

Introduction to the New York State Next Generation Early Learning Standards

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The task of revising the Early Learning Standards provided an opportunity to articulate a shared understanding of what young children can achieve with our support. Across New York State, educators, community members, researchers, and policymakers all advocated for what would be best for *all* children – developmentally appropriate expectations within a context that embraces children’s multiple identities and differing abilities. Standards represent a belief that equitable outcomes among diverse populations are possible when we focus our instruction and programming on who children are and what they need. Standards are only ideals, however, without the investment and dedication of the educators and parents, family members, and other adults in children’s lives. It is their work and protective care that empowers children to reach their fullest potential and makes real the Standards’ potential to equalize academic achievement for New York’s young children.

Articulating the New York State Standards for the youngest children in prekindergarten to third grade required particular attention to the nature of learning in early childhood. The members of the Early Learning Task Force, along with the hundreds of educators, early childhood professionals, and community members who provided feedback during the period of public comment advocated strongly for a clear articulation to key questions:

- Given the range in child development, is it appropriate to set Standards for young children?
- How can Standards protect

children are reading conventionally, there is a continuum of emergent skills that are stimulated and reinforced as early as infancy. This occurs through

development along with academic considerations.⁷ Children's histories and vulnerabilities will manifest in school; in response, educators organize instruction, programming, and service

multicultural perspectives through materials, lesson plans, displays, and experiences that do not privilege any dominant group. They use culturally sustaining approaches to affirm children's identities and frame diversity in positive terms. Rather than making children blind to diversity, educators understand the importance of normalizing differences among human beings so as to establish a positive anti-bias environment that contributes to children's learning.¹⁰

As members of a greater society, educators also examine their own cultural perspective as they make decisions on behalf of children. Here too, educators pursue and develop the competence to create an environment that reflects, not just their own perspective, but that of the diverse groups represented in the classroom and in society, and adopt the values or dispositions that promote diversity as an asset for learning.

As educators work with children's families, they recognize the influence of culture in shaping child-

Research highlights many lifelong advantages associated with bilingualism.¹³ The ultimate purpose of the learning standards would be to develop children's potential so they garner and sustain every possible advantage into adulthood. Promoting bilingualism and multilingualism as children develop proficiency in the English language is in keeping with that purpose.

Conclusion

The Early Learning Standards represent a collective agreement among educators and collaborators of the age appropriate instructional goals for young children. They do not describe the limits children should reach, but the foundation to untold possibilities across a lifetime. Inherently optimistic, the Standards organize the work of teaching, as they build towards a vision of self-efficacy and empowerment that rewards children's innate capacity to learn.

¹³ Callahan, R.M., Gándara, P. (2014). *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the U.S. labor market*. London: Multilingual Matters.