

Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals:

Working with Preschool-Aged Children in Center and School Programs



A Companion Guide



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Companion Guide to Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals: Working with Preschool-Aged Children in Center and School Programs

This document is a companion guide to the publication *Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals: Working with Preschool-Age Children in Center and School Programs*. That document can be found on the [Early Learning Resources page on the Minnesota Department of Education website](#).

Why is this companion guide needed?

Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework describes what early childhood teachers and providers need to know and do in order to work effectively with young children and their families. The companion guide combines key concepts found in the Framework with suggestions and examples of what it might look like in an early childhood setting. It is intended to help people working with young children have a beginning understanding of what to do. This Companion Guide does not replace the original framework, but supports it.

For whom is the Companion Guide written?

This guide is for all adults who work with children three years old to kindergarten entrance. The information is written for those who work with children in group settings such as school-based programs, child care centers, Head Start, Montessori programs, as well as others. The information emphasizes essential, basic skills and competencies.

How does it compare to the Infant-Toddler Companion Guide?

The Infant-Toddler Companion Guide to the Minnesota Core Competencies was published in 2010. It contains important foundational information for those caring for children birth to three years old. Material from that guide that is appropriate for those working with children of any age is also included in this document.

About the organization of this document

The Companion Guide is divided into the same areas as the *Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals: Working with Preschool-Age Children in Center and School Programs*:

1. Child Development and Learning
2. Developmentally Appropriate Learning Experiences
3. Relationships with Families
4. Assessment, Evaluation and Individualization
5. Historical and Contemporary Development of Early Childhood Education
6. Professionalism

7. Health, Safety and Nutrition

8. Application through Clinical Experiences

The eight areas are further divided into what educators should know and do at a very basic level. Some sections list further examples of knowledge and skills expected of educators as they grow and gain experience. Occasionally, you will find additional items that represent a deeper understanding that apply particularly to leaders in the field. The Companion Guide also includes a few “stories from the field” that help illustrate the knowledge and skills needed to provide quality early learning experiences.

At the end of the document is a section titled “Want to learn more?” It contains books, articles and websites that provide helpful additional resource information.

Six things every educator should know about child development

1. Knowing ourselves is part of educating young children.

All adults have personal, family and cultural experiences and knowledge about young children. Educators build on what they already know and believe as they add experience and education. Education, experience and interactions with families and co-workers may challenge some early values and beliefs. Working with young children and their families can also bring up many emotions. Educators need to reflect on their own feelings, reactions and pay attention to underlying feelings as they decide how to connect old information with new.

2. Relationships are the heart of early learning experiences.

Relationships are critical to working effectively with young children and their families. Educators build relationships with children when they get to know each individual’s likes and dislikes, needs and personality. Educators create a welcoming place where all children feel they belong and learn to welcome and include one another. When adults treat children with respect, they learn to respect themselves and one another. Building relationships with families takes time and planning. It is important to build a true partnership with families; one in which families and educators bring equal value to the relationship and respect one another’s beliefs and practices.

3. All children need a rich, engaging environment that is physically and emotionally secure.

Nurturing and responsive care and education helps children develop secure and trusting relationships which support exploration and development. Interesting environments with clear boundaries help children explore and learn. Engaging environments nurture children of all ability levels as well as those with special needs. Consistent, nurturing routines help children build trust and independence, encourage secure attachments and support development and learning.

4. Young children develop in the context of their families, cultures and communities.

Young children learn by observing the important people in their lives. Their families’ home cultures shape children’s understanding of which emotions to express and how and when to express them, the rate at which they develop motor skills, the way they learn and process new

information and the ways in which they use verbal language, facial expressions, gestures and silence to communicate. Culturally responsive educators honor children's cultural identities throughout daily practice, interactions and routines. Educators must make this effort with families from all cultural backgrounds (including their own) because each family expresses their culture in unique ways. Children's relationships with others impact their development.

5. Early childhood represents a period of rapid growth and development that is critical to the foundation of a healthy human being.

Young children are both competent and vulnerable. The care children receive during this critical period will have a powerful impact on how they view the world, relate to others and succeed as learners. Educators have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families. Children who receive nurturing, consistent care are more likely to thrive and become sociable, capable children who get along with others, demonstrate self-control and love learning. Development can be at risk not only by delay or disability, but also by a number of traumatic or stressful experiences. Nurturing and responsive care and education for children whose development may be at risk can help a child develop resilience and skills needed for success in school and in life.

6. Multiple abilities and skills are developing simultaneously in a child's early years.

Development is the result of the interaction between genes and experiences. Experiences and interactions make a difference in early brain development. Educators make many daily decisions about how and when to talk to children, which experiences to offer and when children are ready to take a new step in their development. Educators who know what is taking place during this time of change and growth are better equipped to support that growth. [Find more information about early brain development at the Center for the Developing Child.](#)

Young children's early experiences shape their fast-growing brains. Although young children develop in generally similar ways, each child's individual life experiences (as part of a family, a culture and a community) can result in very different patterns of learning, behavior and developmental outcomes.

Key concept(s): Development occurs in predictable patterns but children develop at individual rates

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Observe and respect what each child can do.
- Get to know each child's unique temperament and personality.
- Get to know how each child is likely to demonstrate interest in something new, communicate their feelings and needs and respond to frustration. For instance, when trying new things, does the child watch others, rush right in or slowly approach something new?
- Respond to each child in ways that supports their identity, growth and development.
- Offer children materials and activities that challenge them but are doable.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Recognize that individual children learn at their own rate.
- Set learning goals and plan activities that help each child reach the next step. For example, you might set a goal to help a child recognize their name in print. Then place name cards at each child's spot for lunch. Play a game in which the child stands up when you hold up their name card. Or have each child place their name card in a bucket when they arrive in the morning.
- Adjust how they interact with a child to match the child's changing abilities to understand and communicate.
- Help children reach milestones set in state early learning standards, known as the [Early Childhood Indicators of Progress](#).

As educators design and lead, they:

- Go beyond relying on learning experiences that have been developed by others and create activities that address an individual child's needs.

Key concept(s): Children grow and learn as part of their family, culture and community

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Talk with family members about how they do things at home and use that information to make the child feel welcome. For instance, learn the routine the family uses at naptime and try to use it too.
- Encourage children to share stories from their daily family life, such as favorite family activities or pets.
- Create a sense of community where children notice and care about each other.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Understand the importance of respecting the family's use of their home language, providing materials in the home language such as books, games and music, and learning some words in the child's home language for songs, conversation and routines.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn about the different cultures, traditions, languages and family structures of other children.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Develop deeper understanding of traditions, values, child-rearing, and expectations of the various cultures of the children in the group by talking with families and attending cultural events within the community.
- Recognize the global society in which children live and are responsive to differences in culture, ethnicity, language and economics of the children for whom they care.



Stories from the field

Marisela watched as Grady worked the scissors. She noticed that he was holding the scissors with his thumb in one hole and his index finger in the other. His thumb was on the bottom and his finger on top. Consequently, as he cut, his scissor chewed through the paper. Grady tried a couple of times to make the scissors work before looking around at other children.

Marisela moved next to Grady. She gently turned his hand over while saying, "thumbs up." Then she said, "I think there's room in this hole for more fingers. Try putting some more fingers in this hole." She handed Grady a narrow strip of stiff paper and suggested that he "try again." This time Grady was able to snip off a small section of paper.

All children need a rich, engaging environment that is physically and emotionally secure.

Key concept(s): Children need physically and emotionally safe and healthy environments in order to explore, experiment and learn

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Establish and maintain a safe and healthy learning environment.
- Create a welcoming environment that appeals to a child, has pictures of people who look like the child, has toys on low shelves so the child can make independent choices, and has space to spread out during play.
- Build a positive relationship with each child.
- Make sure that the learning environment reflects and responds to each child's needs, abilities and interests.
- Accept and appreciate each child's growing ability to do more on their own by giving them the time they need to practice and accomplish new tasks.
- Include toys and materials that are interesting and some that look like those found in the homes of the children.
- Change the environment, as needed, for children with disabilities or special health care needs.
- Choose materials that are challenging yet doable.
- Support play in ways that encourage imagination and peer relationships. For example, help the children create menus, make play money and set up a pretend pizza shop for imaginative play.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Use furniture and gates to define spaces and to keep block buildings from being knocked down.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Examine the environment and determine ways to improve work flow, space available and access to materials.
- Ensure the environment is culturally and linguistically responsive.

- Identify and use a curriculum that helps children prepare for school. [Check the Parent Aware website for curriculum that is aligned to Minnesota's early learning standards.](#)

Key concept(s): Children learn trust and feel secure when they have predictable routines that meet their needs for activity, interaction, food and sleep

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Provide predictable daily routines that meet the needs of children to eat, rest and play both indoors and outdoors.
- Post a daily schedule that helps children and families know what to expect.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Find flexibility within the schedule to meet each child's need for eating and sleeping.
- Include times during the day when children play alone, in small groups and as a large group.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Reflect on and continually adapt the schedule and routines to support children.
- Recognize and explain to families and others the importance of engaging children in play and problem solving.

Key concept(s): Early childhood educators promote curiosity when they allow children to explore and ask questions

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Provide safe space, materials and time for children to actively explore.
- Comment enthusiastically about things children notice and learn.
- Ask questions that can't be answered with "yes" or "no" to encourage children to think more deeply.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Talk with children about cause and effect. You can ask the children, "What happens when you pour water on the sand?" Or ask, "What will happen if you build your tower at the bottom of the slide and someone slides down?"
- Ensure children experience nature and natural materials by giving them time to play outdoors and bringing the outdoors in (for example, sorting pinecones or planting seeds).
- Wonder out loud with children by saying, "I wonder what will happen" or "I wonder why...."

As educators design and lead, they:

- Help children observe and collect information, ask questions and make predictions. For instance, while watching an insect, work with the children to notice what it is doing and guess what it might do next. Watch to see if the prediction is right.

Key concept(s): Children need a strong foundation in language and vocabulary for later reading success

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Talk to children to support the development of vocabulary and an understanding of how words are used to communicate.
- Sing songs and say rhymes. Repeat them many times to help children learn.
- Give simple directions and help children follow through on them.
- Read and tell stories to children.
- Expect and accept mistakes as children try to pronounce new words.
- Ask questions that do not have a yes or no answer to encourage children to use increasingly longer sentences.
- Provide play opportunities that encourage conversations such as dressing up or using props like play telephones, restaurant menus and stuffed toy animals.
- Make sure there are lots of books and printed materials appropriate to their level for children to look at.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Encourage conversation during snack or mealtime, play time, arrival and departure and all other times of the day.
- Help children talk to one another including opportunities for children to engage in home language conversations. For instance, when a child comments on the activities of another you can say, "Tell Jose you think the building he is making is big."
- Encourage children who are learning more than one language to feel confident as they try to communicate using the new language.
- Include different types of reading materials. For example, include fiction and non-fiction books, resource materials and maps as well as materials written in languages represented in the group.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Explain to others the importance of home language development.
- Help children understand the relationship between spoken and written words by writing what a child says or pointing out print when looking at books.



Stories from the field

Brian, a teacher in the four-year-old classroom, and Felicia are working together to label items in a collage. Brian points to one of the pictures and asks, "Do you know what this is?" Felicia responds excitedly, "Pineapple!" Brian repeats, "Yes, pineapple. How can we write pineapple?" Felicia shrugs her shoulders and says, "I don't know." Brian persists in drawing out letters Felicia knows. He pronounces, "PPP- what letter is that?" Felicia names the letter, "P." Brian affirms her answer by writing it and repeating, "P-Pine." He writes pine and continues by saying, "-AAA." Fatima names the letter, "A." Brian writes it and says, "A-PPP." Felicia names the letter "P." Again Brian prompts her saying, "LLL." Felicia finishes by naming the letter "L." Brian proclaims, "Pineapple!"

Key concept(s): Children learn mathematical and scientific concepts by exploring and experimenting with the things around them

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Offer opportunities for children to count, measure, sort, and group objects.
- Provide materials that can be used in many ways (like blocks) for children to explore, experiment and problem solve.
- Use math words like "more," "less," "over," "under," "taller," and the names of shapes and numbers.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Help children recognize patterns. You might notice the red, green, red, green pattern in a striped shirt a child is wearing.
- Expand children's knowledge of nature, living things and materials by providing objects, tools and experiences that allow them to observe and explore concepts like cause and effect, time, temperature, buoyancy, and changes in materials.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Give parents simple math and science ideas to do at home.

Key concept(s): Children need safe, stable, nurturing relationships with adults who help them learn to behave in a way that is firm, fair and friendly

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Sit on the floor and play with children.
- Provide warmth, sensitivity, nurturance, acceptance and safety.
- Set clear expectations and simple rules such as, "Walk when you're inside."
- Redirect children before they engage in disruptive behavior.
- Help children learn another way to act without shaming them when they do something considered wrong or dangerous. You might say, "You can stomp your feet or yell when you are angry but it's not okay to hit anyone."
- Use positive statements to guide children's behavior so they learn what to do. For example, "Remember to hang up your coat."
- Recognize and respond to signs of stress by offering consistent routines, a reliable nurturing relationship and by comforting the child.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Avoid disruptive behavior by changing the schedule, offering activities that are of interest to the child, offering challenging yet doable activities and establishing smooth transitions.
- Help children learn to stop, take a breath and think before responding to upsetting situations.
- Partner with family members to prevent challenging behavior and to respond in consistent ways at home and in your program. Follow licensing regulations if the parent requests responses to behaviors that are not allowed.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Find ways to help children be involved in making decisions such as what they will play next or between two snack options.
- Adapt schedules, routines and environment to avoid challenging behaviors.

Key concept(s): Children need help learning to calm themselves, express their feelings and pause before reacting to situations

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Recognize, respect and help children learn to express feelings and understand the feelings of others. For example, you might say to a child "You look angry. Tell Alex you don't like it when he knocks down your blocks."
- Help children learn to manage their physical and emotional responses, pay attention and make simple choices. You might offer choices like, "Do you want to put away the blue blocks or the red ones?"

- Model self-control.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Support children's growing independence by encouraging children to choose their own activities and solve conflicts. Model words they could use such as, "that's mine" or "I've been waiting for a turn for a long time."
- Encourage children to stop and think before reacting to a problem.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Teach children to control their impulses, express a range of emotions and think of various solutions to problems (see resources below).



Stories from the field

At clean up time, Blake bends down and looks at the picture taped to the shelf. His teacher, Molly points to the picture and asks, "How many purses are in this picture?" Together they point and count, "One, two, three, four." Molly encourages Blake to count the purses saying, "And how many purses are on the shelf?" They count together again, "One, two, three." Molly wonders out loud, "Are we missing any purses? Where is that one?" Blake examines the picture then says, "We better find it." Blake walks to the coat rack and points to the missing purse. Molly says, "You found it. YESSSS! It doesn't go on the hook." Blake points to the picture and says, "I found it on the picture." Molly affirms his discovery, "You found it on the picture and you found it on the rack. Now we can put it where it goes."

Key concept(s): Young children are developing strength and coordination in their large and small muscles

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Set time aside for children to move their bodies by dancing, jumping, pedaling, kicking and throwing.

- Provide opportunities for children to practice using the muscles in their hands, fingers and arms to draw, cut, bead, latch, screw and unscrew and pick up and place small objects.
- Give children materials that they can use to draw and write.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Encourage families to participate in physical activities with their children, both indoor and outdoor and in natural settings like parks and playgrounds.
- Anticipate the next skill a child may work on and offer activities to promote individual development. For instance, a child who is able to hop might begin to practice skipping. Show the child how and provide a cue such as, “Step, hop. Step, hop.”

As educators design and lead, they:

- Find ways for children to move while involved in all types of learning activities. For example, children can march, crawl or side step on their way to the table for lunch.

Key concept(s): Children gain a sense of competence, enjoyment and learn to express themselves through open ended materials, activities and questions

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Provide musical experiences in a variety of ways such as singing, musical toys and different types of recorded music. Include jazz, lullabies, classical, and children’s songs from a variety of cultures and languages.
- Offer a variety of art materials to use independently as a form of self-expression, focusing on process (how they are using the materials) rather than copying a pattern.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Encourage exploration of open-ended materials such as play dough, finger paint, blocks and markers.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Explain to others how children learn to show their thoughts, feelings and ideas through art, dance and music.
- Introduce children to art, music and dance from a variety of cultures.

Key concept(s): Children learn through play and interactions with their peers

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Allow long blocks of time for play so children are not interrupted. Play becomes richer and more meaningful when they have 30 to 40 minutes to pretend.
- Provide materials that allow children to dress up, pretend and play out scenes they observe such as setting the table for dinner or going to a restaurant.

- Help children learn through play by sometimes being a play partner, playing next to a child or offering resources to support play.
- Model ways to share, help others and take turns. Play games with a back and forth rhythm such as rolling a toy car or ball to one another.
- Give children room and time to solve problems on their own or with others when safety is not an issue. Stay close and offer help when needed. You might say to children who are arguing over a toy, “How can you work it out so you are both happy?”

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Identify which learning standard is being practiced during play. For instance, a child who is counting out pretend money to a “customer” is working on math skills.
- Extend children’s play ideas by having them make props or expand the storyline. For example, when children claim they need money to get on the pretend bus, suggest they make money from green construction paper.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Explain to others the importance of play and the early learning standards that are being practiced through play.



Stories from the field

Children in the young preschool class are making structures in the block area. Two or three are saying, “Beep, beep, beep!” Aimee, the teacher, notices another child, Henry, is protecting his building. She asks him, “Are you still using those?” He says that he is. Aimee says to one of the children cleaning up, “Okay, we’re going to leave these here because Henry is still using them.” Another child approaches and Henry cries out, “Don’t!” Aimee recognizes the potential conflict brewing and says to Henry, “Can you tell Wyatt what you just told me?” Wyatt is involved with his play and not paying much attention, so Aimee says, “Hey Wyatt, can you listen to Henry for a minute?” Henry copies her words and says, “Please don’t put this stuff away, I’m still using it.”

Henry seems distracted by the beeping and Aimee suggests, "He doesn't like when you are beeping at him. Tell Henry why you are beeping." Wyatt explains, "We're beeping cuz we're moving heavy loads!" Aimee repeats his words, "Cuz we're moving heavy loads and we don't want you to get hurt Henry. Okay?"

Content Area III: Relationships with Families

The most important relationship a child has is with his family. Educators who understand this will spend time building a positive, respectful relationship with the child's family. Frequent communication between the educator and the family will help make certain the child's needs are being met in ways that support healthy development.

Key concept(s): Families are children's first and most important caregivers and educators

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Help parents and family members feel welcome.
- Recognize, respect and build on family strengths. Support parent's ability to parent effectively by offering information about child development. In addition, help parents build positive feelings about their child and parenting by recognizing positive interactions and problem solving when needed.
- Support positive separations and reunions during drop-off and pick-up times by allowing time for families to say goodbye and letting children save their work or materials so they can continue to play with them the next time.
- Listen with understanding to families' needs and concerns while keeping professional boundaries.
- Respect and promote the rights of families to make their own decisions about what their children need.
- Protect the privacy and confidentiality of each family's information, only making an exception when filing mandated reports to protect the safety of a family member (for example Child Protection Services).
- Exchange complete and unbiased information in a supportive manner with families and other professionals who work with the family/child. For instance, you might report to a child's family specific examples of times the child becomes frustrated with peers. Ask for examples they have seen and then work together to figure out how to help reduce the child's frustration.
- Support the child's home language and culture with an openness and sensitivity to cultural and family style of care, communication and interaction.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Partner with families to resolve problems and work with families on mutually agreed upon goals for the child.

- Support families at drop-off and pick-up time. Be clear about who is responsible for helping a child who is having a hard time.
- Establish open communication including descriptions of daily activities and events.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Reflect on personal cultural heritage and assumptions that influence values, decisions and behavior in order to recognize when these assumptions (beliefs) may cause problems or conflicts.
- Support children and parents when they move to a new school or program.
- Partner with families to develop program policies.

Key concept(s): Children and families need educators who are knowledgeable about the community and can direct them to resources if necessary

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Identify and provide families with information about health care providers and schools in the area, as well as affordable community resources if needed.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Use play, language and literacy experiences (for example, conversations, books and field trips) to help children learn about their community.
- Refer parents and guardians to community agencies, health or social services, when necessary.
- Work in partnership with families and specialists (medical, dental, speech, nutrition and mental health), to meet a child's needs.



Stories from the field

A Head Start program decided to have a family night to introduce parents to some of the math concepts being focused on in the classroom. They weren't particularly hopeful that this would be a well-attended activity, so they tried to market it as a carnival. No one showed much interest, until they explained it was a math carnival. To their surprise, they had great turnout!

They enjoyed seeing the family members and their children counting cotton balls as they placed one in each section of an egg carton, making patterns with squares of fabric, finger painting shapes and seeing how many foam balls they could throw into a laundry basket. They put out stickers, file folders and markers for families to make their own counting game to take home. At the end of the night, families enjoyed the evening so much they asked to have another math night soon.

Careful observation of a young child's play, interactions, and how the child explores their surroundings can help educators offer learning activities and experiences that will be the most meaningful to each child.

Key concept(s): Children do best when educators observe them and use what they learn to promote growth

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Take note of children's individual abilities and interests. Offer activities or materials that individual children enjoy. For example, Stacey notices that Gavin likes football. She goes to the library and finds picture books about football players.
- Observe the skills children are working on and plan activities that will help them practice skills that are just slightly harder than what they are capable of doing now. For instance, encourage a child who can count to five to count five objects.
- Share with families what the children enjoyed, learned and are practicing while they are in your care.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Regularly keep a record (written notes, checklists on specific areas of development, work samples and photos) of children's abilities and achievements.
- Identify and use an assessment tool that helps identify a child's skills and purposefully plan activities that will encourage a child's growth and learning.
- Look for and note progress a child makes over time in learning and development.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Assess children's progress in English and a child's home language if appropriate.
- Use the information from assessment to plan for and guide curriculum, instruction and interactions with children.

Key concept(s): Educators need to know the requirements for growth and development screening and how it can help identify individual needs

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Know the rules and regulations for health and developmental screening.
- Provide families with information about contacting their local public school district for information about scheduling an Early Childhood Screening when their child

turns three. Screening checks for learning and health problems so they can get help right away and children will be better prepared for school.



Stories from the field

Martin, the teacher in the four-year-old classroom, overheard several of the children talking about fairies during snack time. He decided he would find ways to incorporate their interest into play and learning activities the next week. He invited children to bring materials from home related to fairies and is using them in the classroom.

One day, the group is sitting in a circle ready to listen to the story. Martin reads the title, "Ten Little Fairies." Riley corrects him saying, "Ten Tiny Fairies." Martin recognizes his mistake and laughs, "My apologies. You're right." He explores Riley's skill level a bit more asking, "How did you know that?" Riley explains, "Because it says." Martin agrees with her, "It says that. Can you read that?" She carefully repeats herself, "Ten-tiny-fairies." Martin exclaims, "This is your book from home right." Riley says, "I brought it for the class because it's about fairies." Martin affirms that it is about fairies and skills they are working on saying, "It's about fairies and it's about counting. It's a perfect book."

An educator understands what was believed and done in the past impacts current practice. Educators also strive to understand how current events and issues affect children, families and programs.

Key concept(s): Educators need to understand the thinking that underlies current practices and regulations

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Know and work within the requirements of federal, state and local law agencies' policies and practices.
- Know and work within the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct (see resources).
- Recognize the value of quality and program enhancements in early care and education.
- Recognize how historical practices and current trends impact programming and interactions with children.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Use the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct in solving dilemmas.
- Work to continuously improve their skills and programming and to provide high-quality care.



Stories from the field

I wasn't too sure about becoming Parent Aware rated (Minnesota's Quality Rating and Improvement System) when it first came to my area but it was important for our program to be able to access scholarships for some of the children in our community. I decided that it would also be a good thing for our program to keep growing and improving. Once

we jumped in, the supports for quality improvement were really helpful and I've learned a lot through the process. Now that we have our rating, I tell prospective parents about it and they seem to like that we have a "seal of approval." We want to keep working to get the next star. Thinking about quality improvement is becoming so much a part of who we are that even once we get our fourth star I know we'll keep trying to be better for the children and families we serve.

Content Area VI: Professionalism

Child development research is growing and best practices are rapidly improving. It is essential that all educators continue to take professional development and participate in professional organizations that increase their knowledge and improve their skills.

Key concept(s): Early childhood educators strive to continuously improve their own skills

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Fully participate in ongoing professional development by asking questions, reflecting on learning and acting on new information.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Intentionally plan and engage in professional development to improve their own skills.
- Understand and act within professional boundaries.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Model best practices for others.
- Critically reflect on their own practice, research and trends in the field and adjust their behavior.
- Participate in professional organizations and activities.



Stories from the field

"I was looking at the [Knowledge and Competency Framework](#) (a document that describes what teachers need to know and be able to do) and thought "I didn't know I should know that!" As I looked at it some more, I recognized that I was doing pretty well

in some areas but others were new to me. I identified a number of things I wanted to learn more about in order to improve my skills. I decided I'd start with learning more about observation and assessment and how to use it to plan for each child. Then I looked at class brochures to find classes that would help me learn more about observation and assessment. Now I'm going to classes based on what really interests me and teaches me the skills I'm working on."

Joelle

Content Area VII: Health, Safety and Nutrition

When parents are asked what is most important to them when looking for a program for their child, a healthy and safe environment is at the top of the list. Young children in group settings need adult supervision to stay safe and healthy. A healthy environment also means providing young children with nutritious food and daily opportunities for physical activity. Research has shown that children whose basic health needs are met are better able to learn from their environment and are much more prepared to succeed in school than those children with poor health.

Key concept(s): Children who are healthy are better able to participate in and learn from activities

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Promote healthy eating and active living by providing physical activities and offering a variety of nutritious foods for snacks and meals.
- Use, and teach children to use, basic health habits like covering a cough by coughing into their elbow, washing their hands and brushing their teeth.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Keep current with health and safety information and incorporate updated information into daily practice.

Key concept(s): Children learn to develop lifelong healthy habits from the adults around them

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Bring children outdoors as often as possible.
- Give children time, instructions and opportunities to take care of their own needs in the bathroom and in dressing themselves.
- Encourage children to use all of their senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste).
- Encourage children to engage in a variety of physical daily activity to instill healthy habits.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Model and encourage children to develop healthy eating, exercise and rest habits.

Key concept(s): When the environment is safe, children are better able to explore and learn

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Follow health and safety guidelines during hand washing, toileting and sanitizing toys to reduce the spread of infectious disease.
- Arrange the room so that children can be supervised at all times.
- Keep materials, equipment and classroom clean; keep the environment smoke-free.
- Make prompt and correct reports of harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare to protective services.
- Keep emergency telephone numbers handy.
- Know health conditions of children (such as diabetes, food allergies, asthma, etc.) and how to respond to potential health needs.

As educators design and lead, they:

- Know, review and routinely update all applicable rules about record keeping (from emergency card information to written procedures and data privacy and confidentiality).
- Work with other professionals to ensure policies and practices are based on research and best practices (e.g., nutritionist, environmentalist, child care health consultant, etc.).

Key concept (s): Children need proper nutrition to fuel their bodies and help them grow

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Practice safe storage, preparation handling and service of nutritious foods.
- Sit, eat and talk with children during meal and snack time.
- Recognize and avoid health hazards related to food such as choking and allergies.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Provide family style meal and snack times encouraging children to learn good manners such as waiting for a turn, passing food to others, using utensils properly, and saying, "please" and "thank you".

As educators design and lead, they:

- Accommodate cultural food preferences whenever possible.



Stories from the field

During group time, teacher Fortuna showed the children a big tooth on a magnetic board. She explained that there are foods that are friendly to teeth and foods that are not friendly. Foods that are not friendly stick to teeth. She laid out pictures of foods and asked the children to guess which of the foods they thought were friendly. They placed each picture of food on the big tooth. Those that were friendly did not stick. Those that were unfriendly magnetically stuck. Then she explained about bacteria found in our mouths eats the food that isn't friendly and makes little holes in our teeth that can grow and grow. She explained, "That's why we brush our teeth - to take off the foods that stick."

After the discussion, she left the big tooth on the magnet board, the pictures of foods and a giant toothbrush for children to explore on their own. At lunch time, Fortuna talked with the children about the foods they were eating. They talked about the tooth-friendly foods and how they would brush their teeth after lunch to get rid of the foods that were sticking.

Told by Minnesota's Program Manager for National Children's Oral Health Foundation

An educator learns about and learns to use best practices through a variety of experiences.

Key concept(s): Early childhood educators learn from others and implement best practices

To provide quality care and education, educators:

- Observe demonstrations of others interacting with children in videos or various programs and learn from their strengths.

As educators grow in knowledge, skills and abilities, they:

- Reflect on their own skills and work to continuously improve them.
- Seek professional feedback and coaching and reflect on success or challenges.

Want to Learn More?

These additional resources will help you learn more about the care and education of young children:

Caring for Our children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, Third Edition. (2011).

[Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/) (<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>)

[Center for Early Education and Development](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CEED/) (<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CEED/>)

[Center for Early Education and Development. *Questions about Kids*](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CEED/publications/questionsaboutkids/default.html). St. Paul: Center for Early Education and Development
(<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CEED/publications/questionsaboutkids/default.html>)

[Center for Early Education and Development. *Tip Sheets*](http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CEED/publications/tipsheets/default.html). St. Paul: Center for Early Education and Development (<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/CEED/publications/tipsheets/default.html>)

[Chapter 9503 Child Care Center Licensing. \(2007\). *Minnesota Administrative Rules Chapter 9503*](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules?id=9503&keyword_type=all&keyword=9503&keyword_sg=rul&redirect=0). State of Minnesota: Office of Revisor of Statutes.
(https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules?id=9503&keyword_type=all&keyword=9503&keyword_sg=rul&redirect=0)

[Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc) (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>)

[Early Education: Getting your Children Off to a Healthy Start](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdr/earlychildhood/index.html)
(<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdr/earlychildhood/index.html>)

[Infectious Diseases in Child Care Settings and Schools Manual](#). (2008). Hennepin County.

[Minnesota Department of Education. \(2005\). *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards*](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/index.html). St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Education.
(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/index.html>)

Minnesota Department of Education (2014). [Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Framework for Early Childhood Professionals: Working with Preschool-Aged Children in Center and School Programs](#). St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Education.
(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/EarlyChildRes/index.html>)

Minnesota Department of Education. (2013). [Parent Guides for Minnesota Early Learning Standards](#). St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Education.
(<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/JustParent/EarlyLearnKReadi/index.html>)

[National Association for the Education of Young Children](http://www.naeyc.org/) (<http://www.naeyc.org/>)

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2005 Code, Reaffirmed and Updated 2011). *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

[National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic) (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>)

[The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Early Child Care and Early Education](http://nrckids.org/) (<http://nrckids.org/>)