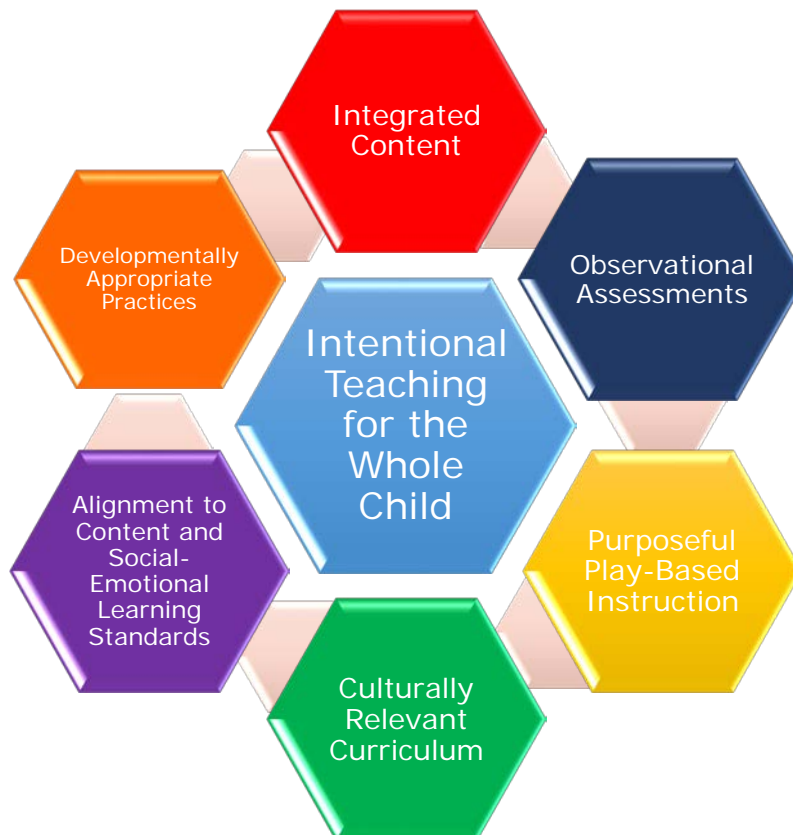


Instruction for Children Birth – Age 8

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) believes in intentional early childhood (birth through age eight) **instruction** that provides equitable access as evidenced by:

- Developmentally appropriate practices,
- Integrated learning across and within content areas,
- Assessments that rely on continued observation of student performance to inform and drive instructional decisions,
- A balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities with opportunities for play-based instructional experiences,
- Culturally relevant curriculum, materials, and practices that are incorporated into daily classroom activities,
- Alignment to content and Social Emotional Learning standards.



High-quality instruction for children from birth through age 8 requires intentionality. Educators must utilize their knowledge of child development and pedagogy; familiarity with learning standards; individual and group strengths of children; and experiences that incorporate the following critical aspects of appropriate instruction.

The term, *developmentally appropriate practice*, considers two fundamental aspects of teaching young children. First, educators must understand the processes of learning so that instruction can meet children where they are developmentally, either as individuals or in groups. The “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching and learning creates inequities in student growth because it relegates children’s prior knowledge and experiences into what’s “typical” for an age group. The “lock-step” approach to teaching and learning creates inequities in student growth because it is not responsive to each child’s needs and strengths.

Second, educators must provide opportunities for children to experience challenging tasks while supporting their success. Educators support children to stretch their current abilities and interests, to build upon their current knowledge, and to achieve outcomes that contribute to the on-going development of the whole child.

Learning experiences for children must consider the **interconnectedness of content areas** and provide opportunities to reflect their developmental, individual, and sociocultural knowledge. Moreover, providing children with learning experiences that are contextualized and connected is more appropriate to how individuals learn, apply, and demonstrate knowledge and skills in the classroom and in life.

Capturing the development of young children is generated through authentic assessments, such as an **observational model**, which are unobtrusive and allow for a more natural way for children to use and express their knowledge and skills. Observational models allow educators to collect both emerging and mastery data, organize evidence, and monitor a child’s progress over time. This comprehensive and holistic view of a child’s growth in academic, physical, social, and emotional standards allows for teachers to differentiate instruction as well as provide personalized interventions and supports, systematically addressing individual trajectories as well as providing data elements for analysis at classroom and school-wide levels.

Research strongly suggests that a child’s academic growth during the early years is strengthened by incorporating **play-based instructional practices**. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009), there is evidence that links play with the development of foundational dimensions of learning for young children, specifically in the areas of memory, social interactions,

self-regulation, oral language development, and overall school success. Purposeful play generates rich contexts in which children can demonstrate and extend their intellectual and social development by engaging in activities aligned to appropriate content standards and social-emotional learning competencies.

A child's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors specific to making appropriate and successful choices are known as **social-emotional learning competencies**. CASEL (2014) describes these competencies as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. While these competencies cannot stand alone, they prepare children to engage in learning experiences to increase the learning capacity (Durlak et al., 2011). More importantly, these competencies are crucial for children becoming career- and college-ready as they are foundational for persevering, collaborating, communicating, and problem-solving in a globally complex world.

Therefore, the curriculum must be such that it provides children with opportunities to express their home and community culture and interact with those from diverse cultural settings. Williams (2015) described **culturally relevant instruction** as an orderly, structured, and purposeful practice that allows the children to infuse their passions into learning, thereby increasing engagement and academic expectations. Children learn best when they engage their minds to create and apply new learning based on their prior experiences (cultural knowledge).

Educator Supports

In collaboration with Michigan higher education literacy experts as well as higher education experts for early mathematics, the MDE has provided classroom instruction to support early literacy and mathematics. The practices support classroom instruction that is:

- Intentional, aligned with standards, and designed to be student-centered and personalized (or relevant) to the needs of the students in the classroom,
- Integrated so that it brings relevance and rigor to the learning, allows students to connect ideas and transfer knowledge across content areas,
- Supported with timely and focused interventions when necessary, then student achievement and engagement in early literacy and mathematics will increase.

[Supporting Early Literacy and Mathematics Instructional Practices](#)

Anchor Documents

The following MDE documents demonstrate a foundation for instruction of students birth through grade 3:

- Michigan Department of Education Mission and Priorities for 2013-2015
- Office of Great Start, Goals of the Governor
- Career and College Ready Statements Supported Across Early Childhood/K-12 Standards
- School Improvement Framework 2.0

Research

The following research documents support the whole child instructional approach for Michigan students ages birth through grade 3.

Damon E. Jones, Mark Greenberg, and Max Crowley. (2015). Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*. e-View Ahead of Print. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630

Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Zongping Xiang, Marijata Daniel-Echols, Kimberly Browning, and Tomoko Wakabayashi. (2012). Michigan Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation 2012: High School Graduation and Grade Retention Findings. [High Scope Educational Research Foundation](#).

Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymicki, A, Taylor, R. & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*, 405 – 432.

Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Zongping Xiang, Marijata Daniel-Echols, Kimberly Browning, and Tomoko Wakabayashi. (2012). Michigan Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation 2012: High School Graduation and Grade Retention Findings. High Scope Educational Research Foundation. www.highscope.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/position%20statement%20Web.pdf>

Williams, D. (2015). An RTI guide to improving the performance of African American students. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.