Selecting a Quality Curriculum Framework

Step One: Know the Elements of a Curriculum Framework

A framework for programs serving young children is composed of four elements: assessment, scope and sequence, activities and instruction, and progress monitoring (DEC, 2007).

- **(A) Assessment**
  - A process of gathering information regarding children’s strengths, interests, emerging skills, and abilities related to important skills and processes across all content and developmental areas for the purpose of planning instruction.
  - “Assessment cannot and should not represent a single point in time and ongoing decisions should be continuously made based on data when programming for young children” (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005, p. 87).

- **(S) Scope and Sequence**
  - **Scope** refers to broad, often-integrated areas of development (e.g., motor, communication, adaptive, social) and/or content areas (e.g., mathematics, science, reading).
  - **Sequence** refers to the order in which skills and concepts from across developmental and content areas will or should be taught. At least three types of sequences guide the order in which skills and concepts are taught including developmental sequences, pedagogical sequences, and logical sequences.

- **(A) Activities and Instruction**
  - **Activities** component refers to the context in which important concepts and skills are addressed, guided by children’s interest during daily routines.
  - **Instruction** component refers to practices, actions, and methods used to deliver the content and should be directly linked to assessment findings.

- **(P) Progress Monitoring**
  - The progress-monitoring element of the curriculum framework refers to a recursive feedback loop by which changes in children’s performance are documented, summarized and interpreted over time.
  - Information gained from monitoring children’s performance is used for different purposes including (a) to identify when a child needs additional or more intensive support or instruction; (b) as the foundation of a decision-making model designed to inform modify, and revise instruction; and (c) to evaluate the degree to which targeted outcomes are being met (e.g., whether children are acquiring critical concepts and skills as expected).

Step Two: Form a Committee

The team should:

- be composed of key stakeholders (e.g., home visitors, service coordinators, classroom teachers, itinerant teachers, family members, community members, related service personnel, and administrators)
- represent the diversity of the children and families being served
- be creative in seeking input (e.g., conduct face-to-face meetings, surveys, phone conferences, e-mail)
Step Three: Know Who You Are

- Review the program’s mission and understand what defines the program
- Identify priorities of the program
- Understand families’ and staff’s beliefs about educating young children
- Know the population of children and families that are served
- Understand what is currently in place and working

Step Four: Identify Elements of the Program’s Curriculum Framework

- Using the definition of a curriculum framework (i.e., the ASAP elements), plug in existing descriptions of what is currently done related to each element of a curriculum framework.
- Some teams choose to use the image of an umbrella to help ensure they have each panel addressed.
- If the team identifies a missing element, then they should examine what is available, what is recommended, and what will meet your needs. Keeping in mind, the aim is to devise a single comprehensive curriculum that will meet the needs of all children and families served.

Step Five: Check for Quality

- Ensure all elements of the curriculum framework are of high quality (DEC, 2007; Jackson, Robbins, Korey-Hirko, Harjusola-Webb, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2007; NAYEC & NAECS/SDE, 2003) identify several characteristics of a quality curriculum framework including:
  - Utilize evidence-based practices
  - Ensure practices are developmentally and culturally appropriate/responsive/relevant
  - Incorporate the principles of universal design for learning
  - Create challenging and engaging learning opportunities
  - Build partnership with families and provide flexible and multiple opportunities for involvement
  - Promote collaboration among service providers, families, and community members
Step Six: Make Connections

- Alignment is defined as a process of linking assessment, activities/instruction, and progress monitoring practices with a set of standards. Standards describe what children should be exposed to, should learn, and should eventually know and be able to do.
- State standards for early learning and developmental domains should be addressed across assessment, activity/instruction, and progress monitoring practices.

Step Seven: Seek Formal Adoption and Make the Program’s Curriculum Framework Available

- Take all components of your curriculum framework (i.e., the ASAP elements) to your governing board for adoption.
- Take only resources that are common among providers and designed for all children.
- Keep focus on resources that are evidenced based
- Make the curriculum framework visible to all stakeholders.

Step Eight: Implement and Evaluate Elements

- Provide needed professional development, resources, and support to ensure implementation of the curriculum framework
- Check to make sure the curriculum framework is being implemented over time using the Big Idea Toolkit (Pretti-Frontczak et al., 2005).
- Conduct formative and summative evaluations regarding the curriculum framework
- Make adjustments, additions, and changes to the curriculum framework based on the changing needs of the program, children, and families served

References


