

Primrose Schools

White Paper Executive Summary

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Foreword

The most important thing a parent can do to prepare a child for success in life is to believe in and support the education of that child at home and at school. The importance of this connection for a child's learning has been encouraged through the development of many different types of programs ranging from home-based daycare settings to fully developed, highly structured and freestanding corporate programs. Each type of setting has the potential for supporting young children's learning and preparing them to be successful in school and in life. Great variability exists between programs and environments. The best and most effective programs utilize up-to-date research in early childhood development, accepted national and state-level standards, as well as, "best practice" recommendations to support their programming. Primrose Schools represents a "gold standard" of this approach and philosophy.

Primrose Schools is a premier, private preschool and a trusted leader in providing quality early education and child care services. At the heart of the Primrose School curriculum and program is a focus on providing early childhood experiences, in a high quality, structured and inviting setting that supports the development and attainment of successful, happy, active, and well-rounded lives for children. The program has also been shown to develop a strong foundation for elementary success and beyond. Primrose students consistently score above average on the Bracken Assessment, a nationally-normed measure of school readiness. For the past two years Primrose students have scored in the 90th percentile compared to same-age peers across the nation.

This foundation for success in elementary school is anchored by encouraging the social-emotional development of every child at Primrose. Children are encouraged to develop confidence in their own abilities and a personal expectation for success in anything they do. Programming and curriculum are in alignment with national and state standards and benchmarks. In addition, the emphasis on standards provides the basis for developmentally appropriate assessment and early identification of any struggles a child might have. This permits the implementation of teaching and learning strategies in a low-risk, low-pressure and highly loving and supportive environment to help the child overcome difficulties. Primrose Schools' goal for every child is to have an active mind, healthy body and happy heart now and in the future.

With an active mind, healthy body and happy heart...anything is possible!

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education has been the focus of increased research for many years. School readiness was established as the top goal set forth in the National Education Goals during the late 80's and early 90's by the first Bush administration. The Clinton administration continued emphasizing this goal by setting the objective that, "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn." To that end, significant funding was provided to agencies working to establish research-based strategies for achieving that objective. This emphasis was continued during the George W. Bush administration through several initiatives, like "Reading First" and NCLB. It was assumed that the increased level of accountability would lead to greater preparation in preschool children. Barack Obama and his choice for Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, have pledged a more direct approach. President Obama has allocated \$10 billion, specifically earmarked for early childhood education.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC) released a Topic Paper titled *The Science of Early Childhood Development* (2007). NSCDC highlighted a series of Implications for Policy and Practice. These implications included: (1) Policy initiatives that focus on high quality learning opportunities for young children prepare children for better achievement in school and more success in work, family, and community. (2) Greater success can be promoted through "a range of parent education, family support, early care and education, preschool, and intervention services." (3) There must be a focus on the child's social-emotional development, in addition to the child's cognitive development, to "have maximum impact on the development of sturdy brain architecture and preparation for success in school." (4) Early identification and early intervention facilitates corrective action and improved likelihood for success in school. (5) Failure to identify vulnerable children early often results in poorer outcomes and higher costs at a later time.

Value of Early Experiences in a High-Quality Setting

The voluminous research literature produced for the last 50 years corroborates the importance of early experiences to a child's future development and success. Study after study presents the need for a strong start when young to ensure children's later successful educational experience, as well as a significantly greater quality of life as an adult. Two key studies are often cited as examples of these conclusions. These studies were the High Scope Perry Preschool Project and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute's study on the impact of a high quality preschool experience. The results of these studies support the importance of high-quality Preschool programming to help ensure the best educational outcomes in the future.

Well-Rounded Programming and a Successful, Happy and Active Life

It is clear that a high-quality early childhood experience provides greater opportunity for success in school and in life. The question that must be answered is, "What are the characteristics of a high-quality early childhood experience?" This question has been studied and the research has identified several components of a high-quality, well rounded early childhood experience. Consistently, the following have been stated as integral factors: (1) Focus on social emotional development ; (2) Child-centered classrooms; (3) Active play and child-initiated activities integrated with teacher-directed activities; (4) A setting which encourages enthusiasm for learning; (5) Relationships between program and family; (6)

Developmentally appropriate and continuous curriculum; (7) Qualified teachers; (8) Alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment; (9) Active professional development programs.

Social Emotional Development

The National Center for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), a working group in Ireland, has issued ongoing reports noting that the most important factors in creating positive learning outcomes were: (1) Quality interactions with other children, adults, objects, and places. (2) A language-rich environment that encourages play, exploration, conversations and collaboration between adults and children and between children and children. (3) A balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated activities. (4) Play and first-hand experiences indoors and outdoors. (5) Adults who observe, empathize, listen to, and talk to children. (6) Recognition of connections and progression in learning as children move from one setting to another. (7) Supportive relationships between parents and settings.

In addition, NCCA identified four themes that are integrated into the curriculum. They are *Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking*. It is clear from their work that social-emotional development must be an integral part of the curriculum and programming of successful early childhood programs.

Enthusiasm for Learning

The concept of activating a desire to learn is a difficult concept to define. On the surface, it would appear quite simple. People have believed for years that children are born with an innate sense of wonder and natural curiosity and therefore, a profound desire to learn. However, research has shown that it is not that simple. In considering enthusiasm for learning, one must consider academic enablers, such as interpersonal skills, study skills, motivation and engagement. Academic enablers are attitudes and behaviors that allow a child to benefit from classroom experiences and instruction. In early childhood education, the most critical academic enablers are Interpersonal Skills, Motivation and Engagement. Interpersonal skills include cooperative learning behaviors necessary to interact with others. Motivation reflects a child's approach, persistence, and level of interest regarding learning. Engagement reflects attention and active participation in classroom activities.

Active Minds and Healthy Bodies

In 2000, A Position Statement of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) developed by the Council on Physical Education for Children (COPEC) reflected research-based *Appropriate Practices in Movement Programs for Young Children Ages 3 – 5*. The Position Statement creates a basis for developing and utilizing developmentally appropriate practices in movement programs to accomplish the goals in the Introduction paragraphs above. The Position Statement articulated the basic premises for a quality, developmentally appropriate movement program for children. It outlines five basic premises. They are: (1) Teachers of young children are guides and facilitators; (2) Children should engage in movement programs designed for their developmental levels; (3) Young children learn through interaction with their environment; (4) Young children learn and develop in an integrated fashion; and (5) Planned movement experiences enhance play experiences.

Steve Stork and Stephen W. Sanders (2008) wrote passionately about the importance of physical activity on cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development in *Physical Education in Early Childhood*, which was published in *The Elementary School Journal*. One of the things that they point out is that there may be an assumption that children provide their own physical activity opportunities. Though sparse, limited research does suggest that this assumption is not true and that opportunities for quality physical activity must be provided. More sedentary lifestyles are developed early and result in increases in health concerns. Stork and Sanders conclude that becoming physically active for a lifetime depends on (1) the learning of developmentally appropriate skills; (2) properly trained and educated individuals who know what and how to provide appropriate instructional practices for young children; (3) promotion of a positive and safe physical activity environment with appropriate-sized equipment; and (4) an inclusive curriculum based on an understanding of movement concepts and skill themes.

Linking a Strong Foundation to Success in Elementary School and Beyond

School Readiness

There is no single definition of school readiness. There is no Federal definition set out in legislation or otherwise. Each state is free to define the concept of school readiness as it sees fit. Another consideration is that school readiness did not only refer to a child's readiness for school, but also a school's readiness to handle a child's needs at all age levels. The concept has evolved over this decade as new research, policy briefs, and working papers are released in conjunction with state-developed standards and expectations for ability and skills at school entry. Further complicating this process is the lack of uniform standards and a lack of uniform strategies for assessing children entering Kindergarten. Finally, a distinction must be made between readiness for school and eligibility for school.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) issued a Preschool Policy Brief titled, *Prepared for Kindergarten: What Does "Readiness" Mean?* (2005). They indicated that there is disagreement between educators and parents as to which skills are important for school readiness. Parents tend to focus more on cognitive skills, while educators tend to give equal weight to cognitive skills and social-emotional development of the child. NIEER argues that, when defining readiness, the definition must include the concept of what is "good enough" in each domain due to the variety and unevenness of development at this age.

While many organizations were focusing on defining school readiness, Pre[K]Now emphasized that the "most essential element" was highly qualified and educated teachers³¹. They also identified ongoing professional development as critical to high-quality programs and the outcome of school readiness.

Assessment

Assessment of children in early childhood is a critical component of the process for preparing a child for school and life beyond. There are multiple research studies which indicate the importance of early identification and early intervention for helping students reach their potential. Unfortunately, there are many issues related to the concept, theory and philosophy of assessment during early childhood. Access to assessment in early childhood may often be limited due to cost and/or availability of knowledgeable individuals. The goals of the assessment and the level of experience doing the assessments vary greatly.

The inter-relationship of a high-quality curriculum and an effective assessment approach is highlighted in many aspects of the research. The use of assessment data from the children permits the evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum in meeting the child's needs. Ultimately, the child exits the early childhood program with the skills, abilities and knowledge that are targeted by the program. The more rigorous, well-balanced, and aligned with standards the program is, the more prepared the child is for learning.

NIERR published a Policy Brief in July of 2004. *Preschool Assessment: A Guide to Developing a Balanced Approach* was designed to provide insight into the philosophy and practice of early childhood assessment, to provide a "pragmatic perspective" to this sensitive area, and to provide support to those involved with the assessment of young children so that the child and what is best for them, remains the centerpiece and focus of assessment. This Policy Brief also outlined four major issues and primary uses of child assessment. These are: (1) Identify children who may be in need of specialized services. (2) Plan instruction for individuals and groups of children. (3) Identify program improvement and staff development needs. (4) Evaluate how well a program is meeting goals for children. One other key aspect of this Policy Brief was to list and describe the variety of assessment methods that are available. Each has its own set of pros and cons.

Bracken Basic Concept Scale – Revised (BBCS-R) and Bracken School Readiness Assessment – Third Edition (BSRA-3)

Primrose Schools selected the Bracken Basic Concept Scale – Revised (BBCS-R) for the standardized testing measure used with their Private Kindergarten program and the Bracken School Readiness Assessment – Third Edition (BSRA-3) for use with their Pre-Kindergarten program. Every child is assessed using the respective instrument at the beginning and the end of the appropriate year. These instruments were chosen because they met the strenuous criteria set by NAEYC, NAECS/SDE, AERA, APA, NCME and many other professional organizations. In addition, the high degree of reliability and construct, concurrent and predictive validity made the tools ideal for assessing individual development of the child and readiness for school.

The BBCS-R and the BSRA-3 were designed to be used for the following purposes: (a) To determine the extent to which a child has acquired the basic concepts needed to be successful in formal education; (b) To determine the basic concepts a child has mastered and the concepts the child has not yet acquired; (c) To plan curriculum-relevant interventions; (d) To assess student progress as it related to response to intervention (RtI); (e) To assist in identifying children with language impairments; (f) To assist in determining eligibility for speech-language services. Data from the BBCS-R and BSRA-3 are used to produce norm-referenced scores. These results can be used to produce printable reports for feedback to families and other educational institutions.

Alignment with Standards

Early learning standards have become increasingly important in defining developmentally appropriate and realistically achievable goals and expectations in early childhood. Standards represent the "mile markers" on the path to adulthood for each child. Early learning standards play an important role in developing curricula and how the curricula are implemented. Finally, early learning standards provide a point of reference for accountability. They supply one of the tools by which students, teachers, and

programs can be evaluated. Standards offer a uniform and consistent measure for all programs, regardless of their individual differences.

NAEYC and NAECS/SDE issued a Joint Position Statement in November of 2002, titled *Early Learning Standards: Creating the Conditions for Success*. This joint position statement was also endorsed by the Council of Chief State School Operators (CCSSO), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the State Collaborative on Early Childhood Education Assessment of the CCSSO and supported by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The purpose of this position statement was to “address the significant educational, ethical, developmental, programmatic, assessment, and policy issues related to early learning standards.”

One of the most significant goals of this joint position statement was to facilitate the collaboration and strengthen the linkage between early childhood programs and the K-12 education community. Further, the statement identified essential features of developmentally effective early learning standards. There are four essential features. These are: (1) Effective early learning standards must emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes. (2) Effective early learning standards are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes. (3) Effective early learning standards use implementation and assessment strategies that are ethical and appropriate for young children. (4) Effective early learning standards are accompanied by strong supports for early childhood programs, professionals, and families.

In addressing the four essential characteristics of developmentally effective early learning standards, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, in conjunction with their partners in this position statement created a subset of criteria. Each of essential characteristics are: (1) Effective early learning standards must emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes. (2) Effective early learning standards are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes. (3) Effective early learning standards use implementation and assessment strategies that are ethical and appropriate for young children. (4) Effective early learning standards are accompanied by strong supports for early childhood programs, professionals, and families.

Primrose Schools

Primrose Schools was founded in 1982 with the goal of being recognized as the leader in early childhood education. The underlying philosophy of Primrose Schools was the importance of balance. Balance for the young, developing child. Balance for the busy parent. Balance for the family as a unit. To accomplish this, Primrose Schools developed the Balanced Learning® curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes balance between learning, play, self-esteem, character development, curriculum, and teaching. Figure 6 represents the Balanced Learning® approach.

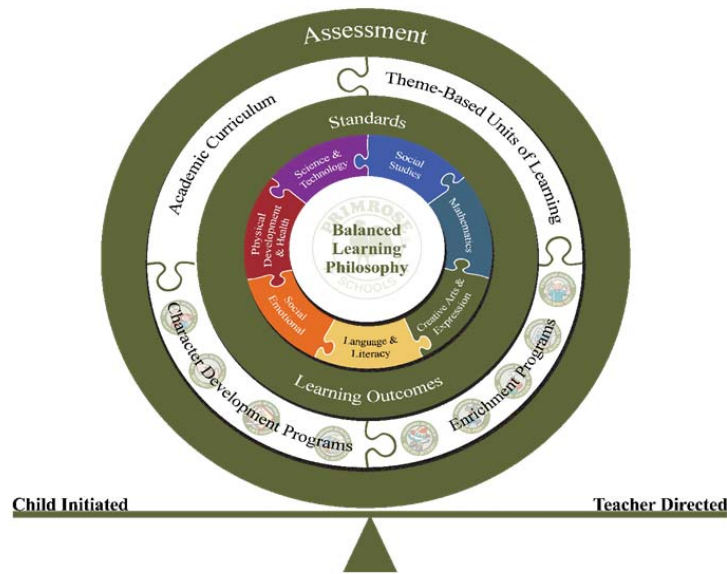


Figure 6. The Balanced Learning® Approach

The Balanced Learning® curriculum is best understood as a series of concentric rings. Each ring is composed of the elements that serve as a basis, anchor, and core for the next larger ring, building outward with a balance between child initiated and teacher directed activities to reinforce learning and development.

Primrose Schools developed the Balanced Learning® curriculum with a commitment to always utilizing “Best Practices,” recommendations from the leading organizations in child education and development and research-based and empirically supported approaches to learning. Primrose Schools has integrated the guidelines and recommendations from some of the key organizations in the field of early childhood education. These include the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP); National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC); National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); Foundation for Child Development (FCD); and National Center for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

Primrose Schools’ commitment to high-quality programming resulted in the successful accreditation of their programs by The Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) and The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), for meeting comprehensive and rigorous standards on curriculum, safety, teacher education, and professional development. The CITA/SACS accreditation process was rigorous and covered seven specific areas:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results Resources
5. Resources and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Based on the information gained throughout the most recent corporate review of Primrose School Franchising Company, the CITA/SACS (Advanced) review team made the following overall commendations:

1. **Visionary and Innovative Leadership.** Commendations are extended to the President/CEO for maintaining the passionate vision of the original corporation founders and expanding that vision through her innovative and successful leadership. The corporate-level staff shares the vision and also provides excellent leadership within their roles and responsibilities.
2. **Reflection and Action.** The business plan is framed on information and market analysis. The development of the plan is based on thoughtful reflection and analysis of the information. The plan provides strategies for action in all departments of the corporation.
3. **Passion for Excellence and Balanced-Learning® Approach.** The heart of the Primrose brand is quality and standards of excellence. For young children, quality is based on the proprietary Balanced Learning® Approach. All franchises are held accountable to standards of excellence through the Primrose Quality Control Systems.
4. **Systematic Processes in Leadership Management.** Processes, procedures, and programs rarely operate in isolation within this corporation. Rather, through quality leadership and management, they are systematically linked allowing each to support and build upon others.
5. **Strong Alignment.** An excellent alignment exists between and among the corporation vision, standards, objectives, curriculum, instructional strategies, student and school assessment, and training. Alignment enables the corporation to observe progress and develop plans for improvements.
7. **Technology Support of Instructional Program.** This is a priority area for Primrose Corporation. Feedback from franchisees strongly supports the increased use of technology at all aspects of their operations and programs (including the instructional program).
8. **Curriculum and Staff Development.** Curriculum improvement is primary in this corporation. The Primrose Curriculum and Instructional Programs are current, founded on best practices research, and are under constant reflection and revision. The Staff Development Programs are excellently fluid to accommodate changes, trends, and leading edge information. All staff members of the corporation and schools have access to quality professional development.
9. **Staffing Qualifications and Capacity in Numbers.** The corporation is dedicated to quality. In that regard, the corporation assures the hiring of staff having integrity and passion for children along with the needed expertise and talents for their roles and responsibilities. The corporation assures enough staff to establish a culture for success. The corporation also hires external companies to assist with projects, as deemed appropriate.
10. **Value of Accreditation as Part of Quality.** Primrose Corporation values accreditation and continuous improvement as part of quality. The corporation requires all schools to become accredited following their first year of operation. The corporation provides the schools with excellent guidance and oversight in the accreditation process.

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David M. Schwartz, Ph.D. was the Senior National Measurement Consultant for The Psychological Corporation, Harcourt and Pearson Inc., for 10 years. Currently, he is President of Education Process Solutions, Inc. He is also a practicing Clinical Neuropsychologist in Atlanta, Georgia, and teaches the School Neuropsychology cohort in the Southeastern United States. Dr. Schwartz also consults with local school districts and clinical settings. He has served as an Adjunct Professor at Kennesaw State University. Dr. Schwartz holds a joint Ph.D. in Behavioral Medicine and Clinical Psychology, with a specialization in Neuropsychology. He has extensive experience in the area of assessment and treatment, and he serves the child, adolescent, and adult populations. Dr. Schwartz utilizes a “consensus building” approach when working with individuals, families, professionals, and community resources. He is known for his practical recommendations and his easy accessibility.