

Developing a Program-Level Curriculum Framework

Quality early care and education programs in Rhode Island are on a continuous improvement path that is informed by Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) licensing regulations; Department of Education Basic Education Program (BEP) regulations; BrightStars Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Standards; and Department of Education Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Program Standards for Approval. The graphics below illustrate the state's quality continuum for center-based programs, family child care programs, and school-based programs. Larger versions of the graphics can be found in *Appendix A*.

This Tip Sheet describes how programs progress on that continuum when developing a *curriculum framework*.

Center-based Programs



Family Child Care Programs



School-based Programs



All early childhood education programs—including public, private, and independent schools; community-based programs; and family child care providers—should develop and use a curriculum framework that outlines the program's priorities, describes what is expected of teachers as they develop classroom-level curriculum, and helps to ensure that all children benefit from a consistent, high-quality early childhood education experience.

Leaders of high-quality early learning programs develop and use an evidence-based, program-level curriculum framework in all classrooms, including those that serve infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and children with special needs. An evidence-based, program-level curriculum framework ensures that

- teaching staff plan and implement classroom curriculum based on current research and best practice;
- classroom curriculum is aligned to the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS);

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- teachers make informed decisions in their design, selection, and adaptation of learning experiences that reflect the unique characteristics of the children they serve;
- teaching staff attend to children’s individual needs as well as the interests of children in groups; and
- child assessment data and information gathered from families informs classroom-level curriculum development.

Moving up the Quality Continuum

Curriculum requirements at BrightStars Levels 3 and 4 are building blocks that support the development of the curriculum framework required to meet BrightStars Level 5 and RIDE¹ CECE program standards.

BrightStars Levels 3 & 4	BrightStars Level 5 and RIDE CECE
<p>Curriculum Outline (or “beginning” curriculum framework)</p> <p>A curriculum outline is a preliminary document that begins to describe expectations for teachers as they develop and implement classroom curriculum aligned to the RIELDS. This document is a core assignment in the following trainings: <i>RIELS III</i> and <i>RIELDS Implementing a Standards-Based Program</i>. A curriculum outline that meets BrightStars standards at Level 3 and 4 includes the four components of curriculum, integrates the RIELDS, and is written for and used by the current program.</p>	<p>Curriculum Framework</p> <p>A curriculum framework is a fully developed narrative that begins by clearly articulating the program’s philosophy on curriculum, including a description of how the program supports all children. The framework also provides explicit guidance for teachers as they develop and implement classroom curriculum aligned to the RIELDS. A curriculum framework that meets BrightStars standards at Level 5 and RIDE CECE standards expands upon the curriculum outline required at BrightStars Levels 3 and 4. A curriculum framework begins with an introduction that describes the program’s philosophy on curriculum, continues with a comprehensive description of the program's integration of the four components of curriculum, and includes additional expectations articulated in CECE Standards 6.1 - 6.7 (see <i>Appendix C</i>).</p>

¹ Rhode Island Department of Education

By comprehensively addressing each component of curriculum—context, content, teaching and facilitating, and process—a program curriculum framework provides overarching guidance for teachers as they individualize high-quality instructional strategies, planned learning environments, multilevel learning opportunities, nurturing relationships, and approaches to children’s learning and development in all RIELDS domains.

Developing a curriculum framework is an iterative, dynamic process. A curriculum framework typically matures over time and is adapted and refined regularly in response to changes in the field and program assessments of the strengths and needs of children being served.

Curriculum framework outlines typically include the following components:

- Introduction – describes the program’s philosophy on curriculum
- Content – details what children should know, understand, and be able to do
- Context – describes the materials, environment, and daily schedule that support children’s learning
- Process – describes and explains how children learn
- Teaching and Facilitating – describes the various roles that teachers play to support learning and the importance of relationships and intentional teaching
- Connection to Child Assessment – details how the program uses child assessment data to inform curriculum planning and implementation
- Connection to Family Engagement – describes how information from families informs curriculum planning and implementation

Program leaders preparing a curriculum framework will fully develop each section of the outline.

Curriculum Framework Introduction

An introduction to a curriculum framework should include the following²:

- A description of the program’s philosophies, beliefs, and theories about central aspects of child development and learning that inform the program’s practices.
- A description of how each child’s individual learning goals and individual learning styles are supported, including those of English language learners and children with developmental disabilities and delays in inclusive settings.

² Components derived from curriculum-related aspects of CECE Standard 5.13.

Developing a Curriculum Framework that Includes Services to Infants and Toddlers

Programs that are licensed to serve infants, toddlers, and preschoolers should develop a single curriculum framework that comprehensively includes all children served. Curriculum frameworks developed by programs that serve infants and toddlers should include guidance and expectations specific to teachers working with very young children. While RIDE CECE Standards were developed for preschool programs, CECE Standards 6.1 – 6.7 may serve as the foundation for a curriculum framework that includes infants and toddlers. The CECE standards found in *Appendix C* include recommended enhancements specific to infants and toddlers. Programs are also advised to reference *Zero to Three’s Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups: Developmentally Appropriate Practice* and RIELDS/RIELS coursework for further guidance.

Resources to Extend Your Learning

- Center for Early Learning Professionals InfoLine: www.center-elp.org
- The Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) professional development courses: *Developing a Standards-Based Curriculum, Implementing a Standards-Based Program*: www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/Workforce.aspx#23021-rields-professional-development
- 2013 RIDE CECE Program Standards for Approval: www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/EarlyChildhoodEducation/Programs.aspx#13021-cece-program-approval
- NAEYC Position Statement on Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/cape
- Zero to Three: www.zerotothree.org
- *Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups: Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Zero to Three*: www.zerotothree.org/early-care-education/child-care

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APPENDIX A

Center-based Program Quality Continuum



Family Child Care Program Quality Continuum



School-based Program Quality Continuum



APPENDIX B

BrightStars – Child Care Center and Preschool Quality Framework, November 2013

Domain 5: Early Learning & Development

Standard 7: Curriculum

The program **uses a curriculum or curriculum framework**, aligned to the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS), for all age groups served, including infants and toddlers. Teaching staff have **emotional connections** with children and respond appropriately to individual early

learning and development needs. Classroom schedules and routines **maximize time spent in early learning and development** activities. The program provides many **opportunities for children to learn and practice skills** in all domains of the RI Early Learning and Development Standards.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	Level Four	Level Five
Licensing Compliance Community-based Programs	Licensing Compliance Community-based Programs	Written Curriculum Curriculum aligned with the RIELDS	Written Curriculum Curriculum aligned with the RIELDS	Written Curriculum Curriculum and curriculum framework aligned with the RIELDS
OR	OR	OR	OR	OR
BEP Compliance Public Schools	BEP Compliance Public Schools	Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards	Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards	Compliance with Head Start Performance Standards
	+	OR	OR	OR
	Learning Environment ¹	NAEYC Accreditation	NAEYC Accreditation	NAEYC Accreditation
		+	+	+
		Learning Environment ¹	Learning Environment ¹	Learning Environment ¹
		+	+	+
		RIELDS Training ²	RIELDS Training ²	RIELDS Training ²
			+	+
			Teaching and Interaction ³	Teaching and Interaction CLASS observation (in one-third of preschool classrooms)

¹ This criteria is measured in Standard 1: Learning Environment

² This criteria is measured in Standards 4 and 5: Teacher Qualifications and Program Leadership

³ At Level Four, this criteria is under development and may be implemented at a later date.

Domain 5: Early Learning & Development

Standard 5: Curriculum

The program **uses a curriculum or curriculum framework**, aligned to the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS), for all age groups served, including infants and toddlers. Educators have **emotional connections** with children and respond appropriately to individual early

learning and development needs. Classroom schedules and routines **maximize time spent in early learning and development** activities. The program provides many **opportunities for children to learn and practice skills** in all domains of the RI Early Learning and Development Standards.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three	Level Four	Level Five
Licensing Compliance	Licensing Compliance + Learning Environment ¹	Written Curriculum Curriculum aligned with the RIELDS + Learning Environment ¹	Written Curriculum Curriculum aligned with the RIELDS + Learning Environment ¹ + RIELDS Training ²	Written Curriculum Curriculum and curriculum framework aligned with the RIELDS + Learning Environment ¹ + RIELDS Training ²

¹This criteria is measured in Standard 1: Learning Environment

²This criteria is measured in Standard 3: Educator Qualifications

APPENDIX C

RIDE Comprehensive Early Childhood Education (CECE) Program Standards for Approval of Preschool and Kindergarten Programs, 2013

Standards 6.1 – 6.7 / Program-Level Curriculum – The Curriculum Framework

Including recommended enhancements for programs serving infants and toddlers

6.1 The program shall have a **written curriculum framework** aligned to the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and/or Common Core State Standards that recognizes the individual needs for all children. This framework is a description of how the program will implement core components of a quality curriculum:

- Context
- Content
- Teaching and Facilitation
- Process

In addition, programs that serve infants and toddlers should address expectations for age-appropriate classroom practices where appropriate. For example, programs should address:

- *the importance of primary caregiving and continuity of care*
- *family partnerships that stress the importance of sensitive, trusting, and respectful, sharing-the-caring relationships with parents*

6.2 The curriculum framework shall describe how the **materials and equipment** are intentionally chosen to support children’s learning, interests, and skills levels while:

- reflecting the lives of the children and families;
- reflecting the diversity found in society, including gender, age, language and abilities;
- encouraging exploration, experimentation, and discovery;
- organized to support independent use;
- rotated to reflect changing curriculum and accommodate new interests and skill levels;
- rich in variety; and
- accommodate children’s developmental delays and disabilities.

6.3 The curriculum framework shall guide teachers in the development of a developmentally appropriate **daily schedule** that is predictable, yet flexible and responsive to the needs of the children.

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In addition, programs serving infants and toddlers should address expectations for responsive care routines rather than predetermined schedules (for example, napping when tired and eating when hungry).

6.4 The curriculum framework shall guide teachers in incorporating content, concepts and activities that foster and integrate the **Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and/or Common Core State Standards/Grade Level Expectations** to support all children’s learning.

6.5 The curriculum framework shall articulate that **intentional teaching practices**, such as learning through play, the mechanisms through which children attain developmentally appropriate goals in all developmental domains.

In addition, programs that serve infants and toddlers should address expectations that teachers use rich language as an additional key practice

6.6 The curriculum framework shall reflect the program’s understanding of **how children learn and develop**, to guide teachers in meeting the individual needs of children.

In addition, programs that serve infants and toddlers should address the role of trusting relationships in fostering learning opportunities.

6.7 The framework shall act as a guide for teachers in **designing and implementing a variety evidence based strategies and multi-level learning opportunities** based on the assessment of the child’s developmental levels, learning styles and interests.

In addition, programs that serve infants and toddlers should address consideration of a child’s temperament.

Standards 6.8 – 6.23 / Classroom-Level Curriculum

Educational leaders creating a curriculum framework should consider how the framework will support teachers as they develop classroom curriculum that meets RIDE CECE Standards 6.8 – 6.23 (adjusted when necessary to meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers).

CONTEXT – Materials, Learning Environments, Routines & Schedules

RIDE CECE Standards 6.8 – 6.11

- 6.8 Teachers shall design a **learning environment** that is well organized, accessible to all children and equipped with clearly defined learning areas which include, at a minimum, areas devoted to: construction, dramatic play, discovery, books, manipulatives and creative expression.
- 6.9 Teachers shall **organize space and select materials** to stimulate exploration, experimentation, discovery and conceptual learning in all developmental areas. These materials shall be:
- chosen intentionally to support children’s learning goals;
 - well-maintained;
 - organized and labeled;
 - easily accessible to children;
 - representative of the interests, needs and cultures of children;
 - age-appropriate;
 - of sufficient quantity for the numbers of children being served.
- 6.10 Teaching staff shall post, maintain, and follow a regular **daily schedule** which allows flexibility to meet interests and individual needs of the children. The schedule prioritizes play and incorporates:
- a combination of teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities;
 - learning opportunities, experiences, and projects that extend over the course of several days;
 - large group, small group and individual activities;
 - indoor and outdoor activities; and
 - an age appropriate balance between active and quiet activities.
- 6.11 The **outdoor environment** shall be used to promote children’s development and active physical play through intentional curriculum planning.

CONTENT – What Children Know, Understand and Are Able To Do

RIDE CECE Standards 6.12 – 6.13

6.12 Teachers shall **intentionally plan and imbed learning opportunities/activities** aligned with the domains of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and/or Common Core State Standards/Grade level Expectations to support all children’s learning throughout the day.

6.13 Teachers shall maintain a **method of documented planning** that demonstrates that curriculum is developed based on the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards and/or Common Core State Standards/Grade level Expectations. Plans should be written at least on a weekly basis with adjustments as needed based on emerging needs, skills and interests of children in the class.

TEACHING & FACILITATING – Teacher’s Role, Relationships & Intentional Teaching

RIDE CECE Standards 6.14 – 6.21

6.14 Teaching staff shall create a **positive learning environment** by using a wide range of teaching strategies. Teaching strategies shall be:

- based on information gained through ongoing observation and documentation of children’s behavior and learning;
- supportive of children’s growth and development in the areas addressed in all domains; and
- supportive of the development of individual relationships through interactions that are respectful of and sensitive and responsive to differing abilities, temperaments, activity levels, culture and cognitive and social developmental levels.

6.15 Teaching staff shall **implement curriculum** in a manner that:

- reflects responsiveness to goals that families have for their children;
- is informed by child assessment and observation data; and
- supports the development and maintenance of children’s home language whenever possible while promoting English language acquisition; while
- ensuring that all children have access to universal curriculum, are active participants in classroom activities, and provided accommodations, as needed, to facilitate such participation.

6.16 Teaching staff shall **promote children’s learning** by responding to their observed and documented need for and interest in practicing emerging skills. Teaching staff shall:

- provide targeted and individualized instruction;

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- utilize multi-level learning opportunities and a variety of instructional strategies to support children’s development;
- use children’s interest in and curiosity about the world to engage them with new content and developmental skills; and
- provide children opportunities to effect what happens in the classroom through participation in decision making about issues concerning classroom behavior, plans, and activities.

6.17 Teaching staff shall **promote positive interactions** with children by:

- managing behavior, teaching and implementing classroom rules and expectations, and helping individual children learn socially appropriate behavior by providing positive guidance that is consistent with the child’s level of development;
- talking frequently with children and listening to children with attention and respect through responding to children’s questions and requests, using multiples strategies to communicate and build relationships with every children, and engage in meaningful and extended conversation with each child;
- creating a positive environment through their own behaviors, including frequent social conversations with children, joint laughter and affection, eye contact, tone of voice and smiles;
- developing individual relationships with children by providing care that is responsive, attentive, consistent, comforting, supportive, and culturally sensitive; and
- providing children with opportunities to effect what happens in the classroom through participation in decision making about issues concerning classroom behavior, plans, and activities.

6.18 When a **child presents with challenging behavior, teaching staff shall:**

- a. meet with parents/guardians to share observations, listen to parental/guardian insights, and discuss intentions of how best support the child’s appropriate behavior.
- b. Observe the child, then identify events, activities, interactions and other factors that predict and may contribute to challenging behavior.
- c. Focus on teaching the child social communication and emotional regulation skills and using environmental modifications, activity modifications, adult or peer support and other intervention strategies to support the child’s appropriate behavior rather than focusing only on eliminating the challenging behavior.
- d. Respond to challenging behavior, including physical aggression, in a manner that:
 - i. Provides for the safety of the child and others in the classroom
 - ii. Is calm and respectful to the child
 - iii. Provides the child with information about acceptable behavior

6.19 For all children, staff **shall not use food or outdoor play as a reward or as a behavior consequence.**

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Exceptions may only be made if specifically stated in a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- 6.20 **For children requiring special education services**, teaching staff shall collaborate with special education professionals and families to support children with disabilities and developmental delays to succeed in inclusive environments and ensure each partner has access to necessary information and supports for appropriate services.
- 6.21 When technology is used in a program, **technology shall be used for the purpose of extending learning** within the classroom to integrate and enrich the curriculum. Staff shall be actively engaged in this process with children.

PROCESS – How Children Learn

CECE Standards 6.22 – 6.23

- 6.22 Teachers shall **implement curriculum through play experiences** that provide multiple opportunities for all children to attain developmentally appropriate goals in each developmental domain.
- 6.23 Teachers shall **design learning opportunities that integrate multiple goals**.

APPENDIX D

BrightStars and RIDE CECE Application Instructions

- Programs seeking support as they prepare for a BrightStars or CECE application may wish to enroll in an appropriate administrator-level RIELDS training (*Implementing a Standards-Based Program* or *RIELDS Next Step*) or contact the Center for Early Learning Professionals to learn about other support opportunities.
- Programs that are ready to submit a 3- or 4-star BrightStars application should submit a curriculum outline as part of the application, using information in this document as a guide. Outlines will be reviewed using a checklist. A curriculum framework may be submitted in place of a curriculum outline.
- Programs completing a 5-star BrightStars application are required to submit a curriculum framework as part of the application, using information in this document as a guide. An electronic copy of the framework should be available upon request. Frameworks will be forwarded by BrightStars to RIDE and will be reviewed using a rubric. Programs will receive feedback and may be given one opportunity to provide requested clarifications.
- Programs applying for RIDE CECE approval should submit an electronic copy of the curriculum framework to RIDE as part of the CECE application process. The framework will be reviewed as part of the larger application review.
- Curriculum frameworks submitted to BrightStars or to RIDE are reviewed using the same criteria. A framework that has been approved as part of one application process is considered approvable for both processes for one year.