

OFFICE OF CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER
Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items
April 16-17, 2015

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND READING

12. Approval to begin the Administrative Procedures Act process: To establish the Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines

A. Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Olds (2015)

B. Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds (2015)

Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Olds (2015) and the *Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds (2015)* will provide clarity on the minimum requirements and recommendations for the operation of public school three and four-year-old programs in the schools of Mississippi.

As a part of the development of the new guidelines, a committee comprised of district leaders, principals, assistant principals, pre-kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators and stakeholders, and Head Start representatives reviewed the *Mississippi Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines for Three Year Old Children (2004)* and the *Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Four Year Old Children (2006)*, along with the *Mississippi Kindergarten Guidelines (2012)*.

The sections in the guides cover the following components:

- Section I: Requirements for Voluntary Enrollment
- Section II: Physical Settings and Outside Play
- Section III: Organizational Procedures and Staff
- Section IV: Curriculum, Materials, and Assessment
- Section V: Parent Participation and Transportation

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material attached



MISSISSIPPI EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOMS SERVING THREE-YEAR-OLDS

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Revised Edition, 2015



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This manual has been prepared for use by administrators, counselors, teachers, and other authorized staff in the pre-kindergarten programs of Mississippi and is to be used as a guide in facilitating state or federally funded pre-kindergarten programs.

Pre-Kindergarten Philosophy and Goals for Three-Year-Old Children

The early childhood years are a critical time in the development for every child. The learning that takes place during the first eight years of life serves as the foundation for all later academic, social, emotional, physical and motor development. All children are capable of learning and meeting developmental milestones. Therefore, the pre-kindergarten guidelines are proposed to assist all early childhood educators in their efforts to provide a high quality research-based program serving pre-kindergarten children at three years of age.

All children attending a pre-kindergarten program should:

1. improve their self-concept;
2. increase their intellectual growth;
3. enlarge their understanding of the world, people, experiences, ideas;
4. increase competencies and skills in oral language, literacy, writing, listening, and thinking;
5. increasing their competencies and skills in mathematical reasoning and scientific exploration;
6. increase their skills involved in physical coordination and gross and fine motor skills;
7. increase their competence in dealing with emotional feelings and social situations;
8. increase their self-direction and independence;
9. develop cooperative, trusting relationships;
10. develop their natural curiosity and creative potential; and
11. develop a love of learning.

Learning Principles

The Early Learning Guidelines outlined in this document are built on scientifically-based principles. The following principles should be reflected in the learning environment and curriculum in the classroom:

1. Skills and concepts specific to developmental domains developed by the Mississippi Department of Education are foundational to all instruction.
 - a. English Language Arts
 - b. Mathematics
 - c. Social Studies
 - d. Science
 - e. Approaches to Learning
 - f. Social and Emotional Development
 - g. Physical Development
 - h. Creative Expression
2. Learning activities are constructed which acknowledge children advance through similar stages of development, but at individual rates.
3. Children are in an inclusive learning environment that embraces diversity.
4. Children use their senses in the instructional process (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling).
5. Active involvement (exploring, playing, manipulating, and problem solving) is the primary strategy for delivering instruction.
6. Children are taught using a combination of instructional strategies, which includes active involvement in learning centers, participating in large and small group instruction and individual instructional settings.
7. Attitudes and examples from teachers and content in lessons taught reflect a positive problem solving approach. Therefore, attention should be given to instructional methods, emotional climate, environment, and educator-child interaction.
8. Children have experiences that are sensitive to the value of play, for it is through play that children create their own meaning and learning.

The majority of the instructional delivery must be organized around learning centers and responsive interactions among children, and their peers and adults. These experiences should provide opportunities for children to acquire skills and concepts through hands-on engaged learning while the teacher is facilitating appropriate language development through conversations.

Section I. Requirements for Voluntary Enrollment

A. Entrance Age

1. **Required Age:** A pre-kindergarten child shall have reached the age of three years on or before September 1.
2. **Required Documentation:** A birth certificate and immunization record (Form 121) are required for all pre-kindergarten children and shall be presented to the proper school authority. If the pre-kindergarten (four-year-old) program is located in a public school setting, the information in Section 1 of the **Mississippi Cumulative Folders and Permanent Records** document must be followed (Mississippi Code Ann. §37-15-1).

Section II. Physical Settings and Outside Play

Any elementary, including pre-kindergarten, and/or secondary school system, accredited by the Mississippi State Department of Education, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Mississippi Private School Education Association, the American Association of Christian Schools, the Association of Christian School International, a school affiliated with Accelerated Christian Education, Inc., and any Head Start program operating in conjunction with an elementary school system, whether it is public, private or parochial, whose primary purpose is a structured school or school readiness program, is exempt from licensing by the Mississippi State Department of Health. If a classroom is located in a public school and sponsored by a non-public school organization, the classroom must be licensed unless named in the exemption requirements section of the Child Care Regulations or a letter of joint sponsorship is provided by the school district and non-profit sponsor that is approved by the Mississippi State Department of Health. Pre-kindergarten providers not located in public schools are required to be licensed by the Mississippi State Department of Health.

Facilities or programs claiming exemption shall be required, upon the written request of the licensing agency, to provide documentation of the facts claimed to support the basis for the exemption, which sworn by affidavit to be true and accurate under the penalties of perjury. However, any entity exempt from the requirements to be licensed but voluntarily choosing to obtain a license is subject to all provisions of the licensing law and regulations. (Regulations Governing Licensure of Child Care Facilities, Office of Health Protection, Mississippi State Department of Health, Effective August 15, 2013, pg. 2.)

A. Physical Settings

1. Required Guidelines for Existing Structures

a. Classrooms

- The classroom will consist of no less than 35 square feet per child with a minimum of 600 square feet.
- Pre-kindergarten classrooms are to be located at ground level.
- Every closet latch shall be such that children can open the door from the inside.
- The maximum distance to an exit from any point in the building shall not exceed 150 feet. The maximum distance from the classroom door at the corridor to an exit shall not exceed 100 feet.
- Safety covers are placed on all wall sockets not in use.

b. Bathrooms

- The classroom will be located no more than 125 feet from a bathroom.
- Every toilet room door lock shall be designed to permit opening of the locked door from the outside in an emergency, and the opening device shall be readily accessible to the staff.

c. Furniture

- Furniture will be of an appropriate height for young children.
- Tables and chairs are required rather than desks.

d. Floors

- Each classroom should have a 9 x 12 foot area rug or individual carpet squares to be used for large group meetings.

e. Building Codes

- All building construction shall conform to the Southern Building Codes, the American Disabilities Act, the Life Safety Codes, and to any other city or county building codes.

2. Optional Guidelines for Existing Structures

a. Classrooms

- Where multiple pre-kindergarten units occur within a school or building, it is recommended that they be grouped adjacent to one another for teacher and child interaction and for optimum use of common facilities.

- It is recommended that each pre-kindergarten classroom have a work counter of at least 12 feet with at least one sink. The sink should be stainless steel or porcelain, standard with gooseneck fitting on one side and a drinking bubble on the other. It is recommended that the sink have cold water only. A paper towel dispenser accessible to students and a trash receptacle should be located near the sink.
- It is recommended that 110 volt wall plugs be located every 10 feet to 15 feet around the classroom.

b. Bathrooms

- A toilet room in the classroom is recommended for pre-kindergarten children.
- It is recommended that toilet seats in bathrooms be from 10 to 13 inches from the floor.
- It is recommended that lavatories be 24 inches from the floor.

c. Furniture

- At least two small bookcases or book display shelves are desirable.
- A desk, chair, file cabinet and/or personal area should be provided within the classroom for teachers.

d. Floors

- Classroom areas, not carpeted, should be covered with resilient flooring or other easily cleaned material. Roll-type resilient flooring has the advantage of a minimum amount of jointing.

e. Storage and Space

- Base cabinets are recommended below all counters. Doors should be attached to some cabinets and some should be left open to serve as shelves. Open cabinets (18 x 24 inches and 24 x 36 inches) will accommodate the large paper used for easel painting.
- Cabinets, 12 inches deep, are recommended over the entire counter area for general storage.
- Open storage units (cubbies) are recommended for every student. Each needs to be four feet high and two feet wide with coat hanging space at the bottom and a storage area at the top. Coat hooks should be installed 36 inches from the floor.
- Adequate storage space should be provided. The storage units may include one wall of built-in cabinets or moveable storage sections. Most storage units should be accessible to children to facilitate independence and responsibility within the classroom. Storage space, above the reach of the children, is recommended for use by teachers.

- Adequate space for display of children's work should be provided. Bulletin boards can be located on walls and/or fastened to the backs of cabinets and bookcases.
- If space within the school is available, it is recommended that a teacher work area of 180 to 200 square feet be allocated for use by every two to three pre-kindergarten teachers. This area is needed for individual assessment of children, conferencing with parents, making classroom materials, and planning meetings.

3. Required Guidelines for New Structures Established after July 2017

a. Classrooms

- The classroom shall be a minimum of 1,000 square feet.
- The minimum classroom width shall be 24 feet except in pod-type structures.
- Classroom lighting shall contain operable standard fluorescent lights with area controls that provide adequate lighting. Switches within reach of the children, will be located at the doors. Toilet rooms will contain lighting fixtures.
- The maximum distance to an exit from any point in the building shall not exceed 150 feet. The maximum distance from the interior classroom door at the corridor to an exit shall not exceed 100 feet.
- Pre-kindergarten classrooms are to be located at ground level.

b. Bathrooms

- Each classroom shall contain a minimum of one bathroom that shall consist of a toilet and lavatory, or at the district's option the lavatory may be omitted if the work counter area is equipped with a sink and is in close proximity to the toilet room door. The toilet paper holder is required and is to be placed within a child's reach from the toilet.
- Individual toilet rooms are required to accommodate the physically handicapped and be in compliance with ADA regulations.
- Every toilet room door lock shall be designed to permit opening of the locked door from the outside in an emergency, and the opening device shall be readily accessible to the staff.

c. Furniture

- Tables and chairs are required rather than desks. Chairs in the pre-kindergarten classroom should vary from 8 to 14 inches so that all children's feet will touch the floor.
- Tables should be from 20 to 24 inches in height.
- Furniture shall be an appropriate height for young children.

d. Floors

- Classroom areas, not carpeted, should be covered with resilient flooring or other easily cleaned material. Roll-type resilient flooring has the advantage of a minimum amount of jointing.

e. Building Codes

- All building construction shall conform to the Southern Building Codes, the American Disabilities Act, the Life Safety Codes, and to any other city and county building codes.

f. Storage and Space

- Open storage units (cubbies) shall be provided for each student.
- Wall receptacles shall be placed 10 feet to 15 feet apart in each classroom. Any receptacle in the counter area should not be located near a sink. A minimum of six outlets is required. Safety covers should be provided for wall sockets.
- Every closet latch shall be such that children can open the door from the inside.
- Built-in cabinets or portable storage areas shall be constructed to promote accessibility of materials to the child in order to encourage the selection of activities and to facilitate room clean-up and to serve as learning center dividers.

4. Optional Guidelines for New Structures

a. Classrooms

- All pre-kindergarten units within one school or building should be grouped in the same general vicinity for optimum use of common facilities.
- A classroom clock is recommended.
- It is recommended that 110 volt wall plugs be located every 10 to 15 feet around the classroom.
- A minimum of 50 square feet of window area per unit is recommended. Windows should be located no more than two feet from the floor. Windows should open from the inside for ventilation purposes. A generous glass window area is recommended to overlook the playground and promote an indoor-outdoor atmosphere. Roofing overhang and installation of blinds or shutters should be provided to combat excessive sunlight.
- Careful consideration should be given to the locating of pre-kindergarten units in new structures. Each classroom should have a door opening onto the playground or other attractive outdoor space. A six-foot roof overhang makes the outdoor area usable on a rainy day as an outdoor learning center.

b. Bathrooms

- One bathroom/shower combination is recommended for every eight pre-kindergarten units.

c. Furniture

- At least two small bookcases or book display units should be provided.
- A body length, shatter-proof wall or floor mirror should be located in the dramatic play/housekeeping center area or in close proximity to the toilet area.
- Chairs in the pre-kindergarten classroom should vary from 8 to 14 inches so that all children's feet touch the floor.
- A desk, chair, file cabinet and/or personal area should be provided within the classroom for teachers.
- A teacher work area of 180 to 200 square feet minimum should be allocated for use by every two to three pre-kindergarten teachers. A proportionately larger space shared by all pre-kindergarten teachers in a school would suffice. This room should be made inviting through use of carpeting and appropriate furniture. Also included should be a four-drawer file cabinet, two chairs, a work counter, or table storage shelving.

d. Floors

- A 9 x 12 foot area rug or individual carpet squares of low pile; high density fiber should be used to carpet a portion of each classroom.
- The entire floor should be covered with resilient flooring or should have an easily cleanable finish. Roll-type resilient flooring has the advantage of a minimum amount of jointing.

e. Storage and Space

- Cubbies should be four feet high and two feet wide with coat hanging space at the top and below. Coat hooks should be placed 36 inches from the floor. Generally these are built in sections of five or ten.
- It is recommended that base cabinets be placed below all counters. Doors should be attached to some cabinets and some should be left open to serve as shelves. Open cabinets 18 x 24 inches and 24 x 36 inches will accommodate the large paper used for easel painting.
- It is recommended that 12-inch deep upper wall cabinets be located at adult height over the counter area.
- It is recommended that an upright 3 x 5 foot cabinet be provided for every two pre-kindergarten classrooms. Utility cabinets will be used for storage of brooms, mops, and other large items.

- Adequate space for display of children's work should be provided. Bulletin boards can be located on the walls and/or fastened to the backs of movable cabinets and bookcases.

B. Outside Play Area

1. **Required Guidelines for Designated Areas:** A designated area for supervised outside periods during the pre-kindergarten day shall be provided. Pre-kindergarten students shall not simultaneously share an area with children six years or older during designated outside periods.
2. **Required Guidelines for Protection from Hazards:** Appropriate playground equipment and landscape design should be provided to facilitate learning and ensure safety. Playground equipment and landscape design must be developmentally appropriate for three-year-old children according to National Standards adopted by the Mississippi Department of Health. The outside play area shall have defined boundaries to protect children from environmental hazards such as traffic and/or stray animals.
3. **Optional Guidelines for Play Area**
 - It is recommended that the outdoor play area be a minimum of 4,300 square feet for two pre-kindergarten classes. For each additional class, another 1,400 square feet is recommended.
 - A covered area should be located on the playground to allow children refuge from the sun and to serve as a play area during inclement weather. It is recommended that this area be 225 to 300 square feet for each pre-kindergarten class, with a sloped concrete surface to shed water.

Section III. Organizational Procedures and Staff

A. Organization

1. **Required Ratio:** The teacher-child ratio shall be 1:7 maximum. If an assistant teacher is assigned in the pre-kindergarten classroom for the entire day, the teacher-child ratio shall not exceed 2:14. Classrooms of mixed three and four-year-olds should follow the *Pre-kindergarten Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Olds* including the teacher-child ratio. The maximum classroom group size shall not exceed 14 children.
2. **Required Length of School Day and Term:** The length of the school day for full-day programs located in public schools should be a minimum of seven hours including lunch, rest, and physical activity. The teaching day must provide at least 330 minutes of instruction per day. {MS Code 37-13-67}

The number of instructional hours to be provided, which shall equal to no less than five hundred forty (540) instructional hours per school year for half-day programs and one thousand eighty (1,080) instructional hours per school for full-day programs.

The length of the school day for half day programs located in public schools should be a minimum of three hours including snack, and physical activity. The teaching day must provide at least 165 minutes of instruction per day. {Mississippi Code §37-13-67}

3. **Required Physical Activity:** Children should engage in physical activity for a minimum of 40 minutes, and a maximum of 60 minutes during a full day program. The physical activity does not have to take place continuously. Weather permitting, physical activity should take place outside.

Children should engage in physical activity for a minimum of 20 minutes, and a maximum of 30 minutes during a half day program. The physical activity does not have to take place continuously.

4. **Required Quiet Time:** Children in full day programs should engage in a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 60 minutes of quiet time daily. Children in half-day programs that are less than six (6) hours in length are not required to rest, but should be provided quiet time as appropriate. Activities during quiet time may include individual activities, sustained silent reading, listening to books on tape, drawing, or resting, as appropriate for each individual student.

B. Staff

1. **Required Certification:** By fall 2018, early childhood educators of three-year-old children must hold a Pre-K - K (153) Mississippi teaching license or an Elementary Education K - 3 (116), Elementary Education K - 4 (152), or Elementary Education K - 6 (120) with a supplemental Nursery - Grade 1 (150) endorsement. No alternative route certifications will be accepted. Master teachers, teachers, or assistant teachers in participating Pre-K programs must meet the guidelines in Mississippi Code Section 37-21-3. These guidelines are as follows:
 - a. Master teacher - A master teacher or any other employee or consultant receiving a salary or fee equivalent to that of a master teacher shall meet the qualifications of a teacher, including the requirement that a teacher may be required to hold a valid, current state teaching license by the Mississippi Department of Education, and has demonstrated effectiveness as an early childhood educator. Effectiveness as an early childhood educator may be demonstrated by a rating of highly effective on a state evaluation of teaching, if

available, or with evidence that the teacher has a record of raising outcomes of Pre-K students.

- b. Teacher - A teacher shall possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field. A teacher may also possess a bachelor's degree in any field as well as have at least twelve (12) credit hours of coursework in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field approved by an institution granting a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field; or have a bachelor's degree in any field as well as have completed a specialized early childhood training program deemed equivalent by the Mississippi Department of Education to twelve (12) hours of approved coursework.
- c. Assistant teacher – Public school assistant teachers in the Pre-K program will be required by the Mississippi Department of Education to meet the definition of a highly qualified paraprofessional. Those applicants must have:
 - Completed at least 2 years of study (48 semester hours) at an institution of higher education; or
 - Obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or
 - Met a rigorous standard of quality as determined by a formal assessment. Mississippi uses ACT WorkKeys® assessment scores to measure this standard.
 - Reading for Information passing score = 4
 - Applied Mathematics passing score = 4
 - Writing or Business Writing passing score = 3

By fall 2018 an assistant teacher shall possess an associate's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field; or an associate's degree in any field and a Child Development Associate credential, a Montessori certification, or an equivalent certification.

There are two entities that can assist the workforce to obtain the required credentials. The Early Years Network offers Child Development Associate credential scholarships to assist with the fees for the exam. The Department of Human Services offers the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program with tuition assistance to earn AA and bachelor's degrees.

The equivalent certification is the Mississippi Department of Education's two week training program that will be held in the summer for those that wish to achieve this certification.

Effective fall 2018, all new hires are expected to meet these requirements.

2. **Required Professional Development:** All teaching staff (teachers and assistant teachers) and program administrators shall annually complete at least fifteen (15) hours of professional development for program instructional staff specific to the education of pre-kindergarten children. This variety of content could include program administration, parent engagement, and instructional content approved by the Mississippi Department of Education and/or Mississippi Department of Health.

Section IV. Curriculum, Materials, and Assessment

A. Curriculum

1. **Instructional Day:** The instructional day shall include all aspects of the child's day (e.g. learning center activities, large and small group activities, individual instruction, and guided physical activity).

Recommended Curriculum: Pre-kindergarten programs should use a research-based comprehensive curriculum that is designed to prepare children to be ready for pre-kindergarten, with emphasis in early literacy, and is aligned with the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Three -Year-Old Children*. The curriculum shall contain thematic units of activities and ideas designed to provide children the opportunities and experiences needed to master the performance standards in the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Old Children*.

2. Learning Centers

- a. **Daily Use:** Instructional delivery shall be organized primarily using learning centers. By week three (3) of the program year, a minimum of five (5) centers containing books, manipulatives, and creative art materials shall be organized, arranged, and labeled so they are accessible to children. All centers should include non-fiction and fiction books and writing materials that are appropriate to the child's developmental state. The centers should integrate thematic unit concepts with the content of the competency areas as indicated below:

- a. Creative Arts Center
- b. Science Center
- c. Math Center
- d. Language Development Center
- e. Cooking Center
- f. Blocks, Wheel Toys, and Construction Center
- g. Sand and/or Water Center
- h. Woodworking Center

- i. Music Center
 - j. Library Center
 - k. Listening Center
 - l. Dramatic Play
 - m. Creative Writing Center
 - n. Social Studies Center
 - o. Technology Center
 - p. Motor Development Center
- b. Space Limitations:** If space is very limited, some of centers may be combined.
- c. Time Constraints:** Every child enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program should be engaged in learning center activities for the purpose of learning and mastery of performance standards for a minimum of 120 minutes per day in a full-day program and 60 minutes per day in a half-day program.
- d. Use of Classroom Computers:** Computers are only to be used in the classroom as an instructional tool.
- e. Resource Materials:** Teachers are to use, at a minimum, the resources developed by the Mississippi Department of Education in curriculum planning such as the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children* and the *Mississippi Teaching Strategies for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children*. Other additional resources may be added as desired by each pre-kindergarten program.
- f. Researched Based Curriculum:** All participating Pre-K programs must use a research-based curriculum that is designed to prepare students to be ready for kindergarten. The curriculum must place an emphasis on early literacy and be aligned with MDE’s Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children.

B. Educational Materials

- 1. Required Cost per Classroom:** The initial expenditure for any new classroom for equipment, instructional materials and consumable supplies should be adequate to equip a classroom of 20 children or the number being served if less than 20. It is recommended that teachers are able to indicate the needs for classroom educational materials.
- 2. Required Instructional and Consumable Materials:** The pre-kindergarten program is to replenish the consumable supplies and instructional materials in each classroom at least once yearly.

3. **Optional Cost for Materials:** In purchasing materials, it is suggested that expensive items be obtained with the intent of joint utilization by pre-kindergarten teachers.
4. **Optional Cost for New Classrooms:** It is recommended that the initial expenditure for any new classroom for equipment, furniture, instructional materials, and consumable supplies should be a minimum of \$5,000 per classroom. Students should have access to technology in the classroom on a regular basis.
5. **Optional Cost per Classroom:** It is recommended that each year the pre-kindergarten program spend a minimum of \$500 - \$5,000 per classroom on instructional materials and consumable supplies. This is needed to replenish instructional materials that have been lost or damaged. Students should have access to technology in the classroom on a regular basis.

C. Assessment

1. **Standardized Test:** All three-year-old students participating in public pre-kindergarten must participate in the state approved kindergarten readiness assessment. Paper and pencil standardized tests are **not** appropriate measures for three-year-old children and should not be used. If testing is conducted on a computer, touch-based technology devices are recommended.
2. **Needs Assessments:** A continuous evaluation through the use of a variety of techniques, procedures, and tools should be used to determine each child's needs. Information obtained from ongoing assessments should be reflected in lesson plans to address children's needs collectively as well as individually.
3. **Individualized Assessments:** Pre-kindergarten programs should collaborate with Mississippi's state-recognized birth to three-year-old provider, First Steps, to formulate a plan regarding services. This plan should ensure any child currently receiving services continues to receive services based on the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The services must begin no later than the first forty (40) days of pre-kindergarten.
4. **Documentation:** Teachers should use observational checklists to measure the child's progress according to the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Old Children* (e.g. curriculum-based, teacher-generated, or MDE developed.). At least one additional method of assessment should be used in real time through technology (e.g. Mississippi's kindergarten readiness assessment).

Section V. Parent Participation and Transportation

A. Parent Participation

Families are viewed as a partner and the child's first teacher. Teachers should assist parents with information and resources that could help their children. Parents should have the opportunity to volunteer in the classroom and participate in enrichment opportunities.

1. **Required Handbook:** Each pre-kindergarten program shall develop and distribute a parent handbook that addresses the program philosophy, goals and specific information unique to the program (e.g. curriculum, credentials, and assessments.)
2. **Required Parent Communication:** Teacher/parent conferences should be conducted at least three times during the pre-kindergarten year to inform parents or guardians of child's progress. The first parent conference, at the beginning of the year, should consist of an information gathering session from the parent. The winter and spring conferences should consist of a progress update to the parent. If documented attempts to meet with parents or other responsible persons fail, telephone conferences can be substituted.

Communication should be conducted on a regular basis. Communication between school and home could consist of notebooks/folders, newsletters, conferences, emails, and phone calls.

3. **Volunteer Participation:** Parents, guardians, and community members should be encouraged to participate in various activities such as developing learning games for home or classroom use, sharing information with the class about their work skills or profession, or sharing their talents through conducting music and/or art activities. **Volunteers should not be in the classroom without a teacher or assistant teacher present and should not be used to meet the minimum adult-to-child ratio.** Volunteers should participate in an orientation session, sign a confidentiality agreement, and agree to a background check.

B. Transportation

1. **Transportation Requirement:** All transportation is optional.
2. **School Bus Safety:** All pre-kindergarten programs choosing to transport children shall refer to MS Code Section 37-41-3. All liability and related expenses are the responsibility of the pre-kindergarten program. In addition to the **National Highway Transportation Safety Association (NHTSA) Guidelines**, the following caregiver ratio should be followed when transporting children: *(Note: Refer to the Transportation Guidelines in Appendix D: Additional Program Guidelines).*

- If five (5) to sixteen (16) pre-kindergarten children are being transported on a bus, one (1) caregiver in addition to the driver should be on the bus.
- If seventeen (17) to thirty two (32) pre-kindergarten children are being transported on a bus, two (2) caregivers in addition to the driver should be on the bus.
- Caregivers should be 18 years of age or older and an agency employee.



MISSISSIPPI EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOMS SERVING FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

Carey Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Education

Kin S. Benton, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer

Revised Edition, 2015



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This manual has been prepared for use by administrators, counselors, teachers, and other authorized staff in the pre-kindergarten programs of Mississippi and is to be used as a guide in facilitating state or federally funded pre-kindergarten programs.

Pre-Kindergarten Philosophy and Goals for Four-Year-Old Children

The early childhood years are a critical time in the development for every child. The learning that takes place during the first eight years of life serves as the foundation for all later academic, social, emotional, physical and motor development. All children are capable of learning and meeting developmental milestones. Therefore, the Early Learning Guidelines are proposed to assist all early childhood educators in their efforts to provide a high quality research-based program serving pre-kindergarten children at 4 years of age.

All children attending a pre-kindergarten program should:

1. improve their self-concept;
2. increase their intellectual growth;
3. enlarge their understanding of the world, people, experiences, ideas;
4. increase competencies and skills in oral language, literacy, writing, listening, and thinking;
5. increasing their competencies and skills in mathematical reasoning and scientific exploration;
6. increase their skills involved in physical coordination and gross and fine motor skills;
7. increase their competence in dealing with emotional feelings and social situations;
8. increase their self-direction and independence;
9. develop cooperative, trusting relationships;
10. develop their natural curiosity and creative potential; and
11. develop a love of learning.

Learning Principles

The Early Learning Guidelines outlined in this document are built on scientifically-based principles. The following principles should be reflected in the learning environment and curriculum in the classroom:

1. Skills and concepts specific to developmental domains developed by the Mississippi Department of Education are foundational to all instruction.
 - a. English Language Arts
 - b. Mathematics
 - c. Social Studies
 - d. Science
 - e. Approaches to Learning
 - f. Social and Emotional Development
 - g. Physical Development
 - h. Creative Expression
2. Learning activities are constructed which acknowledge children advance through similar stages of development, but at individual rates.
3. Children are in an inclusive learning environment that embraces diversity.
4. Children use their senses in the instructional process (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling).
5. Active involvement (exploring, playing, manipulating, and problem solving) is the primary strategy for delivering instruction.
6. Children are taught using a combination of instructional strategies, which includes active involvement in learning centers, participating in large and small group instruction and individual instructional settings.
7. Attitudes and examples from teachers and content in lessons taught reflect a positive problem solving approach. Therefore, attention should be given to instructional methods, emotional climate, environment, and educator-child interaction.
8. Children have experiences that are sensitive to the value of play, for it is through play that children create their own meaning and learning.

The majority of the instructional delivery must be organized around learning centers and responsive interactions among children, and their peers and adults. These experiences should provide opportunities for children to acquire skills and concepts through hands-on engaged learning while the teacher is facilitating appropriate language development through conversations.

Section I. Requirements for Voluntary Enrollment

A. Entrance Age:

1. **Required Age:** A pre-kindergarten child shall have reached the age of four years on or before September 1.
2. **Required Documentation:** A birth certificate and immunization record (Form 121) are required for all pre-kindergarten children and shall be presented to the proper school authority. If the pre-kindergarten (four-year-old) program is located in a public school setting, the information in Section 1 of the **Mississippi Cumulative Folders and Permanent Records** document must be followed (Mississippi Code Ann. §37-15-1).

Section II. Physical Settings and Outside Play

Any elementary, including pre-kindergarten, and/or secondary school system, accredited by the Mississippi State Department of Education, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Mississippi Private School Education Association, the American Association of Christian Schools, the Association of Christian School International, a school affiliated with Accelerated Christian Education, Inc., and any Head Start program operating in conjunction with an elementary school system, whether it is public, private or parochial, whose primary purpose is a structured school or school readiness program is exempt, from licensing by the Mississippi State Department of Health. If a classroom is located in a public school and sponsored by a non-public school organization, the classroom must be licensed unless named in the exemption requirements section of the Child Care Regulations or a letter of joint sponsorship is provided by the school district and non-profit sponsor that is approved by the Mississippi State Department of Health. Pre-kindergarten providers not located in public schools are required to be licensed by the Mississippi State Department of Health.

Facilities or programs claiming exemption shall be required, upon the written request of the licensing agency, to provide documentation of the facts claimed to support the basis for the exemption, which sworn by affidavit to be true and accurate under the penalties of perjury. However, any entity exempt from the requirements to be licensed but voluntarily choosing to obtain a license is subject to all provisions of the licensing law and regulations. (Regulations Governing Licensure of Child Care Facilities, Office of Health Protection, Mississippi State Department of Health, Effective August 15, 2013, pg. 2.)

A. Physical Settings

1. Required Guidelines for Existing Structures

a. Classrooms

- The classroom will consist of no less than 35 square feet per child with a minimum of 600 square feet.
- Pre-kindergarten classrooms are to be located at ground level.
- Every closet latch shall be such that children can open the door from the inside.
- The maximum distance to an exit from any point in the building shall not exceed 150 feet. The maximum distance from the classroom door at the corridor to an exit shall not exceed 100 feet.
- Safety covers are placed on all wall sockets not in use.

b. Bathrooms

- The classroom will be located no more than 125 feet from a bathroom.
- Every toilet room door lock shall be designed to permit opening of the locked door from the outside in an emergency, and the opening device shall be readily accessible to the staff.

c. Furniture

- Furniture will be of an appropriate height for young children.
- Tables and chairs are required rather than desks.

d. Floors

- Each classroom should have a 9 x 12 foot area rug or individual carpet squares to be used for large group meetings.

e. Building Codes

- All building construction shall conform to the Southern Building Codes, the American Disabilities Act, the Life Safety Codes, and to any other city or county building codes.

2. Optional Guidelines for Existing Structures

a. Classrooms

- Where multiple pre-kindergarten units occur within a school or building, it is recommended that they be grouped adjacent to one another for teacher and child interaction and for optimum use of common facilities.

- It is recommended that each pre-kindergarten classroom have a work counter of at least 12 feet with at least one sink. The sink should be stainless steel or porcelain, standard with gooseneck fitting on one side and a drinking bubble on the other. It is recommended that the sink have cold water only. A paper towel dispenser accessible to students and a trash receptacle should be located near the sink.
- It is recommended that 110 volt wall plugs be located every 10 feet to 15 feet around the classroom.

b. Bathrooms

- A toilet room in the classroom is recommended for pre-kindergarten children.
- It is recommended that toilet seats in bathrooms be from 10 to 13 inches from the floor.
- It is recommended that lavatories be 24 inches from the floor.

c. Furniture

- At least two small bookcases or book display shelves are desirable.
- A desk, chair, file cabinet and/or personal area should be provided within the classroom for teachers.

d. Floors

- Classroom areas, not carpeted, should be covered with resilient flooring or other easily cleaned material. Roll-type resilient flooring has the advantage of a minimum amount of jointing.

e. Storage and Space

- Base cabinets are recommended below all counters. Doors should be attached to some cabinets and some should be left open to serve as shelves. Open cabinet (18 x 24 inches and 24 x 36 inches) will accommodate the large paper used for easel painting.
- Cabinets, 12 inches deep, are recommended over the entire counter area for general storage.
- Open storage units (cubbies) are recommended for every student. Each needs to be four feet high and two feet wide with coat hanging space at the bottom and a storage area at the top. Coat hooks should be installed 36 inches from the floor.
- Adequate storage space should be provided. The storage units may include one wall of built-in cabinets or moveable storage sections. Most storage units should be accessible to children to facilitate independence and responsibility within the classroom. Storage space, above the reach of the children, is recommended for use by teachers.

- Adequate space for display of children's work should be provided. Bulletin boards can be located on walls and/or fastened to the backs of cabinets and bookcases.
- If space within the school is available, it is recommended that a teacher work area of 180 to 200 square feet be allocated for use by every two to three pre-kindergarten teachers. This area is needed for individual assessment of children, conferencing with parents, making classroom materials, and planning meetings.

3. Required Guidelines for New Structures Established after July 2017

a. Classrooms

- The classroom shall be a minimum of 1,000 square feet.
- The minimum classroom width shall be 24 feet except in pod-type structures.
- Classroom lighting shall contain operable standard fluorescent lights with area controls that provide adequate lighting. Switches within reach of the children, will be located at the doors. Toilet rooms will contain lighting fixtures.
- The maximum distance to an exit from any point in the building shall not exceed 150 feet. The maximum distance from the interior classroom door at the corridor to an exit shall not exceed 100 feet.
- Pre-kindergarten classrooms are to be located at ground level.

b. Bathrooms

- Each classroom shall contain a minimum of one bathroom that shall consist of a toilet and lavatory, or at the district's option the lavatory may be omitted if the work counter area is equipped with a sink and is in close proximity to the toilet room door. The toilet paper holder is required and is to be placed within a child's reach from the toilet.
- Individual toilet rooms are required to accommodate the physically handicapped and be in compliance with ADA regulations.
- Every toilet room door lock shall be designed to permit opening of the locked door from the outside in an emergency, and the opening device shall be readily accessible to the staff.

c. Furniture

- Tables and chairs are required rather than desks.
- Chairs in the pre-kindergarten classroom should vary from 8 to 14 inches so that all children's feet will touch the floor.
- Tables should be from 20 inches to 24 inches in height.
- Furniture shall be an appropriate height for young children.

d. Floors

- Classroom areas, not carpeted, should be covered with resilient flooring or other easily cleaned material. Roll-type resilient flooring has the advantage of a minimum amount of jointing.

e. Building Codes

- All building construction shall conform to the Southern Building Codes, the American Disabilities Act, the Life Safety Codes, and to any other city and county building codes.

f. Storage and Space

- Open storage units (cubbies) shall be provided for each student.
- Wall receptacles shall be placed 10 feet to 15 feet apart in each classroom. Any receptacle in the counter area should not be located near a sink. A minimum of six outlets is required. Safety covers should be provided for wall sockets.
- Every closet latch shall be such that children can open the door from the inside.
- Built-in cabinets or portable storage areas shall be constructed to promote accessibility of materials to the child in order to encourage the selection of activities and to facilitate room clean-up and to serve as learning center dividers.

4. Optional Guidelines for New Structures

a. Classrooms

- All pre-kindergarten units within one school or building should be grouped in the same general vicinity for optimum use of common facilities.
- A classroom clock is recommended.
- It is recommended that 110 volt wall plugs be located every 10 to 15 feet around the classroom.
- A minimum of 50 square feet of window area per unit is recommended. Windows should be located no more than two feet from the floor. Windows should open from the inside for ventilation purposes. A generous glass window area is recommended to overlook the playground and promote an indoor-outdoor atmosphere. Roofing overhang and installation of blinds or shutters should be provided to combat excessive sunlight.
- Careful consideration should be given to the locating of pre-kindergarten units in new structures. Each classroom should have a door opening onto the playground or other attractive outdoor space. A six-foot roof overhang makes the outdoor area usable on a rainy day as an outdoor learning center.

b. Bathrooms

- One bathroom/shower combination is recommended for every eight pre-kindergarten units.

c. Furniture

- At least two small bookcases or book display units should be provided.
- A body-length, shatter-proof wall or floor mirror should be located in the dramatic play/housekeeping center area or in close proximity to the toilet area.
- Chairs in the pre-kindergarten classroom should vary from 8 to 14 inches so that all children's feet touch the floor.
- A desk, chair, file cabinet, and/or personal area should be provided within the classroom for teachers.
- A teacher work area of 180 to 200 square feet minimum should be allocated for use by every two to three pre-kindergarten teachers. A proportionately larger space shared by all pre-kindergarten teachers in a school would suffice. This room should be made inviting through use of carpeting and appropriate furniture. Also included should be a four-drawer file cabinet, two chairs, a work counter, or table storage shelving.

d. Floors

- A 9 x 12 foot area rug or individual carpet squares of low-pile high-density fiber should be used to carpet a portion of each classroom.
- The entire floor should be covered with resilient flooring or should have an easily cleanable finish. Roll-type resilient flooring has the advantage of a minimum amount of jointing.

e. Storage and Space

- Cubbies should be four feet high and two feet wide with coat hanging space at the top and below. Coat hooks should be placed 36 inches from the floor.
- It is recommended that base cabinets be placed below all counters. Doors should be attached to some cabinets and some should be left open to serve as shelves. Open cabinets 18 x 24 inches and 24 x 36 inches will accommodate the large paper used for easel painting.
- It is recommended that 12-inch deep upper wall cabinets be located at adult height over the counter area.
- It is recommended that an upright 3 x 5 foot cabinet be provided for every two pre-kindergarten classrooms. Utility cabinets will be used for storage of brooms, mops, and other large items.

- Adequate space for display of children's work should be provided. Bulletin boards can be located on the walls and/or fastened to the backs of movable cabinets and bookcases.

B. Outside Play Area

1. **Required Guidelines for Designated Areas:** A designated area for supervised outside periods during the pre-kindergarten day shall be provided. Pre-kindergarten students shall not simultaneously share an area with children six years or older during designated outside periods.
2. **Required Guidelines for Protection from Hazards:** Appropriate playground equipment and landscape design should be provided to facilitate learning and ensure safety. Playground equipment and landscape design must be developmentally appropriate for four-year-old children according to National Standards adopted by the Mississippi Department of Health. The outside play area shall have defined boundaries to protect children from environmental hazards.
3. **Optional Guidelines for Play Area**
 - It is recommended that the outdoor play area be a minimum of 4,300 square feet for two pre-kindergarten classes. For each additional class, another 1,400 square feet is recommended.
 - A covered area should be located on the playground to allow children refuge from the sun and to serve as a play area during inclement weather. It is recommended that this area be 225 to 300 square feet for each pre-kindergarten class, with a sloped concrete surface to shed water.

Section III. Organizational Procedures and Staff

A. Organization

1. **Required Ratio:** The teacher-child ratio shall be 1:10 maximum. If an assistant teacher is assigned in the pre-kindergarten classroom for the entire day, the teacher-child ratio shall not exceed 2:20. Classrooms of mixed three and four-year-olds should follow the Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three-Year-Olds including the teacher-child ratio. The maximum classroom group size shall not exceed 14 children.
2. **Required Length of School Day and Term:** The length of the school day for full-day programs located in public schools should be a minimum of seven hours including lunch, rest, and physical activity. The teaching day must provide at least 330 minutes of instruction per day. {MS Code 37-13-67}

The number of instructional hours to be provided, which shall equal to no less than five hundred forty (540) instructional hours per school year for half-day programs and one thousand eighty (1,080) instructional hours per school for full-day programs.

The length of the school day for half day programs located in public schools should be a minimum of three hours including snack, and physical activity. The teaching day must provide at least 165 minutes of instruction per day. {Mississippi Code §37-13-67}

3. **Required Physical Activity:** Children should engage in physical activity for a minimum of 40 minutes, and a maximum of 60 minutes during a full day program. The physical activity does not have to take place continuously. Weather permitting, physical activity should take place outside.

Children should engage in physical activity for a minimum of 20 minutes, and a maximum of 30 minutes during a half day program. The physical activity does not have to take place continuously.

4. **Required Quiet Time:** Children in full day programs should engage in a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 60 minutes of quiet time daily. Children in half-day programs that are less than six (6) hours in length are not required to rest, but should be provided quiet time as appropriate. Activities during quiet time may include individual activities, sustained silent reading, listening to books on tape, drawing, or resting, as appropriate for each individual student.

B. Staff

1. **Required Certification:** By fall 2018, early childhood educators of four-year-old children must hold a Pre-K - K (153) Mississippi teaching license or an Elementary Education K - 3 (116), Elementary Education K - 4 (152), or Elementary Education K - 6 (120) with a supplemental Nursery - Grade 1 (150) endorsement. No alternative route certifications will be accepted. Master teachers, teachers, or assistant teachers in participating Pre-K programs must meet the guidelines in Mississippi Code Section 37-21-3. These guidelines are as follows:
 - a. Master teacher - A master teacher or any other employee or consultant receiving a salary or fee equivalent to that of a master teacher shall meet the qualifications of a teacher, including the requirement that a teacher may be required to hold a valid, current state teaching license by the Mississippi Department of Education, and has demonstrated effectiveness as an early childhood educator. Effectiveness as an early childhood educator may be demonstrated by a rating of highly effective on a state evaluation of teaching, if

available, or with evidence that the teacher has a record of raising outcomes of Pre-K students.

- b. Teacher - A teacher shall possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field. A teacher may also possess a bachelor's degree in any field as well as have at least twelve (12) credit hours of coursework in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field approved by an institution granting a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field; or have a bachelor's degree in any field as well as have completed a specialized early childhood training program deemed equivalent by the Mississippi Department of Education to twelve (12) hours of approved coursework.
- c. Assistant teacher – Public school assistant teachers in the Pre-K program will be required by the Mississippi Department of Education to meet the definition of a highly qualified paraprofessional. Those applicants must have:
 - o Completed at least 2 years of study (48 semester hours) at an institution of higher education; or
 - o Obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or
 - o Met a rigorous standard of quality as determined by a formal assessment. Mississippi uses ACT WorkKeys® assessment scores to measure this standard.
 - Reading for Information passing score = 4
 - Applied Mathematics passing score = 4
 - Writing or Business Writing passing score = 3

By fall 2018 an assistant teacher shall possess an associate's degree in early childhood education, child development, or an equivalent field; or an associate's degree in any field and a Child Development Associate credential, a Montessori certification, or an equivalent certification.

There are two entities that can assist the workforce to obtain the required credentials. The Early Years Network offers Child Development Associate credential scholarships to assist with the fees for the exam. The Department of Human Services offers the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program with tuition assistance to earn AA and bachelor's degrees.

The equivalent certification is the Mississippi Department of Education's two week training program that will be held in the summer for those that wish to achieve this certification.

Effective fall 2018, all new hires are expected to meet these requirements.

2. **Required Professional Development:** All teaching staff (teachers and assistant teachers) and program administrators shall annually complete at least fifteen (15) hours of professional development for program instructional staff specific to the education of pre-kindergarten children. This variety of content could include program administration, parent engagement, and instructional content approved by the Mississippi Department of Education and/or Mississippi Department of Health.

Section IV. Curriculum, Materials, and Assessment

A. Curriculum

1. **Instructional Day:** The instructional day shall include all aspects of the child's day (e.g. learning center activities, large and small group activities, individual instruction, and guided physical activity).

Recommended Curriculum: Pre-kindergarten programs should use a research-based comprehensive curriculum that is designed to prepare children to be ready for kindergarten, with emphasis in early literacy, and is aligned with the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children*. The curriculum shall contain thematic units of activities and ideas designed to provide children the opportunities and experiences needed to master the performance standards in the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children*.

2. Learning Centers

- a. **Daily Use:** Instructional delivery shall be organized primarily using learning centers. By week three (3) of the program year, a minimum of five (5) centers containing books, manipulatives, and creative art materials shall be organized, arranged, and labeled so they are accessible to children. All centers should include non-fiction and fiction books and writing materials that are appropriate to the child's developmental state. The centers should integrate thematic unit concepts with the content of the competency areas as indicated below:

- a. Creative Arts Center
- b. Science Center
- c. Math Center
- d. Language Development Center
- e. Cooking Center
- f. Blocks, Wheel Toys, and Construction Center
- g. Sand and/or Water Center
- h. Woodworking Center

- i. Music Center
 - j. Library Center
 - k. Listening Center
 - l. Dramatic Play
 - m. Creative Writing Center
 - n. Social Studies Center
 - o. Technology Center
 - p. Motor Development Center
- b. Space Limitations:** If space is very limited, some of centers may be combined.
- c. Time Constraints:** Every child enrolled in a pre-kindergarten program should be engaged in learning center activities for the purpose of learning and mastery of performance standards for a minimum of 120 minutes per day in a full-day program and 60 minutes per day in a half-day program.
- d. Use of Classroom Computers:** Computers are only to be used in the classroom as an instructional tool.
- e. Resource Materials:** Teachers are to use, at a minimum, the resources developed by the Mississippi Department of Education in curriculum planning such as the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children* and the *Mississippi Teaching Strategies for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children*. Other additional resources may be added as desired by each pre-kindergarten program.
- f. Researched Based Curriculum:** All participating Pre-K programs must use a research-based curriculum that is designed to prepare students to be ready for kindergarten. The curriculum must place an emphasis on early literacy and be aligned with MDE's Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children.

B. Educational Materials

- 1. Required Cost per Classroom:** The initial expenditure for any new classroom for equipment, instructional materials and consumable supplies should be adequate to equip a classroom of 20 children or the number being served if less than 20. It is recommended that teachers are able to indicate the needs for classroom educational materials.
- 2. Required Instructional and Consumable Materials:** The pre-kindergarten program is to replenish the consumable supplies and instructional materials in each classroom at least once yearly.

3. **Optional Cost for Materials:** In purchasing materials, it is suggested that expensive items be obtained with the intent of joint utilization by pre-kindergarten teachers.
4. **Optional Cost for New Classrooms:** It is recommended that the initial expenditure for any new classroom for equipment, furniture, instructional materials, and consumable supplies should be a minimum of \$5,000 per classroom. Students should have access to technology in the classroom on a regular basis.
5. **Optional Cost per Classroom:** It is recommended that each year the pre-kindergarten program spend a minimum of \$500 - \$5,000 per classroom on instructional materials and consumable supplies. This is needed to replenish instructional materials that have been lost or damaged. Students should have access to technology in the classroom on a regular basis.

C. Assessment

1. **Standardized Test:** All four year-old-students participating in public pre-kindergarten must participate in the state approved kindergarten readiness assessment. Paper and pencil standardized tests are **not** appropriate measures for four-year-old children and should not be used. If testing is conducted on a computer, touch-based technology devices are recommended.
2. **Needs Assessments:** A continuous evaluation through the use of a variety of techniques, procedures, and tools should be used to determine each child's needs. Information obtained from ongoing assessments should be reflected in lesson plans to address children's needs collectively as well as individually.
3. **Individualized Assessments:** Pre-kindergarten programs should collaborate with Mississippi's state-recognized birth to three-year-old provider, First Steps, to formulate a plan regarding services. This plan should ensure any child currently receiving services continues to receive services based on the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The services must begin no later than the first forty (40) days of pre-kindergarten.
4. **Documentation:** Teachers should use observational checklists to measure the child's progress according to the *Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children* (e.g. curriculum-based, teacher-generated, or MDE developed.). At least one additional method of assessment should be used in real time through technology (e.g. Mississippi's Pre-kindergarten readiness assessment).

Section V. Parent Participation and Transportation

A. Parent Participation

Families are viewed as a partner and the child's first teacher. Teachers should assist parents with information and resources that could help their children. Parents should have the opportunity to volunteer in the classroom and participate in enrichment opportunities.

1. **Required Handbook:** Each pre-kindergarten program shall develop and distribute a parent handbook that addresses the program philosophy, goals and specific information unique to the program (e.g. curriculum, credentials, and assessments.)
2. **Required Parent Communication:** Teacher/parent conferences should be conducted at least three times during the pre-kindergarten year to inform parents or guardians of child's progress. The first parent conference, at the beginning of the year, should consist of an information gathering session from the parent. The winter and spring conferences should consist of a progress update to the parent. If documented attempts to meet with parents or other responsible persons fail, telephone conferences can be substituted.

Communication should be conducted on a regular basis. Communication between school and home could consist of notebooks/folders, newsletters, conferences, emails, and phone calls.

3. **Volunteer Participation:** Parents, guardians, and community members should be encouraged to participate in various activities such as developing learning games for home or classroom use, sharing information with the class about their work skills or profession, or sharing their talents through conducting music and/or art activities. **Volunteers should not be in the classroom without a teacher or assistant teacher present and should not be used to meet the minimum adult-to-child ratio.** Volunteers should participate in an orientation session, sign a confidentiality agreement, and agree to a background check.

B. Transportation

1. **Transportation Requirement:** All transportation is optional.
2. **School Bus Safety:** All pre-kindergarten programs choosing to transport children shall refer to MS Code Section 37-41-3. All liability and related expenses are the responsibility of the pre-kindergarten program. In addition to the **National Highway Transportation Safety Association (NHTSA) Guidelines**, the following caregiver ratio should be followed when transporting children: *(Note: Refer to the Transportation Guidelines in Appendix D: Additional Program Guidelines).*

- If five (5) to sixteen (16) pre-kindergarten children are being transported on a bus, one (1) caregiver in addition to the driver should be on the bus.
- If seventeen (17) to thirty-two (32) pre-kindergarten children are being transported on a bus, two (2) caregivers in addition to the driver should be on the bus.
- Caregivers should be 18 years of age or older and an agency employee.