

Aldine Independent School District Early Learning Framework

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ALDINE
Independent School District



Cultivate Learning
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



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Aldine ISD Early Learning Partners

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New Teacher Center
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Early Learning Framework

Introduction

The Early Learning Framework was developed during spring 2022 by the Early Learning framework committee, made up of primary teachers, principals, and assistant principals as well as Aldine ISD department leads, specialists, and executive leadership. It was developed following the template established by other Teaching & Learning department frameworks. Aldine ISD's leadership team also provided input into the final draft. The framework is grounded in three core beliefs in:

- Developmentally appropriate instruction and high-quality instructional practices,
- Support for diverse learners, and
- Family and community engagement and partnerships.

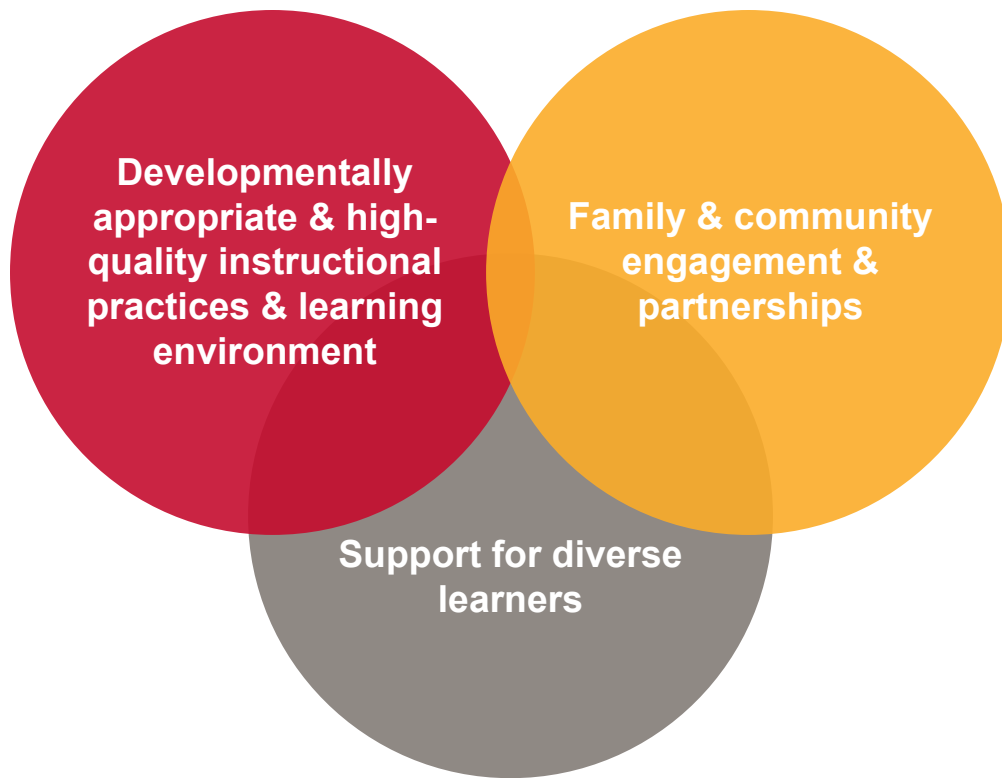
Throughout the framework, references to primary schools, classrooms, and teachers refer to both preschool and kindergarten age-groups, as well as special education and multilingual programs.

Through the committee process, a number of important considerations were identified to ensure the framework is understood in context and is able to be implemented through a shared understanding of its meaning and shared commitment to its intentions. Developmentally appropriate and high-quality are two terms used frequently throughout this document and refer to practices, environments, and structures that are grounded in current research and best practices for young learners, including preschool and kindergarten-aged children and those with diverse learning needs. A number of other terms are used throughout this document that should have a shared meaning among teachers, staff, and leadership as well as families and other stakeholders. A list of key terms used in the framework is included in this document. These, and other identified terms and topics, should be considered in opportunities for family education and communication, professional development, and resource development.

The Early Learning framework was developed during a time of change and adaptation in Aldine ISD. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, and while in the context of Aldine ISD developing and launching a number of new initiatives and strategies - including the new primary school structure and new curricula - Aldine ISD staff members have been asked to accept change or new information over and over again. As part of the trust established during these processes, it is important for Aldine ISD to lean into the goodwill of staff by:

1. Continuing to engage the Early Learning framework committee (and subcommittees) as plans or considerations for implementation are made;
2. Developing a communication plan with strategies for multiple purposes and audiences; and
3. Creating a decision-making process that is available, clear, and transparent to all stakeholders about when, what, and why decisions are made.

Aldine ISD's Early Learning Framework

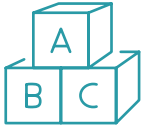


Aldine ISD Early Learning Vision Statement

Aldine ISD will provide developmentally appropriate and equitable learning experiences for every primary student that support the whole child to ensure a foundation of choices and opportunities for lifelong success and a love of learning.

Beliefs

At Aldine ISD, we believe in...



Developmentally appropriate and high-quality instructional practices and learning environments

In order to cultivate strong foundational skills that will benefit our students for the rest of their student and adult lives, our instruction prioritizes student-driven exploration, purposeful play, and integrated learning. We use research-based practices with curriculum and age-appropriate high quality instructional materials. Our learning environments are designed to fully support young learners, providing opportunities for guided exploration and inquiry, including intentionally designed, play-based, and content-integrated centers. We use universal design for learning strategies to foster inclusion with a focus that all students will develop executive functioning, social emotional, and problem-solving skills. We will always ensure our learning environments are both safe and promote high quality adult-child interactions, while maintaining class sizes and adult-to-child ratios in every district classroom to support the needs of all preschool and kindergarten students.



Support for diverse learners

In order to support every Aldine ISD primary student to reach their full potential, we are committed to culturally responsive teaching and maintaining developmentally and linguistically appropriate teaching and instruction. We differentiate instruction based on diverse learning needs and student interest.



Family and community engagement and partnerships

Primary student success depends on family partnerships and lays the foundation for family engagement in elementary, middle, and high school. In order to develop strong family partnerships, we are committed to creating equitable access to communication and information, creating opportunities for families to actively support their child's learning, and elevating family voice in decision making.



Commitments

To achieve our early learning vision and remain faithful to our beliefs, we commit to the following actions:

In partnership with families, students will be supported to...

- Come to school ready to learn every day
- Feel safe and contribute to safe environments
- Respect themselves, their classmates, and teachers
- Use their voice to express wants, needs, feelings, and ask questions
- Work and collaborate with others
- Develop knowledge and skills across learning domains, including social emotional and executive functioning
- Be confident, curious and inquisitive, courageous, and open minded
- Engage in developmentally appropriate learning activities with opportunities for purposeful play and student-led exploration
- Persevere in their learning

Primary teachers will...

- Support the success of all primary students through joyful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences, using the district-approved high quality instructional materials and instructional strategies to ensure student learning and engagement
 - Use developmentally appropriate standards and other resources to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful and challenging instruction for each child
 - Implement curriculum with skill and intention, including adapting curriculum and instructional practices for diverse learners and capturing teachable moments
 - Plan, prepare, and deliver differentiated activities and lessons that promote active engagement and student contribution across learning modalities
 - Encourage and participate with all students in guided exploration and purposeful play
 - Model and guide social-emotional development and problem-solving skills
- Use ongoing assessment data to engage in continuous collaborative learning to inform practice, evaluate student learning, adjust instruction to meet student needs, and communicate results to families
- Create classroom environments, with learning centers based on student interests, that promote a supportive, nurturing classroom culture for all students, including students enrolled in special education and multilingual programs
- Create and maintain positive relationships with students and their families
 - Honor and learn about the cultures and voices of our diverse students and their families
 - Honor families and value them as contributing resources to the classroom community
 - Seek and encourage family engagement to support student success, including in parent/teacher conferences, school events, and volunteer opportunities
 - Communicate information to families about students' learning and wellbeing in timely, caring and culturally-respectful ways
- Invest in their own professional development and capacity building, including learning best practices for teaching primary students
- Be accountable and open to feedback and support; engage in reflective practice toward personal capacity building

Instructional specialists will...

- Be masters of developmentally appropriate and high quality instructional practices and strategies, including district-approved preschool and kindergarten high quality instructional materials, curriculum, and lesson implementation
- Provide coaching and support for teachers' skillful fidelity in implementing curriculum, including when and how to adapt curriculum and differentiate instructional practices for diverse preschool and kindergarten learners
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 - Mentor and empower teachers by providing support that includes modeling best practices and providing meaningful feedback and follow-up
 - Differentiate coaching language and practices to respond to individual needs of teachers toward capacity building
- Provide support to campus leaders and teachers with assessment implementation and data analysis to identify student strengths and needs, inform goal setting and progress monitoring support, and to align interventions
- Establish positive and collaborative relationships among campus staff and across campuses to effectively implement district expectations
- Invest in their own professional development and capacity building, including learning best practices for primary campuses, coaching skills, and leadership development
- Be accountable and open to feedback and support; engage in reflective practice toward personal capacity building

Campus leaders will...

- Have knowledge of developmentally appropriate learning and instructional practices at the primary level; know what they look like in action and understand how they support learning; place value on these practices and advocate for them
- Use data to provide support and allocate resources to implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices and high-quality learning environments, including meeting with teachers to review how data is used to drive continuous improvement of classroom instruction
 - Ensure that teacher have equitable access to materials that support implementation of early childhood and developmentally appropriate instruction strategies for all students
 - Lead ongoing class-level and school-wide dialogue around expectations and demonstrations of students work samples that meet rigorous early learning standards
- Foster a cohesive, collaborative, and safe environment and campus systems that encourage staff success and student achievement through positive and joyful learning experiences that foster social and emotional well-being and development across all learning domains
 - Build positive relationships with staff, students, families and the community to create schools that are safe, caring, and high-quality; create opportunities and experiences that promote family and community engagement
- Invest in their own professional development and capacity building, including learning best practices for primary campuses, and leadership development
- Be accountable and open to feedback and support; engage in reflective practice toward personal capacity building

District leaders will...

- All district leaders will have knowledge of developmentally appropriate learning and instructional practices at the primary level, know what they look like in action, and understand how they support learning
- Place value on developmentally appropriate practices and environments at primary campuses and advocate for them through policies and resource allocation
 - Continuously assess and disseminate proven early childhood education instructional practices, including a consistent message of high expectations and support for all students, without exception
 - Develop daily schedules for preschool and kindergarten that supports developmentally appropriate practices and curriculum implementation; ensure collaboration of representative voices in the development
- Maximize the allocation of financial, human, and material resources to ensure high quality early childhood programs based on data and sound fiscal analyses
 - Provide useful, high-quality curriculum, materials, resources, and assessments aligned to the Aldine ISD Early Learning Framework
 - Develop and implement ongoing professional development priorities, plans, and resources focused on guiding every educator toward meeting the district standards of professional practice
 - Support district and campus staff capacity building through ongoing and differentiated professional development based on research, data, and developmentally appropriate practices
- Align communication across departments and with campuses
- Be proactive in collecting and responsive to feedback from primary campus staff
- Invest in their own professional development and capacity building, including knowledge and understanding of developmentally appropriate practices for primary students.
- Be accountable and open to feedback and support; engage in reflective practice toward personal capacity building



Key Terms in Early Learning Framework

Note: This list of key terms is intended to be a “living” document updated and added to regularly, as terms are identified that need clarity for shared understanding among stakeholders, including teachers, paraprofessionals, instructional specialists/coaches, campus leaders, district leaders, families, and community partners.

Developmentally appropriate practices

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides an extensive description of developmentally appropriate teaching practices: a wide range of skills and strategies that are adapted to the age, development, individual characteristics, and the family and social and cultural contexts of each child served. These teaching practices are designed to foster development and learning for each child across all domains and subject areas. Teaching practices build on each child’s multiple assets and actively counter various forms of bias. Through their intentional teaching, educators blend opportunities for each child to exercise choice and agency within the context of a planned environment constructed to support specific learning experiences and meaningful goals.¹

Playful Learning

Playful learning describes a context in which children learn content while playing together freely (self-directed play), with teacher guidance (guided play), or in a structured game or activity. By harnessing children’s natural curiosity and their proclivities to experiment, explore, problem solve, and stay engaged in meaningful activities, teachers maximize learning while individualizing learning goals. Teachers see children as active explorers and discoverers who bring their prior knowledge into learning experiences and construct understanding. Teachers support children as active learners.²

Executive Functioning

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provides the following definition and description of executive functioning and self-regulation skills: the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. Skills include ability to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.

Executive function and self-regulation skills depend on three types of brain function: working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. These functions are highly interrelated, and the successful application of executive function skills requires them to operate in coordination with each other.³

Differentiated Learning

NAEYC provides guidance for educators to differentiate instructional approaches to match each child’s interests, knowledge, and skills. Children who need additional support receive extended, enriched, and intensive learning experiences, always building on the child’s current interests, strengths, and cultural ways of knowing.

1. Educators take care to provide each child with opportunities to be successful and to engage in joyful learning. They work to avoid children having frustrating or discouraging experiences that lead to a negative association with schooling.
2. Regardless of their need for additional support, all children are provided agency to the greatest extent possible. Educators are highly intentional in use of time, and they focus on key skills and abilities through highly engaging, play-based experiences to build on the assets of children and their families.
3. Recognizing the self-regulatory, linguistic, cognitive, and social benefits that play and active self-direction affords, educators do not reduce or eliminate play opportunities, recess, or any other important community and inclusive activities for children who need additional support to meet school readiness/grade level or behavioral expectations.⁴

Endnotes

- 1 DAP: Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/enhance-development>
- 2 NAEYC. 2022. Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs: Serving children from birth through age 8, Fourth edition.
- 3 Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. 2022. Executive Function & Self-Regulation. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>
- 4 NAEYC. DAP: Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/enhance-development>

About DIAL EE

The Center for District Innovation and Leadership in Early Education (DIAL EE), part of Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington, supports school districts to align early education and K-12 systems to ultimately realize the best outcomes for all children, from early childhood through high school graduation. DIAL EE recognized that district early learning programs are unique in that they serve primarily low-income families, there is the opportunity to design around a system focused on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and ensures that children from communities with less social, political, and monetary capital are supported in a strong educational system from the beginning. DIAL EE's frameworks are focused on: whole child; diversity, equity, and inclusion; measurable impacts; and an early education strategy with a school district setting.

DIAL EE's Team

Dr. Carla Bryant, Executive Director

Dr. Carla Bryant has over thirty years of national experience creating culturally competent policies, programs, and procedures for comprehensive early learning, P-3, elementary, family support, and after-school programs. Prior to creating DIAL EE, as the Chief of Early Education for San Francisco Unified School District, Dr. Bryant was successful in implementing a P-12 vision and aligning curriculum and instruction across grades, P-3. Dr. Bryant oversaw the development and implementation of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) in SFUSD and integrated community-based and district early education practices through strategic partnerships. During Carla's tenure, SFUSD's kindergarten readiness benchmark improved from 37% to 55% in three years. Previously, Dr. Bryant was a strategic advisor for the City of Seattle where she co-created the Seattle Early Education Collaborative (SEEC), a community-based early learning system that joined disparately funded programs (federal, state, local, and private) into one system that included joint assessment and accountability, professional development, and transition processes. SEEC was an integral part of the Seattle Public Schools P-3 model and was highlighted by the National League of Cities as one of four cities with progressive plans to align the early learning and K-12 education systems. Dr. Bryant received her Ph.D. from the University of Washington in special education, M.Ed. in early childhood education from Georgia State University, and B.B.A. from the University of Central Oklahoma.

Tara Ryan, Deputy Director

Tara Ryan has been working in the field of education for over 20 years, including teaching, coaching, administration, and leadership roles. Tara previously served as the Director of the San Francisco Unified School District Early Education Department, Director of the San Diego County Office of Education Early Education Department, and Senior Director of the I3 Institute. She holds a master's degree in Education with emphasis in social justice and equity issues from San Francisco State University, as well as a California multiple subject teaching credential and administrative services credential. Tara's work has focused on P-3 alignment, systems development, professional development and leadership development within education systems.

Karen Baw Vang, Projects and Communications Manager

Karen Vang provides project and communications management support for DIAL EE. Before joining DIAL EE, Karen was responsible for managing early literacy assessments in Oakland, CA, for over 1000 children, conducting data analysis for continuous program improvement, and coordinating professional development across multiple agencies at the Kenneth Rainin Foundation. She initially began her career in early childcare as a student assistant with infants and toddlers, and has also worked as a literacy tutor in a Transitional Kindergarten classroom. Karen holds a BA from the University of California, Berkeley.