

## Maryland Pre-K Grant Programs Instructional Quality Review Clarifications

This is a companion document to the Instructional Quality Review form and includes information to support programs in understanding expectations.

### Lesson Planning

**Activities are appropriate for the developmental levels of the children in the classroom.**

Appropriate activities support all domains of learning and emphasize active exploration, interaction with materials, teachers, and other children. Open-ended activities allow children to explore, create solutions, and problem solve. Use strategies which allow students to work in their own interest areas, use their own learning styles, and work at their own ability level. **Rote/drill activities with memorization, letter of the week, worksheets and dittos are inappropriate.**

**Individualization for specific children is documented as needed.**

Lesson plans will identify specific groups by use of names, initials, symbols, or a number assigned to each child, and identify differentiated activities to support each group's needs/skill levels. Teachers should be aware of children's skill levels and plan activities and materials accordingly. Knowledge of early childhood development and assessment data is used to plan individual, whole group, and flexible small group instruction. Flexible small groups should change regularly to meet the individual and specific needs of children across content areas.

Teachers know that not all children are alike, nor do they learn alike; therefore, children need multiple opportunities for taking in new information and making sense of new concepts. Scaffolding instruction and materials require teachers to be mindful of differentiated instruction.

**Current and complete lesson plans are on site, organized, accessible and implemented.**

Lesson plans should be organized chronologically and kept accessible. Electronic lesson plans are accessible. Instruction in the classroom should be based on the needs of the children. Standards (MCCRS) should reflect the intent/purpose being targeted by that activity. Clock times on lesson plans should correspond with the clock times on the daily schedule.

Lesson plans should include enough detail so that someone else (a substitute, your supervisor or director) can identify the purpose of your lesson, the materials you are using, the standard (MCCRS) and the children who are involved. However, detailed, step-by-step directions are time consuming and not necessary.

**Maryland Early Learning Standards (Maryland College and Career Ready Standards and/or Healthy Beginnings Framework) are documented for all teacher-planned instructional activities.**

Maryland's Early Learning Standards (MCCRS) for Pre-K should be documented for all instructional activities.

## Assessment

### **Evidence of assessment implementation and data collection**

Teachers should use formative and summative assessments in the natural learning environment. Assessment helps to identify the support children need to be successful in school and this data can be used to inform teachers, families, schools as they work together to meet every child’s needs.

Formative assessment is a planned process for teachers to gather information, analyze and reflect on the information, and use it to help plan the child’s next steps in learning. One example of a formative assessment tool is the Maryland Early Learning Assessment (ELA). No matter which tool is used, supporting documentation is needed as evidence to support ratings. Some evidence that a tool may require includes work samples, observation notes, portfolios, and others.

Summative assessment is intended to evaluate student learning by comparing performance to a standard or benchmark (goal) and is administered at the end of a defined instructional period. Examples of summative assessments include curriculum embedded assessments and benchmark assessments.

## Instructional Activities

### **Instruction is free of worksheets and dittos.**

Worksheets and dittos are inappropriate. A common characteristic of inappropriate dittos or worksheets is that there is a very narrow focus – only one right answer, for example. Typical examples of this kind of worksheet require children to circle or color or draw a line to indicate the correct answer.

### **Open-ended activities are planned.**

Providing a good balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities is important because it allows teachers to ensure they are covering key skills in a more structured way while also recognizing children’s interests and using that information for skill-building as well. Activities are planned throughout the day that allow children to experiment and create with different materials.

### **Large Group/Opening Activities are purposeful, vary and are planned daily.**

Group opening and closing activities are included on the daily schedule and are implemented. Activities for opening and closing should be documented in lesson plans and should vary throughout the year. Group opening and closing activities should be made available to all children. These activities should include a welcome and prepare children for the day. Teachers may introduce new topics and/or materials and explain other changes made to the environment and learning areas. Special visitors, experiments, cooking activities and field trips should also be addressed.

### **Teachers have materials at varying levels to meet the needs of individual learning styles.**

Teachers know that not all children are alike, nor do they learn alike. Therefore, children need multiple opportunities for taking in new information and making sense of new concepts. Scaffolding instruction and materials require teachers to be mindful of differentiated instruction techniques. These models require teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and to adjust the materials, curriculum, and presentation of information to the learners.

**Music with gross motor movement is planned daily.**

Opportunities for children to participate in music with gross (large) motor movement should occur daily. Music with movement can occur during a specifically planned time, but can also be incorporated into other blocks of time (Large Group, Closing, and transitions). It is required that at least one planned opportunity for children to interact with music along with a gross motor **activity be** documented in lesson plans; however music and movement is important for young children and should be used throughout the day.

The length of time will vary based on the attention span of children, the time of day and time of year. Be flexible in your planning of music and movement by watching the children’s reactions and involvement. Children naturally enjoy and respond to music so remember to use music as a way to smoothly move through transitions during the day.

**Transitions are quick and efficient; students know what is expected, do not need to be re-engaged, and quickly move from activity to activity.**

The teacher provides advanced warning for most upcoming transitions. (e.g., During center time the teacher states, “In five minutes I’ll play our clean up song.”)

Students move smoothly between group activities.

Students respond to established attention signals (e.g., Raising hand or clap).

The teacher regularly refers to and incorporates the posted visual schedule.

“Downtime” is eliminated as students move to alternative activities when appropriate. (e.g., when students complete a small group activity they move on to another activity.)

## Small Group Instruction

**Developmentally appropriate and purposeful small group activities are planned daily.**

Activities during small group time will maintain the practice of planning developmentally appropriate experiences to meet the different levels of student development. These small group lessons should offer learning and practice opportunities to support children’s acquisition of skills or areas of interest. The activities planned for groups of students working independently should also be purposeful with standards documented. Lesson plans will identify specific groups by use of names, initials, symbols, or a number assigned to each child, and identify differentiated activities to support each group's progress towards mastering early learning standards.

The length of a small group activity should vary with the age, interests and attention span of the children. Small groups should be formed and will change frequently based on the developmental needs and skills of children

## Environment

### **The classroom is inviting, clean, organized and visually appealing to children.**

Appropriate learning areas should be established, and the setting should promote and motivate children’s learning and be welcoming, inviting and inspiring. The classroom should have adequate space for children to move freely, but without large empty spaces that could cause children to run or tumble. The shelving and materials should be clean and free from dust. The classroom furnishings, carpets, rugs and materials should be cleaned on a regular basis and materials should be organized and stored neatly. Materials and shelves should be labeled appropriately.

### **Majority of items (more than 50%) on display in the classroom are child-initiated, at children’s eye level, and displayed no longer than six weeks.**

Unique, child-created work should be included in the classroom display. Majority means more than 50% of what is included in the displayed work in the classroom should be unique and child initiated. The children should have selected the subject and materials and completed the work in their own creative way without teacher direction or teacher choice in the materials. Dittos, worksheets, coloring pages or teacher-directed work and patterned artwork are not considered child-initiated.

### **Photos of children and their families are included in the classroom environment.**

When teachers display photos of children’s families in and around our classroom, they are making a public gesture that families matter. Children are reminded about their family each time they enter the classroom. They know that their parents are invested in their education just as much as their teachers are.

### **Dictations from children are on display in the classroom.**

The environment includes children’s dictation: Teachers record what children say on individual artwork, on chart stories, in journals or in class-made books. The connection between spoken communication and written language is demonstrated in multiple ways. Ways to connect spoken and written language include language experience charts, recording the children’s dictation, class-made books and stories, quotes in class newsletters, messages to and from children, or writing the Daily News. As children progress in writing development, shared and interactive writing should be present.

**Photos and chart stories from recent activities are on display in the classroom.**

The purpose of these charts is to support literacy development. They can include stories that the children create as a class, recalling events of a recent field trip, special event, or special visitor that occurred during the Pre-K day. Charts, graphs, and stories included in the display should include pictures and symbols, as well as print. The majority of charts, graphs and stories included in the display should include pictures and symbols as well as print. As children progress in writing development, shared and interactive writing should be present.

**Classroom rules are developed and posted at children’s eye level.**

Age-appropriate classroom rules are developed and posted: Establish no more than four or five classroom rules. Rules should be written out using simple words and symbols/pictures and posted at the children’s eye level. The rules should be concrete and include only what the children “can” do (e.g., “walk inside” rather than “don’t run inside”). Teachers should refer back to the rules often, as many times this may be a child’s first formal learning experience. The classroom rules should be posted at children’s eye level and be visible to the children from the large group meeting area.

**Teachers consistently model positive behavior and prompt students to model such behavior.**

Teachers model and encourage children to focus on the positive behavior of others. Teachers can recognize children’s accomplishments by commenting specifically on what the child has done, asking questions to learn more about a child’s thoughts, repeating a child’s idea, imitating an action/behavior, or referring children to one another for information or assistance. Other ways to focus on the positive behavior of others might include compliment boards or friendship jars. Teachers talk to and listen to individual children with attention and respect throughout the day. Children feel secure and successful when teachers interact positively with them. Teachers should interact both verbally (listening, conversing with interest and respect) and nonverbally (smiling, hugging, nodding, making eye contact when appropriate, and getting down on children’s eye level when appropriate).

**The classroom is safe and free from hazards.**

Space must be available to store hazardous materials out of children’s reach. Please note teacher’s backpacks and purses must be kept out of the reach of children. Safety hazards include accessible toxic substances, dangling electrical cords, exposed electrical outlets, and broken toys or equipment.

**Quiet and active centers are placed to not interfere with one another.**

(Self-explanatory)

**Learning centers are organized for independent use by students. (e.g., Labeled open shelves; labeled containers for toys and materials)**

Materials in the learning centers are clearly labeled. Children are able to see materials in the center areas and can make choices for their play independently. Shelves should be low, and materials organized. Learning materials and shelves should be labeled appropriately. Learning areas and equipment should be set up and

ready for use (lid is removed from sensory table, tape player for listening area has a power source and is ready for children to use, art easel is supplied and lids from paint cups removed, and brushes placed in paint cups). Centers that are open should be accessible for use; children should not have to ask adults for permission to use materials or to hand materials to them.

The storage and organization of materials is crucial in helping children take care of and use them appropriately. Labels (photos, pictures cut from catalogs, drawings or tracings) and words show where materials belong, promote children’s familiarity and responsibility for their environment, and help children begin to recognize symbols and words.

**At least five different learning centers are clearly defined and accessible to all students.**

At a minimum, five appropriate learning centers should be established, and the setting should promote and motivate children’s learning and be welcoming, inviting, and inspiring.

Boundaries are established for each learning area: Boundaries should be established by using clear signage, shelving, rugs, tables, or other visible barriers. Considerations should be taken when setting up quiet versus noisy areas to allow children to utilize centers appropriately without disturbing other children.

**Teachers adapt learning centers/classroom environments to reflect the current topic/theme.**

While a variety of materials must be present each day to encourage in-depth exploration, some of these materials should be rotated at least monthly to expand children’s learning, prevent boredom, address interests and to facilitate the scaffolding of children’s learning. Changes to materials in the environment must occur in a minimum of 5 centers once a month (reading, language, math, science, art, dramatic play, writing, blocks). When one walks into the classroom, it should be evident what the current topic or children’s interest is. **NOTE:** Not ALL learning areas have to change with each topic. Topics of study will vary in length.

## Daily Schedule

**A schedule for children is posted at children’s eye level and is manipulated by children to facilitate knowledge of the daily routine and time/sequence concepts. This schedule must include pictures.**

A schedule for children (readers and non-readers) is posted at children’s eye level in the classroom and is used to help children understand the daily routine: The schedule should include words (for readers) and photos, pictures, or symbols (for non-readers). Evidence that children are currently able to use and manipulate the schedule must be present. Some suggestions are to have a clothespin, magnet, or other type of marker to move along the side of the schedule as you progress throughout the day or use Velcro pieces on the schedule so children can manipulate and put the routine in the proper order.

**Rest time does not exceed one hour per day.**

To maximize instructional activities, rest time should not exceed one hour per day except when necessary to address specific needs of individual children. Children who do not rest shall be given quiet activities such as books and puzzles.

## Instructional Support

<b>Teacher models the use of materials and calls attention to how students use materials.</b>
When appropriate, the teacher models the use of materials and calls attention to how students use materials. (e.g., During a small group lesson the teacher uses the materials along with the students and says “I am arranging the red teddy bears in size order. The smallest one is first. OR “We will be working with shapes today; I can make different pictures with the shapes. I can turn them upside down or sideways. I wonder how you can arrange your shapes on your paper”)
<b>Teacher clearly states what the students will be learning using rich language and age-appropriate vocabulary, clarifying the concepts and content.</b>
Teachers should introduce each lesson/activity by explaining what the children will learn and be able to do, utilizing the Early Learning Standards’ language. (Example-Today we will compare and contrast the different types of transportation we read about).
<b>Teachers are aware of students who need extra support, assistance or attention and provide support in a timely manner.</b>
Most times, the teacher is aware of students who need extra support, assistance, or attention. The teacher notices when students are struggling to understand a lesson, are disengaged, or appear sad or anxious  The teacher responds when students make a comment, ask a question, or send behavioral signals indicating a need for help or attention.  Even when working with a small group of students, the teacher indicates awareness of students’ activities and needs in other parts of the classroom.
<b>Teacher facilitates students’ involvement through open-ended questions and factual questions that allow students to get involved in the activity or lesson and assist in their understanding or participation.</b>
Teachers should be purposeful in involving children in conversations, discussions and interpretations. Teachers should listen and extend conversations into more descriptive, grammatically mature statements. Instruction should include teaching rare and new vocabulary, cognitively challenging content, and listening to and responding to what children have to say. There should be intentional opportunities for children to use and develop their language skills, both with adults and with each other.
<b>Questions asked and activities provided are open-ended and facilitate students’ use of analysis and reasoning.</b>
Teachers ask engaging and open-ended questions and provide time for children to reflect and respond. Open-ended questions encourage thinking and reasoning and encourage children to express their thoughts. There is



no right or wrong answer. Teachers should pose questions to get insight into what children are thinking and to stimulate their thought processes.

*Reference the following documents:*

**Open-Ended Questions to Help Children Think**

**Questions to Post with centers**

**Teacher promotes analysis and reasoning by focusing on problem solving, experimentation and prediction, comparison and classification, and evaluating/summarizing.**

Instructional plans should include opportunities for children to extend their learning with higher level thinking opportunities. Children can identify a problem and solution, make predictions and experiment to see if their predictions are correct, compare and classify items, make evaluations, summarize events and key details, etc.

**Teachers regularly ask students to explain their thinking.**

The teacher allows students to explain their reasoning when solving problems and makes lesson adjustments. (E.g., Teacher asks, “Tell me why you think that ball will float?”)

Question starters can prompt children to explain their thinking. Examples of question starters can be: Tell me more, Tell me how you know, Why do you think that, How did you figure that out? What do you think will happen if..., why?)

Strategies such as Turn and talk, think/pair/share, whisper to a partner could all be used to support children sharing their thinking.

**Students are allowed to select centers based on their interests.**

“Letting young children make choices is one of the benefits of centers. Children who are given a choice of the center they use will become more involved in the play, follow their interest and maintain their activity longer. Each day children should have an opportunity to choose the center where they will work. Early childhood teachers use various approaches to manage centers and children's choices. Some teachers use a self-managing system for operating centers.” Rebecca Isbell, Director, Child Study Center, East Tennessee State University.

Examples of center management: use of clothespins, popsicle sticks, necklaces, etc. to manage the capacity of the centers.

**Teachers do not rigidly adhere to an agenda at the expense of learning opportunities and student interest in activities.**

The teacher is flexible with planning, goes along with student ideas, or organizes instruction around student interests and needs.

**Teachers provide many opportunities to stimulate students’ creativity and ability to generate new ideas.**





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The teacher is not focused on having students do things in one particular way, rather helping them to explore a variety of ways to approach learning.