



Great Services: Components of a High-Quality Early Care and Education Program

Over a quarter century of scientific evidence has established the extraordinary importance of the first five years of a child's life. Early life experiences have a dramatic impact on brain development and form the foundation for a promising or troublesome future.

A remarkable body of research has established that well-designed early childhood programs increase the odds of positive outcomes for children, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special needs. Recent analysis of successful early childhood intervention efforts and broader studies of quality in child care and other settings have identified common components of effective programs.

Five Components of a High Quality Program

1. **Highly Skilled Teachers**
2. **Small Class Sizes and High Adult-to Child Ratios**
3. **A Curriculum Focused on Children's Development and Learning**
4. **Parent Engagement**
5. **Attention to Health and Safety**

Components of a High Quality Early Care and Education Program

Several studies have synthesized the key elements of effective programs, particularly those by Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, the Committee for Economic Development, and the National Institute for Early Education Research.² Five components stand out from this analysis.



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Five Components of a High Quality Program

1. Highly Skilled Teachers

Well-qualified teachers are a key ingredient to a great program. Teachers with better education and training establish positive relationships with children, engage them in expressive language and early learning, and help them develop the skills they will need in school, including social competence. Teachers with solid educational backgrounds, training and practicum experiences understand child development thoroughly, and can help each child progress positively.

2. Small Class Sizes and High Adult-to Child Ratios

Nearly all studies of staff-child ratios and group size in early care and education have concluded that these key indicators of quality lead to better experiences and outcomes for children. It makes sense that children in smaller groups get more attention from their teachers, as the research shows. The fewer the number of children cared for by an adult, the more optimal the caregiving and teaching.

3. A Curriculum Focused on Children's Development and Learning

A curriculum for young children has clarity on goals, the approaches toward learning, expected outcomes and assessment. In early childhood programs, "curriculum" applies not only to intellectual development, but to a more holistic approach that includes physical, social and emotional components. A great age-appropriate curriculum engages children's natural curiosity and joy of learning.



4. Parent Engagement

Great programs partner with parents in their child's early learning and development. Parents have extraordinary influence on their child's developments; engaging parents and families in a child's development is crucial to positive long-term outcomes. Partnering with parents can include a range of activities from involving parents in the early childhood program to extensive home visiting programs.

5. Attention to Health and Safety

A top level early care and education program pays close attention to health and safety, including early screening, preventive health care, nutrition, and physical and mental health. The first responsibility of a program caring for young children is to prevent harm and promote health and safety.

“Investments in high-quality early learning programs have the greatest rate of return of any social investment.” -- James Heckman, University of Chicago Economist and Nobel Laureate.