experiences? We have to look at our programs honestly to identify what is good and what needs improvement. We also need a common language to share this information with parents, administrators, researchers, and policymakers. An objective program evaluation tool is essential to encourage self-assess-

ment and promote communication among everyone concerned about program quality and its implications for early childhood development.

### **Overview of HighScope's Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA)**

Providing a valid tool to measure program quality is a long-standing and ongoing commitment of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. The PQA is a rating instrument used to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs. It is appropriate for use in all center-based settings, not just those using the HighScope educational approach. For example, the PQA is used by the Michigan Department of Education to monitor and fund its preschool programs in over 500 school districts and 100 community agencies statewide. The instrument has also been used in state and national studies of Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten programs, and child care settings. These programs serve a diversity of children and families.

The PQA intentionally reflects research-based and field-tested best practices in early childhood education. The measure identifies the structural characteristics and dynamic relationships that effectively promote the development of young children, encourage the development of families and communities, and create supportive working environments for staff. In keeping with the field's emphasis on a comprehensive approach to quality, the PQA examines all aspects of program implementation, from the physical characteristics of the setting and the nature of adult-child interaction to program staffing and management. It further reflects a professional consensus that the assessment of the program quality should not be based on a single type of data but requires a multidimensional approach. PQA data are therefore collected using both observational and interview techniques.

The PQA can be administered by trained independent evaluators or used by programs as a self-assessment tool. It can be employed to conduct systematic quantitative research or to design staff development programs. Using classroom observations and interviews with teaching and administrative staff, PQA raters complete a series of objective 5-point scales describing a broad array of program characteristics. The endpoints and the midpoint of each indicator are defined and illustrated with examples to ensure reliable and valid ratings. Unlike compliance measures, which typically permit only yes-no scores on items, the PQA defines quality along a continuum of levels. These multiple levels allow raters to indicate with greater specificity a program's current status and directions for improvement. In sum, the structure and content of the PQA permit both breadth and depth of focus in the measurement of program quality.

### **How to Use the Preschool PQA**

The PQA has widespread applicability as a training, monitoring, observation/feed-





back, and research and evaluation instrument. The information generated can be used to define and illustrate best practices, focus attention on program development issues in preservice and inservice training, examine the relationship between program practices and children's development, and point to promising policy initiatives and investments for improving the quality of early childhood programs. Below are some of the ways the PQA can be applied.

**Training.** The PQA can be used in preservice and inservice training. The detailed examples in the indicators for each item offer concrete illustrations of best practices in operation. Users often comment that the PQA defines "developmentally appropriate practice" by translating an idea or ideal into specific implementation strategies. Even experienced teachers find that the depth of the PQA helps them reconsider long-established practices from a new perspective.

**Self-assessment and monitoring.** The PQA is a valuable tool for programs to assess their own practices and identify areas for further development and training. It can be used by agency supervisors or others responsible for quality control to monitor program implementation at a single site or across multiple sites. Because the PQA is objective and quantitative, it can be used to set program goals in one or more areas and to provide a numerical and anecdotal record of progress.

**Observation and feedback.** Staff supervision and evaluation can be effective and nonthreatening when the PQA is used to conduct observations and provide feedback. An individual staff member of a teaching team agrees with a supervisor to focus on one or more aspects of implementation. The supervisor then uses the relevant PQA items or section(s) to observe the staff member or team in the program setting, record detailed anecdotes and make ratings, and discuss these with the practitioners. Together, they acknowledge strengths and identify areas for improvement, using the PQA's concrete examples to develop a plan of action.

**Research and evaluation.** When administered by trained outside observers, the PQA is a reliable and valid research tool. Studies can be designed to document program practices, compare quality in different program settings or types of auspices, and examine the relationship between program quality and young children's development. The PQA can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of staff development initiatives by assessing program quality before and after training activities.

**Information and dissemination.** With its straightforward language and detailed examples, the PQA can be used to explain research-based best practices to a variety of individuals and agencies. Potential audiences include administrators and policymakers, particularly those who need help identifying the elements of high-quality programs.

Support staff can also benefit from becoming familiar with the PQA to better understand the actions and requests of the instructional staff. Sharing the PQA with parents helps them understand the program and how to carry its educational activities into the home. Results of the PQA can also be easily communicated to researchers, and the instrument's accessibility makes it possible for others to replicate and extend the lessons learned about effective program practices.

### A Snapshot of the PQA

The PQA has 63 items that address seven key areas of program quality. Sections I through IV are assessed in each classroom; sections V through VII are assessed for the agency as a whole.

- I. Learning Environments (9 items)
- II. Daily Routine (12 items)
- III. Adult-Child Interaction (13 items)
- IV. Curriculum Planning and Assessment (5 items)
- V. Parent Involvement and Family Services (10 items)
- VI. Staff Qualifications and Staff Development (7 items)
- VII. Program Management (7 items)

To complete the PQA, raters observe the program and interview the appropriate staff members. They record supporting evidence for each row (component) of every item. They read the indicators (definitions and examples) for that row and check the one box per row that best reflects the supporting evidence. Then, using the scoring rules, they circle one quality rating from 1 (low) to 5 (high) for the item as a whole.

### Conclusion

To be accountable for meeting our mission and goals in early childhood education, we must regularly and systematically evaluate the structural and dynamic components of our programs. Only by engaging in honest assessment can we as practitioners, researchers, and policymakers guarantee that the services we deliver are of sufficient quality to promote the development of young children and support those who care for them. HighScope's Preschool PQA is a reliable and valid tool for conducting this comprehensive assessment. It reflects what current theory, decades of practice, and ongoing research tell us about the ingredients of high-quality early childhood programs.

### References:

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# where we STAND

naeyc and naecs/sde

## on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation

**W**hat should children be taught in the years from birth through age 8? How would we know if they are developing well and learning what we want them to learn? And how could we decide whether programs for children from infancy through the primary grades are doing a good job?

Answers to these questions—questions about *early childhood curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation*—are the foundation of a joint position statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE).

### The position statement's recommendations

#### Curriculum

Implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.

#### Indicators of effective curriculum

- Children are active and engaged.
- Goals are clear and shared by all.
- Curriculum is evidence-based.
- Valued content is learned through investigation and focused, intentional teaching.
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences.
- Curriculum is comprehensive.
- Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject-matter content.
- The curriculum is likely to benefit children.

#### Assessment

Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To best assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional

#### Beyond Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: What Else Matters?

Without other essential components of high-quality early childhood education, these recommendations will be of limited value. *Learn more about . . .*

- early learning standards, as described in NAEYC and NAECS/SDE's 2002 position statement, online at [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning\\_standards](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning_standards).
- teaching strategies and other elements of developmentally appropriate practice. See C. Copple & S. Bredekamp (eds.), *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3d ed., Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2009. Access the position statement online at [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/dap](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/dap).
- standards for early childhood programs and accreditation performance criteria, online at [www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro](http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/standardsintro).
- standards for early childhood professional preparation programs as updated by NAEYC in 2009, online at [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/ppp](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/ppp).
- implementation of professional standards. See M. Hyson (ed.), *Preparing Early Childhood Professionals: NAEYC's Standards for Programs*, Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2003.

National Association for the Education of Young Children  
National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education

development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes. The purposes of doing assessment are: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.

#### **Indicators of effective assessment practices**

- Ethical principles guide assessment practices.
- Assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes.
- Assessments are appropriate for ages and other characteristics of children being assessed.
- Assessment instruments are in compliance with professional criteria for quality.
- What is assessed is developmentally and educationally significant.
- Assessment evidence is used to understand and improve learning.
- Assessment evidence is gathered from realistic settings and situations that reflect children's actual performance.
- Assessments use multiple sources of evidence gathered over time.
- Screening is always linked to follow-up.
- Use of individually administered, norm-referenced tests is limited.
- Staff and families are knowledgeable about assessment.

#### **Program evaluation and accountability**

Regularly evaluate early childhood programs in light of program goals, using varied, appropriate, and conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results.

#### **Indicators of effective program evaluation and accountability**

- Evaluation is used for continuous improvement.
- Goals become guide for evaluation.
- Comprehensive goals are used.

- Evaluations use valid designs.
- Multiple sources of data are available.
- Sampling is used when assessing individual children as part of large-scale program evaluation.
- Safeguards are in place if standardized tests are used as part of evaluations.
- Children's gains over time are emphasized.
- Well-trained individuals conduct evaluations.
- Evaluation results are publicly shared.

#### **Creating change through support for programs**

Implementing the preceding recommendations for curriculum, child assessment, and program evaluation requires a solid foundation. Calls for better results and greater accountability from programs for children in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades have not been backed up by essential supports for teacher recruitment and compensation, professional preparation and ongoing professional development, and other ingredients of quality early education.

The overarching need is to create an *integrated, well-financed system of early care and education* that has the capacity to support learning and development in all children, including children living in poverty, children whose home language is not English, and children with disabilities. Unlike many other countries, the United States continues to have a fragmented system for educating children from birth through age 8, under multiple auspices, with greatly varying levels of support, and with inadequate communication and collaboration.

Many challenges face efforts to provide all young children with high-quality curriculum, assessment, and evaluation of their programs. *Public commitment*, along with *investments* in a well-financed system of early childhood education and in other components of services for young children and their families, will make it possible to implement these recommendations fully and effectively.

The full NAEYC and NAECS/SDE 2003 position statement "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation—Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth Through Age 8" is available online at [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape).

**where we STAND**  
naeyc and naeecs/sde

# WVAYC Offers Scholarship for 2011 SECA Conference

Submitted by Helen Post-Brown, WVAYC



The early childhood community was privileged to know and work with Ann Nutt, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resource's Director of Early Care and Education Quality Initiatives. Early childhood professionals across West Virginia were greatly saddened by her death on October 16, 2006. Ann was a dedicated member of the West Virginia Association of Young

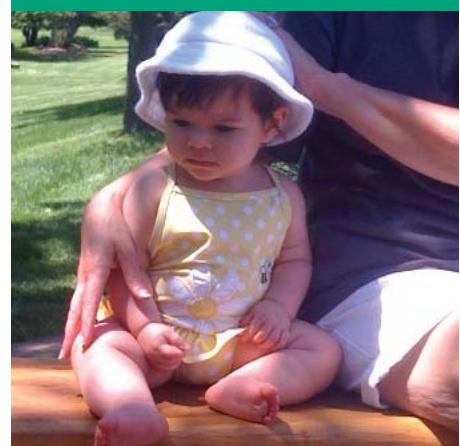
Children. She worked passionately for the children of West Virginia. Ann's first experience in the early childhood field in West Virginia was as director of the Lighthouse Child Care & Development Center in Charleston, West Virginia. Because of her high esteem for child care directors and her belief that the Southern Early Childhood Association Conference (SECA) was an excellent way for child care directors to increase professional development in their field, WVAYC in conjunction with Ann's family, has set up a scholarship fund for directors of child care centers to attend the annual SECA conference. This will be a way to continue the work that Ann has started in the early childhood field.

If you are a child care director, assistant director, or family home provider and would like to be considered for the Ann Nutt Memorial Scholarship, please fill out the attached application form. The SECA conference will be on January 27-29, 2011, in Savannah, Georgia. For more information about SECA and the annual SECA Conference, go to [www.southernearlychildhood.org](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org).

The scholarship is for \$750.00. This covers registration fees and some travel and lodging expenses. Additional expenses over \$750.00 are the responsibility of the recipient of the Ann Nutt Memorial Scholarship.

## Child's Bench Raffled at Celebrating Connections

During Celebrating Connections in February of 2010, WVAYC raffled off a bench for the Ann Nutt Memorial Fund. The bench was graciously donated by Grounds for Play. Sylvia DeWoskin, granddaughter of River Valley Executive Director Suzi Brodof, won the beautiful children's bench. Suzi said, "I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to work with Ann Nutt for more than 10 years in a variety of aspects related to early childhood. Any time Ann and I worked on anything related to early childhood, whether it was reviewing accreditation guidelines for our centers, designing training for ACDS, or even traveling to Alaska to teach others about ACDS, I always knew I was talking with someone who really cared about what was important for young children. In her quiet, thoughtful way, Ann's influence and vision made a difference for children all over our state. I am thrilled that my precious granddaughter will have a bench designed in honor of Ann. Her memory will live on."



Sylvia DeWoskin

# Ann Nutt Memorial Scholarship Application Form

This memorial scholarship is for \$750.00 to attend the SECA Conference, January 27-29, 2011 in Savannah, Georgia. Additional expenses occurred over and above \$750.00 will be the responsibility of the scholarship recipient.

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child Care Center: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer on a separate sheet of paper the following question in 500 words or less:

Explain how attending the SECA Conference will help you meet your professional goals.

(Typed and double spaced)

**Deadline: Postmark by Friday, November 12, 2010**

**Send to**  
**Helen Post-Brown, WVAYC**  
**1654 Mary Lou Retton Drive**  
**Fairmont, WV 26554**  
**SunbeamCCC@aol.com**  
**Fax: 1-304-366-5006**

**Visit [www.wvayc.com](http://www.wvayc.com) for more information**

# 62nd

Annual Conference of the  
Southern Early Childhood Association

# Moving & Playing

## Keeping SOUTHERN CHILDREN HEALTHY AND HAPPY



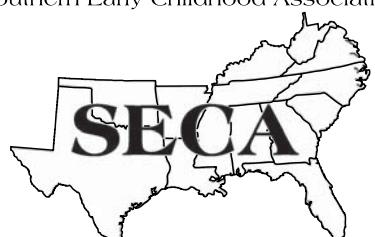
### Featuring Keynotes By:

- Dr. David T. Tayloe of the American Academy of Pediatrics
- Don Monopoli of The Learning Station
- Rae Pica of Moving and Learning
- 2011 Director's Seminar with Holly Elissa Bruno of  
Holly Elissa Bruno Keynotes and Teambuilding
- 2011 Public Policy Luncheon with Dr. Joe Thompson of the Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity

**January 27-29, 2011**  
**Hyatt Regency Savannah**  
**Savannah, GA**

Online registration begins September 2010  
Go to [www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org](http://www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org) for more information

Southern Early Childhood Association



# Making Sure All Learning Senses Are Ready for Transition

Submitted by Barbara Tucker, West Virginia Early Childhood Transition

A little known area affecting transition ease is sensory responsiveness. Many times a child's behavior is related to environmental issues. The Boone County Tadpole team developed a handout about sensory responsiveness highlighting possible red flags.

Children with sensory integration problems have much trouble with sensory processing. Many children show the following symptoms for several reasons. Some of these behaviors are appropriate at certain ages. Most toddlers are pretty impulsive. However, a 4 year old who acts on every little impulse is a different story. Strong dislikes for wool clothing, discomfort making eye contact with strangers, or fear of a large dog that barks loudly and unexpectedly falls within the range of so-called typical sensory sensitivity for a child, so long as these sensory experiences do not interfere with daily functioning.

A child with sensory problems usually has maladaptive responses to everyday situations, consistently showing behavior that is not age-appropriate and that can't be dismissed.

Several of these behavioral symptoms together can interfere with functional daily activities, playing and learning:

- oversensitivity or undersensitivity to



touch, sights, sounds, movement, tastes or smells

- high distractibility, with problems paying attention and staying focused on a task
- an unusually high or low activity level
- frequent tuning out or withdrawal
- intense, out-of-proportion reactions to challenging situations and unfamiliar environments
- impulsiveness, with little or no self-control
- difficulty transitioning from activity to activity or situation to situation
- rigidity and inflexibility at times
- clumsiness or carelessness
- discomfort in group situations
- social or emotional difficulties
- developmental and learning delays and acting silly or immature
- awkwardness, insecurity, or feeling "stupid" or "weird"

- trouble handling frustration, tendency to tantrum longer and more intensely than other children do, and more difficulty returning to a calm state

- problems transitioning from an alert, active state to a calm rested state (for example, difficulty falling asleep or waking, or doing a quiet activity after being very active or vice versa).

What to do? Observe the child and how he or she reacts to changes. Children in a family provider home or child care center may benefit from Behavioral Support Consultant observations. These specialists are employed by the local Resource and Referral agency and are valuable resources to help child care providers develop specific strategies to support a child's learning style. Referrals can be made to specialists in sensory responsiveness.

Families and children enrolled in West Virginia Birth to Three have the benefit of a team of knowledgeable people to problem-solve ways to strengthen successful participation in everyday routines, activities, and places. Transition plans listing specific strategies and the specific knowledge needed to support the child in everyday routines are essential.

# Do you know a child who is not \*moving \*hearing \*seeing \* learning or \*talking like others their age?

By 3 months,

Does your baby...

- grasp rattle or finger?
- hold up his/her head well?
- make cooing sounds?
- smile when talked to?

By 9 months,

Does your baby...

- sit alone or with minimal support?
- pick up small objects with thumb and fingers?
- move toy from hand to hand?

By 18 months,

Does your baby...

- cling to caretaker in new situations?
- try to talk and repeat words?
- walk without support?

By 6 months,

Does your baby...

- play with own hands/feet?
- roll over?
- turn his/her head towards sound?
- holds head up/looks around without support?

By 12 months,

Does your baby...

- wave goodbye?
- play with toys in different ways?
- feed self with finger foods?
- begin to pull up and stand?
- begin to take steps?

By 24 months,

Does your baby...

- point to body parts?
- walk, run, climb without help?
- get along with other children?
- use 2 or 3 word sentences?

If you are concerned about your child's development, get help early.

**Every child deserves a great start.**

WV Birth to Three supports families to help their children grow and learn.

To learn more about the  
WV Birth to Three services  
in your area, please call:

**1-866-321-4728**

Or visit [www.wvdhhr.org/birth23](http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23)



WV Birth to Three services and supports are provided under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and administered through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health.

# Back-to-School Health Tips for Teachers and Child Care Staff

Submitted by Joyce Malson, Nurse Health Consultant, WVECTCR

As we near the end of summer and back-to-school is just around the corner, everyone is focused on getting the children ready, but what about the teachers and child care staff? Along with eager children comes high stress and germs. It is important that you stay healthy so that you can focus on the children. So here are some tips to keep you healthy:

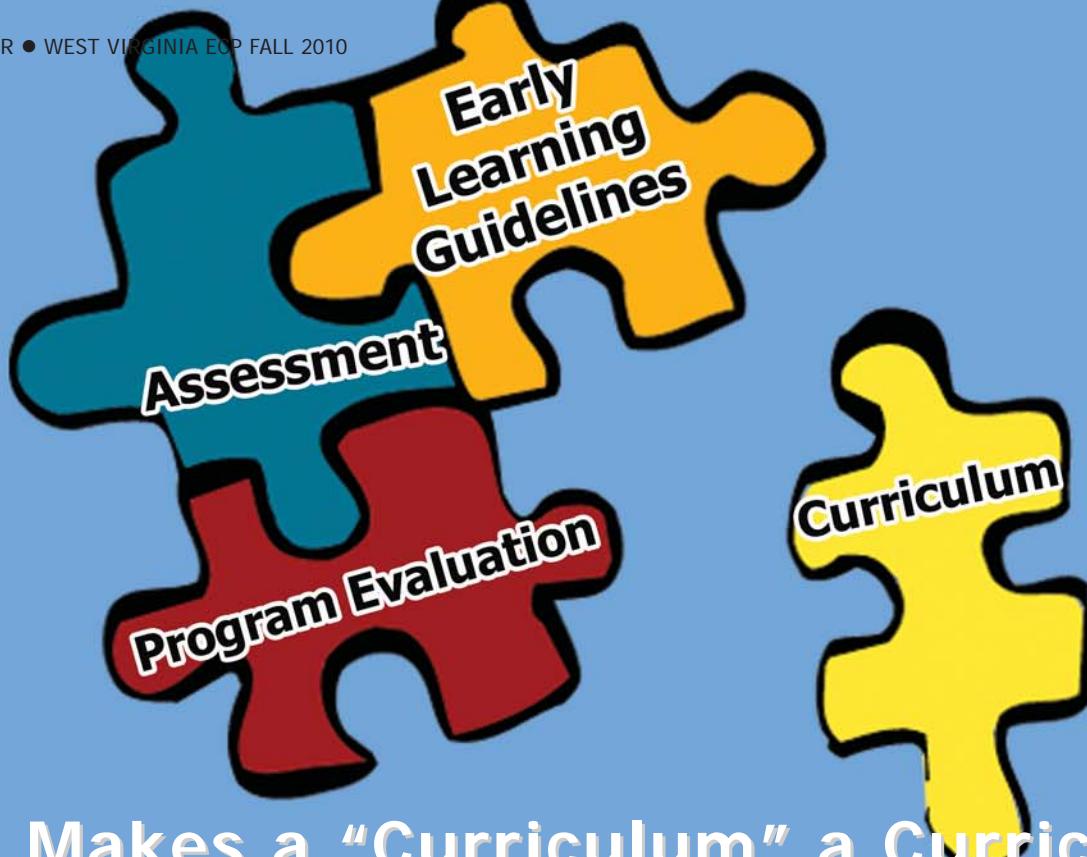
- Eat breakfast! It doesn't have to be a big deal. A bowl of oatmeal and a banana will keep you energized for the morning!
- Keep healthy snacks available, such as grapes or other fresh fruits and veggies to avoid grabbing for a candy bar or cookies when you get the munchies.
- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day and remind the children to do the same. Keep hand sanitizer handy. Use it any time the sink is not available to prevent spread of germs through contact.
- Prevent back and neck pain with simple exercises. Maintain good posture while sitting at the desk. Stand up and walk around every 30 minutes or so. Flex your head forwards and backwards, side to side, look to the right and to the left. Roll your ankles frequently. Make sure that your chair allows you to put your feet flat on the floor, that the computer monitor is the proper height, and that your chair provides proper back support.
- If you have to pick up a heavy object, first make sure that is not too heavy to lift alone and decide where it is to go. Make sure to pick it up firmly with both arms and lift with your legs, otherwise, you strain your back. Do not lean over and grab the object. When carrying the



object, keep it close to your body. Do not carry it above your head. When finally setting an object down, do not lean over. Keep your head straight, and use your legs to put it on the ground. If it's too heavy, just ask for help!

- Fit in exercise. Stretch out before you start your day or make it part of morning activity in the classroom. Walk as much as you can, even if it means parking your car in the furthest parking space available. Book the gym or activity room whenever you can and incorporate physical activity into the learning activities.
- Get support of parents, colleagues, friends and family before the workload gets out of hand! Support may be in the form of copying, getting supplies, or planning activities.
- Sleep! A Harvard-based Nurses' Health Study linked irregular sleep with increased risk of breast cancer, heart disease and diabetes. It also leads to the lowering of the immune system, making you more susceptible to illnesses.

So, take care of yourself so that you are ready to take on the challenges of our future leaders!



## What Makes a “Curriculum” a Curriculum?

### Question:

I'm confused about what a curriculum is for my classroom. What should I look for when choosing a curriculum?



At its simplest, curriculum is defined as what to teach and how to teach it. Some preschool stakeholders feel that a curriculum must detail exactly what to teach, as well as how to teach it and when. Others argue that while this is a type of curriculum, what is more appropriate for young children is one that provides learning goals and guidance to teachers in developing activities and interactions that can lead to accomplishing those goals. This includes carefully planned environments and activities in the classroom, such as story telling at circle time or the obstacle course added to the playground for one week to help children develop spatial terminology and exercise. It also includes unplanned and spontaneous learning, such as learning about water systems when a pipe bursts or develop-

ing self-regulation skills while taking turns on the slide.

### Questions to Consider When Making Curriculum Decisions

Preschool policymakers and stakeholders face a variety of decisions, such as selecting a curriculum for a specific preschool program, generating a list of recommended curricula from which programs may choose, or evaluating the appropriateness of curricula already in use. They should consider a variety of criteria contained in the following checklist:

- 1. How does the curriculum define the roles of the teacher and the child in the learning process?**

Guidance: Multiple curriculum

approaches have been developed reflecting various developmental theories. The roles of teacher and child in the learning process varies with the approach chosen.

**2. What domains of learning are addressed? Are they integrated or treated separately? Will the curriculum lead to achievement of state early learning standards?** Guidance: A preschool program's curriculum should attend to children's overall development. A single curriculum may not address all the domains of learning and those that claim to may not necessarily do it well.

**3. Does the curriculum provide guidance for differentiating teaching for students with special behavioral, linguistic, or learning needs?** Guidance: A curriculum model may fulfill basic requirements and yet not be appropriate for the children served. Age, economic status, cultural context, and language of children attending are important factors in curriculum decisions.

**4. Do the curriculum's developers provide an assessment system that is consistent with the teaching philosophy and learning content?** Guidance: Assessment is central to ascertaining effectiveness. Each approach to assessment has strengths and weaknesses. Standardized tests, for instance, are rarely the best way to help teachers improve and they may not

inform as to how well a curriculum is working unless specifically developed for that curriculum.

**5. What research evidence exists to support the value or effectiveness of the curriculum?** Guidance: Evaluations of curriculum effectiveness are important in an environment where some make unsubstantiated claims. Even when a curriculum has been evaluated, keep in mind that no single curriculum has been proven to be best for all preschool programs.

**6. Is the curriculum appropriate for all teachers, regardless of their qualifications? What kind of professional development is provided?** Guidance: Teachers are the "street level" implementers and curricula should be evaluated for how dependent they are on teacher experience and education. The initial training and ongoing professional development components provided along with curricula are essential to program effectiveness.

**7. Are specific materials required to implement the curriculum?** Guidance: Children learn through interacting with materials. Some, such as blocks or clay, are open-ended and have multiple uses. Others, such as puzzles, have only one use and can be expensive. Curricula vary as to their dependence on and the expense of materials required.

**8. Does the curriculum model pro-**

**vide guidance for such services as parent involvement and the transition to kindergarten?** Guidance: How much emphasis stakeholders place on family involvement may figure into decision-making since curricula vary as to the materials and guidance they provide in this regard.

### Final Thoughts for Preschool Curriculum Decision-Makers

Years of development and research have been invested in designing and researching a variety of curriculum models. However, choosing a curriculum model also involves careful research on the part of the decision-makers. Decision-makers need to be skeptical of curriculum developers' claims unless they are confirmed by researchers who are unaffiliated with the curriculum model. The promise of preschool will not be met if the curricula implemented are not rigorously designed, carefully researched, and implemented as intended.

*Reprinted from "Preschool Curriculum Decision-Making: Dimensions to Consider"*

*by Ellen Frede and Debra Ackerman,*

*www.nieer.org*



# Take a Flower to Childcare Day



October 19, 2010

Thanks to an incredibly successful launch in 2008, the West Virginia KIDS COUNT Fund has decided to make **"Take a Flower to Childcare Day" an annual event!** We are pleased to announce that the third annual celebration of childcare providers will take place on **Tuesday, October 19, 2010.**

The goal of **"Take a Flower to Childcare Day"** is to raise awareness about the important role high-quality childcare plays in the healthy development of young children and the economic future of the state.



Taking part in the statewide celebration is easy. On October 19th, **please join the thousands of parents, young children and community leaders** who rely on great childcare every day and present a single flower of your choice to your favorite childcare provider. This year, KIDS COUNT is adding a new challenge to the celebration. **We are challenging local businesses to join in the celebration by "adopting" a local childcare center and showering its staff with flowers of appreciation.**

From roses, daisies, carnations or lilies to real, silk, homemade or paper... **any flower goes!** To help parents, communities and businesses make this year's celebration another big success, **KIDS COUNT has created an on-line toolkit** for success, including downloadable flyers and creative flower ideas. To find out more go to [www.wvkidscountfund.org](http://www.wvkidscountfund.org).

[www.wvkidscountfund.org](http://www.wvkidscountfund.org)



*Major funding for Take A Flower to Childcare Day 2010 is provided by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Division of Early Care and Education.*

# Parent **Blocks**

NEWSLETTER



"Providing resources to parents throughout West Virginia"  
Volume 7, Issue 4, Fall 2010

## A Look at West Virginia's Approved Pre-K Curricula

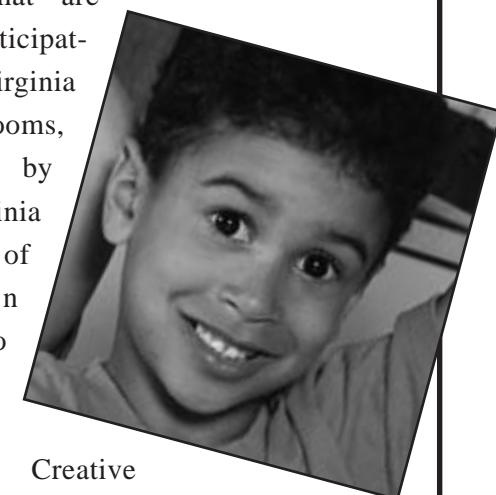
Early experiences are critical to lay the foundation for children's life-long learning and success. Evidence now exists to provide us with information about what is most effective practice for early learning experiences. Curricula frameworks, early learning guidelines, ongoing assessment of children's progress, and program evaluation work in an inter-related way to promote appropriate early education experiences. These critical components guide practitioners in

providing quality early education experiences that are responsive to individual children and maximize learning and skill development.

All early learning programs benefit from using these components.

Classrooms that are approved, participating West Virginia Pre-k classrooms, are required by West Virginia Board of Education Policy 2525 to follow the following curricula:

The Creative Curriculum (Teaching Strategies) or Educating Young Children (HighScope Press). Each of these curriculum provide a blueprint for early educators to plan and implement intentional and thoughtful curriculum, inclusive of all children. The curricula are also supported by effective practices identified by scientifically based research, allowing teachers to be responsive to individual children and communities while providing quality environments. For more information, visit [www.wvdhhr.org](http://www.wvdhhr.org).



WV Parent Blocks Newsletter is a project of West Virginia Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources, a collaborative project of West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources/Bureau for Children and Families/Division of Early Care and Education; WV Head Start State Collaboration Office; Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health/West Virginia Birth to Three; and West Virginia Department of Education/Office of Special Education and is supported and administered by River Valley Child Development Services.

Permission to photocopy

# Improving Study Habits

Unfortunately, children are not born with the study habits needed for them to succeed in school. They must learn them. Very often children begin school without the skills they need to do well. Here are some things that parents can do to prepare their children for school as well as improve their study habits.

**Start early.** Although it is not recommended to begin formally teaching children before they start school, parents can begin to set a good example for their children long before they start school. This can be done by encouraging learning. Parents should try to read to their children daily. Reading skills are very important for success in school. Reading to children helps them develop a love for reading. Parents should provide plenty of interesting books for their children, too. Finally, parents can set a good example by reading often themselves.

Parents should try to encourage their children's natural curiosity about the world. Parents can do this by talking to their children, by listening to their children, and by answering their questions. Parents should also try to expose their children to as many exciting, stimulating things as possible.

**Get involved.** Parents should take an interest in their children's education by joining the PTA or by becoming involved in other school activities. If parents believe their children's education is important enough for their involvement and attention, their children will take an interest, too. It is a good idea for parents to communicate with their children's teachers. Parents



should give their children lots of encouragement, too. They should talk to their children about what they're doing in school. This will help to reinforce what they're learning.

## Once the Homework Begins

Once children reach the grades where homework and tests are part of the curriculum, there are many things parents can do to encourage good study habits.

**Set a schedule.** Parents should decide with their children what time each day homework is to be done. While children are in the lower grades, one hour a day will probably be enough. As homework and responsibilities increase, more time will be needed. It is important that children take part in these decisions. Children need to know that they are able to make decisions about their studying. Once children and parents have decided on a schedule, they should stick to it. If there is no homework to be done on a given day, parents can have their children use this time as quiet time to read

or work on long term projects. It's important for children to get used to studying every day.

**Provide a study area.** Parents should provide a quiet, comfortable area for their children to study in. It's a good idea that studying be done in the same place every day. Parents should make sure their children have the supplies they need (for example, paper, pencils, a pencil sharpener). Sometimes children's bedrooms are not the best place to study. There are often lots of distractions in children's rooms.

**Help your children get organized.** Parents should give their children a calendar on which to record assignments and check them off when they're completed. Parents can also show their children how to keep their work and materials organized and how to prioritize assignments.

**Provide reinforcement.** Parents should praise their children for working hard and completing assignments. Parents should keep in mind, though, that homework is not always fun. Don't expect perfection.

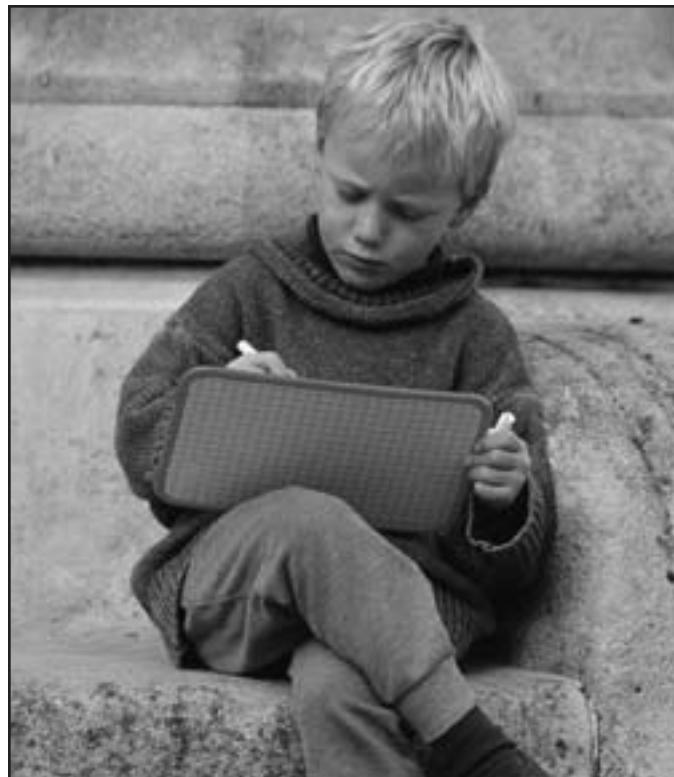
**Offer help.** Parents should be available to answer any questions that might come up. They should try to provide information without actually doing the homework for their children.

**Give children the responsibility for their own homework.** Parents cannot force their children to study. Nagging and threatening don't work. Children need to know that they are responsible for doing their homework and for studying. Parents should give their children the responsibility, and let them suffer the consequences if they, for example, fail to turn in an assignment. The parents' role is to provide support.

**If the schedule is not working, try a different one.** If the plan parents and their children have come up with is not working, they should change it. Perhaps two shorter study periods per day will be easier to take than one long one. Perhaps an early evening study time will work better than one immediately after school. Parents and their children should work with the routine until they come up with one that works.

Remember, children must learn that they are responsible for their own learning. Parents can make the difference by giving their children the tools to do so.

*Written by Kristin Zolten, M.A. & Nicholas Long,  
Ph.D., Department of Pediatrics, University of  
Arkansas for Medical Sciences*



# The First Few Years of School

As a preschooler, your child was well behaved and didn't exhibit any particular problems. Next your child enters school, perhaps Kindergarten, and then First Grade. Slowly, issues with some classes and subjects appear. Maybe you think nothing of them in First Grade, but along comes Second Grade and the problem worsens. Now your child's grades begin to suffer and there may be some issues with behavior. By Third Grade and almost as school begins so too do behavior concerns and they outweigh the academic issues.

Children who surface with behavior problems early in the school year and in early grades, may have an undiagnosed learning disability that increasing educational demands aggravated. There are clinical scenarios that can quickly lead to suspicion. Children whose challenging behavior occurs more in groups or unstructured settings, may have an auditory processing disorder. If the medical history includes recurrent ear infections, the risk of an auditory processing disorder heightens. If behavior is present more during certain subjects or learning demands (visual, auditory, motor), other learning disabilities may be present. Even in the case of a bonifie diagnosis of ADD/ADHD, statistically 50 percent have a co-concurring learning disability.

Notwithstanding biologically determined problems, children who are exposed to arguing or fighting in the home or domestic violence or serious conflict between their parents will appear behaviorally similar to children with academic difficulties or problems. These children will often go to school worrying about one or both parents and even their marriage. This alone is distressing and distracting from schoolwork. It can make children irritable and that can cause them difficulty in getting along with others. Girls in these situations sometimes appear behaviorally similar to children with ADD while boys sometimes appear behaviorally similar to children with ADHD.

In still other instances, a child who is a victim to bullying may also appear behaviorally similar to the above.



A good assessment will be vital to determining the appropriate intervention. Accordingly then, the assessment should look at the child's developmental and medical history as well as family history and any issues between the parents.

Further, the school situation should be assessed to make sure there are no problems such as bullying. Medically, the child should be screened for vision and hearing problems and finally, a psychoeducational assessment to explore for learning disabilities can be in order. A good assessment will help uncover problems contributing to behavior and academic issues. A good assessment will then lead to proper intervention.

The earlier a child's school problems are caught and addressed, the better for the child. The longer problems continue, children can get further behind in their learning and behavior problems can escalate to become separate issues in their own right. Further, as these problems continue and behavior and failure occur, the child's self-esteem diminishes bringing on other psychological/emotional concerns.

In the early years, at the beginning of each school year, track your child's performance carefully. Read report cards thoroughly and attend all parent-teacher meetings. Good information and good communication between parent and teacher will help to identify any academic problems so they can be addressed before they get too big.

*- Reprinted from Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW*

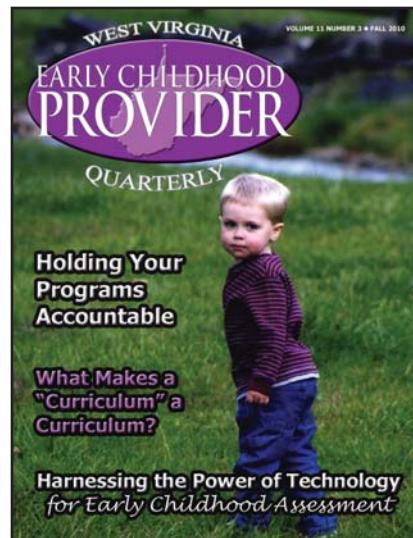
## **ACDS Instructors Academy**

The ACDS Program just completed a wonderful, whirlwind week of the Instructor's Academy. The annual Instructor's Academy took place on June 21 – 25 at River Valley Child Development Services in Huntington, WV. Sixteen participants attended the week long training from various parts of the state. It was an honor to work with each of these professionals and their dedication is appreciated.

The updated mentoring policies have been completed and soon updates for current mentors and trainings for those interested in becoming a mentor will be offered. The ACDS mentor is a committed individual with experience in the field of early care and education and is willing to share their knowledge with others in the field.

If you are interested in this wonderful opportunity to continue your professional development and share your knowledge, please contact Sherrie Barrett at 304-523-0433 or sbarrett@rvcds.org.

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