

Best and Promising Practices in Early Childcare & Education First 5 Kern Position Statements

Introduction

There is a diversity of backgrounds and wide range of experiences represented by different early childcare and education programs, and it is generally accepted by the participating schools, family resource centers and other participating partners that positive outcomes for children are realized when programs are committed to developmentally appropriate early care and education practices. The First 5 Kern Commission and staff recognize the need to develop a formal statement for First 5 Kern to define best and promising practices in order to promote high quality practices for those programs providing early childcare and education services.

This document represents key areas of best practices for First 5 Kern's Early Childcare and Education focus area and the programs which provide services which fall within the category of early childcare and education. The intent of this document is to serve as a guide for all sites in providing developmentally appropriate practices that will contribute to school success for children and families. A program's success may be attributed to participating schools and districts, to parents, to family resource centers, and to participating partners, and this document is intended to assist all attaining that success.

This guide includes the following:

1. Definition of terms
2. Overall Purpose
3. Best Practices Position Statement
 - Staffing
 - Curriculum
 - Follow-up Kindergarten Transition Activities
 - Parent Involvement Opportunities
 - Summer Bridge Programs

Definition of Terms

Summer Bridge is defined as classroom summer school.

Center-based activities include Mommy & Me, Tell-Me-A-Story, or any center-based activity that teaches children and/or demonstrates to parents how to work with their children. Center-based activities are in a licensed center and can take place in a licensed-exempt center.

Home-based activities include developmental activities with children that take place in the client's home providing guidance and support for the child and the parent.

Kindergarten transition orientation (School District) is an orientation for incoming Kindergarteners and their families providing them with a glimpse of their new school, classroom and staff. This may consist of an open house, school tour, presentation by principal, lunch, and / or interaction with their Kindergarten teachers.

Kindergarten Transition Orientation (Program Orientation) is an orientation for the programs new enrollees and their families to provide information regarding the services provided and expectations of the program.

Articulation Activity are meetings with preschool, kindergarten teachers, administration, school staff, and/or community members designed to enhance articulation between early childhood education and elementary school staff.

Case Management is addressed in the Best & Promising Practices for Case Management.

Parent Education Classes is addressed in the Best & Promising Practices for Family Resource Centers.
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Parent Information Classes is information distributed to parents, but no pre- or post-test is administered.

Health Insurance can include initial assistance, renewal, or referral.

Health Services (Screening) is when the program staff provide direct health screening services such as dental, immunizations, and physicals.

Health Services (Coordinate) is any health program that is coordinated by program staff, such as dental, immunizations, physicals, etc.

Kindergarten Round-Up is inclusive of Kindergarten registration, physicals, dental screenings, and immunizations.

Overall purpose of Early Childcare and Education Activities

The overall purpose of Early Childcare and Education activities is to provide children with a developmentally appropriate learning environment and learning activities to better prepare children and families for entering kindergarten. Taking into consideration the varying activities and capacity of the funded programs; the activities are separated into two different areas: licensed centers and license-exempt centers.

Licensed centers: The amount of time children will be engaged in these activities will be based on the center's license; therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the children who are participating will receive a full year's worth of preschool. Assessments should evaluate children's growth within this parameter. Activities should be developmentally appropriate for children aged 0 to 5 and focus on developmental areas such as language development, cognitive development, physical development, and social emotional development.

License-exempt centers: Given the relatively short amount of time children will actually spend engaged in these activities, it is not reasonable or developmentally appropriate to try to condense a full year's worth of preschool into these activities. Assessments should evaluate children's growth within this parameter. Activities and programs should be treated as a socialization time with an emphasis on child exposure to the school environment and school routines. Activities should be developmentally appropriate for children aged 0 to 5 and focus on developmental areas such as language development, cognitive development, physical development, and social emotional development. In order to strengthen articulation, communication between programs, school administration, and kindergarten teachers is essential. Communication will provide opportunities for staff to share child specific information as well as provide opportunities for school administration and kindergarten teachers to express expectations for incoming students.

Best Practices in Early Childcare and Education Position Statement:

The first five years of a child's life is a time of enormous development. From birth until the first day of kindergarten, the child is in a continual state of growth, learning, and relationship building. It is imperative that each child have access to the best possible care and educational experiences to optimize his / her development. The following statements summarize Best Practices within the Early Childcare and Education arena:

General Staffing for Early Childcare and Education Activity Practices:

It is recommended that Program Coordinators, staff, or an individual with early childhood education background and experience, teach the early childcare and education activities (i.e. summer bridge, center-based and home-based activities, etc). Assistants could be recruited through student work programs (such as college student interns), Americorps, current preschool and kindergarten classroom assistants.

Curriculum:

The curriculum for programs will be child-centered and provide plenty of choices for play-based learning within the environment. For example, curriculum could be theme-based with an emphasis on child interest. Appropriate resources include:

Please note that this is not an inclusive list.

1. West Ed- <http://www.wested.org/cs/we/print/docs/we/home.htm>
(i.e. PITC- Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers)
2. NAEYC National Association for the Education of Young Children
<http://www.naeyc.org/>
3. CAEYC California Association for the Education of Young Children
<http://www.naeyc.org//CAEYC>

Kindergarten Transition Activities:

As children move from Early Childcare and education activities into kindergarten, it would be beneficial to facilitate an annual site-based Transition team meeting. The purpose of the meeting would be for staff, kindergarten teachers and others, as deemed appropriate, to meet and discuss outcomes for individual children. Through this activity, child observations, screenings, referrals and services could follow the child into kindergarten, thus providing the proverbial “leg up” for the child, family and kindergarten teacher.

Parent Involvement Opportunities:

Strategies for parent involvement opportunities will be incorporated into child development activities. Parents should actively participate in summer bridge, home-based, and center-based activities. Parent advisory groups should be utilized to give parents an opportunity to participate in school readiness issues. Workshops on a variety of topics such as familiarization of kindergarten standards, developmentally appropriate practices, early literacy with an emphasis on emerging literacy, mathematics, and health (i.e. required immunizations) should be available for parents.

Summer Bridge Programs:

The overall purpose of summer bridge programs is to provide a comprehensive kindergarten transition activity to children 4 to 5 years of age who will be entering kindergarten. The overarching goal is to assist the children and parents in better understanding what to expect from the kindergarten experience. Through this effort, children and parents feel a stronger and more positive connection to the school. Additionally, the child and parent have a sense of the overall navigation of a school campus, including the classroom routine. Given the relatively short amount of time children would actually spend engaged in summer bridge activities, it is not reasonable or developmentally appropriate to try to condense a full year’s worth of preschool into the programs. Instead, the summer bridge programs should be an experience with developmentally appropriate activities in cognitive, language, physical, and social/emotional development.

Length of Summer Bridge:

It is recommended that summer bridge programs be facilitated for a minimum of 3 weeks, 3-5 days per week, for 1 half of the day (i.e. 8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.). Another recommendation is to schedule the summer bridge as close to the start of the school year as possible, while still allowing a few days break (before actually starting school). It is acknowledged that the actual scheduling of summer bridge programs is highly dependent on the individual site’s capacity.

Summer Bridge Staffing:

It is recommended that a kindergarten teacher serve as the lead summer bridge teacher. If this is not possible, another individual such as a Program Coordinator or Preschool teacher should serve as the lead teacher. It is important that the Coordinator communicate with and provide support to the lead summer bridge teacher. This will ensure that the lead teacher is adhering *First 5 Kern’s Best Practices*. Assistants could be recruited through student work programs, Americorps, current preschool and kindergarten classroom assistants, and SRI staff (family advocates). Appropriate adult/ child ratios (1:12) should be maintained to ensure program quality. Sites who serve children with special needs should consider having additional adults to assist these children.

Screening/Assessment Tools:

The Ready to Start Assessment will document the progress made by children in achieving school readiness skills during summer bridge. Furthermore, Ages and Stages III and DRDP-R will be used for center-based and home-based activities. The screening tools should be developmentally appropriate based on the activity provided e.g. summer bridge program, center-based activities, and others. Staff will participate in trainings that pertain to the assessment tools used to evaluate progress of children and the families served.

Conclusion:

It is believed that the overall quality of Early Childcare and Education services to children will be greatly improved as funded programs adhere to the above position statement. It is also believed that this will assist in providing assurance that funding awards made by First 5 Kern will be well utilized and promote optimal growth and development for young children.

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