

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

**PRESCHOOL
PRE-KINDERGARTEN**

**Catholic Schools Office
Diocese of Phoenix
June, 2011**

EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM STANDARDS

**Preschool
Pre-Kindergarten**

Diocese of Phoenix

June, 2011

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June, 2011

These Early Childhood Curriculum Standards reflect the combined vision, insight, and dedication of the preschool and pre-kindergarten teachers involved in writing the August, 2001 Early Childhood Guidelines and the expertise of the consultants participating in the Quality Preschool Project funded by the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust during the 2005-2006 school year. The results are the Early Childhood Curriculum Standards for Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten, September 2006, updated and reviewed during school year 2010-2011. It is expected these standards will be the basis for curriculum in the preschools of the Diocese of Phoenix.

Integrated within these standards are the best practices as presented in the “Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale” (ECERS). All classroom teachers were evaluated according to this scale and concepts from the ECERS are included in the standards to provide guidance and staff development for all teachers.

The Quality Preschool Project consultants’ review of the early childhood guidelines was affirming. The suggested changes highlight the reorganization of some developmental domains that will further align these guidelines with the Arizona State Learning Standards as promulgated in April, 2005.

On behalf of the Diocese of Phoenix, I thank Dr. Diana Abel, Dr. Janet Johnson, and Mr. Bruce Stam of the Quality Preschool Project for your professionalism, interest, and support in all our preschools. I thank the preschool directors, teachers, aides, and staff for their cooperation, input, and development in this project. In addition, gratitude is expressed to the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust for fully funding the Quality Preschool Project that provided a solid assessment and excellent recommendations designed to improve and sustain quality staff and standards.

Sincerely,

Ms. MaryBeth Mueller
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Executive Director of the Division of Education and Evangelization

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MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

MISSION STATEMENT FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS Diocese of Phoenix

The Diocese of Phoenix engages in the faith formation of the young through Catholic schools by integrating faith throughout an educational process that promotes academic excellence, moral values, and lifelong service.

Philosophy of Catholic Schools Diocese of Phoenix

Because our children are our hope and our joy, the future of the Church and society, the Church joins with parents, the primary educators, in placing the child at the center of the educational process, which promotes academic excellence and moral values, and fosters lifelong service.

Because each child needs the values and traditions of the faith community, the school will impart an understanding of the Catholic faith, doctrine and moral perspectives, afford participation in a worshipping faith community, and foster the responsibility for service.

Because each child is a part of the Church and society beyond the school and home, the school will support and foster participation in the parish, the Diocese, and the larger world community.

Because each child needs example in the school and in the home, teachers and parents must model their faith.

Because each child must be able to make informed decisions and to live according to Christian principles, the school must encourage self-discipline, self-respect and respect for others, and growth in learning to deal with issues in a real world.

Because each child needs a strong and caring environment for learning, the school, like the home, must be supportive not smothering, loving yet disciplined, encouraging yet challenging.

Because each child needs knowledge and skills for today's and tomorrow's world, the school will provide opportunity and high expectations for learning and will develop the potential of each child spiritually, academically, socially, and physically.

Preschool/Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum Committee 2010-2011

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Barbara Nicol – St. Theresa School
Sister Richardé Wolf, SSND – Our Lady of Perpetual Help School, Glendale, Arizona

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GOALS

Early childhood education provides the transition from home to a school atmosphere. The early learning years provide the basis for future learning.

Learning experiences and play activities encourage spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth in a spirit of gospel values.

The child should:

1. Become aware of the fact that he/she is a child of God and will develop and grow in a relationship with Him.
2. Come to understand that all people of all cultures are children of God, and as Catholics, our focus is to serve each other.
3. Develop basic social skills including increased independence.
4. Enjoy being part of a community and accept the need to share and cooperate.
5. Respect the rights of others and at the same time express his/her own rights and needs.
6. Develop confidence and acknowledge his/her self-worth.
7. Grow in their ability to trust in themselves and others.
8. Demonstrate the desire to learn.

REASONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The schools of the Diocese of Phoenix believe quality faith-based early childhood education is of great benefit to young children and their families. Child-centered programs for young and older preschool children provide opportunities for discovery, exploration, observation, and experimentation in the manner in which young children learn best. through the vehicle of play. Play is the work of the young child and is supported through standard based curriculum. Curriculum strives to address the needs of the total child and provides age/developmentally appropriate activities and interactions that foster human growth and development on a continuum.

With focus on the child growing in community, faith and Catholic identity are a part of daily activities that demonstrate best practice in programs for young children. We serve a vital role in our work in partnership with families to support parents as the child's first and most valuable teachers. Together we work to build communities strong in Gospel values, faith, and life-long love of learning.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN OBJECTIVES

1. **Relationships:** The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member.
2. **Curriculum:** The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: *religious*, social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.
3. **Teaching:** The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child's learning and development in the context of the program's curriculum goals.
4. **Assessment of Child Progress:** The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children's learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.
5. **Health:** The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.
6. **Teachers:** the program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests.
7. **Families:** The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child's family to foster children's development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.
8. **Community Relationships:** the program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children's communities to support the achievement of program goals.

9. **Physical Environment:** The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.

10. **Leadership and Management:** The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high quality experiences.

Adapted from National Association for the Education of Young
Children – 2008 www.naeyc.org

A brief summary of the book ***Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs*** by Ellen Galinsky.

The purpose of this summary is for reflection upon including a section in our Diocesan Preschool Curriculum Standards which addresses the importance of developing life skills and emotional intelligence in the education of the whole child.

The author emphasizes three essential points as to the importance of nurturing the development of life skills:

- These skills are important for not only the childhood years but equally important as adults.
- Expensive programs, materials, or equipment are not needed to promote these skills. They can be practiced in everyday ways and through everyday fun activities.
- It's never too late to start promoting life skills, but the earlier they are learned and practiced the better.

Based on the author's research in early childhood development, brain development, and interviews with the corporate world she has compiled a list of seven essential life skills that all people use in varying degrees of effectiveness. These skills help the individual interact in our fast-paced, ever-changing, complex, distracting, stress-filled society.

The seven essential life skills are as follows:

1. Focus and Self/Control - to determine what is important and pay attention to it amid distractions. Focusing involves the executive brain functions of paying attention, remembering the rules, and inhibiting one's initial response.
2. Perspective Taking - to be able to see from somebody else's point of view and use that information in making decisions and resolving conflict. This requires the executive brain functions of inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and reflection.
3. Communicating- to determine what one wants to communicate and how it will be understood by others. This requires reflecting on the goal of what is to be communicated and inhibiting one's point of view so that the view point of others can be understood.
4. Making Connections- to be able to sort and classify information by making connections. Making connections in new and unusual ways is the basis of creativity. This requires the executive brain functions of working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility.

5. Critical Thinking- the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide one's decisions, actions and beliefs. It parallels the reasoning used in the scientific method developing, testing and refining theories about "what causes what" to happen.
6. Taking on Challenges- to have a growth mindset, seeing one's abilities as something that can develop and grow; a willingness to accept new challenges and stretch out of one's "comfort zone".
7. Self-Directed, Engaged Learner-to be motivated from within to learn and continue to learn. It is through on-going learning that one realizes his full potential.

These skills are not new to Catholic educators and tend to show up in many of our elementary school Student Learning Expectations, as well as, Discipline with Purpose*. But what is unique is the emphasis of developing and nurturing these skills in the early years. The bulk of the author's efforts are to not only provide sound scientific reasons as to why these skills are essential but also provide many simple, natural ways to practice the development of these skills throughout the preschool day and through daily parent-child interactions.

The time spent on helping foster life skills in our youngest children is time well spent and will serve the child in all areas of development. The practice of these skills is not specific to any one discipline of study, but can be easily integrated into the daily routines whether at home or school. The text provides multiple suggestions on the "how to" .

Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Is available through *Families and Work Institute* –

http://store.familiesandwork.org/store#cat_2