Curriculum
what children learn and how it is taught

The goal of high quality preschool programs is to improve children’s school success. However, the effectiveness of preschool depends on the program’s curriculum, or the content of what children learn in preschool and how it is taught.

Curriculum is an organized framework that defines the content that children are to learn, the processes through which children reach the identified educational goals, what teachers do to help children reach these goals and the environment in which teaching and learning occurs.

A well-designed and goal-oriented curriculum, combined with teachers’ knowledge of children guides instruction so teachers can provide experiences that promote children’s growth across a wide range of developmental and content areas. Having a curriculum also gives purpose to the daily schedule and includes time and materials for play, child-initiated learning, and creative expression. It also provides opportunities for children to learn individually and in groups to match their developmental needs and interests.

The Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County (ELCHC) is responsible for ensuring that all school readiness providers use a developmentally appropriate curriculum. The ELCHC Service Delivery Committee has developed a set of criteria for reviewing curricula and has approved several curricula for use by school readiness program providers. Additionally, the Committee has developed a process for providers to submit a curriculum that is not on the list of currently approved curricula.
Curriculum Categories

Based on input from community partners, three types of curricula were approved by the Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County. The curricula are listed under one of three categories based on the philosophy it supports. A description of each curricula category is provided to help early learning programs determine which curriculum is most compatible with their program's philosophy.

**Approach** - Curricula in this category describes theoretical basis of how children learn. It provides guidelines for how families and the community care for and educate children. Each teacher must have knowledge of current child development and research to select teaching strategies and develop lesson plans that link theory to actual classroom practices.

**Framework** - Curricula in this category are based on approaches or an approach but provide guidance for the teacher to develop the physical room arrangement, select materials and select teaching strategies. Each teacher must then interpret the guidance of the framework to develop lesson plans.

**Curriculum Kits** - Kits use approaches to build a framework and include specific lesson plans, materials, and room arrangements. Kits make the connection between theory and practice and contain detailed guidance to the teacher on how to implement the lesson plans and arrange the classroom environment.

Curriculum Approaches

The High/Scope® preschool curriculum is centered around the belief that children learn best by pursuing their personal interests and goals. Children are encouraged to make choices about materials and activities throughout the day. In this kind of environment, children naturally engage in “key experiences”. Teachers use a wide range of practical strategies for promoting these key experiences.

In Developmental Interactionist (Bank Street) classrooms teachers act as guides and facilitators of learning. Children spend most of their time in research using “hands-on” activities at learning centers and in dialogue and discussions. Teachers plan activities with an emphasis on depth of understanding so children are given ample time to work and play until they are ready to try other activities.

Montessori is both a philosophy of child development and a rationale for guiding such growth. It is based on the child’s developmental needs for freedom within limits, as well as a carefully prepared environment which guarantees exposure to materials and experiences. Through this, the child develops intelligence as well as physical and psychological abilities. The most important years of a child’s growth are the first six years of life.

The Project Approach refers to a set of teaching strategies which enable teachers to guide children through in-depth studies of real world topics. The Project Approach is a structured approach to learning. There is a complex but flexible framework with features that characterize the teaching-learning interaction. When teachers implement the Project Approach successfully, children can be highly motivated, feel actively involved in their own learning, and produce high quality work.
Activity Based Instruction (Diane Bricker, Pre-K exceptional education) (ABI) can be used to turn everyday events and natural interactions into opportunities to promote learning in young children who are considered at risk for developmental delays or who have mild to significant disabilities. It includes some activity suggestions, schedules and planning guides.

Curriculum Frameworks

A Planning Guide (LAP-D activities)

This curriculum is designed to be used with the LAP-D assessment tool. If children assessed by the LAP-D are seen as lacking in any skills, this guide can be used as a directory of activities that can be used to increase those specific lacking skills. The guide has activity ideas and is designed for teachers who have knowledge of DAP but minimal practical experiences. The guide can be used with the resource – Inclusive Preschool Environments to guide the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) adaptations for children with disabilities in everyday activities.

Active Learning Series

This series based on ITERS-R and ECERS-R outcomes, provides a wealth of activities to help children develop their minds and bodies in a safe and healthful environment. The planning guides for infants through 5-year olds provides explicit descriptions of activities, picture and key words to match each activity to the child's stage of development, quick identification of materials, time, number of children and more. Activities are appropriate for one child or for a group. The series also includes a manual for use with children with disabilities.

Beyond Centers and Circle Time (Preschool)
Beyond Cribs & Rattles (Infant/Toddlers)

This is a play-based curriculum which examines the development of the child from three types of play. Providers learn the function and value of each type of play. The training also shows providers how to keenly observe and document the play behavior of children. This understanding allows the teacher to support the play of children and appropriately encourage continuous growth and learning in all developmental areas.

Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers & Two's
Creative Curriculum for Preschool
Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care

This model was designed as a framework that guides teacher involvement in children's learning activities. This type of curriculum promotes informed teacher decision-making. The frameworks presented in all of the books help teachers meet children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development needs. Teachers are guided to be good observers of children's strengths and interests and to create classroom communities. Meaningful learning takes place in centers with activities that integrate appropriate skills, concepts and knowledge in literacy, math, science, social studies, the arts and technology. This curriculum model is practical, logical and meaningful to teachers.
WEE Learn (Faith-based)

This is a comprehensive curriculum with defined activities for infants, toddlers and preschool children. Each teacher’s manual includes ample suggestions for using books, music, nature, and toys to illustrate Christian fundamentals while also addressing all learning areas. Teachers make decisions about how and when to use the activities in this guide.

Curriculum Kits

The DLM Early Childhood Express

The DLM Early Childhood Express is a comprehensive, research based program that develops children’s minds and bodies through carefully selected and sequenced learning experiences. It delivers flexible lessons that reflect cutting-edge research, materials for teaching the lessons, and extensive training to help teachers.

Opening the World of Learning (OWL)

Opening the World of Learning is a comprehensive, integrated curriculum, which provides a strong research-based early literacy curriculum that seamlessly weaves solid content that captures children’s curiosity about the world into an activity-centered day. The curriculum covers all domains of learning: Language and Literacy, Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, The Arts, Physical Development, and Social Emotional development.

Doors to Discovery

Doors to Discovery is a shared literacy model based on early childhood practices. It promotes the skills and competencies identified by the National Association of the Educators of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA). This curriculum is divided into eight monthly themes. Literacy enriched learning centers offer in depth active learning explorations and integration into all content areas.

Breakthrough to Literacy

Breakthrough to Literacy is an interactive software program which provides an integrated set of language-developing experiences. It incorporates well-established principles of early learning with an effective emergent reading curriculum. Staff from the School Readiness Team at HCPS has compiled supplementary activities to incorporate all content areas of science, math, and social studies.

Scholastic Early Childhood Program

Scholastic Early Childhood Program is a comprehensive, year-long curriculum that combines teacher-directed instruction with child-centered explorations. The flexible, easy-to-use curriculum that fosters children’s cognitive and social/emotional development while providing explicit instruction in early language, reading, and math skills.

Houghton Mifflin PRE-K

Houghton Mifflin PRE-K is a hands-on, minds-on curriculum that is based on scientific research. Aligned with key pre-k learning goals, it provides children with the foundational skills they need to succeed as lifelong learners. PRE-K is based on sound research and is aligned with key critical Pre-K learning goals, including those defined by Early Reading First, Head Start, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
Guiding Principles

The development of the Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County’s model for evaluating curricula was informed by the following Guiding Principles, which are based on child development research:

- Children learn best when their physical and emotional needs are met and they feel safe and secure.
- Play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.
- Children learn best at their own pace through active, hands-on interactions.
- Children construct their own knowledge in an attempt to gain an understanding of the world around them.
- Content should have meaning for a child. Interest and the building of understanding is what motivates children to learn.
- Learning occurs in an environment that is well planned and includes a rich variety of materials, choices, and opportunities.
- Children learn through social interaction with other children and adults.
- Children have different ways of thinking at each stage of development and their thinking will change over time.
- Teachers should guide learning experiences and ask questions that encourage children to think creatively and problem solve.
- Parents should play a meaningful role in the school and have a good understanding of its philosophy and goals.
- Learning is an ongoing process with four stages:
  - Awareness (exposure to and notice of events, concepts, people, and objects in the environment)
  - Exploration (figuring out or bringing personal meaning to events, concepts, people and objects)
  - Inquiry (developing understanding of events, concepts, people and objects)
  - Utilization (applying or transferring what has been learned about events, concepts, people and objects)
- Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
- Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of each child’s functioning. Development and learning result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds that children live in.
- Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them.
- Development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery.
- Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know.
Curriculum Approval Process

The Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County is responsible for ensuring that all school readiness providers use developmentally appropriate curriculum. To this end, all School Readiness providers serving children birth to five years of age are required to use a curriculum that has been evaluated by the Service Delivery Committee. Although the Coalition has approved the curricula frameworks, approaches and kits listed previously in this document, there are other early childhood curricula that provide a sound framework for educating young children.

Providers using a curriculum that does not appear on the approved list should use the following procedure to submit their curriculum for evaluation/approval.

- The provider should review the Coalition’s Guiding Principles and the curriculum evaluation tool to be sure that the curriculum they submit align with established criteria. The evaluation tool can be found on the Coalition’s website: www.elchc.org.
- The School Readiness provider submits sample curriculum materials for review.
- The Service Delivery Committee shall appoint a review committee.
- The Review Committee will conduct the review utilizing the applicable Curriculum Evaluation Form (Attachment 3).
- Results of the review will be shared with the Service Delivery Committee at the next regularly scheduled meeting. If a curriculum meets the established criteria, an action item will be presented to the Board at its next regularly scheduled meeting.
- The Provider will be notified in writing of the Board’s decision.