

QUALITY INDICATORS FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS SERVING CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT/BLINDNESS

Adapted from “Early Childhood Program Standards,” 2003,
Massachusetts Department of Education

Developed for Consultation and Training with Preschool Programs in China
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1. Interactions Between Staff and Children, and Among Children

- Do teachers have positive and nurturing relationships with the children and do they treat them all fairly?
- Do staff communicate with children in a respectful manner? Do staff try to understand what children are communicating, through both language and behavior, and respond appropriately?
- Do they handle behavior problems effectively and kindly, taking into consideration the purpose of the child’s behavior? Are the children friends with each other?
- Are teachers respectful of each other and do they communicate clearly with each other? For example, do they share information related to children so they’re all working with children in a consistent way?
- Are “mannerisms” handled consistently and in an effective way, with cueing which is as minimal as possible?
- Are children given as much independence as is safe for their mobility?

2. Curriculum

- Does each child have an individual educational plan, and teaching which specifically address his/her objectives at the appropriate level of difficulty?
- Is there a good balance in what teachers teach, to include how children think, how they feel, and how they move?
- Do teachers use real objects and whole experiences which are meaningful to the children? (*big idea 1*)
- Do teachers use sound/efficient effective teaching strategies, teaching small steps and keeping children’s interest?

3. Scheduling and Grouping

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- Does the child: teacher ratio meet the learning needs of each child?
- Are children supervised at all times?

- Is there a good balance in daily schedules, including indoor/outdoor, quiet/active, individual/small group/large group, child-initiated/teacher-initiated activities?
- Are schedules and staff consistent? Do students have clear ways to know their schedules and who will teach them? (*big idea 4*)
- Is there sufficient time for transitions between activities and for self-help skills so children can be relaxed and as independent as possible? (*big idea 2*)

4. Assessment

- Is the child assessed in a natural, comfortable setting by someone who knows him/her well?
- Is there at least one assessment which is done at least annually for each child? Are the steps in the assessment small enough for the child? Do they measure meaningful skills in a developmental sequence?
- Is progress toward IEP objectives measured periodically, for example every 3-6 months?
- Does ongoing assessment occur within lessons?
- Is assessment information used to plan and modify children's programs?

5. Physical Environment

- Are indoor and outdoor spaces safe for all children?
- Is the space adapted, as necessary for children with visual impairments or blindness? (visual contrast, lighting, areas without too much background noise, padded upper obstacles, drop-offs familiar to the children or consistent adult supervision, paths without obstacles where children can walk independently, etc.)
- Are there many and varied books and other materials related to literacy?
- Do toys/teaching materials have labels, good visual contrast, appealing/natural textures, good variety, storage that makes sense and where children can access them? Are they at developmentally appropriate levels?
- Do toys encourage creative play? Social play?
- Is there a "finish" box or some other way for children to put materials away to indicate the end of activities?

6. Family Involvement

- Does the school invite family involvement? (*big idea 3*)
- Do staff support families as the primary educators of their children?
- Are there ways for parents to learn more about visual impairments/blindness?
- Do parents and staff keep each other well informed about the child?
- Do families of different children have ways to communicate with each other?

7. Staff Qualifications and Staff Development

- Are there frequent opportunities for staff to develop their skills?
- Does training reflect what staff want/need to know?
- Do staff receive supervision so they can improve their skills?
- Are there opportunities for staff to support each other and share information?

8. Teachers and Administration Working Together

- Do teachers and administrators communicate clearly with each other?
- Is there a clear way to implement change within the school?

9. Transition into and at the end of preschool

- Are families given support as their children transition into preschool?
- Is there a systematic plan to choose the next program?
- Do preschool goals lead clearly to next program entry skills?
- Is there a systematic plan to acquaint new staff with specific children?
- Is there a systematic way for children to become comfortable in the new program?
- Are families involved with transitions when the child finishes the preschool program?

10. Program Evaluation

- Does the school periodically do a self-evaluation and set program goals on this basis?
- Does the administration support achievement of program goals?

“Four Big Ideas” (These concepts were emphasized at the consultation and training sessions as the most important principles to keep in mind when developing preschool programs for children with visual impairment/ blindness):

1. It is very important for children to have opportunities to touch and use real objects and to be involved in meaningful experiences/ whole activities.
2. Children should be encouraged to be as independent as possible. In order to be independent, they need to be given plenty of time to participate as fully as possible.
3. Children are part of a family and a community. It is very important to include each child’s family as much as possible, and to communicate with them regularly.
4. Children need consistency of people and events in their daily preschool programs. They need to know what to expect in their daily schedules and they need to be able to depend upon consistent staff being available to them.