

The School as Hub for Early Learning Approach

Principles and Framework

Guiding Principles of Practice

School as Hub for Early Learning unites early childhood and elementary education into a seamless system centered on children’s learning and development. Eight guiding principles—organized by the five commitments to align, center, reach, partner, and reflect—define this shift.

	Principles of Practice	Traditional Approach	School as Hub for Early Learning Approach Expected Long-Term Changes
Align	1. Connected System	Early childhood and elementary education function separately.	→ Education is unified across birth through Grade 3, creating a seamless learning experience.
	2. Developmental Progression	Children's development and learning is segmented into strict age and grade levels.	→ Development and learning are viewed as a continuous process, building on prior experiences at each stage.
Center	3. Child-Centered Priorities	Development is prioritized for young children, while academics take precedence in elementary school.	→ Learning experiences integrate academic, cognitive, social, language, physical, and emotional development at every stage, beginning at birth.
Reach	4. Opportunity for All	Policies, curriculum, instruction, and resources are applied broadly, without attention to what each individual child needs.	→ Schools focus on ensuring each child receives the right resources and support at the right time to maximize development, learning, and well-being.
Partner	5. Family-School Partnerships	Family engagement consists of school-led events with limited family input.	→ Families and schools collaborate as partners, with ongoing communication and shared decision-making.
	6. Strength-Based Approach	Schools address gaps in children's and families' skills as a starting point for action.	→ Schools focus on the strengths of children and families, understanding that challenges often come from many factors.
	7. Community Engagement	Schools engage with community organizations for specific events and support.	→ Schools build lasting community partnerships that provide meaningful resources and support for families.
Reflect	8. Professional Growth	Episodic training on educational practices, with limited consideration of age-specific developmental needs and few opportunities for peer collaboration.	→ Professional learning is continuous, tailored to age-specific developmental needs of children being served, embedded in collaborative practice, and integrated into daily teaching.

School as Hub for Early Learning Framework

The School as Hub for Early Learning Framework translates the five commitments and guiding principles into action and defines the systems, structures, and practices that make early learning work across districts and schools. Organized around three impact areas: Leadership Effectiveness, Instructional Excellence, and Family and Community Partnership Engagement, the framework helps districts identify priorities, plan strategically, and measure progress toward a connected, high-quality birth through Grade 3 system.

Leadership Effectiveness	Instructional Excellence	Family and Community Partnership Engagement
District Organization and Capacity	Foundations of Early Learning	Family Focus
School Leadership	Essential Child Experiences	Community-School Connections

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Leadership Effectiveness ensures districts and schools create well-supported early learning environments.

Leadership Effectiveness
District Organization and Capacity
LE1.1 Integrate early learning priorities into the district's mission and strategic plan.
LE1.2 Structure district central office leadership to prioritize and manage early learning programs.
LE1.3 Use early childhood data to guide decisions and continuous improvement.
LE1.4 Invest in cycles of early childhood-focused professional learning.
LE1.5 Develop community partnerships to expand resources for families and young learners.
LE1.6 Expand access to high-quality early learning for each child and family. *This target zone uses the National P-3 Center's District P-3 Audit© and its six focus areas.*
School Leadership
LE2.1 Strengthen each school leader's child development, early learning, and family engagement expertise.
LE2.2 Apply early childhood data for continuous improvement of early childhood programming and services.
LE2.3 Build strong, collaborative relationships with families and communities.
LE2.4 Align school goals with birth through Grade 3 needs and priorities.
LE2.5 Ensure all children and families have needed resources and opportunities for high-quality learning.
LE2.6 Encourage shared leadership among staff, families, and community.

Instructional Excellence emphasizes effective teaching through positive interactions and engaging learning environments that are developmentally appropriate, intellectually stimulating, and meaningful to each child.

Instructional Excellence
Foundations for Early Learning
IE1.1 Connect children beginning at birth to a learning pathway.
IE1.2 Build strong educator-child relationships.
IE1.3 Align curriculum and instruction with developmental progressions.
IE1.4 Inform learning through informal and formal assessments.
IE1.5 Use learning materials that reflect children's real-world experiences.
IE1.6 Support children's social skills and emotional competency.
IE1.7 Incorporate play-based learning through Grade 3.
Essential Child Experiences
IE2.1 Children explore, play, and build knowledge through connected learning experiences that foster curiosity, confidence, and growth from birth through Grade 3. • IE2.1a Learning is connected to their own experiences and interests. • IE2.1b They engage in speaking, listening, reading, and writing to communicate ideas. • IE2.1c They think critically, solve problems, and apply reasoning. • IE2.1d They collaborate, share ideas, and learn with peers. • IE2.1e They make choices, set goals, and plan their learning. • IE2.1f They express creativity and engage in hands-on exploration.

Family and Community Partnership Engagement strengthens family-school collaboration and community support for early learning.

Family and Community Partnership Engagement
Family Focus
FCP1.1 Build trust between schools and families.
FCP1.2 Engage families as learning partners.
FCP1.3 Use clear, two-way communication.
FCP1.4 Involve families in school decisions.
FCP1.5 Ensure broad family participation.
FCP1.6 Support smooth transitions across learning stages from birth through Grade 3.
FCP1.7 Reduce barriers to family involvement.
FCP1.8 Provide opportunities for families to learn ways to support their children's learning and development.
FCP1.9 Connect families to school starting at birth.
Community-School Connections
FCP2.1 Strengthen partnerships and engagement with community childcare providers.
FCP2.2 Connect families with essential community services and resources.
FCP2.3 Integrate community knowledge into learning experiences and environments.