

CURRICULUM

Introduction

The term curriculum model refers to an educational system that combines theory with practice. A curriculum model has a theory and knowledge base that reflects a philosophical orientation and is supported by child development research and educational evaluation. The practical application of a curriculum model includes guidelines on how to set up the physical environment, structure activities, interact with children and their families, and support staff members in their initial training and ongoing implementation of the program. Curriculum models should be central to any discussion of early childhood programs. Curriculum models are essential in determining program content, training, and supervising staff to implement high-quality programs. Teaching teams need professional development to implement an appropriate curriculum.

One of the most controversial topics in early childhood revolves around the issue of a child-centered approach or a content-centered approach. A child-centered classroom is organized around the principle that children learn best by following their own personal interests and goals. The teacher's role in a child-centered classroom is to provide a rich environment and to facilitate children's natural development by encouraging decision making, focusing on their strengths, forming close relationships, and supporting their play ideas. A content-centered classroom is organized around the principle that there are skills and dispositions that children need to be taught if they are to be prepared for later schooling and life. The teacher's role in a content-centered classroom is to provide a sequence of experiences that will achieve those instruction goals for children. The use of a content-centered approach is very challenging as staff need to create a balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated activities.

A high-quality preschool program develops children's interests and abilities through active learning experiences. The GSRP reflects the value of play in the written philosophy statement, the comprehensive curriculum, and teacher-parent communication.

Selecting Curriculum

It is important when selecting a curriculum model not only to refer to the program's student population and philosophy, but to ensure alignment with the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten* (ECSQ-PK). The following questions can serve as a tool for guiding curriculum selection:

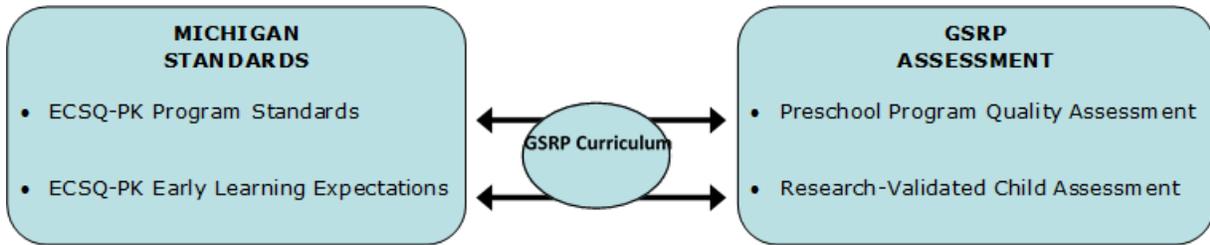
- Is the curriculum "research-based and research-validated"? Are elements of the curriculum clearly based on research about the development of young children? Has research demonstrated the effectiveness of the curriculum model in improving outcomes or results for children?
- Are both scope and sequence included in the design? Are the relevant domains of development included? Is there evidence that the curriculum is tied to children's developmental progress?

- What domains are included? Are there learning experiences and activities in all areas of development outlined in the ECSQ-PK? Does the methodology promote important development in “approaches to learning” such as initiative, persistence, and imagination?
- Are the materials appropriate? Are the materials appropriate for the age and level of development of four-year-old children, including children with special needs and those who may be more advanced in certain areas? Are the materials free of cultural bias? Do the materials reflect the interests and home culture of the local community? Do the materials represent a balance of the need for teacher planning and child initiation of learning activities?
- Is there a balance of teacher-planned and child-initiated activities? Does the daily routine support a balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated activities? Does the curriculum encourage teachers to plan topics of investigation based on the interests of the children?
- Are materials available throughout the learning environment to support systematic child observation in order to assess children’s abilities? Is there evidence that assessment for instructional purposes is integral to implementation of the curriculum?
- Are the teacher materials appropriate? Is there adequate explanatory material for the teachers on how to implement the curriculum?
- Is staff development recommended? Is there a training component to support full implementation of the curriculum?
- Horizontal Alignment: Are the content of ECSQ-PK, curriculum, and child assessments aligned?
- Vertical Alignment: Are the content of Early Childhood Standards of Quality – Infant/Toddler, ECSQ-PK, and local kindergarten grade level content expectations aligned?

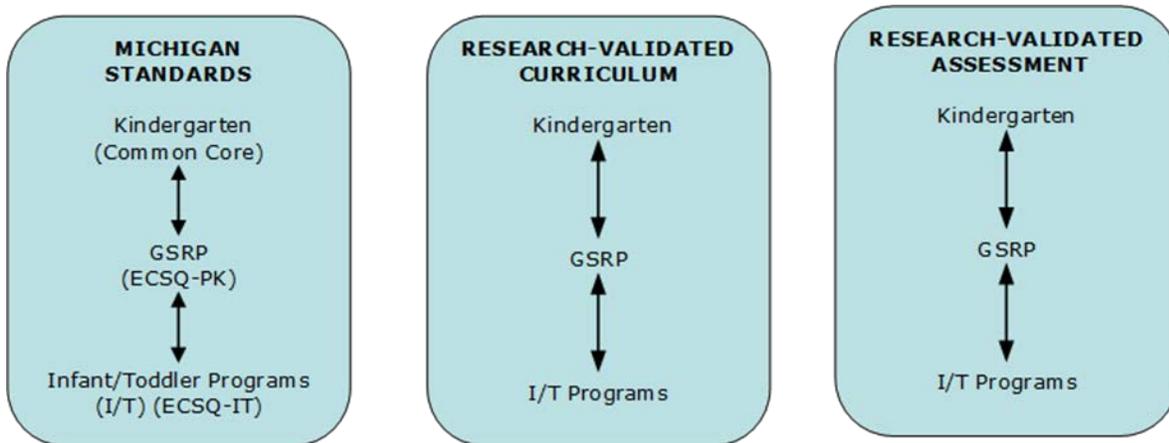
Alignment

Alignment focuses on the content and format of instruction across early care and education settings. Educators are concerned with both horizontal and vertical alignment.

Horizontal alignment refers to the agreement among standards, curriculum and assessment within a given age or grade level. This alignment defines expectations for children, families, and teachers and ensures that child assessment reflects approved early learning expectations. Horizontal alignment of program standards and program assessment allows program administrators to measure the quality of the program based on the standards and research-validated curriculum. For GSRP, the recommended research-validated curricula and child assessments align with the ECSQ-PK. In kindergarten, there should be alignment among the grade level content expectations or Common Core for kindergarten, the kindergarten curriculum, and kindergarten assessments.



Vertical alignment refers to the agreement of the standards, curriculum, and assessments between age or grade levels. This ensures consistent expectations and quality from year-to-year for children, families, teachers, and administrators. MDE has worked to vertically align the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler Programs*, the ECSQ-PK, and the kindergarten GLCE. Additionally, many research-validated early childhood curricula and child assessments have both infant-toddler and prekindergarten versions.



Commonly Used Curriculum Models Validated By Research

GSRP grantees are required to use a research-validated curriculum that aligns with the ECSQ-PK. The following curricula may or may not be aligned with the ECSQ-PK.

Bank Street:

Bank Street fosters children's development by offering diverse opportunities for physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth. It takes into account that children learn at different rates and in different ways. Arts and science education are woven in with social studies-centered lessons and activities that help children find meaning in the world around them.

Explorations with Young Children: A Curriculum Guide from Bank Street College of Education by Anne Mitchell and Judy David assists early childhood teachers in developing their own curriculum based on the needs and interests of children.

Creative Curriculum:

Creative Curriculum focuses on eleven interest areas or activities in the program environment: blocks, dramatic play, toys and games, art, sand and water, library, discovery, music and movement, cooking, computers, and the outdoors. It helps teachers understand how to work with children at different developmental levels to promote learning and guides them in adapting the environment to make it more challenging. It includes a parent component, audiovisual resources, and offers a document showing alignment with the ECSQ-PK.

HighScope Curriculum:

HighScope is used in both public and private Part-Day and School-Day preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, child care centers, Home-Based child care programs, and programs for children with special needs. It is based on the fundamental premise that children are active learners who learn best from activities they plan, carry out, and reflect on. Key developmental indicators are grouped into ten categories: creative representation, language and literacy, initiative and social relations, movement and music, classification, serrations, numbers, space, and time.

A central element of the day is the “plan-do-review sequence” in which children make a plan, carry it out, and then reflect on the results. The daily routine includes times for small- and large-group experiences, time for outside play, and offers a document showing alignment with the ECSQ-PK.

Montessori:

Montessori is based on the work and writings of the Italian physician, Maria Montessori. It appears to be the first curriculum model for children of preschool age that was widely disseminated and replicated. It is based on the idea that children teach themselves through their own experiences and it provides a carefully prepared and ordered environment. The curriculum focuses on five areas: practical life, sensory awareness education, language arts, mathematics and geometry, and cultural subjects. Materials proceed from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract.

Project Approach:

The Project Approach emphasizes integration of the curriculum. A project is an in-depth investigation of a specific topic with the main goals of finding out more about the topic rather than to seek answers to questions proposed by the teacher. Either the children or teacher can generate the topic. The questions to be addressed and investigated during the project are generated and developed by children. Project work should not constitute the whole curriculum, but should address the more informal parts of the curriculum.

Reggio Emilia:

Reggio Emilia emphasizes the involvement of children, staff, and parents in the learning experience, and is based on the following principles:
Emergent Curriculum: An emergent curriculum is one that builds upon the interests of children. Teachers work together with children to formulate hypotheses about the possible directions of a project, the materials needed, and possible parent and/or community support and involvement.

Representational Development: Similar to the idea of teaching through the use of multiple intelligences, the Reggio Emilia approach calls for the integration of graphic arts as tools for cognitive, linguistic, and social development.

Collaboration: Collaborative group work, both large and small, is considered valuable and necessary to advance cognitive development. Children are encouraged to dialogue, critique, compare, negotiate, hypothesize, and problem solve through group work.

Teachers as Researchers: Working as a member of a teaching team, the role of the teacher is that of a learner alongside the children. The teacher is a facilitator and resource.

Documentation: Similar to the use of a portfolio, documentation of children's work in progress is viewed as an important tool in the learning process for children, teachers, and parents.

Environment: Within the Reggio Emilia schools, great attention is given to the look and feel of the classroom. The environment is considered an important and essential component of the learning process.

Tools of the Mind:

Tools of the Mind is based on a Vygotskian approach, incorporating the idea that cognitive and social/emotional self-regulation is important to school readiness. Brain research indicates the areas of the brain responsible for self-regulatory capacities develop during preschool (Blair, 2002). The importance of self-regulation is not only supported by research evidence, it is ranked as the major characteristic necessary for school readiness by kindergarten teachers (Nelson, et al., 1999).

Primary aspects of a Tools of the Mind classroom:

- Children engage in activities that help them develop focused attention and deliberate memory.
- It is a cooperative classroom where children learn to work with each other, help each other learn, and are not afraid to make mistakes.
- Children develop cognitive and emotional skills by engaging in mature play.
- Children develop play plans and cooperate with other children to create play scenarios.
- Literacy and math skills are taught in an individualized manner, without whole group instruction, in a way that is efficient and manageable for the teacher.
- The classroom fosters creativity and imagination through drawing, painting, story creation, and play.

Supplementing a Comprehensive Curriculum

Some classrooms, programs, or sites have traditionally used a supplemental curriculum or may be pressured by the LEA or agency to adopt a supplemental curriculum. The ISD, as the GSRP grant recipient has final responsibility for ensuring the use of an approved comprehensive curriculum in each classroom and

for guaranteeing that any supplemental curriculum utilized is also appropriate. Any program using or planning to use a supplemental curriculum should make a request to the ISD. To be considered for approval, the request should include:

- Child assessment or program quality data indicating a need for a supplemental curriculum,
- Answers to the questions in this section for selecting a curriculum,
- How the requested supplemental curriculum aligns with the GSRP philosophy on active learning and play and with the program's philosophy, and
- An explanation, if the supplemental being requested is not related to the comprehensive curriculum used.