

# Curriculum

## Introduction

While New Mexico PreK does not prescribe a specific curriculum, it does require that learning activities incorporate the essential indicators and outcomes in ways that help each child to grow and develop to his or her fullest potential.

Therefore, curriculum planning must include consideration of how outcomes and essential indicators are incorporated in all activities – play, exploration, projects and studies, and large and small group times.

Daily classroom routines can be fertile ground for curriculum development if learning opportunities are recognized and observed. Being constantly observant of indicators in action, teachers begin to see them everywhere.

A more intentional approach involves identifying specific indicators on each day's activity plans and communicating to colleagues and families about how outcomes and indicators are being addressed throughout curriculum.

After viewing this section, you will be able to describe:

- the relationship between assessment and curriculum planning;
- strategies for curriculum planning;
- the dynamics of interactions between teachers and students;
- how to engage children in learning activities; and
- how to create a balanced daily classroom schedule.



## The Teaching Continuum

Teaching and learning is an ongoing process, sometimes directed by the child, sometimes by the teacher, and sometimes in collaboration.

The teacher decides what strategies will be most effective. In good pre-school classrooms, children's level of engagement will be most frequently to the left of the continuum in child-directed activities or in co-construction with the teacher. Young children respond best to active learning experiences.

Understanding the need for experiences across the continuum helps teachers prepare diverse activities to stimulate learning.



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## Observing Play and Routines

Teachers can learn to see indicators in action in many different ways – when they're taking children to the bathroom, having snacks with them, watching them on the playground, creating art projects or working with puzzles, or acting out in dress up clothes.

But teachers also need to plan observation times during specific activities for children, like counting, identifying colors, writing their names.

A blend of teacher led activities, combined with child directed or initiated activities and daily routines form the heart of a pre-school curriculum. Outcomes and indicators for New Mexico PreK are embedded in all of these activities.



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## Engaging Children's Interest

How do you know that children are productively engaged in an activity? Consider ...

- How they look ...
- How they sound...
- What they say...
- How you see them...
- What other characteristics do you see?

A teacher's best strategy is to find ways to sustain children's engagement rather than interrupt it.



*When in doubt, trust the play. It is the children's curriculum. Play that is scattered or potentially disruptive may require refocusing, but well-focused, complex play requires no intervention. . . Adults who interrupt play, whatever their reasons, are usually in so much of a hurry that they fail to pay attention to children's purposes. SLOW DOWN is advice to keep in mind. We short change young children when we hurry them. We learn most about them, and help them learn most, when we pay attention to what is happening for them as they play.*

Jones and Reynolds. *The Play's the Thing*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1992, page 56.

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## Example

Watch this brief video, focusing on Maya, the girl closest to the camera. What do you notice about her level of engagement?

Maya is highly engaged in this activity as evidenced by her continued interest and activity level.

Noting which activities engage children fully will help you plan future activities.

Now, watch this video, focusing on Sam, the red-haired boy in the green shirt. What do you notice about his level of engagement?

Sam is not fully engaged. His actions are undirected and he



makes sounds as he plays with the eraser.

Think about activities that might that might help engage Sam more fully. . . . perhaps working on a project with only one other child, or offering him some manipulatives to play with.

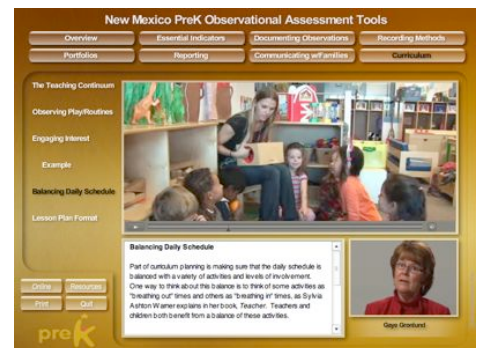
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## Balancing Daily Schedule

Part of curriculum planning is making sure that the daily schedule is balanced with a variety of activities and levels of involvement. One way to think about this balance is to think of some activities as “breathing out” times and others as “breathing in” times, as Sylvia Ashton Warner explains in her book, *Teacher*. Teachers and children both benefit from a balance of these activities.

Breathing out times occur throughout the day. Breathing out involves self-expression, movement, hands-on activities, creation, construction, talking, singing, writing, and drawing. The child is active and expressing him or herself in some way.

Breathing in times occur in small and large group activities and during focused investigations. They include listening, taking in new information, learning new concepts, practicing skills with teacher direction, and focused choices and activities. The child is in a more passive role when breathing in.



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## Lesson Plan Format

New Mexico PreK has formally adopted a lesson plan format that helps teachers incorporate Essential Indicators into activity plans. The three page document is filled out weekly and includes a page for plans for play areas or learning centers, a page for plans for small and large group activities, and a page for reflections about various aspects of the program including meals, transitions, outdoor activities, small reading groups, family involvement and modifications for individual children.

PreK teachers can learn more about using the lesson plan format most effectively from PreK consultants and administrators. An explanatory Lesson Plan Support Document with guidelines for using the lesson plan format is found in the Resources section of this program.

