

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

PURPOSE & PHILOSOPHY

The Learning Knoll believes that children learn best when they have a positive self-image and are accepted by both adults and other children. By providing a rich environment, the child is given various opportunities to discover, explore and be challenged, thereby fostering independence, self-confidence, self-control, and a sense of responsibility.

The organization recognizes the importance of partnering with parents and that strong relationships between parent and child, teacher and parent, teacher and child, best support children's learning. Our approach to creating curriculum is a comprehensive, whole-child approach that integrates nurturing, respectful relationships with learning domains that are interconnected and provides for culturally responsive practices and experiences. During curriculum planning time, teachers use assessment results as well as specific interests and needs of an individual child to develop a developmentally appropriate classroom framework.

In addition to quality learning experiences, the organization strives to maintain quality and consistency within our staff and classrooms. Our classrooms maintain required teacher to child ratios and each classroom has a primary group of teachers that are responsible for the learning environment. This is to ensure high teaching standards, consistency, and smooth transitions for children throughout the day. It also maintains continuity of relationships between staff and the groups of children. For the Infant Room (under 15 months) the ratio is 1 to 3; the Toddler Room is 1 to 4; the Preschool Room is 1 to 10; the School Age Room is 1:13. These ratios are maintained during all hours of operation both on-site and off-site, and staff are always within sight and sound of children. Classrooms are also provided with regular "floating" staff that provide planning and break support for assigned classroom teachers.

TRAINING

The Learning Knoll combines this philosophical approach with knowledge of and experience with child development, birth through six years of age. The purpose of this approach is to use assessments to inform planning for overall program improvements. In addition to coursework and related degrees, Infant/Toddler teachers receive training in the use of Early Learning Guidelines for Infant and Toddlers developed by the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children (MAEYC) and Preschool teachers receive training in the Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences, developed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). All staff are required to complete 20 hours of training with one-fifth (4 hours) of those hours related to diverse learners. Diverse learners are defined as children who have special physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, or linguistic needs or whose primary learning modality is visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic, or who may require an adaptation in the environment, interaction or curriculum in order to succeed in their program (606 CMR 7.02).

CORE COMPETENCIES

These guidelines are used as a framework to help guide and facilitate children's learning and development with an established group of core competencies that align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and prepare children for their future learning in various educational settings. Guidelines include the following domains for Infants and Toddlers:

- Social & Emotional Development
- Language Development
- Cognitive Development
- Physical Health and Wellbeing

The Infant/Toddler guidelines become the foundation for the Preschool Learning Guidelines and core competencies that include the following domains for Preschoolers:

- Health Education
- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- History and Social Science
- Health Education
- The Arts

THEMES & LESSON PLANS

Our curriculum planning incorporates all core competency areas within an established 12-month curriculum that includes the examples of the following themes for our Infants/Toddlers:

- All About Me, Community, Bodies, Opposites, Transportation, Numbers, Colors, Animals, Textures, Shapes and Sizes, Insects

The following are sample themes are used in our Preschool Classrooms:

- Families, Community, Harvest, Health, Celebrations, Farms, Insects, Stories and Literacy, Winter, All About Me, The Senses, Transportation

Each teaching team of 2 to 3 teachers is responsible for creating weekly lesson plans based on the month's theme and core competencies. Teacher-directed activities are done in small groupings or "target groups" to ensure individualized attention and access to all activities for all children in the classroom. Curriculum plans include opportunities for small group activities, teacher directed activities, and to a lesser extent, large group activities. Teachers use information gathered from parent intakes, interactions with children, and assessment data to learn about individual children's needs and interests when creating lesson plans. Lessons plans include the following:

Name of activity, description, materials needed, purpose and objective of activity, core area(s) targeted, individual adaptations;

Along with lesson plans, each classroom maintains a daily lesson and activity log that contains regular entries from classroom teachers about the day's activities and plans for adaptations, adjustments and individualization. These entries are read by all teachers and implemented daily. This companion log is also used for post lesson entries to address any observations about individuals to be used later for assessment.

CENTERS

In addition to daily lessons done in small groups or "target groups," each classroom is set up in discovery centers where children are self-directed, challenged and interactive with materials and their peers. Centers are created with materials that foster social, emotional and cognitive development and include the following:

- Dramatic Play
- Building and Construction
- Book & Reading Area
- Puzzles and Manipulatives
- Arts Area
- Science Area

MEAL TIME

Meal times are regarded as an important part of our daily curriculum. Meals are served pre-plated and unitized by the developmental needs of the children and USDA regulations. Meal times are designed to encourage opportunities for development of self-help skills, manners and socialization. Teachers sit at tables with children to guide serving (when appropriate), eating, socialization and cleaning up. Teachers engage in open-ended conversations with children and encourage conversation among children.

OUTDOOR PLAY

An important element of our curriculum planning is outdoor play. Outdoor play occurs daily, weather permitting. When outdoor play is not possible, indoor experiences such as movement games or dancing are incorporated into the day. Active play in a large, open area that includes various opportunities for practicing locomotor skills, balancing, and large muscle movements on various surfaces is critical to a child's healthy growth and development. Areas in which children engage include the following:

- Climbing structure, sand box, pavement for riding toys, large open area for group games, running/chase games

ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN

PURPOSE

The program understands the importance of observing and documenting children's growth and development in a standardized way that is accurate and comprehensive. As an early childhood center, assessments and observations are crucial and essential to early intervention. In addition, assessments of children's skills and knowledge must be directly linked and interconnected to the provided curriculum. The reliability and validity of an assessment supports developmentally appropriate practices, individual learning, as well as experiences and values within our respective families.

TOOLS & TRAINING

The Learning Knoll uses Teaching Strategies Gold for Infants and Toddlers ages three weeks to 3 years old, and for Preschoolers, children 2.9 years to 6 years old. The program also uses a developmental checklist to supplement the Teaching Strategies Gold program. In addition, we also use Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) as a screening tool for infants through preschoolers during the intake process.

Teaching Strategies GOLD is an authentic observation-based assessment system for children from birth through kindergarten. It blends ongoing observational assessment for all areas of development and learning with performance tasks for selected predictors of school success in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Teaching Strategies GOLD can be used to assess all children, including English-language learners, children with disabilities, and children who demonstrate competencies beyond typical developmental expectations. The primary purpose of Teaching Strategies GOLD is to document children's learning over time, inform instruction, and facilitate communication with families and other stakeholders.

The Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) is composed of 38 items in the following categories and examples of what is in each category:

- Social-Emotional (Emotions, Behavior, Building Relationships)
- Physical (Fine and Gross Motor Skills)
- Language (Expression and Conversation)
- Cognitive (Making Connections, Problem Solving)
- Literacy (Alphabetic Principles)
- Mathematics (Number Identification, Shapes, Patterns)
- Science and Technology
- Social Studies
- The Arts
- English Language Acquisition

PROCEDURES

Classroom teachers begin the process of observations and evidence gathering when a child is first enrolled. Parents are encouraged to participate in the assessment process by being provided with an area for sharing observations from home on the reports. They are also invited to schedule a meeting to discuss progress reports with their child's Lead Teacher. Parents can expect the following schedule of reports and checklists (depending on when a child enrolls):

November/December	Developmental Checklist
May/June	TSG Reports

A child that is an infant (under 15 months) will receive a developmental checklist every 3 months from the date that the child was enrolled.

AGES AND STAGES (ASQ) SCREENING TOOL

The ASQ is a first level comprehensive screening and monitoring program. It identifies children one month to 5.5 years old who need further assessment to determine whether early intervention or special education services may be required. ASQ is provided to parents within the first few weeks their child is enrolled. It is an important tool to engage parents in the process of assessing their child's abilities and developmental levels in partnership with the program. The ASQ comes with 30 questions in the following five areas:

- Communication; Gross Motor; Fine Motor; Problem Solving; and Personal-Social

Parent responses are tabulated and converted to point values. Then they are compared to an established screening cutoff point. The individual scores indicate that children are: developing appropriately; require close attention; or that further diagnostic assessment is recommended.

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

As teachers gather information from their observations on children, areas or “gaps” in curriculum may be revealed. These will be items that have no supporting anecdotal evidence. Teachers will need to assess and adjust their own curriculum plan to address this missing information for the child or children. It could come in the form of an activity, a new material added to the room or even the creation of a new center.

REFERRAL PROCESS

When assessment tools and screening tools indicate that a child is developing below what is considered typical, a meeting is scheduled with the child’s parents. At this time, concerns are discussed and an individualized plan is created. If the needs of the child require specialized support services, resource information is given to the parent/guardian.

The organization provides support to the child’s parent/guardian in making the referral and acquiring written parental consent and confidentiality that allows collaboration and coordination of services. With parent/guardian permission, the organization follows up with service providers who evaluate the child for consultation and assistance in meeting the child’s needs at the program. On an individual basis, the organization documents concerns and actions regarding the referral. From this documentation, the organization will determine if additional steps are required based upon the recommendation(s) of the service providers.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Each summary report has a written statement of confidentiality. Children’s records are filed in the office and maintained by administrative staff in a locked file cabinet. The Lead Teacher, administrative staff and the child’s parent or guardian may have access to this information. With the parents or guardians written permission, information is released to specifically named individuals.

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