Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards in All Essential Domains of School Readiness (Birth – Age 5)

Introduction

In December 2011, Ohio was awarded the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant. To be awarded the funding, Ohio was required to have *Early Learning and Development Standards in all Essential Domains of School Readiness, Birth to Age 5*. These five domains included:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Well-being and Motor Development
- Approaches Toward Learning
- Language and Literacy Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge

Ohio's Early Learning and Development Standards describe key concepts and skills that young children develop during the birth-to-five-year period. Their purpose is to support the development and well-being of young children and to foster their learning. The standards promote the understanding of early learning and development, provide a comprehensive and coherent set of expectations for children's development and learning, and guide the design and implementation of curriculum, assessment and instructional practices with young children.

The standards present a continuum of learning and development from birth to age five in each of the domains. Because the infant/toddler years are marked by rapid developmental change, the standards are divided into three meaningful transitional periods: Infants (birth to around 8 months), Young Toddlers (6 to around 18 months), and Older Toddlers (16 to around 36 months). The standards during the preschool years describe those developmental skills and concepts children should know and be able to do at the end of their preschool experience.

The Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards were created as part of a collaborative effort of state agencies serving young children including Ohio Department of Education, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Mental Health, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, and the Governor's Office of Health Transformation. The state agencies worked with national experts and writing teams made up of Ohio-based content experts and stakeholders to revise and expand the standards in the five developmental domains.

Ohio's revision of standards builds upon the strong set of existing standards in Ohio's Infant and Toddler Guidelines (for children birth to 36 months of age) and the Pre-Kindergarten Standards (for children ages 3 to 5). Ohio's *Infant and Toddler Guidelines* was the major source for the

development of the infants' and toddlers' standards. Similarly, Ohio's *Pre-Kindergarten Content Standards* were revised and expanded in the Language and Literacy and Cognitive Development domains. The Cognition and General Knowledge standards were aligned with the kindergarten Common Core State Standards in English-Language Arts and Mathematics and Ohio's Revised Academic Content Standards in Science and Social Studies. Finally, the standards were reviewed and revised with particular attention to being appropriate for children with disabilities and for children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Knowledge of the strengths and needs of each child is pertinent in order to implement differentiation strategies and culturally responsive pedagogy in a manner to help each child meet the standards.

Organization of the Standards

The standards within each domain are organized according to **strands**, the developmental or conceptual components within each domain. Each strand contains one or more **topics,** the area of focus within each strand, and the **standard statements,** those concepts and skills children should know and be able to do for the different age-groups. Some topics reflect learning and development across the birth-to-five continuum, with standards for all age levels: infants, young toddlers, older toddler, and Pre-K, while other topics pertain only to a specific age-period. For example, some knowledge and skills such as *the ability to identify and describe shapes* or skills related to social studies and science emerge in preschool. Topics that address those competencies include standards only at the Pre-K level. Other topics such as *Self-Comforting* and *Social Identity* have standards only at the infant-toddler levels, because these foundational skills developed during the early years lead to more specific competencies at the preschool level.

An Overview of the Domains

Social and Emotional Development. The standards for Social and Emotional development involve behaviors that reflect children's emotional growth and their growing ability to successfully navigate their social worlds through interactions with teachers and peers. These standards include a focus on children's developing abilities to regulate attention, emotions, and behavior, and to establish positive relationships with familiar adults and with peers. Research indicates that early skills of social competence and self-regulation are foundational to children's long-term academic and social success (National Research Council, 2008). Strands in the social and emotional domain are *Self* and *Relationships.*

Physical Well-Being and Motor Development Physical Well-Being and Motor Development standards address motor skills and health practices that are essential for children's overall development. These skills include the ability to use large and small muscles to produce movements, to touch, grasp and manipulate objects, and to engage in physical activity. These

standards also describe the development of health practices that become part of children's daily routines and healthy habits such as nutrition and self-help. These skills and behaviors play an important role in children's physical well-being and set children on a path leading toward a healthy lifestyle. Healthy children are more likely to attend school, to be physically active, and to learn more effectively (Bluemenshine and others, 2008). The two strands in this domain are *Motor Development and Physical Well-Being.*

Approaches Toward Learning. Approaches Toward Learning centers on the foundational behaviors, dispositions, and attitudes that children bring to social interactions and learning experiences. It includes children's initiative and curiosity, and their motivation to participate in new and varied experiences and challenges. These behaviors are fundamental to children's ability to take advantage of learning opportunities, and to set, plan, and achieve goals for themselves. This domain also includes children's level of attention, engagement, and persistence as they do a variety of tasks. These factors are consistent predictors of academic success (Duncan et al., 2007). Finally, children's creativity, innovative thinking and flexibility of thought allow them to think about or use materials in unconventional ways, and to express thoughts, ideas and feelings in a variety of media. The standards in the domain Approaches Toward Learning are organized in the following strands: *Initiative*; *Engagement and Persistence*; and *Creativity*.

Language and Literacy. The standards for language and literacy reflect knowledge and skills fundamental to children's learning of language, reading and writing. Young children's language competencies pertain to their growing abilities to communicate effectively with adults and peers, to express themselves through language, and to use growing vocabularies and increasingly sophisticated language structures. Early literacy skills include children's developing concepts of print, comprehension of age-appropriate text, phonological awareness, and letter recognition. Research has identified early skills of language and literacy as important predictors for children's school readiness, and their later capacity to learn academic knowledge (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). The Language and Literacy domain consists of the following strands: *Listening and Speaking, Reading and Writing*.

Cognition and General Knowledge. This domain includes those cognitive processes that enable all other learning to take place, as well as children's knowledge of the social and physical world. This domain is organized into the strand, *Cognitive Skills* and those concepts and skills in **sub-domains**, *Mathematics, Social Studies* and *Science*.

Cognitive Skills. This strand refers to the underlying cognitive mechanisms, skills and processes that support learning and reasoning across domains, including the development of memory, symbolic thought, reasoning and problem-solving.

- **Mathematics.** The sub-domain of mathematics encompasses the mathematical concepts and skills that children develop during the birth-to-five-year period, including children's developing understanding of number and quantity, number relationships, and basic algebraic concepts. A meta-analysis conducted by Duncan and colleagues (2007) suggests that specific early math skills such as knowledge of numbers and ordinality are important predictors of later achievement in math and reading. The Mathematics sub-domain also addresses children's developing knowledge of key attributes of objects, including size and shape, and the way objects fit, are positioned, and move in space. The standards in the domain of mathematics are organized in four strands: *Number Sense*, *Number Relationships and Operations*; *Algebra*; *Measurement and Data*; and *Geometry*.
- **Social Studies.** The sub-domain of social studies includes basic skills and competencies that set the foundation for learning about concepts of social science. At a young age, children begin to develop their social identity and to think about their place in the social world. As they grow, they develop an increased awareness of their personal histories and heritage, and a sense of time and place. Through everyday interactions with children and adults, they develop an appreciation for rights and responsibility within a group, and how social rules help people in promoting safety and fairness (Mindes, 2005). Such competencies are described in the domain of Social Studies under the following strands: *History*; *Geography*; *Government*; and *Economics*.
- **Science.** This sub- domain focuses on children's curiosity to explore and learn about their environment. It includes behaviors of exploration and discovery, and fundamental conceptual development such as problem solving and cause and effect. These early behaviors develop into increasingly systematic inquiry skills, and the ability to observe, investigate and communicate about the natural environment, living things, and objects and materials (Gelman and Brenneman, 2004). Early competencies in science are organized in four key strands: *Science Inquiry and Application*; *Earth and Space Science*; *Physical Science*; and *Life Science*.

Ohio's early learning and development standards illuminate the breadth of learning and development from birth to kindergarten entry that strengthens school readiness. An understanding of learning and development in each domain guides programs and teachers as they plan developmentally appropriate learning opportunities and environments for young children. In particular, teachers can use an understanding of standards to focus on the kinds of interactions and environments that support, for example, language development or approaches toward learning. While the standards facilitate a focused look at young children's learning in each domain, teachers and others responsible for the care and education of young children need to keep in mind that infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children learn holistically.

Moreover, social and emotional development stands at the center of their learning. For example, as an infant or toddler builds security in a relationship with a caring adult, that child is also learning to communicate with language and to use the relationship as a secure base for practicing new movement skills and building knowledge about the world through exploration. Likewise, as preschool-age children tell stories about family experiences they are expanding their self-awareness, using their growing cognitive capacity to remember the past, and practicing narrative skills. Such examples of integrated learning are endless. In addition to providing focused looks in each domain, the standards can help us see how learning occurs in different domains at the same time.

Teachers and others can use the standards as starting points for observing and understanding young children's learning and development. With each learning encounter teachers observe, they can refer to the standards and ask what knowledge and skills are the children gaining in the areas of language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, social and emotional development, physical well-being and motor development, and approaches toward learning. Teachers can use their observations of integrated learning to plan new learning encounters for young children and support the building of knowledge in all essential domains of school readiness.

References

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