



First 8 Memphis:

High-Quality Early Care and Education Definition Statements and Indicators

for Memphis and Shelby County

Introduction and Purpose of Definition and Indicators

High-quality early care and education (ECE) systems nurture young children's early learning and development by promoting healthy relationships with caregivers, supporting family needs, and cultivating a strong workforce. Further, high-quality ECE systems employ evidence-based practices, community wisdom, emerging knowledge, and promising approaches to support young children. This system fosters developmentally-appropriate learning environments.

It also employs a robust workforce that has access to ongoing professional development opportunities and engages in reflective consultation and supervision. Finally, a high-quality ECE system implements continuous program quality improvement practices guided by regular data collection and analysis. More than 20 years of research affirm the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality ECE. Young children participating in high-quality early childhood programs are more likely to be Kindergarten ready, read at grade level at third grade, graduate from high school, and be workforce ready.



Memphis and Shelby County have had a long commitment to building a high-quality ECE system. The system includes disciplines and practices that comprise of infant and early childhood mental health, home visiting, childcare, early childhood education, child welfare and social services, early identification and intervention, physical health, and family support. The system works across the promotion-prevention-treatment continuum to promote healthy development, employ prevention services that support young children and their families with high-needs, and provides treatment programs that work with young children and their families in need of ongoing therapeutic support through the use of screening and other development tools. A high-quality ECE system employs a strong wraparound loop of referrals and services.

Memphis and Shelby County outline key components of its ECE system via the following age/grade brackets: prenatal - age three, Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), and Kindergarten (K) to 3rd grade. While the system is delineated by age and/or grade, our system will reflect a seamless set of services with grounding principles of developmentally and culturally appropriate high-quality care rooted in children's social and emotional development and relationship-based practice.

This document aligns all aspects of Memphis and Shelby County's ECE with a common definition of high-quality early care and education, using indicators of success, quality, and performance as defined. This provides a foundation for collaboration, professional development, and high-quality care for young children and their families. Memphis and Shelby County will be coordinated and aligned to ensure children reach their full potential and thrive with the support of their families and community.

Important Definitions

Continuous Quality Improvement Practices are an intentional, ongoing effort to understand processes and regularly use data for program improvement. It is an ongoing effort that is responsive to community needs and improving outcomes.

Evidence-Based Interventions are based on a strong theory or conceptual framework that comprise activities grounded in that theory or framework and that produce empirically verifiable positive outcomes when well implemented.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is the developing capacity of the child from birth to five years old to form close and secure relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn - all in the context of family, community, and culture.

Promotion-Prevention-Treatment Continuum is a continuum of care that promotes wellness, prevents behavioral health disorders and other conditions related to the individual and community context, and provides treatment for those in need of ongoing services that support their needs.

Reflective Consultation and Supervision is a form of ongoing professional development that supports early childhood providers and educators in their work and guides them in providing services focused on children's needs.



High-Quality Learning Environments: Prenatal - Age 3

High-Quality Definition

High-quality prenatal to three experiences set children up for a lifetime of learning and success. The components of high-quality care for our youngest children include developmentally-appropriate relationship-based care, whole family support, service coordination and collaboration, and leadership to support providers to improve systems and services.

Developmentally-appropriate care begins with providers and educators trained in the physical, cognitive, and social and emotional development of infants, young children, and their families. This care should be safe and align with all children's development and learning needs rooted in their relationships with adults. Family-centered practice works to ensure that providers build positive, supportive relationships to partner with families to support children's development.

Services for children prenatal to age three, including doula services, home visiting, early intervention, pediatric primary care, and childcare, as well as child welfare, immigration systems and other services, should incorporate evidence-based strategies and community wisdom to support and connect families to key resources. High-quality services to the whole family include opportunities to highlight family strengths, provide developmental guidance, and connect families to professionals and resources that address all elements of well-being to support the healthy growth of a young child.



High-Quality Indicators

Physical Health as the Foundation of Development

- Partner with families to support children's health and development by building positive, supportive relationships
- Support low infant mortality rates, especially among Black or African American women, and increase healthy births
- Increase breastfeeding rates for the first six months of a child's life
- Connect families with newborns to medical homes
- Support individual child needs through early individualized interventions

Safe & Welcoming Environments

- Ensure engaging, safe, and nurturing environments rooted in social and emotional, cognitive, language, physical and motor development
- Provide availability and access to developmentally appropriate materials and activities in learning and care environments

Continuous Development & Support of ECE Caregivers

- Provide positive working environments and compensation aligned with Kindergarten - 12th grade teaching and learning environments
- Provide professional development and aligned materials to implement developmentally- and culturally appropriate practices effectively identify risk and protective factors in families and communities
- Actively participate in collaborative community partnerships

Two Generational Family Partnership

- Support and serve families through wraparound services connected with prenatal to three community health and well-being professionals that address all needs and desires for wellbeing

High-Quality Learning Environments: Pre-Kindergarten

High-Quality Definition

A high-quality Pre-K program gives young children the foundation to learn, be creative, and develop the social and emotional skills needed to navigate school and life. High-quality Pre-K comprises developmentally-appropriate instructional practices, continuous educator improvement, and wraparound family support.

High-quality Pre-K environments emphasize a student-centered learning experience that promotes a community of belonging through peer interactions, and encourages exploration, independence, and self-expression for all children. Students develop linguistic and social skills that promote strong relationships through positive, collaborative interactions and conversations with peers and staff. Classroom activities encourage engagement with various learning materials that foster physical and cognitive development.

Continuous educator improvement ensures that educators have access to professional development opportunities that foster an understanding of the diverse needs of all learners, social-emotional and literacy-rich curricula and materials, and data-driven instructional strategies. Wraparound family services support families of Pre-K children through access to information on child development, at-home learning supports, and connection to key resources for health and wellness. Meeting children's physical and socio-emotional needs allows children to engage in instructional experiences fully. Memphis and Shelby County's developmentally-appropriate instruction is aligned with the TN Early Learning Development Standards (TN-ELDS) and ensures that four-year-old children acquire the skills necessary to support lifelong learning.

High-Quality Indicators

Safe & Welcoming Environments

- Foster positive, child-centered learning environments through low adult-to-child ratios
- Support flexible environments and schedules that promote developmentally-appropriate exploration, high engagement, independence, and self-expression

Developmentally Appropriate, School Readiness Instruction

- Staff classrooms with qualified, highly effective teachers and teaching assistants, representative of the communities served
- Maximize instructional time implementing curriculum aligned to the TN-ELDS, gross motor engagement, and associative interactions with children and/or adults
- Support children's social and emotional development through an aligned curriculum and use of a common developmental screener
- Teach to meet the individual needs of learners to ensure Kindergarten readiness using informed, differentiated, and scaffolded instruction prepared through the collection and use of individual student performance data

Continuous Development & Support of Educators

- Provide positive working environments and compensation aligned with Kindergarten - 12th grade teaching and learning environments
- Provide professional development and instructional coaching to include social-emotional learning and development, culturally appropriate practices, and early literacy and developmental skills
- Actively participate in collaborative community partnerships

Two Generational Family Partnership

- Serve families through wraparound supports that include:
 - Establishing relationships with trusted family engagement personnel
 - Training and workshops that include culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement opportunities
 - Provisions for health and mental health screenings
 - Provisions for resources and referral services through community organizations



High-Quality Early Learning Environments: Kindergarten-3rd Grade

High-Quality Definition

A high-quality K-3rd grade learning experience sets children up for a lifetime of learning and success. High-quality education includes data-driven instruction by qualified educators, rigorous academics, early interventions, and family and whole-child support.

Rigorous academics include evidence-based curricula and instructional materials, standard-aligned instruction, and early literacy support. In addition to academics, whole child K-3rd grade experiences ensure that children's social and emotional development continues to be cultivated and supported. Whole child experiences also ensure that families' needs are met through strong community schools or other models of wraparound support. Individual students' needs are met, specifically for exceptional and multilingual learners, through an emphasis on differentiated instruction. Strong instruction relies on qualified and supported certified and/or licensed educators.

Ensuring all K-3 teachers are prepared, trained in research-based instructional strategies, and supported in navigating materials and challenges sets all classrooms up for success. Warm hand-offs between grades will help ensure that adults ensure continuous and seamless transition between early grades. Monitoring of performance indicators, including the state standardized assessment and other developmental benchmark assessments, are indicators for success in K-3 education. F8M is aligned with Tennessee's expectations for high-quality K-3 instruction.

High-Quality Indicators

Safe & Welcoming Environments

- Provide engaging and welcoming learning environments fostering student independence, leadership, and responsibility

Developmentally Appropriate Instruction

- Staff classrooms with qualified educators trained in evidence-based instructional strategies, including those to meet the needs of multilingual and exceptional learners
- Teach foundational subject skills that support critical thinking and problem solving
- Evaluate and synthesize individual student, classroom, and grade level data to inform instructional strategies and provide intervention
- Provide curriculum and aligned curriculum materials to ensure equitable teaching and learning practices
- Support children's social and emotional development through an aligned curriculum and the use of a common developmental screener

Continuous Development & Support of Educators

- Provide professional development and instructional coaching that includes:
 - Social emotional learning and development
 - Culturally affirming practices
 - Evidence-based classroom management and instructional strategies
 - Early literacy and subject area skills that includes critical thinking and problem solving
 - Supports for diverse learners
- Actively participate in collaborative community partnerships

Two Generational Family Partnership

- Serve families through wraparound supports that include:
 - Establishing relationships with trusted family engagement personnel
 - Training and workshops that include culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement opportunities
 - Provisions for health and mental health screenings
 - Provisions for resources and referral services through community organizations



Summary

Investments in young children and the services and systems that support them and their families can change a lifetime of outcomes for children and can ensure that Memphis and Shelby County is a place where all children and families thrive. High-quality ECE systems include families that are aware of services in their community, trained professionals who align with evidence-based practice, community knowledge, emerging knowledge and promising approaches to help children succeed by third grade, and a coordinated approach across all players, including providers, systems builders, government, and business. Memphis and Shelby County's early care and education system has worked to align efforts to ensure that children receive high-quality care from the many practitioners and systems that support them.

Acknowledgements

Memphis and Shelby County ECE systems builders have worked to align a high-quality system of care for young children for more than ten years.

People First Partnership and Seeding Success, along with public and private stakeholders, launched this work and cultivated the growth of First 8 Memphis, Memphis and Shelby County's systems building organization. This document reflects the efforts of many years, and includes the active participation of Memphis and Shelby County's ECE convening body, the First 8 Memphis Leadership Council.



First 8 Memphis

First 8 Memphis (F8M) works to ensure every child in Memphis and Shelby County can reach their full potential by building a strong start during the first 8 years of life. We are leaders, conveners, and advocates working to implement, scale, and improve the early care and education system for young children during their most critical developmental ages. This includes support for nurturing early learning and care environments, high-quality Pre-K programs that prepare children for Kindergarten and beyond, and two-generation services, such as home visitation, early childhood mental health, and more. F8M's early care and education systems-building work is conducted in collaboration with the F8M Leadership Council and other stakeholders. Success in the first eight years leads to success for a lifetime. Learn more at first8memphis.org.



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Sources

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