

September 2005

AIM HIGH

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY



AIM HIGH ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

On July 1, 1999, the Children, Youth and Families Department, Office of Child Development launched a new initiative called AIM HIGH to improve the quality of child care services to children and families. The Office of Child Development developed the AIM HIGH Essential Elements as a major part of the AIM HIGH initiative. The Essential Elements are specifically designed for early childhood programs and includes increasing levels of quality. Each level includes criteria that are nationally recognized to enhance the quality of services provided to young children, support for families accessing child care services, and improve working conditions for staff who provide the services. The highest level of quality – Level 5 results in accreditation by a nationally recognized organization.

In planning for the new STAR Quality Rating System for child care licensing, the Children, Youth and Families Department made the decision to include the criteria of AIM HIGH Essential Elements into the child care licensing regulations. The new STAR Quality Rating System, called **Look for the Stars** contains five levels. The higher the Star Level, the higher the level of quality.

Therefore, basic licensing regulations now include the criteria in Level One of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. All licensed programs are required to comply with the new regulations in order to receive a STAR 1 license signifying that the program meets minimum licensing regulations. STAR 2, 3, 4, and 5 license status is voluntary and correspond with the AIM HIGH Essential Elements levels of quality. If you wish to obtain a 2 STAR license, you will need to maintain licensing regulations (STAR 1) and meet and maintain criteria in Level Two of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. If you wish to obtain a 3 STAR license, you will need to maintain licensing regulations, meet and maintain criteria in Level Two and criteria in Level Three of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. If you wish to obtain a 4 STAR license, you will need to maintain licensing regulations, meet and maintain criteria in Level Two, criteria in Level Three, and criteria in Level Four of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. If you wish to obtain a 5 STAR license, your program will need to maintain licensing regulations and maintain current national accreditation by an approved accrediting body.

Please be aware that the Office of Child Development periodically revises the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. It is your responsibility to insure that you have a current copy of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. Current copies of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements are available through the Office of Child Development, the Training and Technical Assistance Programs, or can be downloaded from www.NewMexicoKids.org.

AIM HIGH ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS AT A GLANCE

Voluntary: Not Required for Basic Licensure

<p style="text-align: center;">2-STAR* (AIM HIGH Level Two) <i>Programs must meet all Child Care Licensing Regulations plus:</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3-STAR (AIM HIGH Level Three)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4-STAR (AIM HIGH Level Four)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5-STAR (AIM HIGH Level Five)</p>
<p><u>2A) Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></p> <p><u>Staff Qualifications</u>—All staff members working directly with children must have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED) by July 1, 2008.</p> <p><u>Staff Evaluation</u>—No requirements for this level.</p> <p><u>Staff Communication</u>—No requirements for this level.</p>	<p><u>3A) Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u>. Continue meeting requirements for Level Two plus:</p> <p><u>Staff Qualifications</u></p> <p>a) Group Child Care Home—Second caregivers have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in the career lattice.</p> <p>b) Out of School Time Care—All school-age staff have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in the career lattice.</p> <p><u>Staff Evaluation</u>—No requirements for this level.</p> <p><u>Staff Communication</u>—No requirements for this level.</p>	<p><u>4A) Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></p> <p><u>Staff Qualifications</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two and Three. No additional requirements for this level.</p> <p><u>Staff Evaluation</u></p> <p>a) A tool, which includes criteria for evaluation and the process of evaluation for staff at least on an annual basis;</p> <p>b) A plan for staff improvement for each staff member, if appropriate, based on evaluation results.</p> <p><u>Staff Communication</u></p> <p>a) Meetings are held on a regular basis, at least quarterly;</p> <p>b) Staff participation in developing agendas;</p> <p>c) Evidence that meeting provide a safe environment where staff members can ask questions, present alternative ideas, and share feelings.</p>	<p><u>5A) Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></p> <p>Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two, Three and Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
<p><u>2B) Environment</u></p> <p>a) Noisy and quiet areas are arranged so that children's activities can be sustained with out interruption.</p> <p>b) Materials are organized by type and, where appropriate, are labeled with words or pictures. Unused materials are stored in inaccessible storage.</p> <p>c) Centers of interest are placed near needed resources (e.g., art area is near water supply).</p> <p>d) Traffic patterns prevent children from continually interrupting on another.</p> <p>e) Floor surface is suitable for activities that will occur in each center</p> <p>f) No one's on the appropriate rating scale. See list of rating scales in Element 3B.</p>	<p><u>3B) Environment</u> –Continue meeting Level Two requirements plus:</p> <p>a) Evidence that materials and equipment are rotated on a regular basis to conform to curriculum goals.</p> <p>b) Staff of the program are very familiar with the rating instrument and feel confident that they will score an average score of four with no ones.</p> <p>c) Evaluation of program's environment requires the completion of a post rating scale*, scoring an average of 4 with no one's.</p> <p>*See list of environment rating scales in Element 3B.</p>	<p><u>4B) Environment</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two and Three plus:</p> <p>a) Outdoor space has some protection from the elements.</p> <p>b) Outdoor space has some play interest centers (refer to page 37 of the Essential Elements for a detailed list).</p> <p>c) Opportunities to develop motor skills.</p>	<p><u>5B) Environment</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two, Three and Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>

<p>2C) Curriculum and Assessment of Children Progress—no requirements for this level.</p>	<p>3C) Curriculum and Assessment of Children's Progress</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a written curriculum that represents: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Consistency between the mission and philosophy statement, short-range and long-range goals. b) Knowledge of child development (i.e., the curriculum is developmentally appropriate) c) Facilitation of all areas of development; d) Variety of learning experiences; e) Variety of materials that range from simple to complex; f) Meaningful content (i.e., it is worth knowing for the children involved); g) Active engagement of children; h) Opportunities to make choices; i) Opportunities to experiment and explore; j) Integrates foundations for the following content areas (math, science, social studies, language arts/literacy, health, fine arts); k) Large blocks of time for discovery and child-initiated learning activities; l) A balance of active/quiet, individual/small group/large group activities and indoor/outdoor time; m) Emphasis on the value of social interaction through peer learning; n) Protection of children's psychological safety. 2. Staff begins to implement the beginning stages of the items listed above. 3. Research and choose an assessment instrument. Staff receives training on how to observe children, and on the use of the assessment instrument. 4. Develop and implement an observation and assessment process (i.e. anecdotal observations or a developmental checklist) for individual curriculum and program planning. 5. Describe how the program will communicate assessment information with families. 6. Posted weekly lesson plans organized around an appropriate curriculum that incorporate a posted daily schedule (one for parents and one for children) and a written description of the role of the teacher(s) and teaching/learning strategies used. 	<p>4C) Curriculum and Assessment of Children's Progress—Continue meeting Level 3 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A written curriculum that is carefully planned to meet both short-term and long-term goals for the program and for individual children and includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Knowledge of children's needs and interests based on observation and assessment completed in the classroom; b) Continued use of assessment information and child observations for individual curriculum and program planning (evidence that the program ties assessment of children to curriculum); c) Reflection of on-going implementation demonstrated in classroom environment; d) Broad range of content; e) Variety of instructional strategies; f) Sequencing of activities from simple to complex; g) Support for children's thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving; h) Evidence that each child's language and culture are integral components of the daily program; i) Evidence of child participation in planning activities and developing program rules and routines; j) Evidence that adults challenge children just beyond their current level of development (scaffold their learning); k) Documentation verifying at least a 3 months history of curriculum planning and preferably a year's history of planning. 	<p>5C) Curriculum and Assessment of Children's Progress—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Three and Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
--	--	--	--

<p>2D) <u>Staff Professional Development Plan</u></p> <p>a) Development of a written plan for on-going professional development for each staff member, including the director. See sample forms in Element 2D.</p>	<p>3D) <u>Staff Professional Development Plan</u> – Continue meeting Level Two requirements plus:</p> <p>a) Evidence of progression of the professional development plan from Essential Element 2D. The progress should show evidence that the program is beginning to meet the professional development criteria in AIM HIGH Level 4 (if the program is planning on attaining AIM HIGH Level 4).</p>	<p>4D) <u>Staff Professional Development Plan</u></p> <p>a) Evidence that individual professional development plans established at Levels 2 & 3 are progressing for each staff member, including the director.</p> <p>b) Evidence of career guidance to ensure that all training contributes to program and individual goals.</p>	<p>5D) <u>Staff Professional Development Plan</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two, Three and Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
<p>2E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u></p> <p>a) Statement supportive of family involvement is incorporated into the parent handbook that includes an open door policy to a child’s classroom.</p>	<p>3E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u> –Continue meeting Level Two requirements plus: Provide at least two family involvement activities including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion Box, Parent Bulletin Board, Newsletter; • Parent meetings, Socials, Informational Workshops, Minimum of one activity that encourages male participation • Child developmental milestone information, Parent/Staff Conferences • Classroom and/or Field Trip volunteer, Support of program operation • Daily (written) communication system between parent and teacher. 	<p>4E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two and Three plus: Provide at least three family involvement activities (review list in Element 3E).</p>	<p>5E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Two, Three and Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
<p>2F) <u>Administrative Policies--Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</u></p> <p><u>Financial Policies and Procedures</u>—no requirement for this level.</p> <p><u>Operational Evaluation</u>—no requirement for this level.</p>	<p>3F) <u>Administrative Policies--Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</u></p> <p><u>Financial Policies and Procedures</u></p> <p>a) Evidence that program has a business plan;</p> <p>b) Evidence that program has a one-year budget showing all income and expenditures;</p> <p>c) Polices and procedures for the handling of financial transactions.</p> <p><u>Operational Evaluation</u>—no requirements for this level.</p>	<p>4F) <u>Administrative Policies--Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</u></p> <p><u>Financial Policies and Procedures</u>—Continue meeting Level Two requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</p> <p><u>Operational Evaluation</u></p> <p>a) A written plan for a process that is comprehensive and includes all aspects of the program’s operations, is on-going and occurs on a regular basis;</p> <p>b) A plan for using evaluation results for program improvement;</p> <p>c) Exit interviews with all staff who terminate, with feedback incorporated into program planning/evaluation.</p>	<p>5F) <u>Administrative Policies--Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</u></p> <p><u>Financial Policies and Procedures</u>—Continue meeting Level Two requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</p> <p><u>Operational Evaluation</u>—Continue meeting Level Four requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</p>

<p>2G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u></p> <p>a) Development of a compensation philosophy statement that is incorporated into the personnel handbook.</p>	<p>3G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement an incremental compensation plan that includes tangible recognition and salaries. 2. Provide at least three employee benefits including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment of individual professional membership or association fee • Insurance supplement • Paid Leave (sick, vacation, personal, maternal, parental or bereavement) • Monetary bonuses • Insurance (health, life accident, disabilities, dental or vision) • Work release time to attend professional development 	<p>4G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u>— Continue meeting Level Two and Three requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to implement an incremental compensation plan that includes tangible recognition and salaries. 2. Program must provide at least four employee benefits (review list on Element 3G). 	<p>5G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u>—Continue meeting requirements for Levels Three and Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>																												
<p>2H) <u>Ratios and group size</u>—No requirements for this level.</p>	<p>3H) <u>Ratios and group size</u>—No requirements for this level.</p>	<p>4H) <u>Ratios and group size</u>—Implement ratios and group size:</p> <p>Licensed Centers:</p> <p>Center in which children are grouped by age:</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>6 weeks through 24 months</td><td>1:5</td></tr> <tr><td>2 years</td><td>1:8</td></tr> <tr><td>3 years</td><td>1:10</td></tr> <tr><td>4 years</td><td>1:10</td></tr> <tr><td>5 years</td><td>1:12</td></tr> <tr><td>6 years</td><td>1:12</td></tr> </table> <p>Centers in which age groups are combined:</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>6 weeks through 24 months</td><td>1:5</td></tr> <tr><td>2,3 and 4 years</td><td>1:10</td></tr> <tr><td>3,4 and 5 years</td><td>1:12</td></tr> <tr><td>6 years</td><td>1:12</td></tr> </table> <p>Maximum group size:</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>6 weeks through 24 months</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>2 years</td><td>16</td></tr> <tr><td>3, 4, and 5 year</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>6 years and up</td><td>24</td></tr> </table> <p>Licensed Homes: 1:6 for programs licensed for 6 children</p>	6 weeks through 24 months	1:5	2 years	1:8	3 years	1:10	4 years	1:10	5 years	1:12	6 years	1:12	6 weeks through 24 months	1:5	2,3 and 4 years	1:10	3,4 and 5 years	1:12	6 years	1:12	6 weeks through 24 months	10	2 years	16	3, 4, and 5 year	24	6 years and up	24	<p>5H) <u>Ratios and group size</u>—Continue to meet Level Four requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
6 weeks through 24 months	1:5																														
2 years	1:8																														
3 years	1:10																														
4 years	1:10																														
5 years	1:12																														
6 years	1:12																														
6 weeks through 24 months	1:5																														
2,3 and 4 years	1:10																														
3,4 and 5 years	1:12																														
6 years	1:12																														
6 weeks through 24 months	10																														
2 years	16																														
3, 4, and 5 year	24																														
6 years and up	24																														

		2:12 for programs licensed for 12 children Licensed School-age Programs Group size does not exceed 24 1:12	
<p>2) Accreditation—No requirement for this level.</p> <p>*Programs serving children on Child Care Assistance will be required to achieve 2-STAR status at the time of their annual visit effective 7/1/2006.</p>	<p>3) Accreditation—No requirement for this level.</p>	<p>4) Accreditation—No requirement at this level.</p>	<p>5) Accreditation through a nationally recognized accrediting body approved by the Office of Child Development Board through demonstration that their accreditation significantly matches standards set by the NAEYC Academy of Early Childhood Program Accreditation.</p>

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY

LEVEL TWO

Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Two.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2A

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

RATIONALE—One of the most important determinants of program quality is hiring qualified staff in order to ensure the provision of quality services to children and families. Minimum educational qualifications ensure that staff have basic awareness of what is required to perform their assigned functions responsibly.

DEFINITION—Minimal requirements for professional development/qualifications of the teaching staff.

CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. All staff members working directly with children must have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED) as of July 1, 2008.

STAFF EVALUATION

No requirement for this level.

STAFF COMMUNICATION

No requirement for this level.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2B

ENVIRONMENT

RATIONALE—The environment affects the way children behave, develop, and learn. It also affects the quantity and quality of interactions between adults and children. It includes tangible aspects, such as appropriate materials and equipment, and intangible aspects, such as the physical and human qualities that together create an atmosphere that promotes self-esteem, social interaction, rich language, and joy of learning.

DEFINITION—The environment meets all required local, state, and federal regulations. It includes space (both indoors and outdoors) with appropriate equipment and materials that encourage children to engage in hands-on learning. The environment represents New Mexico’s diverse languages and cultures.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. The environment is organized into identifiable learning centers in child care centers and identifiable spaces for home-based programs.
 - ❖ Noisy and quiet areas are arranged so that children’s activities can be sustained without interruption.
 - ❖ Materials are organized by type and, where appropriate, are labeled with words or pictures. Unused materials are stored in inaccessible storage.
 - ❖ Centers of interest are placed near needed resources (e.g., art area is near water supply).
 - ❖ Traffic patterns prevent children from continually interrupting one another.
 - ❖ Floor surface is suitable for activities that will occur in each center.
2. No ones (1’s) on the appropriate rating scale (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ITERS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ECERS), Family Day Care Rating Scales (FDCRS), or School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)*.

*For information on where to obtain rating scales, see Essential Element 3B.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2C

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS*

*No requirements for Level Two.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2D

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RATIONALE—The quality of the staff is the most important determinant of the quality of programs. Research shows that the level of professional preparation and formal education directly impact developmental outcomes for children. Teachers make decisions about the environment and the curriculum based on knowledge of early childhood theories and best practices. Well-prepared teachers advocate for quality in early childhood programs and take advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of New Mexico’s culturally diverse children and families.

DEFINITION: A staff professional development plan is a written plan (see samples on the following pages) for the training of all staff, including the director, in order to meet the overall goals of the organization as set forth in the mission statement.

CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Development of a written plan for on-going professional development for each staff member, including the director.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENT

1. Staff participate in the development of their own professional development plans.

Staff Development Goals Blueprint¹

Teacher's Name _____

Date _____

Strengths as a teacher

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Areas in need of improvement/growth

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Goal(s) _____

Objectives

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Teacher's signature

Director's signature

¹ Excerpted from Blueprint for Action: Achieving Center-Based Change Through Staff Development, Bloom, P. J., Sheerer, M., and Britz, J., New Horizons, 1991.

Staff Development Action Plan

Name _____ Date _____

Objective #1 _____

Activities	Time Needed	Resources Needed
1.		
2.		

Evaluation (how/when) _____

Objective #2 _____

Activities	Time Needed	Resources Needed
1.		
2.		

Evaluation (how/when) _____

Objective #3 _____

Activities	Time Needed	Resources Needed
1.		
2.		

Evaluation (how/when) _____

Teacher's signature

Director's signature

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2E

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PLAN

RATIONALE—Parent participation is valuable in assisting parents to increase their knowledge about child development and education which enhances their ability to serve as their child’s primary teacher and to help staff make learning meaningful for children.

DEFINITION: The program has developed a written plan on how it will involve families.

CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Statement supportive of family involvement, which includes an open door policy to a child’s classroom, is incorporated into the parent handbook.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2F

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES—FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL EVALUATION*

*No requirements for Level 2

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2G

EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

RATIONALE—Incremental compensation and benefits act as incentives for the staff to participate in professional development activities and remain in the program. Retaining an increasingly qualified teaching staff reduces costly staff turnover and increases program quality.

DEFINITION: There is evidence that the program has developed a written statement regarding compensation and benefits for staff.

CRITICAL ELEMENT

- a) Development of a compensation philosophy statement that is incorporated into the personnel handbook.

EXAMPLE:

The objective of our total compensation package is to pay above the average rate for early childhood staff employed in our community when individual performance, team and overall agency performance goals are achieved. The agency will compensate its entire staff based on the following factors: an individual's job performance level, type of position, and internal equity. Additional compensation, depending on program budget, will be variable based on team or individual performance.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: 2H

RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE*

*No requirements for Level Two

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2I

ACCREDITATION*

*No requirements for Level Two.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY

LEVEL THREE

**Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, Level Two requirements
PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Three.**

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3A

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION*

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and Level Two requirements plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENT

Group Child Care Home:

1. Second caregivers have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in New Mexico's Early Care, Education and Family Support Career Lattice*.

Out of School Time Care:

1. All school-age staff have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in the career lattice.

STAFF EVALUATION

No requirement for this level.

STAFF COMMUNICATION

No requirement for this level.

*For more information on the New Mexico's Career Lattice, go to www.newmexicokids.org

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3B

ENVIRONMENT

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM'S ENVIRONMENT

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Evidence that materials and equipment are rotated on a regular basis to conform to curriculum goals. Evidence of rotation of portable outdoor equipment is included in this requirement. Evidence can be written lesson plans documenting rotation or chronological dated photographs or dated videotapes of the classroom.
2. Staff of the program are very familiar with the rating instrument and feel confident that they will score an average score of four with no ones.
3. Each classroom in the program must earn an average score of four (4) with no ones (1) on the appropriate environmental rating scale (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ITERS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ECERS), Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS), or School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)*. The post rating scale is administered by a professional who have been trained in the use of the scale (ITERS, ECERS, FDCRS, OR SACERS). The Program Development Specialist (PDS) assigned to the program may not administer the post rating scale.

*Environment rating scales are available through:

- Your local Training and Technical Assistance Program
- Publisher: Teachers College Press at www.tcpres.com
- Various early childhood catalogs

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3C

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

RATIONALE—One of the major aspects of high quality programs for young children is the curriculum, which stems from sound principles of child development and reflects that each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth and development. The curriculum consists of developmentally appropriate practices that are based on a holistic view of children, meeting their needs in all six developmental areas: physical, motor, social, emotional, language, and cognitive. Some programs might also include the spiritual domain as a seventh developmental area. Curriculum is carefully planned to meet both short-term and long-term goals for the program and for children.

Children's progress is assessed informally on a continuous basis using a series of brief anecdotal records (descriptions of the child's behavior or skills in given situations). Children's progress also can be assessed formally at least twice/year using a developmental checklist (checklist of behaviors that indicate physical, motor, language, cognitive, social, and emotional development/progress).

DEFINITION: Curriculum is what happens every day in the classroom and on the playground. It includes every aspect of the daily program. Curriculum derives from the program's mission statement, philosophy (which, in turn, is based on assumptions about young children's development and learning), and program goals and objectives. It includes how materials and equipment are used, activities that children and adults participate in, and interactions among children and between children and adults.

Assessment information is used to inform the development of curriculum. Observation of children is the primary method of gathering information for assessment, but especially in the case of children with special needs, other forms of assessment and evaluation may be used. Information on each child is collected, summarized and analyzed to document progress, and this information normally is shared with parents.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Develop a written curriculum. Staff begins to implement the beginning stages of the items listed below:
 - ❖ Consistency between the mission statement, philosophy statement, short-range and long-range goals;
 - ❖ Knowledge of child development (i.e., the curriculum is developmentally appropriate);

- ❖ Facilitation of all areas of development;
- ❖ Variety of learning experiences (i.e., water/sand play, science activities, block play, use of creative media, literacy activities, etc.). This includes having materials and equipment available to support activities;
- ❖ Variety of materials that range from simple to complex (i.e., classroom contains puzzles that range from 4 to 14 pieces depending on the ages of children served in the classroom);
- ❖ Meaningful content (i.e., it is worth knowing for the children involved);
- ❖ Active engagement of children;
- ❖ Opportunities to make choices;
- ❖ Opportunities to experiment and explore;
- ❖ Integrates foundations for the following content areas (math, science, social studies, language arts/literacy, health, fine arts)
- ❖ Large blocks of time for discovery and child-initiated learning activities;
- ❖ A balance of active/quiet, individual/small group/large group activities and indoor/outdoor time;
- ❖ Emphasis on the value of social interaction through peer learning;
- ❖ Protection of children’s psychological safety.

2. Research and choose an assessment instrument² based on the following guiding principles excerpted from Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments, National Education Goals Panel, 1998. Staff receives training on how to observe children, and on the use of the assessment instrument.

- **Bring about benefits for children.** To justify conducting assessments, there must be a clear benefit—using the assessment results in planning curriculum for the children in the classroom or to improve the overall quality of the educational program.
- **Be tailored to a specific purpose and should be reliable, valid, and fair for that purpose.**
- **Recognize that reliability and validity of assessments increase with children’s age.** The younger the child, the more difficult it is to obtain reliable and valid assessment data. It is particularly difficult to assess children’s cognitive abilities accurately before age 6.

² An excellent example of an assessment tool is *Focused Portfolios: A Complete Assessment for the Young Child*, Gronlund, G., & Engel, B., Redleaf Press, 2001. Web address: www.redleafpress.org. Other examples of assessment tools are listed on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website under Beyond the Journal at www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/. Click on the January 2004 article “Choosing an Appropriate Assessment System.”

- **Be age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection.** Assessments of young children should address the full range of early learning and development.
 - **Be linguistically appropriate, recognizing that to some extent all assessments are measures of language.** Assessment results are easily confounded by language proficiency, especially for children who come from home backgrounds with limited exposure to English. Each child's first- and second-language development should be taken into account when determining appropriate assessment models and in interpreting the meaning of assessment results.
 - **Be a valued source of assessment information, as well as an audience for assessment results.** Assessments should include multiple sources of evidence, especially reports from parents and teachers. Assessment results should be shared with parents as part of an ongoing process that involves parents in their child's education.
3. Develop and implement an observation and assessment process (i.e., anecdotal observations or a developmental checklist) for individual curriculum and program planning. For preschoolers, anecdotal observations should be completed at least four times a year for each child enrolled in the program or a development checklist completed at least twice a year accompanied with written observations that are conducted during the interim time period. For infants and toddlers, anecdotal observations should be completed six times a year or a developmental checklist completed three times a year accompanied with written observations conducted during the interim time period.
 4. Describe how the program will communicate assessment information with families.
 5. Post weekly lessons plans organized around an appropriate curriculum (see information on infant and toddler curriculum listed below) that incorporate a posted daily schedule (one for the parents and one for the children) and a written description of the role of the teacher(s) and teaching/learning strategies used.

Curriculum For Infants and Toddlers

Curriculum for infants is unlike that for preschool children. It is based on their daily routines. Each infant determines his/her own daily schedule, by being fed when he is hungry, put down for a nap when he is tired and sleepy, changed when he is wet or soiled, consoled when he is distressed, and played with when he is awake and alert. Each of these routines is used as a "teaching" experience by the caregiver talking, smiling, singing, and naming objects. Awake time

should be balanced between child-initiated exploration of the environment (toys and other materials) and one-on-one play/interaction with his caregiver. Appropriate toys are introduced at each stage of development, and toys and other materials are rotated on a regular basis, maintaining a mix of the familiar and novel.

Curriculum for toddlers is similar to that for preschool children with a few exceptions: There is more flexibility in the daily schedule to accommodate each toddler's needs (for eating, sleeping, toileting, etc.). Duplicate toys and other items are recommended because of toddlers' inability to share. Fewer and different centers of interest are appropriate, and little emphasis is placed on group activities.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3D

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RATIONALE–The quality of the staff is the most important determinant of the quality of programs. Research shows that the level of professional preparation and formal education directly impact developmental outcomes for children. Teachers make decisions about the environment and the curriculum based on knowledge of early childhood theories and best practices. Well-prepared teachers advocate for quality in early childhood programs and take advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of New Mexico’s culturally diverse children and families.

DEFINITION: An on-going plan for continued professional development for each staff member, including the director.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Evidence of progression of the professional development plan from Essential Element 2D. The progress should show evidence that the program is beginning to meet the professional development criteria in AIM HIGH Level 4 (if the program is planning on attaining AIM HIGH Level 4).

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3E

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

RATIONALE—Parent participation is valuable in assisting parents to increase their knowledge about child development and education which enhances their ability to serve as their child’s primary teacher and to help staff make learning meaningful for children.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Provide at least TWO (2) family involvement activities including but not limited to:
 - ❖ Suggestion box, parent bulletin board, newsletter;
 - ❖ Parent meetings, socials, informational workshops, minimum of one activity that encourages male participation;
 - ❖ Child developmental milestone information, Parent/Staff conferences;
 - ❖ Classroom and/or field trip volunteer, support of program operation;
 - ❖ Daily (written) communication system between parent and teacher.
2. Information on family involvement activities is cross-referenced in the program’s parent handbook.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3F

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES—FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

RATIONALE— Sound financial management is one of the best ways for businesses to remain solvent. How well a program manages the finances of the business is the cornerstone of every successful business venture. Each year thousands of potentially successful businesses fail because of poor financial management. Business owners will need to identify and implement policies that will lead to and ensure that financial obligations are met. (U. S. Small Business Administration)

FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

DEFINITION: A business plan that details strategies for obtaining adequate funding, the handling of money, accompanied by a budget, which balances income and expenses, in compliance with all local, state, and federal laws regarding the reporting of income and management of money.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Evidence that program has a business plan.
2. Evidence of a one-year budget.
3. Policies and procedures for the handling of financial transactions.

For example, a business plan could include:

1. Executive Summary
 - ❖ In one page, capture the strengths of the business and the particular place it holds in the industry.
2. Business Description
 - ❖ Describes the services offered by the business. Provides a brief history of the business and its philosophy for doing business.

3. Market Information
 - ❖ Describe and quantify the target market for the services. Identify and describe the competition. Identify and describe the company's "competitive advantage" – characteristics which make it better than or different from the competition in your market.
4. Marketing Plan
 - ❖ Identify specific tactics for informing your target market that the service exists, i.e., public relations, advertising, promotions, pricing discounts, etc.
5. Financial Plan
 - ❖ Copy of the last year's financial statements.
 - ❖ Prepare a detailed operating budget, providing monthly detail and yearly summaries.
6. Management Plan
 - ❖ Identify the key personnel in the business, including job descriptions and relevant background experience. Include plans for other personnel. Discuss any expansion opportunities and plans.
7. Contingency Plan
 - ❖ Identify areas of risk to the successful operation of the business and describe your plans to lessen each area of risk. Also explain how debt would be repaid in the event of business failure.

Recommended Elements

1. Sources of funding for the long-term (5 years).
2. A five-year projected budget, showing all income and expenditures.

OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

No requirements for Level 3.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3G

EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

RATIONALE—Programs that are able to offer employee incremental compensation and benefits reinforce the professionalism of the staff employed by the program and provide incentive for the staff. Research shows that programs that provide incremental compensation and benefits are more likely to retain staff.

DEFINITION: Provide a brief written description of benefits available to staff.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Implement an incremental compensation plan that includes tangible recognition and salaries.
2. Programs must provide at least THREE (3) employee benefits* including but not limited to:
 - ❖ Payment of individual professional membership or association fee;
 - ❖ Insurance supplement;
 - ❖ Paid Leave (sick, vacation, personal, maternal, parental or bereavement);
 - ❖ Monetary bonuses;
 - ❖ Insurance (health, life, accident, disabilities, dental or vision);
 - ❖ Work release time to attend professional development.

*Benefits other than those listed must be approved by the Office of Child Development prior to implementation.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: 3H

RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE*

*No requirements for Levels Two or Level Three.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3I

ACCREDITATION*

*No requirements for Levels Two or Three.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY

LEVEL FOUR

**Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, Levels Two and Three requirements
PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Four.**

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4A

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Levels Two and Three. No additional requirements for this level.

STAFF EVALUATION

DEFINITION: Each staff member is evaluated by the director, using criteria from the individual's job description. The evaluation criteria and procedures (which may include self-evaluation) are known to each individual being evaluated as described in the programs personnel handbook. The director discusses evaluation results with each staff member, and results are considered when determining salary increments and are incorporated into the individual's professional development plan.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. A tool, which includes criteria for evaluation and the process of evaluation for staff at least on an annual basis.
2. A plan for staff improvement for each staff member, if appropriate, based on evaluation results.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENT

1. Staff participate in the development of any corrective action plan, if necessary.

STAFF COMMUNICATION

DEFINITION: Meetings held on a regular basis with all staff for program planning and problem solving.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Evidence that meetings are held at least on a quarterly basis;
2. Staff participation in developing agendas and setting meeting dates;
3. Evidence that meetings provide a safe environment where staff members can ask questions, present alternative ideas, and share feelings.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4B

ENVIRONMENT

DEFINITION: The environment meets all required local, state, and federal regulations. It includes space (both indoors and outdoors) with appropriate equipment and materials that encourage children to engage in hands-on learning. The environment represents New Mexico's diverse languages and cultures.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Levels Two and Three plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Outdoor space has some protection from the elements.
2. Outdoor space has some play interest centers such as the following*. Outdoor space should include as many centers as possible and be offered as often as possible:
 - ❖ Active Play area that includes climber, swings, slides, space for active games, play with a parachute, hoops, balls and other equipment.
 - ❖ Sand box for digging area and various sand toys made available to children. Sandbox /sand is kept clean.
 - ❖ Water table or dish tubs and water toys located near a faucet.
 - ❖ Riding toys with trails or paths that link various spaces on the playground, a large patio area for riding, and a storage area.
 - ❖ Dramatic play area that includes a playhouse or other play structure. Dramatic play also occurs on climbers in conjunction with riding toys. Wide variety needed.
 - ❖ Quiet play area for relaxing, enjoying books, listening to stories, and alone space.
 - ❖ Science/Nature area such as a small garden, animal area or bird feeders.
 - ❖ Art/Woodworking area for children to engage in creative and constructive play with equipment such as a table, an easel, tree stumps, etc.
3. Opportunities to develop motor skills.

*Excerpted from the 45-Hour Entry Level Course, State of New Mexico, 1994

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4C

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Three plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. A written curriculum that is carefully planned to meet both short-term and long-term goals for the program and for individual children that includes:
 - ❖ Knowledge of children's needs and interests based on observation and assessment completed in the classroom;
 - ❖ Continued use of assessment information and child observations for individual curriculum and program planning (evidence that the program ties assessment of children to curriculum).
 - ❖ Reflection of on-going implementation demonstrated in the classroom environment;
 - ❖ Broad range of content;
 - ❖ Variety of instructional strategies;
 - ❖ Sequencing of activities from simple to complex.
 - ❖ Support for children's thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving;
 - ❖ Evidence that each child's language and culture are integral components of the daily program;
 - ❖ Evidence of child participation in planning activities and developing program rules and routines;
 - ❖ Evidence that adults challenge children just beyond their current level of development (scaffold their learning).
 - ❖ Documentation verifying at least a three (3) months history of curriculum planning and preferably a year's history of planning.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4D

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RATIONALE–The quality of the staff is the most important determinant of the quality of programs. Research shows that the level of professional preparation and formal education directly impact developmental outcomes for children. Teachers make decisions about the environment and the curriculum based on knowledge of early childhood theories and best practices. Well-prepared teachers advocate for quality in early childhood programs and take advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of New Mexico’s culturally diverse children and families.

DEFINITION: An on-going plan for continued professional development for each staff member, including the director. Evidence should show that staff professional development plans are progressing in order to meet national accreditation standards, if the program plans on attaining national accreditation.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Levels Two and Three plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Evidence that individual professional development plans established at Levels Two and Three are progressing for each staff member, including the director.
2. Evidence of career guidance to ensure that all training contributes to program and individual goals.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENT

1. Staff participate in the development of their own professional development plans.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4E

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PLAN

RATIONALE—Parent participation is valuable in assisting parents to increase their knowledge about child development and education which enhances their ability to serve as their child's primary teacher and to help staff make learning meaningful for children

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Levels Two and Three plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Provide at least THREE (3) family involvement activities including but not limited to:
 - ❖ Suggestion box, parent bulletin board, newsletter, written monthly communication
 - ❖ Parent meetings, socials, informational workshops, minimum of one activity that encourages male participation;
 - ❖ Child developmental milestone information, Parent/Staff conferences;
 - ❖ Classroom and/or field trip volunteer, support of program operation;
 - ❖ Daily (written) communication system between parent and teacher.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4F

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES—FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

RATIONALE— Sound financial management is one of the best ways for your business to remain profitable and solvent. How well you manage the finances of your business is the cornerstone of every successful business venture. Each year thousands of potentially successful businesses fail because of poor financial management. As a business owner, you will need to identify and implement policies that will lead to and ensure that you will meet your financial obligations. (U. S. Small Business Administration)

FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two. No additional requirements for Levels Three or Four.

OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

DEFINITION: The operational evaluation is a process to determine if the goals and objectives of the program are being met. The evaluation process includes collecting, summarizing, analyzing and using data to document outcomes.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. A written plan for a process that is comprehensive and includes all aspects of the program's operation, is ongoing and occurs on a regular basis;
2. A plan for using evaluation results for program improvement;
3. Exit interviews with all staff who terminate, with feedback incorporated into program planning/evaluation.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENT

1. Evidence that the plan for the evaluation process includes the director, the staff, family members, and external early childhood professionals.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4G

EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

RATIONALE—Programs that are able to offer employee benefits reinforce the professionalism of the staff employed by the program and provide incentives for staff. Research shows that programs that provide benefits are more likely to retain staff.

DEFINITION: Provide a brief written description of the benefits available to staff.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two and Three plus:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Continue to implement an incremental compensation scale to include tangible recognition and salaries.
2. Programs must provide at least FOUR (4) employee benefits* including but not limited to:
 - ❖ Payment of individual professional membership or association fee;
 - ❖ Insurance supplement;
 - ❖ Paid Leave (sick, vacation, personal, maternal, parental or bereavement);
 - ❖ Monetary bonuses;
 - ❖ Insurance (health, life accident, disabilities, dental or vision);
 - ❖ Work release time to attend professional development.

*Benefits other than those listed must be approved by the Office of Child Development prior to implementation.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: 4H

RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE

RATIONALE—Research has consistently documented that fewer children per adult and smaller group size result in a higher quality program and more positive developmental outcomes for children. When teachers have smaller numbers of children and smaller groups, they can supervise and monitor children more carefully, provide more individualized attention, implement activities that are developmentally appropriate for each child, and engage in more one-on-one language. Basic health and safety are compromised when adults have responsibility for too many children and/or when group size is large.

DEFINITION: Ratios are stated as the number of children allowed per one adult in each classroom or home at all times. The number of children per adult increases as the age of children increase. Group size refers to the total number of children in any one classroom or home.

Programs preparing for national accreditation should check with the chosen accrediting body for specific information related to ratios and group size. It is recommended that programs meet the ratios and group size identified by national accrediting bodies.

CRITICAL CONTENTS

Licensed Centers:

Center in which children are grouped by age:

6 weeks through 24 months	1:5
2 years	1:8
3 years	1:10
4 years	1:10
5 years	1:12
6 years	1:12

Centers in which age groups are combined:

6 weeks through 24 months	1:5
---------------------------	-----

2,3 and 4 years	1:10
3,4 and 5 years	1:12
6 years	1:12

Maximum group size:

6 weeks through 24 months	10
2 years	16
3, 4, and 5 years	24
6 years and up	24

Licensed Homes:

- 1:6 for programs licensed for 6 children
- 2:12 for programs licensed for 12 children

Licensed School-age Programs

Group size does not exceed 24 1:12

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4I

ACCREDITATION*

*No requirement at this level.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY

LEVEL FIVE

Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, Levels Two, Three and Four requirements PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Five.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 5

ACCREDITATION

Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, all Levels Two, Three and Four requirements plus:

RATIONALE–The purpose of voluntary national accreditation is to improve the quality of care and education provided to young children. The accreditation process provides an opportunity for administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, and parents to work collaboratively to evaluate and improve program quality. It also involves external validation by an early childhood expert. Accreditation enhances the credibility of the program and communicates to parents, funders, and policy-makers that the program is of high quality.

DEFINITION: The program has participated in the accreditation process, has been validated by a nationally recognized accrediting body approved by the Child Development Board through demonstration that their accreditation significantly matches standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Academy of Early Childhood Program Accreditation.

CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Evidence of current accredited status by one of the bodies listed below. National accrediting entities must be approved by the Child Development Board. If an accreditation entity makes changes to the accreditation process, the accreditation must be re-reviewed and re-approved.

CENTERS:

- a) NAEYC (National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- b) NECPA (National Early Childhood Program Association)
- c) ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International)
- d) COA (Council on Accreditation)

FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES:

- a) NAFCC (National Association of Family Child Care)

SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS:

- a) NAA (National Afterschool Association)