



Four Corners
Regional Education Cooperative #1

Aztec Municipal Schools – Bloomfield Public Schools—Central Consolidated Schools—Farmington Municipal Schools—Gallup-McKinley County Schools—Zuni Public Schools—San Juan College

**Bloomfield Public Schools &
Four Corners Regional Education Cooperative #1**

**Plan for Enhancing
Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

**as part of the broader
*Comprehensive Navajo Dual Language Project***



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Four Corners Regional Education Cooperative #1 & Bloomfield Public Schools

Plan for Enhancing Pre-Kindergarten Programs

Summary:

The Four Corners Regional Education Cooperative #1, with Bloomfield Schools as the fiscal agent, received WKKF funding to plan for the expansion and enhancement of Pre-Kindergarten programs. This document contains the results of extended examination of current programs within the Bloomfield Schools geographic area.

This report contains 4 major sections, as follows

1. Overview of current Pre-K options
2. Indicators and review process for assessing program characteristics
3. Results and identified areas for enhancement
4. Contextualized findings and actions to address program indicators

Four Corners REC #1 collaborated with multiple stakeholders and partners to determine a process and indicators for assessing pre-k programs, not only in areas of instruction and environment but also in key supports for children's social-emotional development and cultural relevancy. Development partners included the public school district, NM PED Pre-K program leadership, NM ECECD leadership, and tribal liaisons. The Navajo Nation early childhood leadership provided additional input into the issues of cultural relevancy.

REC #1 collaborated with broader statewide Pre-K initiatives and the regional early childhood coalition and contacted local commercial, tribal, health, and social centers to identify providers. Two providers were identified outside the Bloomfield city limits: one housed at a Presbyterian Medical Service center, and a FACE program at a tribally controlled boarding school. As neither agreed to participate in this study, the plan focuses on the three identified "in-town" providers: one home-based provider, one local incorporated provider, and one early childhood center under the direction of the local school district.

The overall finding is that children are well-served in each program under analysis, though they share common areas that would benefit from support, particularly in instructional design that integrates social-emotional development, cultural relevancy and resources, and parental input and involvement.

However, it must be noted that each program is actively maximizing its use of current fiscal resources in areas that directly tie to the children's development within the state's priority areas of reading and mathematics, as well as ensuring that children have age- and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Additionally, the majority of children "graduating" from these programs demonstrate readiness for kindergarten.

Pre-Kindergarten Program Enhancements

Plan for Enhancing Pre-Kindergarten Programs

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Section I: Overview of current Pre-K options

Site Identification Process

The Bloomfield School District geographic area is an “early childhood desert,” with few options for early childhood care both inside and outside of city limits.

The Four Corners Regional Education Cooperative #1 (REC-1) made extensive efforts to identify any childcare, early childhood, and Pre-K programs, both formally organized programs and home-based or community child services. Strategies for identifying programs included the following:

- Phone calls and emails to Navajo chapter houses
- Phone calls and emails to rural community organizations
- Flyers posted in rural community spaces and convenience stores
- Phone calls to rural health clinics
- Coordination with regional PED-sponsored early childhood coordinators
- Phone calls and emails with ECECD and PED Pre K
- Phone calls to remote school sites
- Internet searches

These efforts identified two child care and/or pre-K programs: the FACE program at Dzilh-Na-O-Dith-Hle Community Grant School and a child care program at the Presbyterial Medical Services facility in Counselor. Both programs declined to participate, and neither program was able to provide information about other potential services that might participate.

The resulting conclusion is that either child care and/or pre-K programs do not exist (other than the two identified programs) outside of the Bloomfield city limits or that programs wish to remain unknown.

Coordination with the regional early childhood coordinator, phone directory searches, plus word-of-mouth, led to identification of two private programs within city limits, both of which participated in the site review and planning process. With approval by the Kellogg Foundation program coordinator, the school district’s early childhood program was also included, as the major provider in the Bloomfield schools geographic area.

Provider Descriptions

Private provider 1: A small, un-registered home-based provider with more than 25 years of operation. The program serves up to 10 children 5 days per week for morning hours. Children engage in a broad range of instructional activities focused on mathematics and literacy, with opportunities for socialization and development of social emotional skills. Staffing includes the program owner and a family member. Although neither are formally trained in pre-K children’s development and instruction, they provide well-rounded experiences for children, and most children would be considered kindergarten-ready by the time they age out of the program.

Private provider 2: A medium-sized, registered, and incorporated provider serving 3 and 4-year old children. The program is part of a multi-facility organization that overall serves children from birth to age 5. The program serves up to 25 children daily, and has a staff of 4 to 5 early childhood workers. Staff members have or are acquiring licenses and formal training in pre-K. Children engage in a well-organized, developmentally appropriate schedule of academic, social, and exploratory play activities.

Public school provider: The Bloomfield Early Childhood Center is a public school program under the jurisdiction of the school district. The staff comprises 8 teachers, each with a classroom of approximately 15 to 20 children. Staff are licensed with required credentials under the State's pre-k program. The curriculum follows state guidelines and emphasizes both mathematics and literacy programming, with appropriate free-select exploratory play and recess times under the guidance of the teachers.

All programs: In each case, children are nurtured, provided with a physically and emotionally safe instructional environment, and engaged in developmentally appropriate learning activities by attentive, affirming staff. Aggregate needs for support, expansion, and/or enhancement will be discussed later in section 3.

It is worth noting that the program review period occurred during the Covid pandemic, and that in alignment with state regulations at the time of assessment, some program features were not readily observable. Rather, those specific issues were discussed with program administrators for understanding. They will be identified further in section 2.

Section II: Indicators and review process for assessing program characteristics

Development of Early Childhood Program Quality Indicators

Each participating program was assessed using a comprehensive set of early childhood quality indicators, provided below. The indicators were developed in collaboration with the NM ECECD, NM Pre-K leadership at the NM Public Education Department, tribal liaisons associated with NM Pre-K, Navajo Nation Head Start, and regional early childhood coordinators funded through the NM PED. Initial indicators were developed through a review of resources provided from each collaborator, plus additional research on effective early childhood programming from a variety of states and early childhood leadership organizations.

Administrative factors espoused by the ECECD or NM PED that were not applicable to private providers were removed, as were items that did not relate into programming and operations. Overall, the focus of the program indicators was students' learning experiences, health and safety, development, and instruction. Additional indicators related to social / emotional development, and indicators that addressed cultural relevancy were also added.

Once indicators were identified, they were grouped into nine categories. Specific indicators, with scoring guides follow below. In brief, the categories were as follows.

1. Program Administration: e.g., licensing, regulatory adherence, administrative processes, connections to broader Pre-K community
2. Child Health and Safety: e.g., health and safety practices for staff and children, health supplies, screenings and referrals
3. Teacher and Child Interactions: e.g., teacher-child talk, encouragement, direct engagement
4. Environment (General): e.g., features of the instructional environment, learning supplies, partitioning by activity
5. Environment (Outdoors): e.g., features of the outside play area, safety and monitoring, usage
6. Child to Child Interaction: e.g., collaboration, social awareness and interaction
7. Teacher and Parent Interactions: e.g., communication with parents, parent participation in the learning environment
8. Learning Program: e.g., curriculum, use of assessments, academic learning experiences
9. Community Cultural Relevancy: e.g., language usage, environmental artifacts and print reflecting community cultures, alignment with home cultures

Overall, each program was assessed on 77 individual indicators. With this high degree of specificity, the assessment process ensured that program characteristics were not overlooked or combined with other indicators, which might affect the ability to assess their individual quality.

Scoring Strategy

Each indicator was scored according to one of three conditions:

- Condition 1 (0 points): finding of no, none, never, not present, no evidence
- Condition 2 (1 point): finding of some, sometimes, somewhat, occasionally
- Condition 3 (2 points): finding of yes, always, every

Note that in alignment with the purpose of the project, which is to improve overall learning opportunities of culturally diverse students, based on the degree to which services are situated within a culturally relevant structure, points for cultural relevancy were doubled. Conditions for each indicator were, therefore, scored as 0, 2, or 4 points, respectively. By doubling the possible points for each indicator in this category, this category would have a greater effect on the overall program results than other individual categories.

Assessment Process

The program assessment process comprised three distinct stages.

Stage one: Program assessment began with discussions with program administrators. Initial discussion centered on the fact that the review process would be an assessment of current conditions and not an evaluation of the program and staff members. Rather, the process was described as a means to identify potential areas where the program may benefit from additional support and resources.

Each indicator was clarified and discussed to ensure agreement with the definition of the indicators and understanding of the items under review. Those items specific to program administration, policy decisions, and general programming were discussed at length and then collaboratively scored. Predominantly, these were indicators that would not be observable, such as maintenance of student records, curriculum selection, and staff training and licensing.

Stage two: Following discussion with administrators, the program implementation, including the learning environments, teacher behaviors, and student activities were observed and scored. The two private providers were observed for a minimum of 2 hours, and each classroom at the public school program was observed for a minimum of one hour. The observer used a Early Childhood Program Quality Indicators Review Form to guide and record the observation findings.

Stage three: Observation results were shared and discussed with program administrators. Preliminary scores were explained on the basis of the observation. Administrators collaborated on “fine-tuning” the scores and contributed additional information that affected ratings by indicator. Through this collaboration, administrators and the observer reached agreement on the most appropriate scores for each indicator. In no case was there a discrepancy between the administrators’ and observer’s final rating following this collaboration.

Program Indicators

Program Administration

The program is licensed and/or authorized.

The program follows clear check-in / check-out procedures for children.

Staff are licensed and/or certified.

The teacher to child ratio for 3-year-old children is no greater than 1: 9.

The teacher to child ratio for 4-year-old children is no greater than 1:10.

Staff have active background checks.

Staff are trained to identify symptoms of child abuse, neglect, or malnutrition.

The program has emergency processes for lost, injured, or sick children, with staff trained on processes.

The program office keeps emergency contact information for all children.

Program directors and teachers have annual meeting with other early care and education programs.

Child Health and Safety

The program maintains current immunization records for all children.

The program enforces regular hand washing for staff and children.

The program maintains information about food allergies or restrictions for all children.

Children are supervised at all times and all places.

First aid kits are fully stocked and available, and staff are trained to use them.

Staff have current certifications in CPR and first aid.

Toys are sanitized, clean, and safe for the age group.

Children referred to health professionals for screening before or early in services.

Teacher and Child Interactions

Teachers interact with children with eye contact, smiles, and listening without interrupting.

Staff read to children at the children's eye level.

Teacher interact with children throughout activity times.

Children are allowed to talk more than teachers.

Teacher talk is affirmative, informational, or conversational, not for managing behavior.

Teachers ask open-ended questions.

Teachers help children develop self discipline through modeling behaviors and thought processes, and by offering praise.

Teachers demonstrate and reinforce unconditional acceptance for each child.

Teachers help children solve their own problems.

Environment (General)

Children have access to lots of books.

Children have access to blocks and puzzles.

Children have access to art materials and musical instruments.

Children have access to materials with varied textures.

Children have access to science materials.

The environment is clean and sanitary.

The environment contains separate areas for rest, quiet play, active play, and pretend play.

Furniture for children's use is safe and appropriately sized.

The environment is smoke, alcohol, and drug free.

Environment (Outdoors)

Children have access to an outdoor play area and use it daily (weather permitting).

Items from inside the facilities can be brought outside for play.

Teachers are engaged with kids playing.

The environment is free from physical dangers.

Outdoor equipment is safe for the age group.

Children are encouraged to explore and study the natural environment.

Child to Child Interactions

Kids are encouraged to play together.

Children are encouraged to work together and resolve differences.

Kids can move freely from one activity to the next.

Children participate in thoughtfully designed collaborative activities.

Teacher and Parent Interactions

Teachers discuss each child daily with parents / caregivers.

Parents are encouraged to visit at any time.

Staff reports on children's development regularly.

Parents can provide input into the program.

The program distributes a parents' handbook with information about helping children develop, participating in the program, and the enrollment process.

Staff conduct 3 or more conferences with child's family members annually.

The program offers 4 or more family engagement activities / events annually.

Learning Program

The program has an evidence-based curriculum, and staff use it with fidelity.

Learning activities are interactive, participatory, and engaging, with opportunities for student activity, production, and collaboration.

Staff are trained to administer development assessments.

The curriculum design cross-walks development assessments and types of learning experiences.

The curriculum includes a transition plan for next program level or kinder.

Activities and staff-child interactions promote social and emotional development.

Students participate in structured early literacy instruction throughout the day, including phonological awareness; oral language development; vocabulary development; alphabetic

Staff conduct individual or small-group reading activities weekly.

Staff conduct large-group reading activities daily.

Children engage in developmentally appropriate writing activities daily.

The curriculum includes age-appropriate developmental activities in math and science.

Children use toys and resources for literacy, math, and science development.

Staff conduct intentional activities to build numeracy development, such as counting comparing, and ordering.

Staff receive professional development in age-appropriate development strategies and social-emotional development.

Community Cultural Relevancy

Parents provide input into instruction and environment regarding cultural relevancy.

Staff have training in second language acquisition.

Staff conduct a home language survey.

Staff encourage students to speak home language, and can respond in the same.

The environment reflects the cultures of the community, including pictures, artifacts,

toys, books, decorations, and music.

Children hear music from musician that represent the community culture, as appropriate to the time and place.

The program supports both English language and home language development through speech, books, and environmental print.

Children sing songs and listen to stories in English and community languages, as appropriate to the time, place, and children's development.

Staff provide developmental activities that reflect common practices in the students' community.

Children with different primary languages are encouraged to interact.

Section III: Results and Identified Areas for Enhancement

Site Assessment Results

Following are the average ratings per indicator and per category.

Also included is the “urgency level” per indicator, as follows:

- Low: 1 program received less than full points
- Semi-urgent: 2 programs received less than full points
- Urgent: 3 programs received less than full points.

For indicators with no urgency rating, all programs received full points.

	AVERAGE	URGENCY
Program Administration: average = 1.5 / 2		
The program is licensed and/or authorized.	1.3 / 2	LOW
The program follows clear check-in / check-out procedures for children.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Staff are licensed and/or certified.	1 / 2	SEMI
The teacher to child ratio for 3-year-old children is no greater than 1 to 9.	2 / 2	
The teacher to child ratio for 4-year-old children is no greater than 1 to 10.	2 / 2	
Staff have active background checks.	1.3 / 2	LOW
Staff are trained to identify symptoms of child abuse, neglect, or malnutrition.	1.3 / 2	LOW
The program has emergency processes for lost, injured, or sick children, with staff trained on processes.	1.7 / 2	LOW
The program office keeps emergency contact information on file for all children.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Program directors and teachers have annual meeting with other early care and education programs.	1 / 2	SEMI
Health and Safety: average = 1.6 / 2		
The program maintains current immunization records or proof of immunization for all children.	2 / 2	
The program enforces regular hand washing for staff and children.	2 / 2	
The program maintains information about food allergies or restrictions for all children.	2 / 2	
Children are supervised at all times and all places.	1.9 / 2	LOW
First aid kits are fully stocked and available, and staff	1.3 / 2	SEMI

	AVERAGE	URGENCY
are trained to use them.		
Staff have current certifications in CPR and first aid.	0.7 / 2	SEMI
Toys are sanitized, clean, and safe for the age group.	1.9 / 2	LOW
Children are referred to health professionals for screening before or early in services.	1 / 2	SEMI
Teacher-Child Interaction: average = 1.6 / 2		
Teachers interact with children with eye contact, smiles, and listening without interrupting.	1.9 / 2	LOW
Staff read to children at the children's eye level.	1.5 / 2	SEMI
Teacher interact with children throughout activity times.	1.9 / 2	LOW
Children are encouraged to talk more than teachers.	2 / 2	
Teacher talk is affirmative, informational, or conversational, not for managing behavior.	1.1 / 2	URGENT
Teachers ask open ended questions.	1.1 / 2	URGENT
Teachers help children develop self discipline through modeling behaviors and thought processes, and by offering praise.	1.3 / 2	URGENT
Teachers demonstrate and reinforce unconditional acceptance for each child.	2 / 2	
Teachers help children solve their own problems.	1.5 / 2	SEMI
Environment (General): average = 1.6 / 2		
Children have access to lots of books.	1.3 / 2	SEMI
Children have access to blocks and puzzles.	2 / 2	
Children have access to art materials and musical instruments.	1.3 / 2	SEMI
Children have access to materials with varied textures.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Children have access to science materials, including natural materials.	0.8 / 2	SEMI
The environment is clean and sanitary.	2 / 2	
The environment contains separate areas for rest, quiet play, active play, and pretend play.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Furniture for children's use is safe and appropriately sized.	1.9 / 2	LOW
The environment is smoke, alcohol, and drug free.	2 / 2	
Environment (Outdoor): average = 1.6 / 2		
Children have access to an outdoor play area and use it	2 / 2	

	AVERAGE	URGENCY
daily (weather permitting).		
Items from inside the facilities can be brought outside for play.	1 / 2	URGENT
Teachers are engaged with children while playing.	1.7 / 2	LOW
The environment is free from physical dangers.	1.5 / 2	SEMI
Outdoor equipment is safe for the age group.	2 / 2	
Children are encouraged to explore and study the natural environment.	1.2 / 2	SEMI
Child-Child Interaction: average = 1.4 / 2		
Children are encouraged to play together.	1.9 / 2	LOW
Children are encouraged to work together and resolve differences.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Children can move freely from one activity to the next.	1.4 / 2	SEMI
Children participate in thoughtfully designed collaborative activities.	0.7 / 2	URGENT
Teacher-Parent Interaction: average = 1.3 / 2		
Teachers discuss each child daily with parents / caregivers.	0.7 / 2	URGENT
Parents or caregivers are encouraged to visit at any time.	0.7 / 2	URGENT
Staff reports on children's development regularly.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Parents or caregivers can provide input into the program.	1.3 / 2	LOW
The program has a parents' handbook, provided to all parents/guardians, with information about helping children develop, enrolling in the program, and participating in the program.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Staff conduct 3 or more conferences with child's family members or caregivers annually.	1.7 / 2	LOW
The program offers 4 or more family engagement activities / events annually.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Learning Program: average = 1.3 / 2		
The program has an evidence-based learning curriculum, and staff can use it with fidelity.	1 / 2	SEMI
Learning activities are interactive, participatory, and engaging, with opportunities for student activity, production, and collaboration.	1 / 2	URGENT
Staff are trained to administer development	1.3 / 2	LOW

	AVERAGE	URGENCY
assessments.		
The curriculum design cross-walks with development assessments and types of learning experiences.	1.3 / 2	LOW
The curriculum includes a transition plan for next program level or kindergarten.	1.3 / 2	LOW
Activities and staff-child interactions promote social and emotional development.	1 / 2	URGENT
Students participate in structured early literacy instruction throughout the day, including phonological awareness; oral language development; vocabulary development; alphabetic knowledge; comprehension strategies during read-along activities.	1.5 / 2	SEMI
Staff conduct individual or small-group reading activities weekly.	2 / 2	
Staff conduct large-group reading activities daily.	1.7 / 2	LOW
Children engage in developmentally appropriate writing activities daily.	1.6 / 2	SEMI
The curriculum includes age-appropriate developmental activities in mathematics and science.	0.7 / 2	URGENT
Children use toys and other resources that foster literacy, mathematics, and science development.	1.4 / 2	SEMI
Staff conduct intentional activities to build numeracy development, such as counting comparing, and ordering.	1.3 / 2	SEMI
Staff receive professional development in age-appropriate development strategies and social-emotional development.	1.3 / 2	LOW
Cultural Relevancy: average = 1.6 / 4 (or 0.8 / 2)		
Parents or other caretakers provide input into instruction and environment regarding cultural relevancy.	0.7 / 4	URGENT
Staff members have training in second language acquisition.	2 / 4	SEMI
Staff members conduct a home language survey.	2 / 4	SEMI
Staff members encourage students to speak in their heritage language, and can respond in the same language.	0.9 / 4	URGENT
The environment reflects the cultures of the community, including pictures, artifacts, toys, books, decorations, and music.	1.6 / 4	SEMI

	AVERAGE	URGENCY
Children hear music from musicians that represent the community culture, as appropriate to the time and place.	1.7 / 4	SEMI
The program supports both English language and heritage language development, through speech, books, and environmental print.	1.7 / 4	SEMI
Children sing songs and listen to stories in English and community languages, as appropriate to the time, place, and children's development.	2 / 4	SEMI
Staff members provide developmentally appropriate activities that reflect common practices in the children's community.	1.8 / 4	URGENT
Children with different primary languages are encouraged to interact.	2.1 / 4	URGENT

Overall ranking per category, from lowest average finding to highest average finding, is as follows.

- Cultural Relevancy: 0.8 / 2 (actual: 1.6 / 4)
- Learning Program; Teacher - Parent Interaction: 1.3 / 2
- Child-Child Interaction: 1.4 / 2
- Program Administration: 1.5 / 2
- Health and Safety; Teacher-Child Interaction; Environment (General & Outdoor): 1.6 / 2

Following is a deeper discussion of each indicator category and recommendations for improving indicator ratings, with a focus on those indicators rated as semi-urgent and urgent.

Section IV: Contextualized and Actionable Findings per Category

Program Administration

Low urgency ratings are primarily due to the one unlicensed, home-based provider, and those conditions are not likely to change as the provider is not interested in licensure and the parents of the children served are not concerned about those issues.

Within this category, the only finding of interest is the low level of connection among programs. This condition is already being addressed somewhat with the development of the San Juan County early childhood program directors newly created association and monthly meetings, plus the recently formed San Juan County Early Childhood Coalition, the formation and operation of which was supported by REC-1.

Health and Safety

Overall, children's safety was prioritized, and staff members were attentive to children's health and safety needs. The findings of importance within this category regard the capacity to respond to potential health emergencies. The desired state was for appropriate first aid supplies to be accessible where the injury or illness occurs, e.g., the classroom, and for any staff member present to be able to administer first aid appropriately. Sufficiency of immediately accessible supplies was found to be inconsistent, and staff members training in first aid was similarly inconsistent.

This is an area for potential support: not only for ensuring fully stocked first aid kits in all places where children may be present but also for all staff members to have training in their use. Of note, however, other than in the home-based program, such supplies exist and some trained personnel serve within the program facilities, so appropriate first aid may be available even though the desired state is not fully realized.

One essential principle relative to this category is that first aid for small children, as well as for children without the verbal skills to accurately describe an injury or illness symptoms, requires different techniques than for older persons. For example, CPR techniques for 3-year-old children are quite different than for an adolescent through adult person. Each of the three programs would benefit from targeted, specialized training in first aid for the age group, plus assistance acquiring sufficient quantities of all the potentially needed first aid supplies to address a wide range of injuries and illness symptoms at any potential site of need.

Teacher–Child Interactions

Before any actionable findings or areas for support are mentioned, it is important to note that every teacher and staff member, without exception, demonstrated unconditional support, care, and affirmation for each child in his or her care.

The three actionable findings regard the manner and content of speech between teachers and children.

First, as observed, most teacher statements were instructional or managerial, e.g., “now do this” and “go there.” As such they typically did not lead to back-and-forth communication exchanges

in which children could express their ideas, provide input, offer responses, or practice conversational skills.

Second, and similarly, teachers did not consistently employ open-ended question, which directly ties to the first finding just mentioned. Open-ended questioning would provide the context for conversational exchanges, as well as provide an opportunity for the modeling thought processes and exploration of topics, discussed next.

Third, teachers were not observed modeling thought processes, conversational exchanges, and pro-social interaction skills, though all teachers were observed at various times offering both general and individual praise for appropriate student behavior.

The key to addressing these three findings is greater application of open-ended questions, which can be used for instructional purposes, lead to conversational exchanges, and provide opportunities for modeling thought process and appropriate pro-social interactions among students. Open-ended questioning for these purposes is a discrete skill set, and teachers may need coaching and other professional development to support their use of this strategy.

Environment (General)

Learning environments were generally orderly, safe, and engaging. Students had access to a wide variety of pretend play resources and to developmentally appropriate learning and exploratory supplies. Only three types of resources seemed to be in low supply or generally missing from the learning environments: wide selection of books, musical instruments, and science exploration and learning resources.

While all programs and classrooms had a library of books, the quantities and variety were low, such that students may have difficulty either finding books with content matching their interests or finding new materials of interest. One learning environment did maintain well-stocked library collections that could be rotated according to various holidays and seasons, and each “library” featured a large collection of books to address diverse interest. Indeed, this multi-library approach may be a good model for all programs, should sufficient funding and organizational structure be available to support establishing multiple libraries per learning environment.

Musical instruments, or resources that could be used as musical instruments, were not observed in most learning environments. Given the connection between musical exploration (whether directed or free play) and sensory development, numeracy and language development, and motor skill development, infusing the learning environments and providing opportunities for their use would be a key enhancement to the early learning environments. Teachers may need some professional development in providing directed experiences with musical instruments, but the immediate need, in consideration of children’s natural exploration and interest, is for the resources to be accessible and for their use to be encouraged.

Similarly, science learning resources, as well as students’ artifacts indicating science instruction and exploration, were not observed in most learning environments. As an explanatory note, the State has heavily emphasized literacy and numeracy development for this student age group, and available funding resources for instructional materials are prioritized for those areas. Regardless, this age group can benefit broadly from age-appropriate science instruction and from resources to explore science (including nature) concepts.

Environment (Outdoor)

Although several indicators are rated as “semi” or “urgent” needs, only one indicator would benefit from enhancement: exploration of the natural world. Such issues as whether or not indoor resources can be brought outside, while useful, do not significantly or meaningfully contribute to overall program quality.

Rather, given that students are outside, there will be opportunities to explore a variety of science concepts (particularly those that relate to the natural world: geography, biology, change and growth, etc.), as well as mathematical concepts, such as greater / less than, bigger / larger, and quantity. Teachers were not observed taking advantage of these opportunities.

Understandably, outdoor time was commonly employed as a chance for play, physical activity, and the like. However, in an effort to expand and enhance students’ academic learning and social development opportunities, focused and intentional use of outdoor time, following the concept of purposeful play, would be valuable. Teachers will need professional development to understand the concept of using the natural environment for program purposes, as well as modeling, specific strategies, and various activities they can use with their students.

Child–Child Interactions

Children were observed playing around and with each other during free play / free choice times. In contrast, during instructional time, children either worked independently or under the direction of a staff member. No children were observed engaging in collaborative activities, formal or informal, in which the nature of the activity required children to work together.

Although children did play together during self-selected activity times, the various activities were not designed to foster collaboration or shared activities. Similarly, teachers did not assist students in shared decision-making or resolving differences in interests or opinions (or did not have the opportunity to do so). Basically, students played together because they are children, but it was not purposeful or by design.

The independent nature of the observed activities suggest missed opportunities for students to engage in child-to-child talk and to develop social skills.

This topic is an area for reflection and further consideration. It may also suggest a critical area for professional development.

Teacher–Parent Interactions

The primary finding in this indicator category pertains to the regularity and nature of parent and teacher interactions: daily progress updates and parental input into programming. At the time of observation, programs were operating under Covid restrictions, which greatly limited the opportunities for parents to visit programs and created difficulties for providing child progress and activity updates.

Now that site access is more flexible, sites may wish to re-assess whether they facilitate and welcome parent visits.

The standard to update parents daily represents a very high bar, which none of the programs meet or don’t have processes to achieve. While at each site there was general agreement that daily updates would be valuable, creating and sharing updates may represent a significant burden

on staff members. Regardless, staff members noted that they would be willing to further explore this concept, whether through live interactions, printed notices, or via technologies tools, such as phone apps. Additionally, program leadership will consider how they might use the student drop-off and pick-up periods to provide updates.

Learning Program

Evidence of a wide variety of age-appropriate literacy and numeracy developmental activities was apparent in all classrooms and in observed lessons, with resources available for both areas. For the development of literacy skills, classrooms may need a wider variety of books to ensure students may find new books on topics of interest, which may change frequently. Large format books may also be useful for small and whole group reading experiences.

As noted previously, science instruction, activities, and resources were not observed in most classrooms.

Also, as observed, learning activities are engaging for the children, with multiple and varied opportunities for practicing and demonstrating knowledge and skills. By design, activities are primarily individual or teacher-focused, although children may interact naturally in the various student production and play components of lessons.

Lesson and activity design did not seem to include specific or purposeful opportunities for developing social-emotional skills, which administrators indicated is an area where support may be valued. Similarly, evidence and practice of collaborative learning was not observed, meaning the various lessons and activities were not designed to employ principles and strategies for fostering collaboration, which corresponds to the absence of targeted or intentional social-emotional development.

These two areas, collaborative learning and social-emotional development, are of particular concern, given the developmental stages of the children, and reflect the highest need for support within the learning program. Staff have not received formal training in SEL, and may not yet have received formal support for designing collaborative lessons, which, in great part, create the context for SEL development.

Cultural Relevancy

All programs struggle in this area. Learning environments generally do not demonstrate artifacts, printed language, art work, music, or other effects reflecting diverse community cultures; instruction and teacher - student interactions are in English; and observed activities were not designed to foster cross-cultural understanding and interaction.

In brief, recognition, application, and integration of diverse cultures were not generally observed (with one exception for a classroom where printed language was observed and vocabulary in the three dominant cultures was included in a language lesson). Furthermore, no specific actions were observed to foster cross-cultural student interaction.

Several of the indicators within cultural relevancy can be addressed within other indicator categories. For example, (a) through collaborative learning opportunities, students of multiple cultural backgrounds will be encouraged to work together; (b) increased quantity and diversity of books and other literacy resources can address students' access to culturally relevant materials,

and (c) increased parent access to and involvement in classrooms and in program design can foster increased learning experiences representing the diverse student population.

Several indicators within this category will need specific attention. To meet the indicators, teachers and staff members will need training in at least rudimentary language skills, i.e., survival language, in the languages students use at home or with caregivers, and they will need professional development in the integration of languages and in children's language development within a multi-language setting.

Perhaps the most critical action regards parent input into lesson content and design, teacher to student interactions, student to student interactions, and culturally appropriate environmental artifacts. Following a series of parent classroom walk-throughs and lesson observations, parents representing the diverse community populations can provide in-depth input into the manner in which their unique cultures are respected, represented, and engaged. Parents and caregivers may also teach songs and stories, as appropriate, to staff members for integration into lessons. They can also recommend types of artifacts, supplies, and learning resources that may be appropriate for inclusion in the learning environment. Such input will need to be followed with financial support to acquire recommended supplies, etc., as are appropriate.

One last need, as identified by the two larger programs, is for increased staffing and/or substitute staffing. Often, when a staff member is unable to attend, the programs struggle to have sufficient trained and prepared substitutes to ensure uninterrupted learning experiences for the students. A strong strategy to address this need, while at the same time to address the indicators for cultural relevancy, is to train a pool of community members from diverse cultures in early childhood education who can serve as qualified substitutes in case of need and who can bring their cultural knowledge, experiences, and skills to the classroom to enhance students' learning.

The net effect of these efforts will be a richer learning environment for all students, as well a more welcoming and affirming experience for students from all cultures represented by the local population.