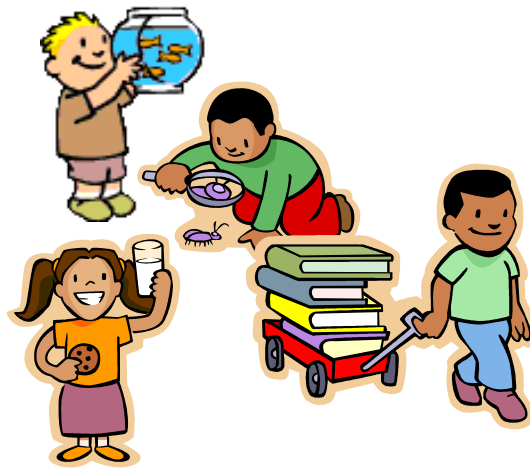




Hamilton Township School District

Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum



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INTRODUCTION

Philosophy

It is the goal of the Hamilton Township School District to provide a holistic, integrated learning environment that meets the needs of all pre-kindergarten children regardless of race, ethnicity, language, culture, social experiences, economic status, lifestyle, and physical and mental abilities. It is intended that the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices will support and prepare these children to meet New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) when they enter kindergarten.

Overview

This document explains the significant components in an early childhood program necessary to effectively implement the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality* which are aligned with the NJCCCS to allow a smooth transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. Although the *Standards of Quality* are listed separately, they need to be implemented in an integrated manner through the use of themes, projects and/or small group activities.

Because play is such an integral part of a child's learning, it is strongly encouraged that all activities be play-based to foster the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of each child. Early childhood educators need to personalize learning for each child and honor the differences in all children as they facilitate hands-on activities, both planned and spontaneous, with individuals or small groups of children.

The curriculum guide provides a framework for opportunities to learn. The suggested learning activities present a wide range of developmentally appropriate experiences that support children's attainment of the indicators in the *Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality*. All educators in early childhood will be given opportunities for collaboration and professional development for the purpose of refining programming, researching best practices, and improving classroom instruction.

COMPONENTS OF THE PRE-KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

School and Home Partnerships

Successful school/home relationships promote effective and appropriate learning opportunities for students. Successful collaboration requires a well-defined plan for incorporating a wide range of parent involvement and educational opportunities.

Trust is a key factor to building such relationships between teachers and parents. These relationships allow teachers and parents to share ideas and learn from one another. In addition, sensitivity to the cultural background of each child ensures successful school/home collaboration. Preschool programs will incorporate staff and volunteers who are capable of communicating effectively with parents and caregivers.

School and home partnerships will allow for:

- Providing program information to the family of each student
- Educating teachers, families, and preschool children in the principles of inclusion and English language learning through literature, family groups and classroom practices and activities.
- Classroom materials that reflect the characteristics, values, and practices of diverse cultural groups.
- Special populations to be included in the regular education program (e.g. students with disabilities)
- Confidentiality of child and family information
- Information concerning program/classroom expectations and activities throughout the year (e.g. calendars, newsletters, memos, etc.)
- Documentation of each child's progress to families and the receiving elementary school.
- Parent/teacher conferences with the teacher to be held once a year and any additional times, as needed, to discuss each child's progress, accomplishments and difficulties.

Classroom Environment

The early childhood environment is an important part of the foundation for creating an atmosphere of imagination and individuality that allows young children to learn and grow at a comfortable and continuous pace. It is imperative that children have multiple opportunities to explore a variety of learning centers and are encouraged to choose learning experiences from all domains of development. That total environment should ensure welcoming, safe healthy, clean, warm and stimulating areas to promote creative thinking while enabling the exploratory process to continue.

A rich learning environment should:

- Provide learning centers that encourage interrelationships of various content areas that have print, audio, and visual materials
- Be arranged to accommodate active and quiet activities
- Encourage curiosity, new ideas and fantasy through exploration and sensory/arts experiences
- Provide a variety of manipulatives to stimulate problem solving
- Provide individual and small group experiences both indoors and outdoors
- Ensure that the home and classroom are an extension of the community by providing opportunities for special events, visitors, and parent participation.
- Offer exposure to language through different media and offer the integration of all activities into language development objectives
- Enhance thinking through the use of computers with age appropriate software when available
- Provide for questioning and discussion during all activities.

Assessment

Assessment entails observing, recording, and documenting the work children do and how they do it. The purpose of assessment is to help teachers determine appropriate classroom activities for each preschool child. Assessment should be ongoing, authentic (extracted from the actual activities in which children are engaging), and cumulative. All assessment practices must be sensitive to each child's special needs, home language, learning style and developmental stage. **Documentation** is extremely important and effective for teachers. Teachers who document are more often able to teach children through direct firsthand interactive experiences that enhance brain development.

The types of assessment recommended for young children are:

- **Initial screening**
- **Observation**
- **Student work (Portfolio collection)**
- **Working with the children's parents and family**

When a parent or teacher has a concern specific to the development of a child and suspects a potential disability, a **written referral** to the district's Intervention and Referral Services Team should occur. The parent, preschool teacher, and the team will meet to determine the need for evaluation and discuss the assessments to be completed.

OVERVIEW OF STANDARDS OF QUALITY

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development are connected to physical and cognitive development; therefore, young children enrolled in preschool programs require a welcoming environment. It should be safe, secure, accessible, organized, comfortable, predictable and consistent. Children need a program that provides emotional security and is respectful and accepting of individual differences. This includes staff that does not vary from day to day and is sensitive to culture, physical and developmental variations in the children and their families.

Expectations for social/emotional development of children include:

- Children demonstrate self-confidence.
- Children demonstrate self-direction.
- Children identify and express feelings.
- Children exhibit positive interactions with other children and adults.
- Children exhibit pro-social behaviors.
- Children exhibit attending and focusing skills.
- Children participate in group routines.

Creative Arts

Creative Arts in the preschool classroom will be integrated into all curriculum areas to develop an appreciation for the arts and as a way to conduct classroom activities to meet expectations in all content areas. When used in a developmentally appropriate way, creative arts promote curiosity, verbal and nonverbal expression, and can be used as a strategy for learning about other cultures. For children, the critical component of creative art is the process rather than the end result or product. Children develop independence, self-motivation and self-expression through concrete, hands-on learning in an environment that stimulates creativity through music, dramatic play, dance, and art.

Expectations for creative arts include:

- Children express themselves and develop an appreciation for music.
- Children develop an appreciation for dance and movement.
- Children develop an appreciation for dramatic play and storytelling.
- Children develop awareness and appreciation for visual arts.

Health, Safety and Physical Education

Health, safety, and physical education in the preschool classroom encourages children to think, experience, explore and make connections to enhance each child's sense of control and competence as a learner at the child's developmental level. In addition, these skills extend the children's knowledge of themselves, those around them, and their world or culture. This area should be integrated into each of the other content areas. Through daily indoor and outdoor activities, play, and planned and spontaneous teaching, the teacher will provide a wide range of concrete, firsthand experiences that assist in the healthy development of each child.

Expectations for health, safety, and physical education include:

- Children develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make nutritious food choices.
- Children develop self-help and personal hygiene.
- Children develop an awareness of potential hazards to their health.
- Children develop competence and confidence in activities that require gross motor skills.
- Children develop competence and confidence in activities requiring fine motor skills.

Language Arts Literacy

Literacy learning has a profound effect on the social and academic lives of children. Their future educational opportunities and career choices are directly related to literacy ability. Since early childhood is the period of the most rapid language development, it is imperative that young children have a variety of literacy and language experiences throughout the day in environments that are rich in language and print.

Literacy is composed of the listening, speaking, writing, reading, and viewing components. Each child's interest and motivation to read is evident before that child is able to read. It is important to recognize the need to differentiate presentations of vocabulary, directions, storytelling, reading, and other oral language communication when working with special populations.

Expectations for language arts literacy include:

- Children listen and respond to environmental sounds, directions and conversations.
- Children converse effectively in their home language, English or sign language for a variety of purposes relating to real experiences and different audiences.
- Children demonstrate emergent reading skills.
- Children demonstrate emergent writing skills.

Mathematics

Children will develop an understanding of mathematical concepts through a play-based, child-centered, inclusive environment. Throughout all content areas, the children will be provided with opportunities to talk, write, and sing about mathematical concepts. Children will have access to a wide variety of tools and hands-on experiences that are relevant to real-life situations in order to help all children learn to enjoy mathematics.

Teachers will use any given situation and ask open-ended questions to explore mathematical concepts that are initiated by each child during his/her natural play. With this awareness, the teacher's role is to implement curricular activities that address each child's level of functioning.

Expectations for mathematics include:

- Children demonstrate an understanding of number and numerical operations.
- Children develop knowledge of spatial concepts, e.g., shapes and measurement.
- Children understand patterns, relationships and classifications.
- Children develop knowledge of sequence and temporal awareness.
- Children will use mathematical knowledge to represent, communicate and solve problems in their environment.

Science

The intent of science education in the early childhood classroom is to build on children's natural sense of wonder and curiosity. Children will employ their five senses to develop an understanding of scientific principles through multisensory experiences and the teacher's use of open-ended questions. In the context of individualized play, children will explore, experiment, and learn new skills through trial and error and their own investigation and discovery. It is important that teachers are knowledgeable of basic science concepts. Teachers need to be prepared and look for opportunities to explore concepts during the child's play in all content areas. Science concepts should be introduced during their interaction with materials, people, and everyday activities.

Expectations for science include:

- Children develop inquiry skills, including problem-solving and decision-making.
- Children observe and investigate the properties of objects, both living and non-living.
- Children explore the concept of change in both living and non-living entities and in the environment.
- Children develop an awareness of the environment and human responsibility for its care.

Social Studies, Family and Life Skills

Social studies in the preschool classroom begins with cultivating children's understanding of themselves and their place in their families and their world. It then extends to the development of an understanding of the role of the larger community, and respecting and appreciating other cultures of the world. Social studies should be thematically integrated into all areas of the curriculum.

The classroom environment must be organized to provide opportunities for children to develop independent behaviors and to act out real life situations. The environment should reinforce those skills and concepts which encourage good citizenship and develop the child's capacity to participate in a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

Expectations for social studies include:

- Children identify unique characteristics of themselves and others.
- Children communicate about their families, family roles and family traditions.
- Children become contributing members of the classroom community.
- Children demonstrate knowledge of neighborhood and community.
- Children participate in activities that reflect the cultures within their classroom and their community.

World Languages

Language begins as a social activity. A child uses language to express feelings and communicate needs. The environment for learning language needs to be natural and rich with opportunities for social interaction to promote the development of language and communication skills. Early childhood educators should encourage and assist all parents in becoming knowledgeable about the cognitive value for children knowing more than one language.

Language learning in the preschool classroom focuses on the development of listening and speaking skills and cultural awareness through concrete experiences. Preschool children absorb languages effortlessly and are adept imitators of speech sounds. They respond well to learning situations relating to their own interests and experiences. They communicate by participating in simple face-to-face interactions with classmates, teachers, family and visitors from the community.

Expectations for World Language include:

- Children know that others may use different languages (including sign) to communicate and will express simple greetings, words and phrases in a language other than their own.