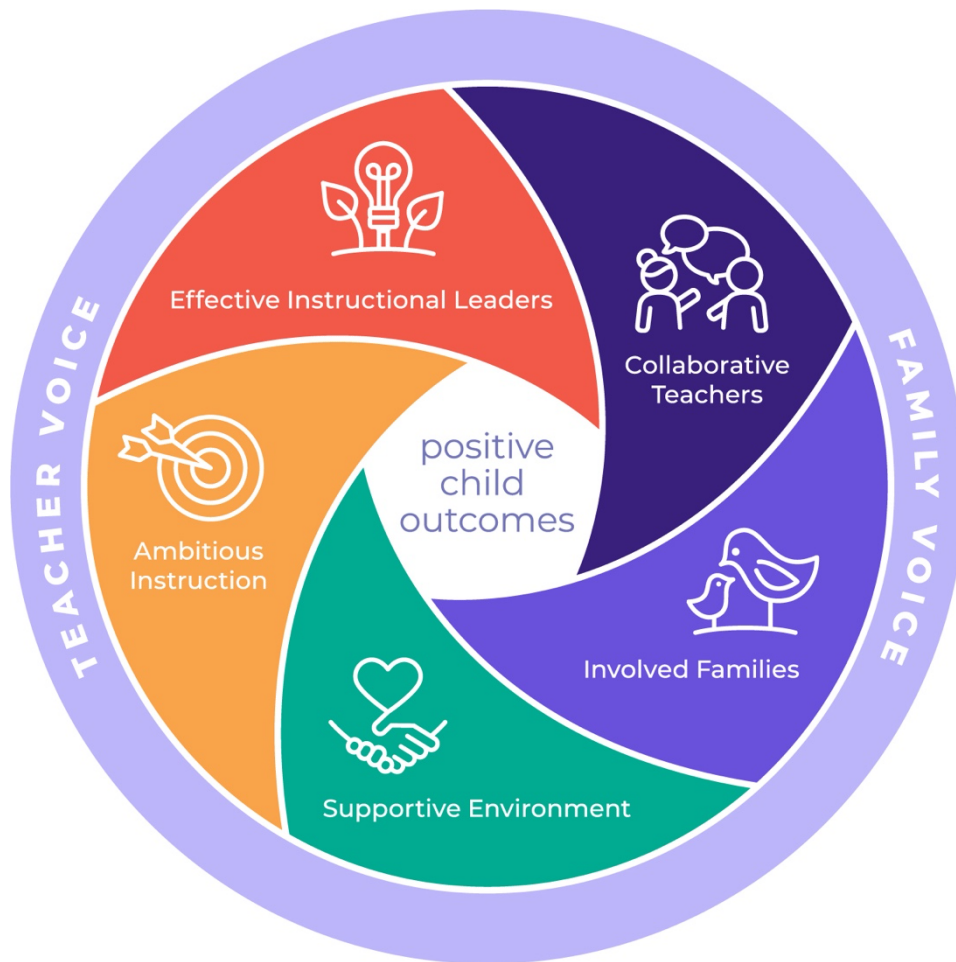


Start Early Essentials Definitions



EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

In programs where the Effective Instructional Leaders Essential is strong, leadership positively impacts teaching, children's learning, and engagement of families through a strong, purpose-driven vision for developmentally appropriate and ambitious early childhood education. Leaders strategically focus on children's healthy development and early achievement. Their vision is grounded in child development science and developmentally effective teaching and learning. They ensure that staff and families can work together to understand and advance the vision; everyone participates in creating a strong professional community. In daily interactions, leaders advance a climate of mutual trust and respect, focused on improving children's learning. They galvanize all resources, staff, and program operations to sustain a culture of high expectations for excellence and program improvement. They advance educational equity and culturally responsive practices at all levels. They practice shared decision-making and cultivate leaders among teachers, families, and the community. They hire staff who strive for continuous improvement and ambitious outcomes for children and families. They support the professional advancement for all staff.

COLLABORATIVE TEACHERS

In programs where the Collaborative Teachers Essential is strong, leaders champion professional collaboration as the pathway to excellent early childhood education. Leaders build professional capacity through ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities. They protect frequent and routine times to facilitate and participate in staff collaborations to define strategies for improvement and solve organizational problems that impede progress. They advance improvement efforts with supervisory resources, positive and trusting relationships, and strengths-based performance feedback. Data is consistently used to reflect on evidence-based practices and to improve children's learning and healthy development. All staff are invested in their own and in their colleagues' professional growth. They are active partners with families for continuous program improvement and high-quality, responsive teaching.

INVOLVED FAMILIES

In programs where the Involved Families Essential is strong, all work is undergirded by the belief that partnerships with families are critical to the staff's effectiveness and children's success. Children do not exist alone; they are members of families who live in communities. When families, schools, and communities focus collectively on children's needs from birth to their independent careers, children are healthy, competent, and motivated learners who realize long-term social and academic success. Early home-school partnerships build each family's capacity to become effective advocates for their child's needs to ensure positive experiences in school and life. Systematic approaches by an entire staff nurture responsive, trusting, and mutually respectful relationships with families that motivate engagement. Staff value families' perspectives and participation; they are willing to be influenced by families and work with them in developing and achieving goals that support each child and family. Decisions are made collaboratively, and everyone works cohesively across home and school to support children's attendance, health, learning, and development. All staff cultivate strong ties with elementary schools to actively support successful kindergarten transitions. Through referrals and connections to community resources, staff work to reduce material hardships, promote well-being, and maximize each family's capacity to engage with their child's learning and development. By building social networks among families, staff reduce isolation, increase social-emotional supports, and expand life and learning opportunities that strengthen families and entire communities.

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

In programs where the Supportive Environment Essential is strong, all staff work together to create the most emotionally supportive and developmentally appropriate learning environment they can for young children and their families. For children to learn and flourish, they need child-centered environments where they feel safe and liked. Supportive environments are critical so that children develop positive self-images, trust in others, and learn successfully and eagerly. Leaders ensure that resources and policies consistently support child-centered learning environments. All adults attend to effective use of physical space and materials daily, and they provide a daily structure and reassuring routines. Group size, teacher-to-child ratio, and continuity of care are maintained. A Supportive Environment likewise supports every adult to maintain mutually trusting relationships with one another, and to create consistently safe, responsive, and nurturing climates that allow children to build positive relationships and actively explore. Teachers are responsive to children's individual needs, both emotional and intellectual. They hold high expectations for children's capacity to explore, engage, build friendships, and develop persistence.

AMBITIOUS INSTRUCTION

In programs where the Ambitious Instruction Essential is strong, leaders and staff hold strong commitments to crafting inquiry-based and developmentally appropriate early learning experiences that help children achieve comprehensive development and learning goals. All adults endorse and use early learning and development standards, population-specific learning goals (e.g., special needs, dual language learners, and other special populations), and assessment information to examine children's progress. They are provided guidance that articulates and refines the "what" and "why" of inquiry-based teaching and learning. This guidance scaffolds teachers to (a) plan enriching explorations that build on children's prior knowledge and experiences, and target social-emotional development and academic content and skills (early literacy, math, science, and the arts); (b) differentiate instructional goals, materials, and activities; and (c) reflect and plan intentionally to facilitate learning through interactions that are emotionally supportive, organized, and instructionally meaningful, and that support cultural awareness and sensitivity. All staff partner with families to extend meaningful learning experiences both at home and at school. Systems for continuous practice improvement use research-based curricula and assessments that are coordinated and coherent across the program. While teachers may have discretion about how these resources are used, teaching effectiveness depends on reflective communities of practice and reflective supervisory dialogue and feedback to support transfer to practice.

FAMILY VOICE

In programs where the Family Voice Essential is strong, families have a strong and valued voice within the early learning community. Thanks to regular and purposeful communication from leaders and staff, parents and guardians are familiar with the program's purpose-driven vision for early learning and the specific strategies employed to realize that vision. Leaders, teachers, and staff speak with parents as peers and communicate the value of high-quality early learning. Teachers and parents work together as partners in children's education, and they use data, observations, and shared understandings of individual children's needs to make decisions. Parents also extend classroom learning at home with structured and purposeful activities provided by their child's teachers. Leaders and teachers create leadership opportunities for parents that leverage parents' unique strengths and involve them in decision-making within and beyond the classroom. Parents assume these leadership roles, develop their leadership and advocacy skills, and can articulate the ways in which they influence the program.