

**ILLINOIS BIRTH TO THREE PROGRAM STANDARDS
AND QUALITY INDICATORS & RESOURCE GUIDE**

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FOREWORD

Learning begins at birth. Despite this widely accepted fact, school systems have until recently concentrated their efforts largely on children over age five, and to a lesser extent on children ages three to five. The last decade, however, has seen tremendous growth in both professional knowledge and public awareness about the importance of the first three years after birth and the role of the family in the life of the child. This has been accompanied by increases in public support for programs that help families provide infants and toddlers with the experiences they need for healthy growth and development. In Illinois, the Early Childhood Block Grant is enabling communities across the state to work with families to lay the foundations for future success in school and in life from the beginning of their children's lives.

Much has been learned over the last several decades about how best to help families in their efforts to support their children's early development, and this knowledge is reflected in this document. While working with very young children is in many ways a natural extension of a school district's mission, it presents unique challenges based on the developmental tasks and contexts of infancy and toddlerhood. Babies and toddlers grow and develop physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively through stable, loving relationships with adults, especially their parents. Therefore, programs must recognize and respect the centrality of parent-child relationships rather than attempting to work with children in isolation from their families.

In Illinois, grants are provided to support programs and services for children birth to three and their families by the authority of Section 2-3.71a of the School Code (105 ILCS 5/2-3.71a) and Section 2-3.89 of the School Code (105 ILCS 5/2-3.89). Recipients of grants must be committed to establishing programs, providing services and demonstrating accountability in compliance with all aspects of the requirements as stated in the School Code. The standards and quality indicators in this document are the basis for the development, implementation and evaluation of high-quality birth to three programs.

These standards and quality indicators reflect current knowledge, research findings and shared beliefs about high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood care and education in the context of programs for infants and toddlers and their families. The current research on infant and toddler development supports and validates the importance of quality programs and services for young children in partnership with their families, schools and communities. Implementing these standards and quality indicators will lay a foundation for future growth and development that promotes the child's physical, emotional, social and cognitive well-being leading to successful learning as appropriate for each child.

The process leading to the development of these standards and quality indicators included leadership from the Illinois State Board of Education with participation from birth to three scholars and practitioners. A work plan was developed which included the following: identification of a task force made up of early childhood professionals representative of the varied programs and geographic regions of the state; compilation of resources from Illinois, other states and national organizations; development of draft standards and quality indicators; and external and internal review of proposed standards. A resource guide and evaluation process will be provided for all grant recipients to assist them in their efforts to implement and provide accountability for the approved standards.

Quote: "I believe that a child's irreducible needs are the need for ongoing, nurturing relationships; physical protection, safety and regulation; experiences tailored to each child's individual differences; developmentally appropriate experiences; limit setting and structure; stable supportive communities and cultural continuity for children and their families, and the need to protect the future for our children. I feel the strongest about the need for ongoing nurturing relationships."—Dr. T. Berry Brazelton

VISION

All Illinois children, birth to three, will experience loving, stable, and nurturing relationships in safe, supportive environments that promote their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development and well being. These experiences provide the basis for successful learning as appropriate for each child. More importantly, they lay a foundation for children to lead fulfilling lives and become responsible, productive citizens. Therefore, it is important and expedient to support and invest significantly in Illinois' youngest children and their families.

Quote: "Children truly are the future of our nation. We owe to them, and our nation, to ensure that all children are born with the best possible chance to live, love, grow and excel." – Irving B. Harris, Children in Jeopardy: Can We Break The Cycle

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES*

Childhood is a sacred time that should be nurtured, celebrated and preserved.

Children's basic needs are family, safety, education, health, economic security, and arts, recreation and culture.

All children need to know they belong to loving families and caring communities.

Just as families must support children, communities must support families, and government and business must support both.

All children deserve safe homes, safe schools and safe communities.

Our children's sense of hope and possibility requires equal access to appropriate resources.

Children are prepared for the future when we teach them and they learn to honor and respect diversity.

As children mature, we must seek their voices, engage them and recognize the freedom they need to shape their destinies.

Children can learn from their mistakes. They deserve systems that give them that opportunity.

Each child is unique.

Every child is entitled to respect.

We must never give up on any child.

*The Charter for Illinois Children, Voices for Illinois Children, 1999

Quote: "Inspire one child...And you inspire the future."- TeacherCare

Resource Guide Introduction

The materials contained in this document were developed to assist you as your birth to three program proceeds to implement the Illinois Birth to Three Program Standards and Quality Indicators. The birth to three professionals who wrote the Resource Guide intended to offer choices and suggestions and did not intend that the document be read cover-to-cover. The user can go to a specific element of programming and find material that can stand-alone. There are many choices that can be made as we demonstrate that a program meets identified standards. It is important that these choices support the individual program in its own mission to provide services to infants and toddlers and their families.

The document contains and expands the original program standards draft in a consistent manner in the treatment of each quality indicator. Each program standard has two or more quality indicators that demonstrate a standard has been met. The first part of each quality indicator section, *Laying the Foundation*, is based on accepted practice and research. It is meant to provide additional support and thought for the quality indicator statement. *Getting Started*, the second part of each section, provides ideas and suggestions for programs beginning implementation of the indicator. It is usually presented in a step-by-step process. *Moving Forward*, the third and final part of each quality indicator section, is meant to suggest possible next steps, sometimes creative and innovative, that the program can take to move to a higher level of implementation.

The Additional Resources Section in the document contains curriculum and program materials, videos and web sites. Many of these resources were identified by the Illinois Birth to Three Programs funded by the early childhood block grant. Thanks and appreciation is extended to all who submitted materials and suggestions for their time and effort.

The development of this document was rewarding but challenging to those who worked the better part of two years on the draft. It is presented in respect for what you do and in the hope that you are encouraged, stimulated, supported, and validated in what your program provides to young children and their families in Illinois.

Respectfully and humbly offered,

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