

Comprehensive Curriculum Elements

A comprehensive curriculum includes these elements:

1. Goals and Objectives

Goals tell us the intent of activities. They are designed to allow for individualization to support meeting each child's needs and interests and should be developed to help children learn and develop in all of the different domains – social emotional, physical, literacy and cognitive. In fact, many activities will help children's skills grow in different goals at the same time.

2. Experiences for Children's Learning

A well-defined comprehensive curriculum helps children achieve their learning goals and objectives. The activities that children experience will encourage them to construct their understanding and knowledge through play, active exploration, and investigation of materials and ideas. The curriculum should promote both child-directed and teacher-directed activities; large group, small group and individualized learning opportunities; and learning during every day routines and experiences. A strong curriculum is flexible and will promote teachers' use of both planned experiences and those experiences that occur naturally as a result of children's interests. Both indoor and outdoor environments are important learning spaces where the large equipment, learning materials, and spatial arrangement of these materials are key to supporting children's learning. The way in which teachers design classroom environments optimizes children's interaction with materials and concepts in ways that assure children's growth and development, and at the same time, provides opportunities for the teacher to authentically assess and build on those learning experiences.

3. Varied Domains of Learning

A rich curriculum will assure that children have opportunities to expand their learning and development in all domains or areas of learning. This is known as "the whole child." These areas include social and emotional learning, physical development, language and literacy skills, and the cognitive areas of knowledge that address mathematics, science, social studies and creative expression. Experiences that are included within the curriculum framework should be integrated or demonstrate how they can incorporate varied domains within one activity. Technology is also a new, but important, area of learning that should be included within a curriculum model.

4. Connection to Learning Standards

Delaware's Early Learning Foundations for Infants and Toddlers and Preschoolers are based on the age-appropriate expectations for children that explain what children should know and do at specific ages. When a curriculum is aligned or cross-walked with the Early Learning Foundations, it assures that children are receiving experiences that are based on age-appropriate standards across all of the domains of learning and that the expectations for learning are challenging, yet realistic and attainable. A comprehensive curriculum will also correspond to classroom or teacher assessments such as the Environment Rating Scale or CLASS to assure classrooms plan for high-quality performance that is demonstrated in their scores.

5. Plans for Teachers

A curriculum should include ways that teachers can help children achieve or reach their goals and objectives. Delaware's Educational Enduring Understandings state that teachers must understand how children learn and design learning environments that complement children's learning needs. The curriculum should guide teachers' thinking about their own intentional role and include ways in which they can purposefully provide materials, ask questions or design the environment to help children learn through play and investigation. Delaware's teachers use essential questions to stimulate children's thinking and help them transfer current knowledge to new situations (scaffolding).

6. Ways to Measure Children's Learning

Curriculum must include an ongoing process for understanding each child's growth and development and progress towards meeting their learning goals. This process provides the evidence that children are learning and should include strategies for observing and documenting children's current levels of development, their interests and their needs as well as analyzing that information to develop new or modify learning objectives.

7. Diversity and Inclusivity

Activities that are linked to children's personal experiences are more meaningful and often provide more successful ways for them to learn. The curriculum should provide information on ways to provide experiences that reflect the cultures and backgrounds of the children within the early learning site. The curriculum should also be appropriate or provide for adaptations for children with varied abilities including children that are English Language Learners or children with disabilities.

8. Family Engagement

Families and teachers work in partnership to help children achieve learning success. The curriculum should include ways in which families share in children's individualized goal-development, provide information about their progress, or participate in classroom experiences. It should include ways to assure family celebrations or events include consideration of family cultures and ethnic practices and provide ways to make adaptations for those cultural or ethnic practices or for adults who may have special needs. Suggestions for at-home connections will enrich the families' understanding and supports for children's experiences and learning and should be provided throughout the curriculum model.

Resources:

Delaware Department of Education. Curriculum Resources: Essential Questions, Essential Understanding and Design Principles.

National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (2003) Joint Position Statement. Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation. Building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8.

North Carolina Division of Child Development & Early Education. North Carolina Approved Early Childhood Curricula. (2011)

Taylor, H.H., (2000). Curriculum in Head Start. Head Start Bulletin. Issue 67.