

What is aligned curriculum?

Curriculum broadly refers to academic subject matter and instructional strategies but encompasses everything teachers intend for children to learn inside the classroom. This includes goals and objectives in social-emotional, physical, and cognitive domains.

Curriculum are aligned both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal alignment refers to the degree of alignment among standards, curricula, and assessments *within* a grade level. Vertical alignment refers to the degree of alignment *across* grade levels. One study that surveyed alignment of instructional supports in Pre-K and kindergarten found that alignment within these grades (horizontal) was stronger than the alignment between them (vertical). This relatively weak vertical alignment could be explained by differences in how educators view the purposes of early education or by separation between the agencies and departments that govern Pre-K and kindergarten.¹

Alignment should be developmentally oriented to reflect the increasing capabilities of children. As developmental capabilities broaden and deepen, so too should the curricula. Curricula are aligned with prior instruction so that content, organization, and sequence build on prior knowledge. Further, both horizontal and vertical alignment are supported when using curricula that have been evaluated for effectiveness in real classrooms (evidence-based curricula).



What does aligned curriculum accomplish?

- Provides consistent and developmentally appropriate instructional practices throughout the early learning years
- Supports student learning and outcomes² and helps students smoothly transition from grade to grade
- Provides clear understanding to teachers, parents, and others of how to support learning at each stage of development

What is evidenced-based curricula?

These are curricula that have been rigorously assessed in classrooms. Studies endorsing these curricula can be found on government websites and in professional journals.³ Among endorsed early childhood curricula, including those in CPCs, are the following:

General

- High/Scope
- The Creative Curriculum
- Curiosity Corner

Literacy

- Doors to Discovery
- Success for All
- DLM Early Childhood Express with Open Court Pre-K Reading
- Early Literacy and Learning Model

Mathematics

- Pre-K Mathematics
- DLM Early Childhood Express Math Software
- Everyday Mathematics

Social-Emotional Development

- Positive Action

What is the curriculum in CPC P-3?

The Child-Parent Center preschool to 3rd grade program does not have one standardized curriculum, but rather it embraces a philosophy that promotes children acquiring basic skills through varied instruction. Classroom activities are structured to promote language, reading, and mathematics skills as well as social-emotional development. Liaisons for curriculum alignment and parent involvement share their information and strategies for promoting continuity in instruction and parent engagement with other schools.

The goal of the CPC P-3 aligned curricula is to provide consistent and developmentally appropriate instructional practices throughout the early learning years. Children learn through a variety of experiences, including whole group experiences, small group activities, shared reading, and journal writing. Teachers and aides focus on providing children frequent feedback on their performance. Because classes are small (preschool ratio 17 students: 2 teachers, elementary grades 25:2), individualized and interactive learning activities are frequent. Teachers and aides receive regular in-service training and feedback on curriculum strategies to ensure classroom practices are true to the model proven effective by years of research.

“We have created a new curriculum that supports center-based active learning and connects the content curriculum to an overarching area of study for students to engage with. Along with seeing higher levels of student engagement, we see more student-initiated work and child-driven conversations, lower suspension and referral rates in kindergarten, and higher numbers of students meeting targets in oral language and foundational literacy skills.”

— Jenna Ruble, Former Preschool-3rd Grade Manager

CPC P-3 curriculum requirements

- Aligns to standards (Head Start, Common Core, Early Learning Standards, etc.)
- Addresses language-literacy, math, science, and social-emotional learning
- Supported by ongoing assessment of child progress
- Aligned from preschool to 3rd grade
- Balances child-initiated and teacher-directed activities
- Involves regular participation for leadership team members in grade-level and across-grade meetings throughout the year
- Promotes continuity in instruction and parent engagement with other schools through input from liaisons on curriculum alignment and parent involvement who share their strategies

Research on curriculum in CPCs

A 2004 study² found that children in CPCs with both frequent child-initiated and frequent teacher-directed activities had better outcomes when compared with children who experienced only teacher-directed or only child-initiated activities.

Children who received this type of integrative approach were more likely to be ready for kindergarten, had higher reading achievement scores in grade 3 and grade 8, and were less likely to be held back a grade. Children who participated in a highly child-initiated but lower teacher-directed classroom had the highest rates of high school completion by age 22.

Curriculum Approach	School Readiness Score	3 rd Grade Reading Score	High School Completion Rate
HT + HC	51.4	99.6	66.5%
HT + LC	46.5	96.8	62.2%
LT + HC	49.6	99.7	68.4%
LT + LC	46.7	95.1	57.2%

HT – High in teacher-directed activities
 LT – Low in teacher-directed activities
 HC – High in child-initiated activities
 LC – Low in child-initiated activities

What curriculum should a school consider?

Schools should consider their individual needs when selecting a curriculum package or materials. In schools with limited resources, it is important to make sure curricula are being used in the most effective way possible. Also, consistent, high-quality curricular resources across a district’s classrooms is a critical means to bring equitable outcomes for all students.

Using an evidence-based curriculum, while not a guarantee of better learning, can be an effective use of school resources when implemented with quality and adherence to the researched model. Evidence-based curricula have been evaluated using high-quality research methodology and found to have a positive influence on one or more aspects of a child’s development.

References

- 1 Cohen-Vogel, Lora & Sadler, James & Little, Michael & Merrill, Becca. (2020). (Mis)Alignment of instructional policy supports in Pre-K and kindergarten: Evidence from rural districts in North Carolina. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 52. 10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.11.001.
- 2 Graue, E. Clements, M. A. Reynolds, A. J. & Niles, M. D. (2004). More than teacher-directed or child initiated: Preschool curriculum type, parent involvement, and children’s outcomes in the Child-Parent Centers. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12 (72).
- 3 Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Initiative. (2008). Effects of preschool curriculum programs on school readiness: Report from the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Initiative. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/20082009/>.

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