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# HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM DEFINITION

The National Association for the Education of Young Children describes a high-quality program as “providing a safe, nurturing environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families.” This definition provides the foundation of the criteria below.

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

A high-quality early childhood program fosters a sense of community within its doors and connects families to resources and opportunities in the surrounding community. This sense of community is created through open communication with understanding and respect for the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages of families. Programs engage the community by utilizing local resources to support child development.

**OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT**

A high-quality early childhood program uses an ongoing cycle of observation and assessment as an analysis of a child’s growth and development. Results are used to plan and modify instruction and are shared with families. Partners and resources are sought to address identified needs and provide additional opportunities.

**ENVIRONMENT AND CURRICULUM**

A high-quality early childhood program provides an environment designed for children. This learning environment is characterized by supportive relationships and conversations that foster language development. The environment is strengthened by curriculum and materials that engage children in developmentally appropriate activities that address all domains of development (social/emotional, language, cognition and general knowledge, physical well-being and motor development).

**HEALTH, SAFETY AND NUTRITION**

A high-quality early childhood program protects the physical, social, and emotional safety of a child. It promotes the care of the whole child through healthy relationships and habits, including nutrition, hygiene, and physical activity. It provides information about and access to regular health screenings, interventions, and referrals as needed.

**FACULTY AND STAFF**

A high-quality early childhood program employs educators that have the knowledge and training to make informed decisions. These educators have experience in the field and are engaged in continuous learning. Staff engage in ethical conduct and maintain a positive disposition and a sense of empathy.

**ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP**

A high-quality early childhood program is led by administrators with an understanding and appreciation for the unique needs of their program, including regulatory requirements, communication strategies, and management plans. They implement program policies to foster a child’s growth and development, and advocate for children and their families. They engage in strong business practices that attract and sustain resources, and create an accessible, affordable program.

**EVALUATION**

A high-quality early childhood program receives an annual evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of services on improving children’s learning and well-being. Evaluation consists of two parts: rate of readiness and monitoring. The rate of readiness is a score assigned to each site through completion of specific evaluation tools that assess how children grow academically and developmentally throughout a school year and how the classroom environment and teaching practices support children’s learning. Monitoring is a process where evidence is provided to ensure compliance with grant requirements, *Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three- and Four-Year-Olds*, and/or best practices in early childhood.

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