

EARLY CHILDHOOD ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

A DIVISION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF FLORIDA, INC.

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

I. Nature and Purpose of the Association

- A. The nature of the Independent Early Childhood Program is to provide educational opportunities unhampered by political considerations. Independent schools, including not-for profit, non-profit, and for profit schools, add to the variety of educational choices in this country and enrich the quality of educational programs available to our nation's youth.
- B. AISF Early Childhood Programs are varied in their purposes and programs, but they all emphasize educational fundamentals while tailoring their programs to meet the needs, capabilities, and interests of their children. AISF Early Childhood Programs are committed to furthering their stated philosophies and objectives.
- C. The purpose of this Association is to improve private education in Florida by monitoring its accredited and provisional members to maintain the accreditation standards, by fostering relations with the public, other schools, and local, state, regional, and national educational authorities and associations, and by promoting in-service education of teachers and administrators.

II. Philosophy and Objectives

- A. Each member program shall complete the Association's self-study as required by the Association to:
 - 1. express its basic philosophy,
 - 2. state its educational objectives
 - 3. incorporate "best practices"
- B. Programs shall convey and disseminate their philosophies and educational objectives to the public in order to adequately notify the community of such information.

III. School Calendar and Class Hours

- A. The program's year shall consist of at least 175 class days or its equivalent.
- B. A program's day shall consist of at least 5 1/2 hours of net instructional time in grades 1-3 and 3 hours of net instructional time in kindergarten and pre-kindergarten (4 year olds to kindergarten) classes.
- C. Either the above standards or current standards incorporated in the Florida Compulsory Attendance Law shall be used, whichever requires longer student attendance.

IV. Governance

RATIONALE

The role of the governing entity is to provide oversight of the early education program and to create general policies that will ensure high-quality care and educational opportunities for the children. The governing entity should empower the administrator, director, or program head to make day-to-day decisions concerning the

implementation of the policies and programs being offered by the organization. These policies should be reflective of the mission and philosophy of the early education program.

Nationally accepted research provided through a cooperative effort of the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, *The Children of the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study Go to School* and The National Research Council in *Eager to Learn* notes that a well-planned, high-quality early childhood program leads to the success of children in later academic years. This is especially true for young children who are at greater risk of school failure because of poverty, low level maternal education, and other factors that limit opportunities and resources that enhance learning and development (Bowman 2001). (The rationale statements placed at the beginning of each AISF Standard are required by NCPA and FL Gold Seal is also to be positioned prior to each standard in the self study. The rationale was written based on research from the NCPA-ECE Commission – see “Accreditation Overview” in the NCPA-ECE Standards.)

- A. The corporate entity having oversight of the program – whether incorporated, franchised, proprietary, religiously affiliated, or otherwise – has clearly articulated bylaws that include the program.
 - 1. Programs under the auspices of another organization and/or agency, such as a Church, Synagogue, or umbrella corporation, are represented by a governance or committee (“the governance”) responsible for the general policies and the financial stability of the program.
 - a. The governance of the program operates in conjunction with and under the appropriate bylaws of the corporation.
 - b. The governance of the program establishes and maintains written governing policies and procedures that are consistent with the program’s philosophy.
 - c. The governance of the program has clearly written defined roles and responsibilities in the program and new governance members and staff are provided with an orientation when they join the governance.
 - d. The governing entity approves wages, benefits, recruitment procedures, and staff retention and is reviewed at least annually.
 - e. Written minutes of meetings by the governance of the program are maintained.
 - f. The governance ensures an annual evaluation of the administrator/director (hereinafter referred to as “the director”).
 - g. The program meets all applicable governmental regulations.
- B. The program:
 - 1. has a written mission or vision statement that clearly articulates the program’s purpose for the care and/or education of young children.
 - 2. has clear admission policies and procedures which are written, nondiscriminatory, and linked to the philosophy, mission, and goals of the program.
 - a. In an inclusive environment for children with special needs, the program will have individualized student plans as needed.
 - b. Policies regarding the enrollment and disenrollment of children protect children’s rights.
 - 3. is accurately described in any informational sources or resources it creates.

V. Finances and Related Records

A. Tuition and Other Revenues

- 1. Tuition and other revenues shall sustain the educational program and services of the program.
- 2. The program is not undergoing financial reorganization to protect itself from creditors.

- B. The Association may periodically require a program to submit a professionally constructed financial statement
- C. An annual budget shall be used as a guide for financial stability.
- D. A program's financial affairs shall be under the general review of a professional, certified accountant.
- E. The program shall maintain accident, liability, and comprehensive insurance policies with a minimum liability policy of \$500,000 and keep copies of the policies.
- F. The program shall maintain vehicle maintenance files and copies of automotive titles.
- G. The program shall maintain and display all licenses and certificates as may be required by any applicable governmental agency.

VI. School Leadership

RATIONALE

Research suggests that *the performance of the program director, particularly as it relates to providing leadership in a program, functioning at the administrative level, and providing high-quality supervision and feedback, predicts program quality* (NCEDL). The quality of care and education received by the children, the continuing education and professional growth of the staff, and the confidence the parents will have in the program, is dependent on the knowledge and skills of the early education administrators (CFOC Standards 2002).

- A. The director of the program shall be of sound moral character, at least 21 years of age and have professional training as evidenced by having obtained a minimum of:
 - 1. A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution with twenty-four credit hours in specialized course work in early childhood education, child development, elementary education, or early childhood special education and 9 credit hours of college course work in administration, leadership, or management; or
 - 2. A Director's Credential; and
 - 3. The director has a working understanding of business practices as evidenced by twelve credit hours of college course work or the equivalent of one year of on-the-job training in an administrative position under the supervision of a mentor; and
 - 4. Demonstration of an effective academic program; and
 - 5. Submission of a portfolio to the AISF Board of Directors for approval, which is to include educational and professional accomplishments that validates the administrator as fully qualified to perform the duties assigned to him/her in the school; and
 - 6. Successfully completes a minimum of 6 units (college credits or equivalent) per calendar year until such time the Director completes his/her Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science Degree from an accredited college or university, and
 - 7. The plan to attain a Bachelor of Arts or Science is part of the School Improvement Plan.
- B. The director is charged with assuming and/or delegating appropriate qualified personnel with the responsibility of the day-to-day operations of the program, maintaining program policies, guiding the mission, philosophy and objectives of the school, and monitoring the program's compliance with applicable governmental regulations.
- C. The director has experience working directly with children whose ages are represented in the program for which the director has oversight.
- D. The director obtains a minimum of thirty documented clock hours during the first year of employment especially as it relates to State requirements. In each subsequent years, the director shall obtain at least twenty-four documented clock hours of continuing professional development of which at least twelve hours shall be from outside sources, in such areas as serving on boards of directors for accreditation organization or schools, participating or chairing evaluation teams, presenting or attending AISF Annual Teaching Conferences or workshops, or conducting or participating in educational curricula workshops such as emergent literacy and mathematics, child or staff development, programming, administration, health and safety, family relations, legal issues, communications, and technology.

- E. The director designates a qualified person to assume leadership and responsibility of the program in the event of his/her absence.
- F. The director/administrator or qualified designee is responsible for:
 - 1. hiring staff that supports the philosophy and mission of the program.
 - 2. ensuring that each staff member receives a copy of the employee handbook and is instructed at least annually on the program's employee policies.
 - 3. ensuring that new staff members are provided with an orientation within six months of employment.
 - 4. building strong relationships and communication between the staff, children and their families, and administration, and for encouraging team spirit among the staff.
 - 5. overseeing the interaction between staff and children, the publishing of discipline policies and procedures for parents/guardians and staff, and assuring that appropriate measures are taken to maintain discipline. Corporal punishment or legally questionable practices as outlined by Department of Children and Families will not be allowed.
 - 6. conducting monthly regularly scheduled staff meetings to consult and collaborate on program planning, to plan for implementation and attaining goals, and plan for individual children and family involvement, and discuss program and working conditions.
 - 7. ensuring instructional staff is trained in the use and presentation of the curriculum, either are trained to observe children and record these observations or have aid from trained personnel to observe and record observations, and have opportunities to share input regarding curriculum at least annually.
 - 8. ensuring that a list of qualified, background-checked and screened substitutes is maintained.
 - 9. ensuring that a formal evaluation of new employees takes place no more than six months after employment start date.
 - 10. ensuring that each staff member has an annual written evaluation.
 - a. Written evaluations address the staff member's on-going professional development.
 - b. Written evaluations address strengths as well as areas needing improvement.
 - c. Areas needing improvement receive follow up.
 - 11. ensuring that discussions of the formal evaluations with each staff member are confidential.
 - 12. submits an annual program evaluation to governance based on early childhood/child development theory, research, and best practices, and assists the governance in setting and prioritizing short- and long-range goals for the program.
- G. The director meets with the staff annually to evaluate the program and to discuss areas of strengths as well as areas needing improvement. The areas needing improvement are addressed through the school improvement plan or by other follow up.

VII. Personnel

RATIONALE

Extensive research has been conducted concerning the effect of early education programs on young children. The education of the staff and the training they have received in the field, as well as child to staff ratios and group sizes and staff turnover, may play a significant role in the quality of an early education program. The longer the amount of time children attend such programs, the more likely both positive and negative consequences can be attributed to the quality of the program (Helburn 1995)

Children in early education programs who are taught and cared for by an educated staff have been shown to be more compliant and socially competent. College-educated early educators are also better equipped in developing age appropriate goals and activities for children (Fiene 2002).

- A. The director or qualified designee recruits and hires quality staff with appropriate training and experience to carry out their roles.
- B. The program's hiring procedures include background screening and fingerprinting to obtain a history regarding abuse and any criminal convictions for all employees and for others who have regular contact with the children in the program
- C. The program:
 - 1. has a nondiscrimination policy regarding its hiring practices.
 - 2. has a diverse staff that reflects the program's population and its surrounding community
 - 3. maintains a confidential personnel file on each employee. The file should contain but not be limited to: resume, application, copies of college or university transcripts, background screening and results, fingerprints/clearance, annual staff evaluations, documentation of any grievances, evidence of in-service training, I-9 form, and copy of contract/work agreement if applicable, all information required by governmental regulations. (NOTE: The State of FL now mandates specificity.)
- D. Volunteers undergo orientation, background screening, and training and works under the supervision of qualified staff.
- E. Instructional staff
 - 1. Instructional personnel of the kindergarten program or above must have one of the following:
 - a. a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and a valid teaching credential; or
 - b. a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and be enrolled in the Florida Professional Education Competency Demonstration Program or its current equivalent; or
 - c. a MACTE or NCME approved Montessori teaching credential; or
 - d. other appropriate qualifications with experience and/or academic training and/or in-service training appropriate for the position and appropriate for the school's philosophy and program.
 - 2. Instructional personnel of the infant to four year old children (for Montessori schools, this shall apply for the infants to six year olds) must have one of the following:
 - a. a valid teaching certificate in early childhood education; or
 - b. a college degree in early childhood education; or
 - c. an Associate of Arts Degree with an emphasis in Early Childhood; or
 - d. an Associate of Arts Degree with training in Early Childhood Education; or
 - e. a CDA or its equivalent; or
 - f. a MACTE or NCME approved Montessori teaching credential; or
 - g. other appropriate credentials.
 - 3. Early Childhood Specialist (If applicable): must have one of the following:
 - a. a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development from an accredited college or university; and
 - b. at least three years of full-time teaching experience with young children; or
 - c. a post graduate degree in early childhood education or child development from an accredited college or university.
- F. Assistant Teachers/Paraprofessionals must have one of the following:
 - a. a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university and a valid teaching credential; or
 - b. State/nationally recognized competency credential, two years of experience working in an early childhood program, and twelve clock hours of early childhood training; or
 - c. Montessori teacher training or

- d. other appropriate qualifications with experience and/or academic training and/or in-service training appropriate for the position and appropriate for the school's philosophy and program.

G. Support staff

1. Support staff such as secretaries, kitchen staff, maintenance, and substitutes must have appropriate qualifications such as training and/or experience to carry out their duties and/or a minimum of two years of experience in their field.

H. Policies and procedures

1. All instructional staff participate annually in a minimum of thirty documented clock hours during the first year of employment and twenty-four documented clock hours in each subsequent year of continuing professional development of which at least twelve hours shall be from sources outside their early education program relating to child growth and development in the areas such as cognitive learning and social, emotional, and physical development; safety and health issues for young children; family and community relations; classroom and program management; and professional development which may include special needs, technology, serving on accreditation evaluation teams, presenting at and/or attending the AISF Annual Teaching Conference or workshops.
2. Clear and up-to-date written personnel policies have been developed. These policies include but are not limited to job descriptions, benefits, and resignation and termination procedures.
3. Written personnel policies have been communicated with the staff, and receipt of them by the staff has been documented.
4. In order to help ensure the care, bonding, and nurturing of the individual child, each group of children has at least one primary teacher/caregiver.
5. Staff members maintain a continuous, accurate account of the children in their care
6. Staff members who are sharing responsibility for a group of children must communicate with one another to ensure smooth operation of the program.
7. All early care and education personnel are expected to work closely with the administration in the on-going efforts to ensure collaboration and good relations that will promote a high quality educational program.
8. All staff is given the opportunity to complete a survey to evaluate the quality of program administration at least every five years in conjunction with the evaluation team visit.

VIII. Children's Data

- A. Current, complete, confidential records for each child are kept and are available to authorized personnel. The file will include, but not be limited to, all documentation as required by governmental regulation
- B. Records
 1. Current, complete, confidential records for each child are kept in a secure location, available to authorized personnel, and shall be kept up to date.
 - a. Records of previously enrolled children shall be maintained for a minimum of 5 years from the last date of attendance.
 - b. Cumulative records, at minimum, include grades received, attendance and tardy information, assessment and standardized test results, and dates of entrance and withdrawal.
 2. Accurate daily attendance and tardiness records shall be maintained.
 3. Children's progress reports shall be issued at least twice a year.
 - a. Other forms of parent-teacher communication shall be offered.
 - b. Records of parent-teacher conferences shall be maintained at least through the current program year.
 4. Teacher and children's schedules shall be maintained in an administrative office.

5. In the event of a program's closing, student records for pre-kindergarten and higher shall be transferred to the Board of Public Instruction (or its equivalent) of the county in which the program is located.
- C. Assessment
1. For the pre-kindergarten level, ongoing assessment of children's progress takes place and is used to plan activities for individual children and for groups of children. Assessment methods are consistent with the program's philosophy and methodology.
 2. The program recognizes that instructional improvement and the progress of children require the use of multiple tools for assessment and the findings are shared with the parent and/or guardian. The variety of assessment must include at least two tools such as the following:
 - a. Samples of children's concrete learning explorations (writing and art projects) and sketches of constructions with blocks or sand
 - b. Photographs, audio recordings, and videos of children engaged in play while alone and while in groups in a variety of situations and of children otherwise engaged in interactions with others
 - c. Written observations such as time and event samplings of children's interactions, individual and group activities, and language while alone and in groups
 - d. A checklist of developmental levels and behaviors, on which to mark children's progress and increasing capacities across time
 - e. Observations that address multiple areas of children's development—that is, the seven intelligences, not just cognitive development
 - f. Results of screenings and formal assessments, if appropriate
 - g. Individual portfolios containing a wide array of records and documentation that aid teachers in using flexibility to adapt lesson plans
 - h. Media (especially videos) are used on a limited basis during the structured portion of the day, and are used particularly for the reinforcement of a teaching topic.
 3. National standardized tests shall be administered annually in grades kindergarten and higher.
 - a. The program shall make the results available to parents and teachers.
 - b. All data shall be dated and recorded in the children's cumulative records within two months of its availability.
 - c. Qualified personnel shall be available to help parents interpret the results of any assessment tools.

IX. Enrollment and Class Size

RATIONALE

Several research studies suggest that child to staff ratio's and group size impacts the health, safety, and school readiness of young children (Fine 2002, Bowman 2001, CFOC 2002). The Children of the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Go to School research project found that children in early education programs with lower ratios and low staff turnover built closer teacher-child relationships which resulted in better classroom social and thinking skills, language ability, and math skills into the elementary school years (1999).

- A. The program educates children from birth through third grade or at any level(s) therein.
 1. There must be at least twenty-five (25) total students enrolled in the program from birth through third grade or at any level(s) therein.
- B.
 1. Students shall be taught in a class, not tutorial, manner.
 2. In an inclusive environment children with special needs will have individualized program plans as needed
 - a. Policies regarding the enrollment and termination of children protect children's rights.
- C. The program shall admit students who can benefit from its programs .

1. The program shall determine class sizes based on the program’s philosophy and objectives, buildings and grounds, and student needs.
 - a. The program must adhere to the following guidelines in each class:

Grade Level*	Maximum Student:Staff Ratio**	Maximum Class Size
Birth - 1 year	4:1	8 max
1 year olds	4:1	12 max
2 year olds	8:1	16 max
3 year olds*	12:1	24max*
4 year olds*	16:1	26max*
Kindergarten*	20:1	28max*
Grades 1 - 3	28:1	

*When children of mixed ages are grouped together in the same room, cluster, or group, and the mixture includes a child of twenty-three months or younger, then the standard to be applied is the standard applicable to the youngest child. (Example: If one room, cluster, or group contains 1 nine month old, 2 twenty-two month olds, and 3 three year olds, then the standard for the nine month old would be applied – in this case, a ratio of 4:1.)

**When children of mixed ages are grouped together in the same room, cluster, or group, and the mixture does not include a child of twenty-three months or younger, then the standard to be applied is the standard applicable to the age group which makes up the majority of the children in the room, cluster, or group. (Example: If one room, cluster, or group contains 3 two year olds, 6 three year olds, and 5 four year olds, then the standard for the three year old program would be applied.)

*PLEASE CONSIDER: AISF SCHOOLS HAVE VARIED PHILOSOPHIES WHICH MAY INCLUDE CLUSTERING OF AGE GROUPS. WHEN THE SCHOOL’S PHILOSOPHY INCLUDE CLUSTERING AND THESE CHILDREN ARE 3 YEARS AND ABOVE ALLOWANCES NEED TO BE MADE FOR A MAXIMUM CLASS SIZE OF 36 STUDENTS FOR THE MIXED AGES.

**Exceptions may be made in physical education, music, art, chorus, recess, extracurricular classes, and other similar activities, provided that the class size in these areas is manageable and appropriate for the philosophy and objectives of the school.

X. Educational Media

A. Financial provisions

1. Money shall be budgeted annually for rental or purchase of educational media.
2. Provisions shall be made in the program budget as appropriate for the annual purchase of current books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, or other audio-visual materials.

B. Library

1. The program must maintain either a centralized or decentralized library. In either case, the library program shall:
 - a. at minimum receive on site consultation of a librarian or media specialist on an annual basis, with regular supervision of the library program being provided by a specifically designated staff member;
 - b. provide a minimum of ten books per student, the majority of which should be hardbound;
 1. In no case shall a program be required to have more than 10,000 books in its collection.
 2. Books on CD-ROM may be counted towards this requirement.
 3. No more than 5 copies of a title shall be counted towards this requirement.

4. For new programs with either a centralized or decentralized library, the program shall open with at least 4 books per student and add at least 2 books per student per year until the program comes in line with the regular standards in this section.
 - c. gain a net increase in books each year;
 - d. remove outdated materials and materials that are in poor condition at least annually; and
 - e. have a developmentally appropriate balance of fiction and non-fiction books.
2. A centralized library shall:
 - a. be of sufficient size to contain the books and equipment and provide sufficient seating and study space;
 - b. reflect current technologies;
 - c. provide a complete shelf encyclopedia no more than five years from date of copyright with annual supplements; and
 - d. be organized according to the Dewey Decimal System and provide a charging desk, a computerized or traditional card catalogue, and an adequate system for locating and circulating books.
3. A decentralized library system shall provide:
 - b. appropriate materials and services in various areas of the program;
 - c. a centrally located and accessible complete shelf encyclopedia no more than five years from date of copyright with annual supplements;
 - b. a planned library program such as regular visits made by the children to the local public library, regular visits from the book mobile or public library outreach program, and /or other appropriate library and book exploration; and
 - c. a feasible system for circulating books.

XI. Curriculum

RATIONALE

Research on cognition and learning, child development, and the social and cultural context of learning has shown that young children are competent learners even at a young age. It is important to note, however, that the “pace of learning will depend on whether and to what extent the child’s inclinations to learn encounter and engage supporting environments” (Bowman, et al. 2001).

Federal-State partnerships in the delivery of quality early education programs are now being formed that impact all pre-kindergarten program. These educational reform initiatives have specifically targeted the need to align expectations of the early education program prior to children entering kindergarten and what is expected of them once they enter the elementary school years.

Initiatives are also being developed to evaluate the success of the early education program by how well the children are prepared to succeed once in the elementary school system.

Finally, initiatives to develop informational pieces to educate teachers, parents, childcare providers, and others are in place to provide ways to prepare children to be ready for school.

Voluntary guidelines are being developed to support early education programs in preparing young children in the areas of literacy, language, pre-reading skills, pre-mathematics, science, and early social studies.

The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the whole child including social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and the development of character. This includes but is not limited to the multiple intelligences, learning styles, and learning preferences of each child.

The following standards were based on a review of State and Federal pre-kindergarten curricular guidelines.

A. Teaching strategies

1. The curricular practices provide for a developmentally appropriate balance of active and quiet activities including large-group (teacher-directed), small-group (teacher/child-interactive), and individual-choice (child-initiated) activities throughout the day.
2. The length of group times is appropriate for the age and development of the children in the class. In mixed-age groupings, accommodations and flexibility meet the needs of each age group included in the class.
3. Staff uses transition activities to move the children from one activity to another throughout the day. Transitional tools may include songs, poems, or other signs that children recognize as signaling a change of activity.
4. Ample developmentally appropriate materials and equipment are provided to support the learning objectives of the program's scope and sequence. Materials and equipment may include but are not limited to manipulatives, puzzles, building materials, musical instruments, creative art materials, sand and water tables, dolls, and other items that support the educational objectives.
5. Ample developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to interact independently, in small groups and in large groups, are provided in order to help meet social/emotional needs of children.
6. Classroom activities address the individual needs, strengths, and preferences of the children including those resulting from the application of classroom observations of multiple intelligences, learning styles, and learning preferences.
7. Instructional staff initiates interaction with children who are not engaged in order to stimulate and expand the involvement of these children in the classroom offerings.
8. Curricular plans include ensuring children learn about healthy nutrition through experience and instruction, as appropriate to the age or program.
9. Children are made aware of good health practices and are taught appropriate hand-washing techniques as part of the curriculum. Methods may include the use of related daily routines by teachers, teacher example, visits to health facilities or from health care professionals, and other curricular presentations appropriate to the program's curriculum.
10. Media (especially videos) are used on a limited basis, and are used particularly for the reinforcement of a teaching topic.
11. The program's discipline policy is clearly articulated in a written document for the instructional staff to follow. The policy employs interactive procedures such as redirection, reflective listening, adult role modeling, and positive reinforcement. Corporal punishment or legally questionable practices as outlined by Department of Children and Families is not allowed.
12. Staff prepares the environment and plans the flow of the day in such a way that encourages children to become independent and to accept personal responsibility with initiative at developmentally appropriate levels. For example, routines are clearly established so that children know when to clean and organize the room, when to put on clothing for outside activities, and/or when to transition to different activities.

B. General practice

1. In a written curriculum guide, a scope and sequence including each age group is developed with specific goals.
2. Instructional staff develops written lesson plans for each class/age group that reflect the goals and objectives of the scope and sequence.

C. Physical development

1. The curriculum is designed to meet the physical needs of each child. The curriculum includes a balance of indoor and outdoor play opportunities to enable the children to develop gross-motor skills.
2. The curriculum results in lesson plans that provide opportunities for children to develop fine- and gross-motor skills.

D. Social/Emotional

1. The curriculum provides opportunities to foster the social/emotional development of children.

XII. Core Knowledge

The curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the whole child including social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and the development of character. This includes but is not limited to the multiple intelligences, learning styles, and learning preferences of each child.

- A. The curriculum is designed to meet the intellectual needs of each child. To do so, the curriculum addresses multiple intelligences, learning styles, and learning preferences and supports the program's program philosophy and mission.
- B. Language and Literacy

RATIONALE

Children begin developing language and literacy at birth. As young children express their feelings, ask questions, and share imaginative stories, they are communicating what they know about their world. Between the ages of three and five, children are becoming more aware of print in their environment, however, oral language continues to be their primary means of communicating (Preschool Planning Guide 1998).

1. Developmental experiences
 - a. Receptive and expressive language experiences appropriate to the development of children are provided throughout the day. Children in the preschool classes are provided with increased exposure to print and active experiences that support the development of listening and speaking concepts and skills.
 - b. The preschool classroom is a print-rich environment that contains books, pictures, labeled materials and equipment, and opportunities for name recognition.
 - c. The instructional staff consciously works to help children develop vocabulary and comprehension. They verbally interact with the children to guide them in the acquisition of new and expanded vocabulary, in anticipating outcomes, and in comprehension of what they have heard. This may include (1) "What if?" type questions to help children anticipate outcomes, (2) recall of a story, and (3) other verbal interactions that help the children understand sequence (building memory) and interaction between characters.
 - d. Children are given experiences with the form and function of the alphabet through opportunities such as tracing shapes, copying or writing letters, and practicing writing names.
2. Lesson plans
 - a. Children begin to develop a phonemic awareness through understanding that words are made up of a combination of sounds. Lesson plans reflect a variety of songs, fingerplays, stories, and games that have rhyming words and alliteration to strengthen phonemic awareness. Lesson plans include activities that encourage the awareness of phonemes, such as:
 1. Listening for sounds in words;
 2. Beginning to isolate the syllables of a word using snapping, clapping, or rhythmic movement;
 3. Learning to differentiate between sounds that are the same and different (e.g., environmental sounds, animal sounds, phonemes); and
 4. Beginning to recognize when words share phonemes (sounds) and repeat the common phoneme (e.g., /b/ as in Bob, ball, baby; /t/ as in Tom, kite, boat)

C. Mathematical awareness

RATIONALE

Young children begin to develop the concept of numbers through interactions in their environment on a daily basis. They learn through observations and hands-on activities that objects may be manipulated, sorted, ordered, and quantified. They learn about relationships, when engaged in meaningful experiences involving skills that include collecting, counting, building, and comparing. “As they proceed through the daily routine, children experience a variety of ‘math moments.’” (Preschool Planning Guide 1998).

1. The instructional staff plan activities that provide a math-rich environment for children on a daily basis through activities such as sorting and classifying concrete objects, recognizing and identifying, likenesses and differences, recognizing first, middle, and last, using opposite concepts such as long and short, in and out, up and down, over and under, and top and bottom, and using concepts of quantity such as more than and less than.
2. The instructional staff plan ample opportunities for children that provide experiences with early math concepts such as numbers and numeration through counting; placing objects in one-to-one correspondence; grouping objects by color, shape, or other characteristics; patterning; and recognizing numbers in their environment.

D. Science

RATIONALE

Preschool children learn about the natural world, including the physical properties of things around them, as they interact with objects, people, and other living things. Children whose early lives are rich in sensory experiences and accompanying verbal labels tend to have greater facility for building up the more complex labels and patterns required for thought and problem solving in later life.

1. The classroom is a sensory-rich environment that includes numerous objects and organisms with which the students can interact. Opportunities are provided throughout the day for children to use their senses for observing and learning about objects, events, and organisms.
2. Instructional staff members help children to perform simple investigations, make predictions, and to describe their observations.

E. Social Studies

RATIONALE

Preschool children develop an awareness of self as a growing individual. They learn about their own needs, interests, and abilities. They begin to learn about similarities and differences between themselves and others, including their peers, their family members, and their community.

1. Instructional staff promotes the advancement of social skills and positive dispositions by offering numerous opportunities for children to learn about themselves and others.
2. Instructional staff foster positive communication and interaction as children actively engage in a variety of such learning experiences as taking turns, playing simple small-group games, and performing daily routines. Staff shows awareness that certain behaviors are appropriate in one culture but may not be acceptable or desirable in another.

F. Fine Arts

1. The curriculum provides developmentally appropriate opportunities for children in each age group to have a variety of musical experiences — including child-initiated ones — such as singing, listening, rhythmic movements, and playing rhythm instruments.
2. The curriculum provides opportunities and experiences for children in each age group for a variety of developmentally appropriate creative arts experiences—including child-initiated ones—such as

painting, gluing items together to create art, cutting for design purposes, combining mediums, modeling with clay, and creating one's own stories, plays, and other dramatic activities.

XIII. Nutrition and Food Services

RATIONALE

One of the basic responsibilities of every parent and caregiver is to provide nourishing food that is clean, safe, and developmentally appropriate for children (Caring for Our Children 2002).

Early food and eating experiences are the foundation for the formation of attitudes about food and eating behavior and consequently of food habits. Sound food habits build on eating and enjoying a variety of healthful foods. Including culturally acceptable family foods is a dietary goal for feeding infants and young children.

Current research documents that a balanced diet combined with regular and routine age-appropriate physical activity can reduce the risks of chronic diseases later in life that are related to diet (U.S. Dept of Agriculture 2000).

A. Food preparation

1. If food is prepared on the premises, the program must be in compliance with governmental regulations for food storage, preparation, and service. Food may be prepared at an approved facility and transported to the program in approved containers and at approved temperatures.
2. The meals and/or snacks provided for the children are appropriate per nutritional guidelines regarding food groups and quantities offered to children.
3. At least two food groups are included for each snack, preferably one being a protein source, and four food groups for each meal.
4. Lunch areas and kitchen areas shall be clean and well supervised. Lunch areas and kitchen areas must be adequately equipped to meet the needs of the program and must comply with all applicable regulations.

B. Parent/guardian information

1. Parents/guardians have access to written menus that are also posted.
2. Nutritional suggestions are provided to parents based on nutritional guidelines.
3. Food brought from home is stored appropriately.

C. Social interaction

1. Mealtime is to be cultivated as a pleasant social time. Staff encourages healthy social interaction, appropriate table manners, and good eating habits.
2. Staff encourages children to serve themselves and assist with cleanup within age-appropriate levels and ability.

D. Infant and toddlers

1. Infants are held when bottle fed until they have developed sufficient independence to hold and drink from the bottle safely. Infants with bottles will never be placed into cribs at any time.
2. Feeding times and amount of food consumed are recorded and made available to parents/guardians of infants on a daily basis.

XIV. Family and Community Relations

RATIONALE

Parents are a child’s first teacher, and the early education program respects the critical role parents play in supporting the growth and development of their child. Partnerships with parents are a part of a quality early education program. A rapport is built between staff and parents, which supports communication between the home and the early education program.

A. Parent/guardian information

1. Parents/guardians of the children in the program receive information that includes but is not limited to:
 - a. The philosophy statement regarding the care and education of young children attending the program, enrollment policy, the mission statement; a statement of nondiscrimination; and including what discipline techniques will be used;
 - b. Policies regarding holidays, illnesses, hours of operation, fees, refunds, enrollment, and dismissal procedures;
 - c. An explanation of the program’s day-to-day functioning; and
2. Parents/guardians are expected to sign a statement acknowledging that they have received the program’s policies as outlined in Standard A(1)(a, b, c) above.
3. The program has an open-door policy, which provides access to and observation of the child, such as opportunities for scheduled and unscheduled visits on the premises, according to the policies, philosophy and schedule of the program, as appropriate.

B. Communication

1. Administrators and staff communicate with the parents/guardians in a variety of ways on a regular basis, such as daily and/or weekly verbal or written communication, posted information, monthly newsletters, and/or classroom calendar of events.
2. Conferences with each child’s parents/guardians are offered at least twice per year—and at other times as needed—to discuss the child’s developmental progress, personal care, and education. Conference schedules accommodate working parents/guardians.
3. Parents/guardians of the children in the program receive written communication regarding their children’s developmental progress at least twice per year.

C. Parent/guardian education

1. The program director or designee plans and implements parent education and/or training.
2. The director is familiar with community services and resources regarding children with specific needs. The program provides this information to parents/guardians.
3. All parents/guardians are given the opportunity to complete a survey at least every five years in conjunction with the evaluation team visit.

XV. Physical Facilities

RATIONALE

Programs should provide equipment, materials, and space to facilitate the children's success in learning, by encouraging teachers to effectively organize the classroom and playground environments in a way that not only promotes the achievement of each child's educational goals but also increases the number of opportunities for achieving these goals during both child- and teacher-initiated activities (Bowman, et al. 2001).

A. General environment

1. Buildings and grounds shall be clean (including sanitizing the bathrooms and removing trash), well-maintained, and attractive. The facilities are free of mold and offensive odors.
2. Buildings shall be sufficient in size for groups served.
3. Buildings shall comply with all applicable zoning and structural codes and other governmental regulations.
4. Grounds shall have proper drainage.
5. Buildings shall have adequate lighting, ventilation, heating, and cooling.
6. Buildings and structures shall be safe and of stable construction.
7. Adequate, unobstructed exits shall be provided and identified.
8. All equipment and furniture shall be appropriate for the ages being served and sufficiently provide for the children's needs and the children's instructional objectives.
9. Classes shall have sufficient display areas including bulletin boards and whiteboard/chalkboard (or the equivalent).
10. An inspection of all play area equipment shall be conducted at least 4 times per year.
 - a. The school shall maintain play area equipment inspection forms indicating the date of inspection, person conducting the inspection, equipment inspected, and deficiencies found.
11. Sufficient area shall be provided for organized play appropriate for the children's age ranges.
12. There shall be adequate storage space.
13. The program's main office shall be accessible to students, parents, faculty, and visitors. Its location shall be well marked.
14. The facilities include appropriate administrative office space.
15. Facilities must support the program's philosophy and educational objectives including, when appropriate, a designated area for staff meetings and breaks.
16. Equipment must support the program's philosophy and objectives.

B. Classrooms

1. Classrooms are clean and well maintained.
2. Classrooms are suitable for the age or grade level and activities of the children in the program.
3. Floor space meets or exceeds all government regulations.
4. The physical environment of the infant classrooms is arranged not only to stimulate learning by accommodating large and small groups of children but also to encourage exploration and experimentation. These classrooms should have features such as a protected space for crawling and playing away from more mobile babies. Shatter-proof and safety-approved mirrors, pull-up bars, and other interactive items are placed on the walls at babies' eye level.
5. The environment designed for toddlers through three-year-olds facilitates optimal developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Shelving and storage units provide an organized flow to the room and thereby invite children to interact with materials and equipment.

6. Children are provided with individual spaces in which their work and/or personal belongings can be stored.
 7. The physical environment includes not only appropriate furnishings, such as tables and chairs, that allow children's feet to touch the floor, but also appropriate room flooring and soft areas that are comforting to children.
- C. Drinking water
1. Drinking water is adequately available to the children.
- D. Lavatory facilities
1. The size and number of lavatory facilities shall be adequate for the size and number of children in attendance. Sinks and toilets are readily accessible to children.
 2. Sinks are located in the areas near the toilets, with soap and paper towels accessible to the children.
 3. Supplies shall be adequate.
 4. Facilities shall be clean and properly maintained.
- E. Infants and toddlers
1. The diapering area is in good repair and is sanitized after each use, and soiled diapers are stored in a sealed container. Gloves as well as running water and soap for hand washing are accessible and utilized by the staff during diapering.
- F. Outdoors
1. To accommodate the children's various play activities, the outdoor physical environment includes seventy-five square feet per child on the playground(s) at any given time.
 2. The playground is designed and equipped to provide optimal learning experiences for the children. Playground equipment is scaled appropriately, varied and sufficient. Equipment may include items such as climbers, swings, slides, riding toys, equipment for sand and water play, outside easels, and playhouses.
 3. Children are supervised at all times and the child-adult ratio (see Article IX) is maintained while the children are on the playground.
 4. The program provides adequate protection for the play area, including fencing and a balance of sun and shade.
 5. Wood chips, sand, or other cushioning materials of recommended depths are used under equipment such as swings and climbers, as recommended by governmental regulations or national playground safety standards.
 6. When inclement weather prevents children from playing outdoors, alternative activities are planned to ensure gross-motor exercise and to foster gross-motor development.

XVI. Health and Safety

RATIONALE

The early education program has a responsibility for the health, safety, and general welfare of each child in attendance. The staff should have continuing and required training in emergency first aid and in special medical needs in order to be alert and prepared for emergencies. Staff members need to be safety conscious with a view toward prevention (Caring for Our Children 2002).

- A. Facility
1. To accommodate the children's various play activities, the outdoor physical environment includes seventy-five square feet per child on the playground(s) at any given time.
 2. The playground is designed and equipped to provide optimal learning experiences.
 3. The facilities are cleaned on a daily basis.
 4. Hot water heaters are set for 110°F or less if the heated water is accessible to children.
 5. Electrical outlets in the wall are covered to prevent children from being shocked by electricity.

6. The program is inspected by governmental authorities as applicable for licensing (i.e., fire department, health department, food services, etc.). Inspection documentations are on file. If the program is exempt from licensing, voluntary inspection has been sought, and recommendations for improvement have been followed.
- B. Health
1. Children's records
 - a. Children in attendance are in compliance with the requirements of governmental regulations regarding immunizations, physical examinations, and communicable diseases. Up-to-date, complete, and confidential health records for each child enrolled in the program are maintained in a safe and secure area and are available to authorized personnel. These files may include information such as the child's life history, developmental milestones, screening or assessment results, typical behaviors, and interests.
 2. Special health conditions & emergency information
 - a. Staff are alerted to special health conditions of children and are equipped, when applicable, to handle such concerns.
 - b. Current emergency information is maintained for each child enrolled in the program, including parent/guardian contact information, people authorized to take the child off the premises, allergies, and other important health information.
 3. Attendance
 - a. A written policy regarding the attendance of children who are ill, have been diagnosed with a contagious disease, or have been found to have a communicable condition has been developed and made available to parents/guardians. An isolation area is made available for ill or contagious children while they wait for someone to take them home.
 4. Medicines – administration, log, and storage
 - a. A written policy that complies with the governmental regulations for administering and storing medications has been developed and made available to the parents/guardians of the children in the program.
 - b. A detailed medical log is maintained that includes a record of all medications given to children, the time the medication was given, and the person administering the medication.
 5. Blood-borne pathogens
 - a. The program has developed policies and procedures to protect the staff and children from blood-borne pathogens by including a blood-borne exposure control plan and by providing annual in-service training to the staff regarding protective procedures. As a result, the staff use “universal precautions” when encountering children's body fluids.
 6. General policies
 - a. The program makes screening information for developmental and health issues available to the children's parents at least annually.
 - b. Children and adults wash their hands after toileting, before eating or handling food, and as otherwise necessary to prevent the spread of disease.
 - c. Parents/guardians are encouraged to provide a change of clothing (for children age four and younger) to be kept on the program's premises. The program maintains a supply of generic clothing in varying sizes to ensure children are provided with a change of clothing in case of an emergency.
 - d. Children's bedding is washed at a minimum of twice a week for infant and toddlers and a minimum of once per week for preschoolers and when soiled, and it is used by only one child between washings.
 - e. While attending the program, children's bedding will be stored in individual containers.
- C. Safety
1. Arrivals and departures

- a. Safe arrival and departure procedures have been developed that ensure all children in the program are accounted for throughout the day and released only to authorized adults. Children are supervised by sight at all times, and transition of children from one teacher to another or from one area to another is accounted for to ensure the supervision and whereabouts of children at all times.
2. First Aid – Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
 - a. At least one staff member with first aid certification—and infant/child and adult CPR certification when applicable — is present on the premises at all times during operational hours.
 - b. The program maintains adequate first aid supplies and a universal precaution kit that are conveniently available. A detailed medical log is maintained regarding the use of these items.
3. Accident reports
 - a. Written notices of accidents are kept on file, and copies are given to the parents/guardians of the children in the program.
4. Chemicals, medicines, and other “dangerous if swallowed” materials
 - a. All chemicals, medicines, and other “dangerous if swallowed” materials are stored in their original containers and documented according to governmental regulations. All potentially dangerous products are stored in a locked area.
5. Child abuse training, reporting, prevention
 - a. The staff is trained to recognize signs of child abuse and neglect. They know the laws and procedures for reporting to the appropriate agency. All communication regarding reports are kept in a confidential file.
 - b. Significant changes in a child’s pattern of behavior and/or physical condition are reported to the parent(s)/guardian(s), if appropriate, documented, placed in the child’s file, and / or reported to the appropriate civil authority as mandated by law.
 - c. Abuse prevention is practiced by means such as having viewing windows or a camera system to allow for visual access into the classrooms, having bathroom doors that allow for adequate monitoring of children, and having random walk-throughs.
6. Crisis and emergency policies and procedures
 - a. Emergency phone numbers and/or 911, and the child abuse hotline are posted by readily accessible telephones in order to allow for quick reference in contacting the fire department, police department, poison center, and rescue squad.
 - b. A plan is in place to contact parents/guardians in case of an emergency closing, and the parents/guardians have been made aware of the plan.
7. Emergency crisis plans and drills
 - a. Emergency evacuation plans with alternative evacuation routes must be posted in each classroom by the exit.
 - b. Emergency drills must be conducted monthly. The program shall maintain records of such drills indicating the dates of the drills, the time taken to evacuate, student attendance and any deficiencies found.
 - c. Other crisis plans shall be devised as are appropriate for the program.
 - d. Crisis plans shall be communicated to the staff, parents, and children as may be appropriate for the program.
 - e. Crisis drills shall be conducted as may be appropriate for the program.
 - f. The program shall maintain records of such drills.
8. Fire control system
 - a. There shall be a manual and/or automatic fire alarm system that can be heard throughout the building(s).

- b. Fire extinguishers and smoke detectors are provided and checked as mandated by governmental regulations.
- c. Staff is trained in the use of fire extinguishers.
- 9. Vehicles
 - a. The program shall maintain vehicle maintenance files and copies of automotive titles.
 - b. Appropriate safety precautions are taken when children are being transported, such as using age-appropriate restraint devices and equipping the vehicle with a first aid kit.
 - c. All drivers shall maintain appropriate qualification needed as required by civil authorities.
 - d. All requirements of civil authorities shall be met and documented.
- 10. Field trips
 - a. The program has written field trip policies and procedures that are implemented to ensure the supervision of all children at all times and thus promote the safety of the children. The policies and procedures must include that permission is obtained from parents/guardians and that roll checks are logged before the trip, at regular intervals during the trip, and upon return to the program's facilities.
- 11. Cleaning and sanitizing
 - a. The program has an established plan for safely maintaining and sanitizing toys, equipment, and furniture regularly (infants: daily; toddlers: semiweekly, preschoolers: weekly) in order to sustain a healthy and safe environment for the children.

XVII. School Improvement

- A. Each school shall continually work to improve student learning and/or school performance. Such improvement must focus on the developmental aspects of the students in order to improve cognitive, social, emotional, and/or physical growth. This commitment to improvement shall include a planning process to integrate and unify the school's efforts toward improvement and to build the school's capacity to sustain improvement.
- B. In order to achieve such goals for improvement, each school must:
 - 1. select a team of individuals including administrators, teachers, non-instructional staff, and parents who will plan together for school improvement;
 - 2. clearly identify the priorities for improving student learning and/or school performance;
 - 3. have written goals related to the priority areas that reflect growth in those areas, and each written goal must show what level of achievement or proficiency is expected;
 - 4. indicate what assessment measures are being used to evaluate the current level of performance in each of the priority areas and indicate the current levels of performance for each priority area;
 - 5. describe what growth is expected in each priority area and describe the strategies and/or materials to be used to attain this growth;
 - 6. provide a timeline to attain its goals; and
 - 7. shall monitor and review the school's progress in reaching its goals for improvement.

XVIII. Variances

- A. The AISF Standards are designed to encourage all members to meet various criteria in order to achieve certain levels of quality. However, in some circumstances, it may be necessary or desirable to allow certain variations from the Standards to be approved by the Board.
- B. Request for variance:
 - 1. A variance may only be requested and submitted along with the Self-Study or within 15 calendar days of any other inspection.
 - 2. In order to request a variance from a Standard, the school must:
 - a. in writing, identify the Standard for which a variance is requested;
 - b. in writing, state the reasons for requesting the variance;
 - c. in writing, state how the variance will meet the intent of the Standard; and
 - d. submit any required fee.

NOTES:

The AISF-ECAP Standards have integrated the components of the Florida Gold Seal requirements throughout this document. All accredited members of ECAP must full satisfy these requirements for recognition as a Florida Gold Seal as determined by state law.

Glossary

Background checks - The process of checking for history of criminal charges of potential child care providers before they are allowed to care for children.

Body fluids - Urine, feces, saliva, blood, nasal discharge, eye discharge, and injury or tissue discharge.

Child:Staff ratio - The maximum number of children permitted per teacher/caregiver.

Compliance - The act of carrying out, or meeting a recommendation, policy, or procedure.

Corporal punishment - Pain or suffering inflicted on the body (such as spanking).

Credential - 1) A competency based award granted to educators based on formal and informal education, experience working with young children, and observations of competency within the classroom; a certification. 2) As in "other appropriate credentials"; experience, training and other qualifications.

Director's Credential - As defined by the Florida Department of Children and Family Services

Disinfect - (See Sanitize).

Evaluation - Impressions and recommendations formed after a careful appraisal and study.

Gross-motor skills - Large movements involving the arms, legs, feet, or the entire body (such as crawling, running, and jumping).

Group size - The number of children assigned to a caregiver or team of caregivers occupying an individual classroom or well-defined space within a larger room. See also Child:Staff Ratio.

Immunizations - Vaccines that are given to children and adults to help them develop protection (antibodies) against specific infections. Vaccines may contain an inactivated or killed agent or a weakened live organism.

Infant - A child between the time of birth and the age of ambulation (usually between the ages from birth to 18 months).

Instructional Staff - Teachers/caregivers responsible for the instruction provided to young children within a program.

Parent - The child's natural or adoptive mother or father, guardian, or other legally responsible person.

Pre-kindergartner - A child who is at least 4 years old but not yet enrolled in kindergarten.

Preschooler - A child between the age of toilet learning/training and the age of entry into Kindergarten; usually aged 3 to 5 years and related to overall development.

Sanitize - To remove filth or soil and small amounts of certain bacteria; to eliminate virtually all germs from inanimate surfaces through the use of chemicals (e.g., products registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as "disinfectants") or physical agents (e.g., heat).

For an inanimate surface to be considered sanitary, the surface must be clean and the number of germs must be reduced to such a level that disease transmission by that surface is unlikely. This procedure is less rigorous than disinfection and

is applicable to a wide variety of routine housekeeping procedures involving, for example, bedding, bathrooms, kitchen countertops, floors, and walls. To clean, detergent or abrasive cleaners may be used but an additional sanitizer solution must be applied to sanitize. A number of EPA-registered "detergent-disinfectant" products are also appropriate for sanitizing. Directions on product labels should be followed closely.

In the child care environment, a 1:64 dilution of domestic bleach made by mixing a solution of 1/4 cup household liquid chlorine bleach with one gallon of tap water and prepared fresh daily is an effective method to remove germs from environmental surfaces and other inanimate objects that have been contaminated with body fluids (see Body fluids), provided that the surfaces have first been cleaned of organic material before applying bleach and at least two minutes of contact time with the surface occurs. (Since complete elimination of all germs may not be achieved using the 1:64 dilution of domestic bleach solution, technically, the process is called sanitizing, not disinfecting. The term sanitize is used in these standards most often, but disinfect may appear in other or earlier publications when addressing sanitation in child care.)

Scope and Sequence - A curriculum plan or guide in which a range of instructional objectives, skills, etc., is organized according to the consecutive levels in which they are expected to be taught.

Staff - Used here to indicate all personnel employed at the facility, including both caregivers and personnel who do not provide direct care to the children (such as cooks, drivers, and housekeeping personnel).

Toddler - A child between the age of ambulation and the age of toilet learning/training, usually one aged 13 to 35 months.

Universal precautions - apply to blood, other body fluids containing blood, semen, and vaginal secretions, but not to feces, nasal secretions, sputum, sweat, tears, urine, saliva and vomits unless they contain visible blood or are likely to contain blood. Universal precautions include avoiding injuries caused by sharp instruments or devices and the use of protective barriers such as gloves, gowns, aprons, masks, or protective eyewear, which can reduce the risk of exposure of the worker's skin or mucous membranes that could come in contact with materials that may contain blood-borne pathogens while the worker is providing first aid or care.

Volunteer - In general, a volunteer is a regular member of the staff who is not paid and is not counted in the child:staff ratio. If the volunteer is counted in the child:staff ratio, he/she must be 16 years or older and preferably work 10 hours per week or more in the facility.