Model Practices and Supports for Early Childhood Classrooms

Young Children with Disabilities Community of Practice
January 2026

Agenda

I. Session Overview

II. Model Practices and Supports

III. Improving Child Outcomes

IV. Developing New Practices

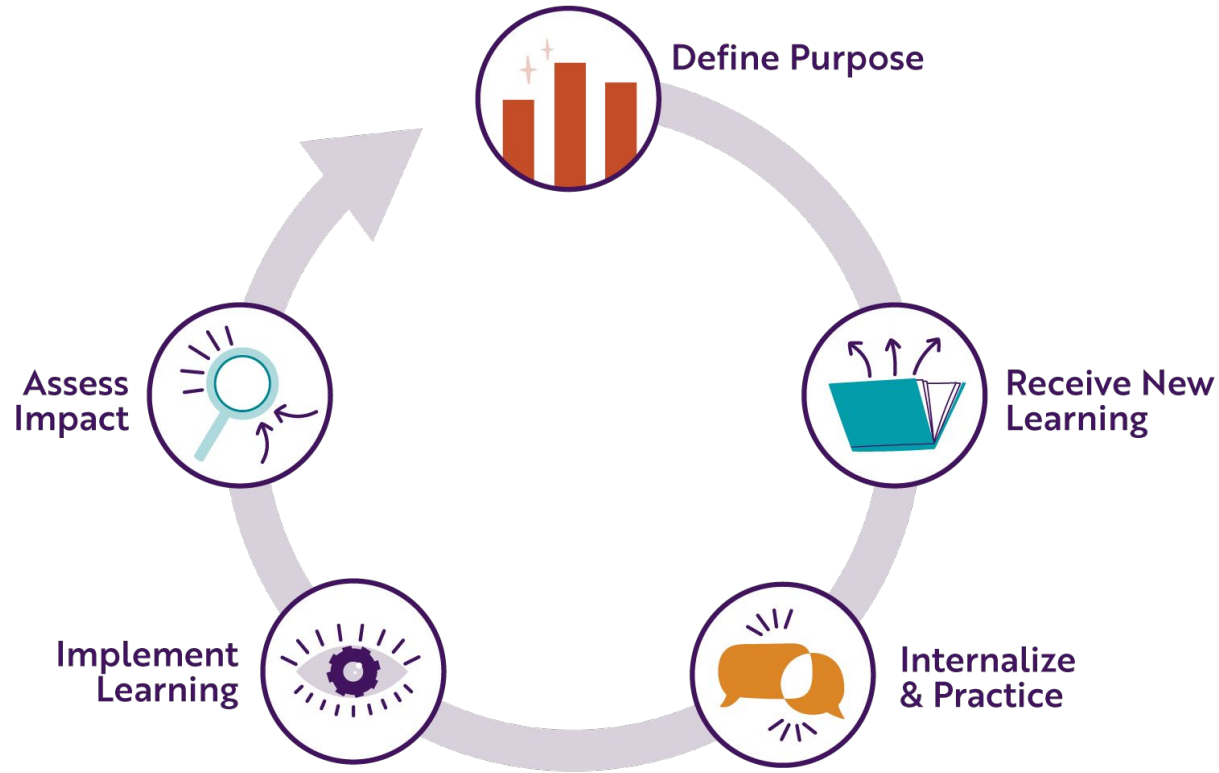V. Implementing Model Practices and Supports

VI. Closing

Session Overview

Louisiana's Education Priorities

✓ **Early childhood** leading to kindergarten readiness

✓ **Literacy** instruction aligned to the Science of Reading

✓ **Math** instruction from foundational to advanced skills

✓ Opportunities ensuring a **meaningful high school experience**

✓ An effective **teacher for every student**

✓ Expand **educational choice** for students and families

Professional Learning Cycle

Define Purpose

Receive New Learning

Internalize & Practice

Implement Learning

Assess Impact

Objectives

During this session, participants will:

- Better understand how a high-quality program benefits young children with disabilities.
- Learn how to embed high quality supports into the learning environment to support the individual needs of children.

Icebreaker

Think

How do the practices and supports used in early childhood classrooms directly impact the long-term outcomes of young children with disabilities?

Model Practices and Supports
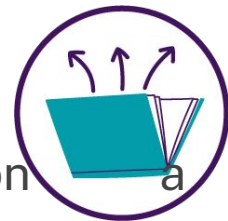
Model Practices and Supports Matter

Model practices and support are essential to improve outcomes for young children with disabilities because they provide educators with the necessary tools to:

- **Improve Child Outcomes:** They are essential for better child outcomes for all children, focusing on both developmental and academic skills.
- **Individualize Support:** They enrich learning environments to meet children's specific, individual needs.
- **Create Responsive Environments:** They help meet children's needs by providing predictability, which is important for comfort and security.
- **Ensure Intentional Instruction:** They are necessary for providing intentional, systematic instruction, which is crucial for children with disabilities to learn how to interact and develop.

Improving Child Outcomes
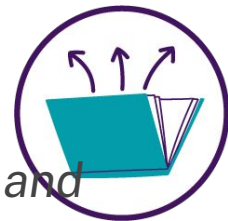
Model Practices and Supports

Model practices and supports for early childhood classrooms depend on a variety of strategies that provide educators with the tools necessary to improve child outcomes.

In order to improve child outcomes, educators must learn to:

- Focus on both developmental and academic child outcomes.
- Individualize supports to enrich the learning environment and skills.
- Create environments that are responsive to children's needs and interests.
- Provide intentional, systematic instruction.
- Actively facilitate learning through intentional opportunities.

Focusing on Individual Child Outcomes

The focus of individual child outcomes should be on both developmental and academic skills and outcomes such as acceptance, participation, and friendships.
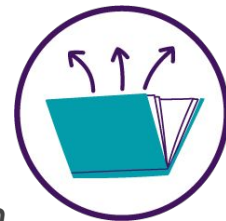
Individualized supports can improve child outcomes by:

- providing the child with an environment that enriches child development skills through play and intentional center activities;
- and engaging in play with children, encouraging participation, and guiding the children through the process with prompting.

Examples on how to focus on individual outcomes may include:

- Using a lighted toy to encourage scooting or crawling on the floor.
- Using manipulatives that are a child's favorite color to engage them in a counting activity.

Creating Responsive Environments

When creating a responsive learning environments, the key is to consider the interests and developmental needs and levels of the children in the classroom.

Ways educators can adjust the environment that is responsive to individual needs may include:

- Ensure children have access to manipulatives that are safe for biting or chewing.
- Set up a learning environment for more space if children are beginning to walk and pull up so that there is plenty of room to move around.
- Follow daily routines.
  - Predictability is important. Do not rearrange the environment too often, because children need consistency and the environment.
  - Daily routines allow for children to feel comfortable in the classroom and the children know what is expected and what is next in their day.

Responding With Intentional Efforts

Children with disabilities need more intentional, systematic instruction to learn how to interact with others. Teachers can provide opportunities through play for improved child connections.

Examples may include:
- *Playing a game where children take turns.*
- *Making faces during diaper changing time.*
- *Greeting children as they enter the classroom.*
- Sitting with a group of children and giving the children the words to say such as "your turn" and "my turn" to help the child interact appropriately.
- Pairing children with peers who have strong language skills to nurture the development of language in others.

Facilitating Learning and Development

Facilitation of learning and development considers how well the teacher facilitates activities to support children's learning and developmental opportunities.

Active facilitation in the toddler classroom includes:

- Teachers providing opportunities for exploration and learning within their classrooms.
- Teachers guiding exploration through intentional learning opportunities.
- Teachers working with children to support learning and development by engaging in activities with children.
- Teachers can find ways to relate information to a child's life and experiences.
- Teachers can integrate concepts across the activities or tasks.
- Teachers can encourage children to problem solve to improve thinking skills.

Developing New Practices

Child Development and Support

Healthy development is supported when children are exposed to   opportunities and experiences where their needs are met.

Development through daily activities can be met by:
- **Educators and Providers** participating in consistent quality training on the subjects that matter the most to better support child development.
- **Educators and Providers** monitoring child development through Teaching Strategies GOLD® to identify learning and developmental lags and gaps in order to provide appropriate instruction and make decisions on whether or not a child may be in need of additional support.

Promoting child development requires intentional **planning** and consistent **monitoring**. The Louisiana Early Learning Development Standards provide information in planning and Learn the Signs. Act Early provides materials from the CDC to monitor children's development.

Development Through Early Learning

Through studies, the CDC has found that early child experiences in childhood educational programs improved academic achievement and cognitive development.

Screening/Assessment

- It is important to collect information to pinpoint gaps in development.
- Use observations to identify developmental targets for individual children.

Embedding developmental needs across activities, routines, and transitions.

Examples may include:

- Starting the day with tummy time for an infant/toddler who needs to build strength.
- Utilizing sensory approaches to maximize child engagement through songs, movement, and visuals.
- Planning intentional activities that can provide quality interactions and engagement to develop language and movement.

Internalize & Practice

Instructional Support

Individualized instructional support should be made to daily routines and activities. Educators should be utilizing intentional, specialized instruction to meet the needs of all children in their care.

- Educators can make adaptations to their routine and activities to allow for children to learn and grow. Ways that children can be supported through instruction include:
    - Embedding instruction into the school day can promote child engagement, learning, and independence in activities, routines, and transitions.
    - Designing instructional procedures for teaching learning can target specific goals and objectives across the school day through activities, routines, and transitions.
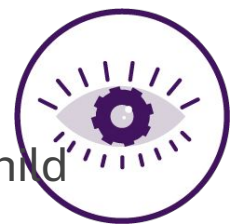
Implementing Model Practices and Supports

Implementing Instructional Practices

Implementing instructional practices that are effective for individual   child needs takes screening/assessment and planning for instructional needs.
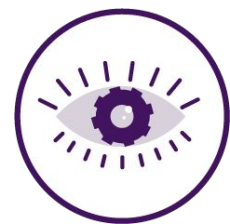
Step 1: Screening/Assessment

- It is important to collect data to pinpoint gaps in understanding. Use data to identify learning targets for individual children.

Step 2: Embed Instruction across activities, routines, and transitions. *Educators can embed learning into the school day by implementing intentional activities.*

- *Arrival Time:* Open centers with intentional activities to meet individual learning targets.
- *Morning Meeting:* Utilize sensory approaches to maximize child engagement through songs, movement, and visuals.
- *Center Play and Small Groups:* Plan intentional small group activities that can provide quality interactions and engagement.
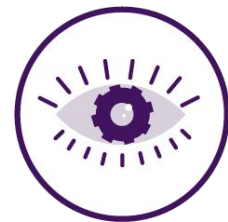
Utilizing Instructional Learning Formats

Educators will need to use different instructional learning formats to promote early development.

- **Learning through free play** allows children to set their own goals and follow their own interests. During free play, educators can observe, listen, and acknowledge child learning during play. Free play improves executive functioning skills and helps children make choices through interactions with materials and their peers.
- **Learning through guided play** allows educators to set the goals and plan with the child's learning needs and interests in mind. During guided play, children choose what they would like to do and how they want to learn, but the adult prepares the activities available.

Utilizing Instructional Learning Formats

Educators will need to use different instructional learning formats to promote early development.

- **Learning through direct instruction** is characterized by goals that are set by the teacher and are planned with the child's learning needs and interests in mind. During direct instruction, the educator prepares the learning environment and materials to align with the targeted goals, but the educator guides and scaffolds high quality instructional activities.
- **Learning through games** is characterized by utilizing games to set the goals and scaffold interactions through learning. Children learn to play by the rules, which direct the activity. Learning through games can lead to higher achievement in literacy and numeracy skills.

Closing

Key Takeaways

Key takeaways to provide high quality care to all children in early childhood classrooms include:

- Utilizing model practices are essential to improving better child outcomes for all children.
- Individualizing supports enrich learning environments to meet the specific needs of children.
- Creating responsive environments can better meet children's needs by allowing them to find comfort in predictability.
- Ensuring that intentional and systematic instruction is used in the classroom setting is necessary.