



Montana Early Learning Standards: A Developmental Continuum for Birth–Age 8



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Acknowledgements

The 2025 revision of the Montana Early Learning Standards reflects the collective expertise, dedication, and vision of professionals across Montana’s early childhood and early elementary systems. This update represents a significant step forward in supporting the learning and development of children from birth through third grade.

For the first time, these standards have been expanded to include children in Kindergarten through 3rd grade, creating a more cohesive and aligned continuum of learning. To support accessibility and practical use, the standards are now organized by age bands, offering clear and developmentally appropriate entry points for educators, caregivers, and families.

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To all who contributed their time, expertise, and passion—thank you. Your efforts ensure that these standards will continue to serve as a strong foundation for early learning and early elementary education across Montana.

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Introduction

Montana Early Learning Standards

The Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS) provide a continuum of expectations for children’s growth and learning from birth through age 8. Rather than serving as mandates, the MELS are a guide for learning and development wherever children are — at home, in childcare, informal learning spaces, public or private preschool, or in kindergarten and the early primary grades. The MELS affirm that every child is a capable learner who deserves supportive environments that honor their identity, respect individual developmental pathways, and nurture emerging strengths. The MELS are designed to support intentional teaching, responsive caregiving, and alignment across Montana’s early childhood system.

Specifically, the MELS seek to:

- Provide a common language for everyone who works with and cares for young children, birth through age 8.
- Guide intentional practice and professional learning for adults working with and on behalf of young children and their families, including caregivers, educators, families, and community partners.
- Encourage practices that are developmentally appropriate,

meaningful, and responsive to children’s home languages.

- Create continuity by connecting learning expectations across in-home care, community settings, child care programs, preschool, kindergarten, and the early primary grades.
- Strengthen professional learning and foster communication among educators, caregivers, families, and community partners.
- Keep play, relationships, and meaningful experiences at the center of children’s growth and development.
- Embed practices in the Learning Opportunities that support home languages for multilingual learners, provide inclusive pathways for children with disabilities, and integrate Indian Education for All (IEFA) Essential Understandings across daily learning experiences.

Grounded in research, family context, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the MELS are a guide for young children’s play, learning, and development.

A New Chapter in 2025

This version adds standards for children ages 6 through 8 and provides Montana with a continuum that guides learning and development across birth through age 8, while recognizing that transitions are especially critical. The MELS organizes benchmarks and indicators by age and presents a developmental continuum,

reflecting the continuous and individualized nature of children’s growth. Development and grade levels often overlap. Grade bands serve as a familiar point of entry within early care and education, helping align with educational systems while keeping child development—not grade level—as the primary focus.

Guided by the P–3 Framework

The 2025 Montana Early Learning Standards are informed by the national [P–3 Framework \(Kauerz & Coffman, 2019\)](#), which emphasizes attention to both child development and adult practice.

The framework promotes aligned, high-quality early learning by emphasizing continuity from birth through early grades, the vital role of effective adults, the influence of each child’s unique background and experiences, and a shared vision that unites educators, families, and leaders.

Prenatal development through age 8 represents a period of extraordinary growth and possibility. Beginning before birth and extending through early childhood, children’s brains develop more rapidly than at any other point in life, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and well-being. Brain architecture is shaped through rich interactions, responsive relationships, and language-filled environments that build curiosity, problem-solving, self-regulation, and empathy. Because development across these years is continuous, the field of early childhood education defines its scope as spanning birth through age 8. By extending the MELS into the early grades, we honor what research and experience

show: Children’s growth spans before and beyond kindergarten, and alignment across birth through third grade strengthens their path to success.

In Montana’s public schools, K–3 content standards define what children should know and be able to do in core academic subjects by the end of each grade. These grade-level benchmarks support curriculum alignment, instruction, and accountability across classrooms and schools.





The MELS complement those standards by anchoring to development. They highlight windows of growth across the birth through age 8 continuum and describe how skills emerge at different times across domains, acknowledging that progression is fluid and individualized.

Decades of research show that brain systems mature on different timelines—sensory pathways develop earliest, language systems follow, and higher-order cognitive functions (including executive control) emerge later. Recognizing staggered learning progressions helps educators and families use the MELS alongside K–3 content standards: to interpret grade-level expectations through a developmental lens, design responsive learning opportunities, and support smooth transitions.

The Role of Relationships and Environments in Development

Children’s growth across the birth through age 8 continuum does not unfold in isolation. The expectations described in the MELS are realized through children’s daily interactions within their social and physical environments. Developmental progress depends not only on inherent capacities but also on the quality of the experiences and relationships that surround a child.

Neuroscience confirms that early learning is shaped through serve-and-return interactions (back-and-forth exchanges, like a game of catch, in which adults notice, respond to, and extend children’s gestures, sounds, and ideas). These interactions build brain architecture, strengthen self-regulation, and foster a sense of

security and belonging. For example, adults act as conversational partners and language facilitators, creating rich opportunities for children to hear, practice, and use language in meaningful contexts.

Equally important is the environment in which children learn and play. Children thrive in spaces that invite exploration, risk-taking, and problem-solving. Supportive environments also offer consistent routines and responsive guidance. When adults intentionally design environments and engage as partners in learning, they open developmental windows, supporting each child to progress along the continuum.

The MELS underscore that expectations are not checklists of what children should accomplish on their own. Instead, they highlight how development emerges through dynamic interactions between the child, their caregivers, and their environment.

Indian Education for All (IEFA)

The MELS honor Montana's constitutional commitment to Indian Education for All (IEFA) and the [Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#). These commitments recognize that children's development is embedded in cultural and historical contexts. Together, IEFA and the Essential Understandings guide early learning in Montana to affirm the sovereignty, histories, languages, and identities of Tribal Nations, while cultivating learning environments for all children that reflect and respect diverse cultural heritages.

Unique Learners

Woven into the MELS benchmarks, indicators, and suggested learning opportunities are supportive strategies for unique learners to develop. These strategies guide how educators plan instruction, engage families, and shape environments by providing multiple pathways for participation, embedding authentic family perspectives and language in daily learning.

Applied across all domains and age bands, these strategies promote meaningful engagement and access for every learner.

Connecting the MELS Audience and Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The MELS are intended for a wide range of audiences, including families, early care and education educators, kindergarten through third grade educators, family educators, home visitors, administrators, higher education faculty, policymakers, and professional development providers.

The standards are designed to guide practice, inform professional learning, and strengthen alignment across the early childhood system. They are not diagnostic tools, readiness checklists, or mechanisms to limit children's access to services or kindergarten. Nor should they be used to introduce expectations that override children's natural developmental progression. Instead, the MELS affirm that play, relationships, and meaningful experiences are the foundation of early learning and must remain at the center of practice.



Importantly, the MELs are anchored in the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\) framework for Developmentally Appropriate Practice \(DAP\)](#). DAP's three core considerations:

Commonality

- Children share predictable patterns of growth and learning from birth through age 8.
- Development in these years is rapid and foundational for later success.
- All development occurs within family, social, and historical contexts; play is universal and expressed differently.

Individuality

- Every child is unique, with distinct strengths, interests, and identities.
- Children bring knowledge and experiences from their families and communities.
- Educators learn about each child through observation, listening, and partnership with families.
- Differences are assets that enrich the classroom and guide responsive teaching.

Context

- Children develop within families, communities, and broader social systems.
- Lived experiences shape every child's learning.
- Educators bring their own perspectives.
- Programs and classrooms should affirm children's uniqueness and foster belonging.

Closing Statement

The Montana Early Learning Standards are a living document, continually shaped by research, cultural knowledge, and the voices of families, educators, and communities. By extending the standards through age 8, Montana affirms its commitment to honoring the full continuum of early learning and development.

The MELS reflect what children need most: responsive relationships, rich environments, and practices that honor individuality, providing a strong, coherent foundation so every child has the opportunity to thrive in early childhood environments and in life. The MELS lead adults to balance unique developmental needs and academic expectations by centering play, relationships, and meaningful daily experiences. The MELS point the way toward a future where all Montana children are supported to learn, grow, and succeed.

The MELS help educators put Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) into action, valuing what is common in children's development, what is unique to each child, and the contexts in which learning takes place.

Organization of the Standards

The MELS are organized to reflect the complexity and continuity of child development. Standards are structured by Domains, Subdomains, and Benchmarks, each with Indicators and suggested

Learning Opportunities. This layered approach helps caregivers and educators observe growth along a continuum without rigid age cutoffs.

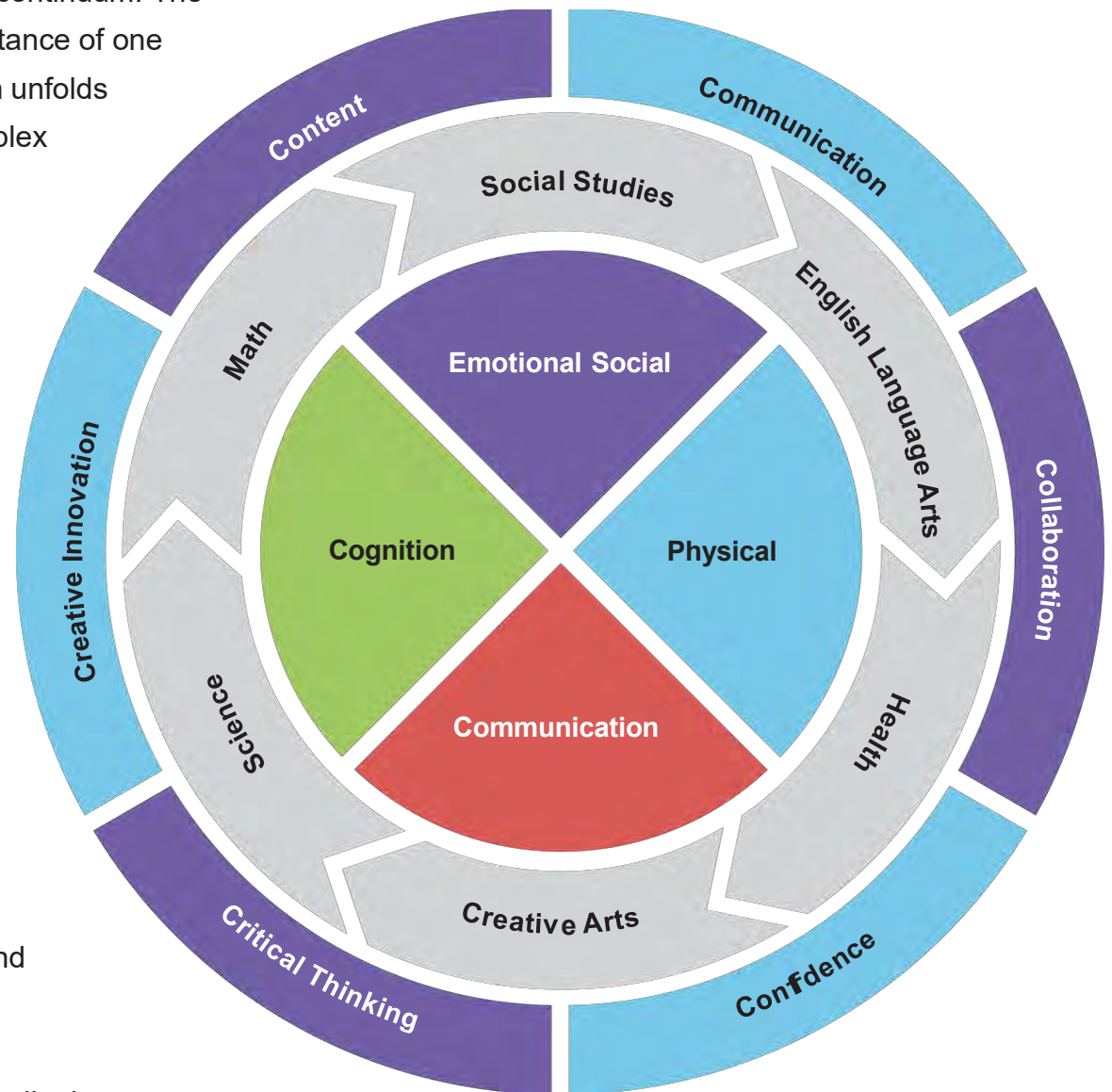
Benchmarks, indicators, and learning opportunities are organized within three overlapping developmental groupings: infants and toddlers (birth to 3, up to 42 months), preschool (ages 3 to 5), and kindergarten through grade 3 (ages 5 to 8). The infant–toddler age band includes all infants and toddlers, as well as younger 3-year-olds (from 36 to 42 months). Because development does not occur in discrete steps, there is intentional overlap between age bands. For example, standards for 3-year-olds appear in both the infant–toddler and preschool sections, and standards for 5-year-olds appear in both the preschool and K–3 sections. This overlap reflects the continuous nature of growth and supports smooth transitions across early learning settings.



Montana Early Learning Standards Wheel

This graphic illustrates the essential domains of learning within the MELS and reflects the progression across the birth through age 8 continuum. The framework is not intended to suggest the relative importance of one domain over another. It highlights how children’s growth unfolds across interconnected areas of development. The complex relationships within and among domains are explored throughout the guidelines.

The MELS are presented as an integrated learning framework designed to support the development of the whole child. At the center are the foundational domains—Emotional Social, Physical, Communication, and Cognition—representing the core areas of child development. Surrounding these are the key content areas—science, math, social studies, English language arts, creative arts, and health—through which children’s growth is nurtured through rich, integrated learning experiences. The outer ring illustrates 21st century whole-child skills—content, communication, collaboration, confidence, critical thinking, and creative innovation—that prepare children for lifelong learning and success.



Together, these layers embody the vision of the MELS: aligning developmental growth, content knowledge, and essential skills to create a cohesive educational pathway from infancy through the early grades.



Introduction to Infant/Toddler

Birth to 3 (up to 42 months)

Transitions Into Infant/Toddler

Use Alongside Infant/Toddler Benchmarks, Indicators, and Suggested Learning Opportunities

As infants enter care, keeping relationships and consistent routines supports development. This section helps families, caregivers, home visitors, and educators plan for a smooth start.

- **Caregiver well-being:** Infants are born with early foundations for development that begin forming even before birth—early attachment bonds and caregiver well-being; established soothing, feeding, and sleep rhythms; and emerging regulation and sensory engagement. Honoring these patterns helps babies feel secure and supports healthy development from day one.
- **New opportunities in this age band:** Daily care opens rich moments for frequent serve-and-return interactions. Floor time and tummy time encourage safe gross-motor exploration, while simple, varied sensory materials (textures, sounds, light movement) invite curiosity and gentle discovery.
- **Partnership actions (families and professionals together):** Prenatal or early-entry intake visits, along with establishing one primary caregiver, can set effective early two-way communication. Co-creating personalized strategies

and supports helps infants and toddlers feel safe and secure. Using regular check-ins (photos/notes/messages) to discuss the baby's cues and adjust routines ensures continuity between home and the care environment.



Transition Considerations

Foundational Stage (Prenatal–Birth): The partnership actions referenced above are critical in this age band because of the intimate nature of care routines. Consistency within these routines supports the infant’s comfort and smooths the adjustment into care.

First six weeks (newborn/infant entry): Include families in gradual start; prioritize serve-and-return interactions and daily floor/tummy time; begin MELS-aligned observations (early social connection, regulation, sensory-motor); adjust routines based on the child’s cues.

From home to family- or center-based care: Use in-care familiar language, songs, and comfort items; keep predictable routines (a simple picture schedule can help); keep one consistent primary caregiver; embed supports from IFSPs (Individualized Family Service Plans), if applicable; set up quick, reliable communication with families.

Into preschool (around age 3): Share observation notes, work samples, routines, and rituals summaries from the toddler experience; schedule a classroom visit and identify a buddy educator/peer; explore learning centers, simple classroom jobs, and visual schedules.

Age-related guidance provided in the section is a reference, not a requirement—use a child’s developmental readiness and family knowledge to individualize care.

From birth to age 3, children grow and change very quickly. During this time, their brains develop fast, creating a strong base for future learning, relationships, and health. They learn new skills in many areas, such as moving their bodies, expressing emotions, thinking, and getting along with others. While most children follow a similar path—like learning to walk, talk, and bond with caregivers—each child grows in their own way, shaped by their personality, experiences, and surroundings. It’s important to respect these differences to help children grow in healthy ways.

A child’s development is influenced by many things, including family routines and values, caregiving styles, and access to resources.

Caregivers play a key role in development through warm connections, meaningful guidance, and opportunities to safely explore their environment. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) supports Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). DAP practices meet children where they are—both as individuals and at their stage of development—while helping them grow new skills, such as hands-on activities, caring relationships, and responsive adults.

In Montana, the Early Learning Standards (MELS) give guidance to families, caregivers, and educators to support children’s growth while honoring each child’s unique journey. The MELS describe common milestones and celebrate the different ways children grow, shaped by their experiences and environment. By using developmentally appropriate practices and focusing on the whole child, we help build a strong foundation for lifelong learning, healthy relationships, and future success.

Commonality

From birth to age 3, children grow and change rapidly and in amazing ways. Some of the skills and behaviors that may be observed and guided are rolling over, sitting up, crawling, walking, talking, building bonds with caregivers, expressing emotions, and playing with others.

Development unfolds in predictable ways, but the pace varies greatly. Knowing the stages of development helps parents, caregivers, and educators give the right kind of support when and how it is needed, guiding the creation of safe, fun environments where children can explore.

Individuality

Even though development is similar, children are best supported when educators work to understand each child's uniqueness, considering their personality, interests, and experiences. With this knowledge, adults can be responsive to individual needs, supporting children's choices while guiding for appropriateness. By creating flexible, caring environments and building strong relationships, adults help children grow in ways that match who they are and how they learn best.

Context

Infants and toddlers grow and learn in the context of their environment and are influenced by the people around them. Family routines, interactions, traditions, and access to community resources shape development. For example, a rich language environment could result in an infant speaking earlier, and a toddler

in an active family may develop motor skills more rapidly. Family and community experiences have a significant impact on how children are cared for; for example, families may have very different feeding routines and approaches to encouraging independence. Honoring these responsive environments not only helps children develop but also encourages a sense of pride in who they are and where they come from.

- **Emotional Social Development:** Infants and toddlers begin to express basic emotions and form close bonds with caregivers, gradually learning to understand and manage their feelings while developing social skills through nurturing relationships shaped by their environment, family, and interactions.
- **Physical Development:** Infants and toddlers use movement—like reaching, crawling, and walking—to explore and learn about their world. These physical skills help them build strength, confidence, and problem-solving abilities while also supporting their thinking, emotions, and social growth.
- **Communication Development:** Infants and toddlers start learning language by engaging in warm, reciprocal communication with adults and making sounds. Then they move on to babbling, saying their first words, understanding, and using more words. The pace at which language develops is in relation to the richness of the language environment.
- **Cognitive Development:** Through play, infants and toddlers expand curiosity and problem solving and develop early thinking and learning skills. Their development is supported through predictable routines and environments that encourage exploration.

Core Domain 1: Emotional and Social

Infant/Toddler



CULTURE, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

Culture may be broadly defined as the quality in a person or society that is based on shared behaviors, beliefs, traditions, and values. As children interact with their families and communities, they develop a feeling of belonging and begin to recognize and understand the value of differences among people. This awareness leads to an appreciation of differences and builds skills for interacting effectively with others.

Standard 1.1 Culture

Children develop an awareness of and appreciation for similarities and differences between themselves and others.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Shows recognition and preference for familiar people, voices, and routines that reflect their home environment. Builds trust and attachment through contextually meaningful interactions.	Turns head toward familiar voices, calms more quickly with known routines or caregiving styles, and shows preference for familiar people who reflect their home environment patterns of care (how they are held, soothed, or spoken to).	Create a “Family Connections” photo book with pictures of each child’s family, caregivers, and familiar home routines (meals, bedtime, celebrations). Encourage caregivers to record short greetings or songs in their home language. Educators can play these during transition times or as greetings to foster comfort and belonging.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Begins to notice and respond to differences in people’s appearance, voice, language, or behaviors. Expresses early social awareness through sensory cues and interactions.	Engages in pretend or role play—such as feeding a doll, mimicking family routines, or using varied voices—that reflect both familiar and unfamiliar people, showing awareness of differences in appearance, language, or behavior observed in daily interactions.	Offer a “Mirror and Friends” exploration area with mirrors, dolls, and photos of people with a range of appearances (different hair textures, facial features, clothing styles). As children explore, use gentle, descriptive language to reflect what they see (e.g., “Yes, Jamal’s hair is curly like yours,” or “Mei’s hair is smooth and long”). This helps infants begin to notice and name physical characteristics.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Shows curiosity and enjoyment in stories, songs, and traditions from their community and own environments. Engages in heritage-rich pretend play and expression.	Uses gestures, sounds, or emerging language to express interest in stories, songs, or routines from their own or other cultures, such as mimicking a family tradition, repeating a song, or asking about others' actions.	Host a “Global Story Time,” where families share favorite stories, songs, or fingerplays from their culture. Include materials like scarves, instruments, or props for children to retell stories through pretend play, music, and movement throughout the week.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Engages with diverse peers in play and daily routines, demonstrating growing comfort with individual differences. Initiates interactions and begins to show empathy.	Initiates play or interaction with peers who have different routines, languages, or appearances, showing comfort and curiosity.	Set up a “Friendship Café” dramatic play center where children explore and share pretend meals reflecting different family backgrounds. Encourage cooperation (“Let’s make tortillas together!”) and model respectful communication practices and empathy when differences arise (“We all take turns, even if our families eat in different ways.”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Explores social roles and identities through play and asks questions about others' traits, ages, and experiences. Demonstrates appreciation and curiosity about differences and similarities.	Responds with acceptance, interest, or comfort—such as offering a toy, imitating behaviors, joining in play, or showing empathy—when engaging with others who may look, sound, or act differently than themselves.	Create an “All About Us” project where children draw or paint self-portraits and share something special about their family, language, or traditions. Display everyone’s work together and guide reflective discussions about what’s similar and different—focusing on respect, curiosity, and pride in identity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Identifies and describes similarities and differences between themselves and others.	Describes differences between people of different ages and stages based on strengths, challenges, and interests. Talks about what people can do and what they are still learning, such as saying “She can’t walk yet because she’s a baby.”	Encourage conversation by asking open-ended questions, acknowledging their curiosity about differences, and positively highlighting the unique characteristics that make everyone special. Ask family members and friends or classmates simple questions (e.g., “What is your favorite food?”) to explore similarities and differences in a fun way.

Standard 1.2 Family

Children develop an awareness of the functions, contributions, and varied characteristics of family.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
Birth–8 months	Shows recognition and positive responses—such as smiling, cooing, or reaching—to familiar voices, songs, and rhythms associated with their family environment, demonstrating early awareness of family connections and comforting routines.	Turns head, makes eye contact, smiles, vocalizes, or physically responds (e.g., kicking, reaching) to familiar songs, voices, or storytelling patterns from their home culture, showing enjoyment and recognition.	Invite families to share short recordings or videos of themselves singing lullabies or speaking in their home language. Play these during diapering, feeding, or naptime. As the caregiver or educator gently hums along, infants hear familiar tones and rhythms, building comfort and early recognition.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
9–18 months	Enjoys exploring stories, songs, and traditions from their own and others' heritages. Participates in imaginative play that reflects meaningful customs and experiences.	Uses eye contact, reaches, babbles, crawls toward, or gently pats a familiar adult or family member to stay engaged or reconnect during play or after separation, showing trust and emotional connection.	Encourage curiosity and joy in stories, songs, pretend play, and family traditions. Create a dramatic play area with diverse baby dolls, soft wraps or carriers, and familiar household items like bowls and scarves. Add photos showing different ways babies are cared for—such as being rocked or fed. Support toddlers as they explore, and talk with them about how families care for babies in different ways.
19–24 months	Uses sounds, gestures, and simple words to maintain connection with familiar adults and shows caution or curiosity toward unfamiliar adults.	Uses gestures (e.g., pointing, waving, or reaching), sounds, or simple words (e.g., “Mama” or “Dada”) to stay connected with familiar adults, and may show caution or curiosity when encountering unfamiliar adults.	Create a short greeting and goodbye ritual using a song or gesture in each child’s home language. When visitors or new adults join, model warm introductions and let children choose how to greet them (wave, smile, or stay near a caregiver). This supports trust and social confidence.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Identifies and names familiar family members; begins to recognize routines and caregiving roles within their home environment.	Uses simple words, gestures, or short phrases to name familiar family members and describe or imitate caregiving routines, such as feeding, cooking, or comforting. Notices and comments on similarities and differences among people, objects, and routines, and uses emerging language to talk about what others do in daily life.	Set up a dramatic play area with family-related props (baby dolls, pots, pretend food, clothing). Include family photos labeled with names (“Grandma,” “Uncle Joe”). Encourage children to act out familiar routines, such as cooking, caring for a baby doll, or setting the table.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Describes personal relationships (e.g., “my mom,” “my teacher”) and uses language, play, and actions to show connection, comfort, and independence.	Uses language, gestures, and pretend play to describe and imitate familiar relationships and routines, such as saying “my mom,” pretending to cook like a parent (“Daddy cook”), or bringing a diaper when caring for a doll.	Help children create a small book with photos or drawings of important people in their lives. Encourage them to dictate or describe each page (“This is my dad. We go to the park.”). Read the books together during group time, highlighting the diversity of families and relationships.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Shows awareness of their role in the family and can name and talk about family members.	Names people in their family, like saying “That’s my mommy” or “My brother is big.” Talks about what family members do and how they’re connected, like “Daddy goes to work” or “I help Grandma bake cookies.”	Provide props for pretend play such as dolls, animals, kitchen supplies, and other home goods that reflect each child’s home life. Encourage imaginary scenarios to act out family roles.

Standard 1.3 Community

Children develop an understanding of the basic principles of how communities function, including work roles and commerce.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Observes and shows interest in nearby children through eye contact, sounds, or movement during routines and play.	Shows awareness of other children through visual tracking, smiling, vocalizing, reaching toward, or physically orienting their body in response to a nearby peer.	Place two babies close together during tummy time with a mirror between them. Encourage them to notice each other’s reflections, coos, and movements. Narrate what’s happening (“You see your friend moving! You both are kicking!”). This supports early social awareness and connection.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Engages in simple social exchanges with peers, such as handing toys, imitating sounds, or smiling in response to another child’s actions.	Plays alongside another child using similar materials, occasionally glancing, smiling, imitating sounds or actions, and engaging in brief exchanges, such as handing a toy or responding to a peer’s gesture.	During group play, sing a short song (“We pass the ball around, around”) as children roll or hand a soft ball or shaker to a peer. Celebrate each exchange with smiles and gentle applause to reinforce positive interaction.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Participates in parallel play near peers and begins to use gestures or single words to communicate during shared routines or activities.	Engages in parallel play near peers and uses gestures or single words—such as calling a peer’s name, pointing, or offering a toy—to communicate during shared routines or pretend activities.	Provide blocks or stacking toys and encourage children to build beside each other. Comment on their play (“You’re both making tall towers!”). Model short phrases like “my turn,” “your block,” or “help?” to encourage peer communication.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Recognizes and uses the names of familiar peers during play, routines, and social interactions. Begins turn-taking and shared play activities.	Uses simple words and actions—such as naming peers, offering toys, commenting on play, or imitating others—to engage in turn-taking and shared play activities, showing growing interest in group interactions.	During morning meetings, use a soft ball or puppet and sing a name song (“Where is Mateo? Here I am!”). Encourage children to pass the ball to friends while naming them. Later, extend into small group games that require short turns (rolling a car, stacking cups).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Plays roles of family or community members during pretend play and demonstrates growing empathy and collaboration with peers.	Engages in cooperative pretend play with peers, such as taking turns, assigning roles (e.g., parent, teacher), and working toward shared goals, while showing awareness of others’ feelings, ideas, and needs.	Set up a dramatic play area with props for community roles—doctor, teacher, cook, mail carrier. Encourage children to choose roles and work together to solve simple problems (“Let’s help the baby feel better,” “Who will deliver the mail?”). Discuss feelings and teamwork during reflection.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Recognizes and describes community workers and their roles.	May identify community workers—such as a firefighter, police officer, or cashier—and describes what they do.	Point out jobs in public or display pictures of community members in various roles, being mindful to avoid gender stereotypes.

Standard 1.4 Self Concept

Children develop an awareness and appreciation of themselves as unique, competent, and capable individuals.

Prairie Morning

Story

It's a quiet morning in the infant-toddler room. Sunlight filters through the window, casting soft light on a cozy play area filled with natural textures—soft wool, smooth wood, and a basket of pinecones collected from a nearby trail. Ms. Annie kneels beside the babies, gently humming a lullaby in Salish.

She softly says, “Good morning, Aiden,” as she approaches a 10-month-old who’s exploring a wooden rattle. Aiden pauses, turns his head toward her voice, and smiles. “You heard your name,” Ms. Annie says warmly, smiling back. A few minutes later, she calls, “Lula, would you like to come see the snow out the window?” Lula, 18 months, looks up from the book she’s holding and toddles over, clearly responding to her name.

Throughout the morning, educators use each child’s name during routines—diapering, snack time, and play—watching as the children respond with eye contact, movement, or vocalizations, showing their growing awareness of themselves and others.

Linked Benchmark

Reacts to hearing his or her own name.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how consistent, warm use of a

child’s name supports early identity development and social connection. By embedding name recognition in calm, culturally rooted routines, educators nurture belonging and trust in even the youngest learners.

Try It!

Use children’s names during caregiving routines and transitions. Pair names with gentle touch, eye contact, or familiar songs in home languages. Consider incorporating local elements—like nature walks or traditional lullabies—to deepen connection and family/community grounding.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Explores hands, feet, and facial expressions with fascination, and begins to respond to their own name during routines and caregiving.	Gazes at, touches, or brings their hands or feet to their mouth, exploring them with visual focus, movement, or mouthing. Turns their head, becomes alert, vocalizes, or smiles when their name is spoken by a familiar adult.	During caregiving routines (diapering, feeding, tummy time), use a mirror and gently say the child’s name while describing what they’re doing (“Hi, Amira! You see your hands moving!”). Pause to let them look and respond. This builds name recognition and early body awareness.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Demonstrates preference for familiar faces and shows pleasure or pride when achieving a new skill or mastering a task.	Turns head, vocalizes, or smiles in response to familiar adults during routines or play. After completing a new or familiar task, smiles, claps, vocalizes, or seeks acknowledgment, showing pride and desire for recognition.	Create moments to celebrate new accomplishments—clapping when a child stacks blocks, stands, or says a new word. Display photos of children engaging in their favorite activities, and point to them often (“That’s you dancing!”). Reinforce pride through smiles and verbal praise.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Recognizes own body as belonging to self, uses “me” and “mine,” and begins to name familiar body parts.	Explores their own body by looking at, touching, or moving their hands, feet, or other body parts with focused attention or purposeful movement. Uses words such as “me” or “mine” when referring to their own belongings, body, or actions during play or daily routines.	Sing songs like “Head, Shoulders, Knees, & Toes” or a familiar body song (invite families to share versions in their home environment). Encourage children to point to or name body parts. Reinforce self-awareness by adding mirrors and labeling pictures of themselves.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Engages in play that reflects personal interests and choices, showing emerging independence and self-direction.	Independently selects materials or activities and engages with them for a sustained period, demonstrating focus, curiosity, or enjoyment, and emerging self-direction.	Offer two or three simple choices during free play (“Do you want to build or draw?”). Provide a range of home environment familiar toys and materials (dolls, cooking utensils, fabrics). Support children’s autonomy by acknowledging their decisions (“You chose to paint today!”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Expresses preferences, describes personal characteristics, and asserts ownership through words, actions, and role-based play.	Uses words, gestures, or actions to express likes and dislikes, such as choosing favorite toys, requesting preferred activities, or resisting undesired items, and engages in role-based play that reflects personal identity, interests, or family roles (e.g., saying “I’m the teacher” or “That’s mine”).	Provide dress-up materials representing family and community roles (chef, doctor, mail carrier, caregiver). Encourage children to talk about what they like (e.g., “I wear blue” or “I cook like Grandma”). Add mirrors and family photos to the area for reference and discussion.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Shows awareness of self, including own body, abilities, thoughts, and feelings.	Knows the name of some body parts, says how they feel and what they like, and talks about things they can do, like jumping or drawing. They may say things like, “I’m sad because I dropped my ice cream” or “I’m happy when I play with my friends.”	Encourage children to express their feelings with simple words, engage in puppet play or participate in obstacle courses.

Standard 1.5 Self Efficacy

Children demonstrate a belief in their abilities.

Family Faces

Story

During morning arrival, Ms. Rivera welcomes toddlers into the classroom. Along the wall at eye level, a display of family photos invites connection. Two-year-old Amara walks over, scanning the pictures. Her eyes light up as she spots one. “Ama!” she exclaims, pointing to herself in the photo beside her parents. She gently pats the image, then turns to Ms. Rivera with a proud smile. Nearby, another child joins her, pointing to their own family photo. The two toddlers giggle and name familiar faces together.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Recognizes self in a picture or mirror.

Demonstrates emerging self-awareness and connection to familiar people.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This moment highlights the importance of visual cues in supporting identity and belonging. Amara’s recognition of herself and her joyful response show growing self-awareness. The shared experience also fosters peer connection and language development.

Try It!

Create a “Family Wall” at children’s eye level with labeled photos from home. Encourage families to update pictures throughout the year. Use the display as a springboard for conversations, storytelling, and social bonding.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Responds to attention from familiar adults through cooing, movement, or facial expressions and begins to show varied reactions when viewing a mirror.	Smiles, vocalizes, moves their body, or turns their head in response to being spoken to, smiled at, or gently touched by a familiar adult; shows varied reactions, such as smiling, reaching, or vocalizing, when viewing their reflection in a mirror.	During floor time or diaper changes, hold an unbreakable mirror and talk gently about what the infant sees: “There’s your smile! I see you waving!” Respond to coos or wiggles with warmth and repetition. This nurtures self-recognition, secure attachment, and early emotional expression.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Repeats actions to elicit reactions from others and clearly expresses likes and dislikes through gestures, vocalizations, or expressions.	Uses gestures, facial expressions, words, or actions to express preferences—such as choosing one item over another, accepting or rejecting foods, or requesting favorite activities or people. May repeat actions to gain attention, elicit responses, or recreate enjoyable outcomes.	<p>During snack time or play with soft finger foods, offer a small bowl and a spoon. Encourage the child to try scooping or picking up pieces with their fingers. Narrate what they’re doing: “You’re trying the spoon! Look at you picking up the banana. Yum!”</p> <p>Respond warmly to their efforts, even if it’s messy. This supports fine motor development, hand-eye coordination, and early language while fostering independence and confidence.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Recognizes themselves in mirrors or pictures and uses self-referential language to assert identity and ownership.	Identifies themselves in a photo or mirror by using gestures, naming themselves, or referring to the image with “me” or their own name and asserts ownership or identity by labeling personal items or actions (e.g., “mine!” “my toy!” or “I did it!”).	Display photos of each child engaging in everyday activities (eating, playing, cuddling). Invite them to point and name themselves (“me!” “my toy!”). Add a mirror nearby for comparison and practice of self-labeling. Encourage early ownership language with praise (“Yes, that’s your cup!”).
<i>25–30 months</i>	Displays pride in achievements and expresses personal preferences when choosing materials, activities, or routines.	Selects preferred materials, activities, or routines and expresses pride in accomplishments, such as clapping, smiling, or seeking acknowledgment; may assert preferences by insisting others join or follow their play ideas, showing belief in their influence.	Offer multiple play materials (art, blocks, sensory bins) and invite children to choose what they’d like to explore. Acknowledge their decisions and effort (“You chose painting! You’re working so hard!”). Display finished art or photos of play to reinforce pride and self-esteem.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Acts as though their feelings, preferences, and experiences are shared by others—demonstrating emerging self-concept and perspective-taking.	Speaks or behaves in ways that assume others share their thoughts, preferences, or feelings, such as insisting others play a certain way, expecting peers to know what they want, or seeking immediate responses to their needs or ideas.	Use puppets or dolls to act out short scenarios (“I’m sad because my block tower fell”). Ask children how the puppet feels and what they might do to help. Encourage them to connect (“That happened to me too!”) to build empathy and self–other understanding.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Develops an awareness and appreciation of themselves as a unique, competent, and capable individual, and demonstrates growing confidence in their abilities.</p>	<p>Demonstrates increasing awareness of personal preferences, abilities, and accomplishments. Begins to take initiative, persist in tasks, and express pride in efforts and achievements, showing confidence in trying new or challenging activities.</p>	<p>Engage children in a “Try-It Station” where they choose from new or challenging tasks (e.g., buttoning a shirt, building a tall tower, or drawing a self-portrait), take initiative to start and stick with the activity (e.g., “I’m going to try again”), and share their accomplishments with others (e.g., “Look what I made!”), building confidence, persistence, and awareness of their own abilities and preferences.</p>



Standard 1.6 Self Regulation

Children manage their internal states, feelings, and behavior and develop the ability to adapt to a variety of situations and environments.

Liam's Lift

Story

It's diaper-changing time in the infant room, and soft music plays in the background. Ms. Jordan gently places Liam on the changing table and begins their familiar routine. "Okay, time to lift your legs," she says with a smile. Without hesitation, Liam raises his legs in the air, grinning as he waits for the next step. Ms. Jordan continues narrating the process, and Liam stays engaged, clearly anticipating what comes next. Across the room, another caregiver mirrors the same calm, predictable routine with a younger infant, creating a peaceful rhythm to the morning.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Follows a few consistently set rules and routines.
Demonstrates understanding of familiar caregiving sequences.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how consistent routines support young children's sense of security and cooperation. Liam's active participation shows his growing understanding and trust in the caregiving process. Predictable language and actions help build autonomy and strengthen caregiver-child relationships.

Try It!

Use consistent language and cues during daily routines like diapering, feeding, and transitions. Narrate each step to support comprehension and predictability. Over time, children will begin to anticipate and participate in these routines with confidence.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Communicates physical or emotional discomfort—such as hunger, fatigue, or overstimulation—through fussing, crying, turning away, or changes in affect.	Signals a physical or emotional need through changes in vocalizations, facial expressions, body movements, or behavior, such as fussing, crying, turning away, or becoming unusually quiet or agitated during routines or interactions.	Respond promptly and consistently to infants’ cues during feeding, diapering, or transitions. Use calm tone, gentle touch, and familiar words or songs from the family’s culture. Narrate feelings (“You’re hungry; milk is coming now.”) to validate emotions and foster trust.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Begins to calm and settle when comforted by a familiar adult through touch, voice, or presence, and shows emerging consistency in daily routines.	Reduces signs of distress—such as crying, fussing, or tense body movements—when comforted by a familiar adult using soothing voice, gentle touch, or close presence and begins to anticipate and respond to consistent daily routines.	Create predictable daily patterns—soft music for nap, a song for cleanup, or a hug before outdoor play. When a child is upset, use those familiar cues to help them settle. Include home language phrases or comfort objects shared by families to strengthen security and trust.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Manages feelings and behaviors by accepting comfort or using simple self-soothing strategies.	Begins, with support from a familiar adult, to follow simple rules or routines, such as helping to clean up toys, sitting for a short group activity, or walking to the sink for handwashing when prompted while using basic strategies like hugging a toy or seeking comfort to manage emotions.	Model and teach simple soothing strategies such as hugging a stuffed toy, taking deep breaths, or asking for a comfort item. During play, name emotions (“You’re mad your tower fell.”) and help children choose a strategy (“Let’s hug your bear until you’re ready.”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Recognizes personal needs (e.g., hunger, tiredness) and begins initiating strategies to meet them, such as requesting rest or food during routines.	Identifies a personal need, such as hunger, fatigue, or overstimulation, and independently takes action, like retrieving a snack, lying down with a blanket, or moving to a quiet space, showing emerging self-regulation without adult prompting.	Use mealtime and rest transitions to talk about body signals (“Your tummy is growling—that means you’re hungry!”). Encourage children to use words, gestures, or picture cards to express needs. Celebrate when they recognize and communicate needs independently.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Follows simple rules and routines with support, relying on trusted adults to regulate emotions and begin to make independent choices to meet needs.	Uses more complex language or combinations of gestures and words to express emotions and preferences, such as asking for specific activities, commenting on others’ actions, or negotiating choices with peers or adults; begins to adjust behavior in response to others’ feelings, showing early empathy and flexibility.	Invite children to participate in daily routines—setting the table, watering plants, or choosing storybooks. Use visual cues and gentle reminders to support following steps. When frustration arises, model calming strategies (“Let’s take a deep breath together before we try again.”). Reinforce independence and pride (“You remembered the rule—thank you for helping!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Follows classroom rules and routines with increasing independence.	Follows classroom routines and expectations with increasing independence; uses environmental cues (e.g., music, lights, visual signs) and peer or adult guidance to transition between activities, take turns, and participate in group rules and limits (e.g., waiting for a turn at the water table, cleaning up when music plays, going to the rest area when lights dim).	Create a few simple rules for daily routines; use children’s words and simple picture cues that can be posted in the environment. Recognize and respect that a child’s protests to limits are a normal part of development.



Standard 1.7 Emotional Expression

Children express a wide and varied range of feelings through their facial expressions, gestures, behaviors, and words.

Montana Animal Friends

Story

In a cozy corner of the infant–toddler room, Ms. Larson sets out soft animal puppets representing Montana wildlife—like a bear, moose, trout, and meadowlark. She gently sings, “Who lives in Montana?” as the toddlers gather around. One-year-old Kai reaches for the moose puppet, while two-year-old Riley offers the bear to a younger peer, saying, “Bear for baby.”

Ms. Larson models gentle touches and says, “Let’s be kind to our animal friends and each other.” When a small disagreement arises over the trout puppet, Ms. Lopez helps the children take turns, saying, “Now it’s Kai’s turn, then Riley’s turn.” The children begin to imitate her words and gestures, learning to share and respond to each other’s feelings.

Later, the group explores a Montana-themed sensory bin with pinecones, felt animals, and smooth river rocks, encouraging parallel play and shared discovery.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Begins to show awareness of others’ feelings and responds with gestures or simple words.

Engages in parallel or associative play with peers.

Demonstrates emerging skills in turn-taking and sharing with adult support.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how responsive caregiving and familiar, place-based materials support early social–emotional development. Through gentle modeling and shared play, children begin to build empathy, cooperation, and a sense of belonging rooted in their Montana environment.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Communicates emotional and physical needs through fussing, crying, cooing, babbling, or laughing—seeking comfort from familiar adults.	Uses sounds, facial expressions, and body movements, such as fussing, crying, cooing, babbling, or laughing, to signal emotional or physical needs like hunger, discomfort, fatigue, or desire for interaction with familiar adults.	During caregiving times (feeding, diapering, cuddling), respond promptly to infants’ cues with eye contact, calm tone, and gentle touch. Narrate emotions as they appear (e.g., “You’re hungry; milk is coming.” or “You’re smiling, happy baby.”). Provide consistent, sensitive responses to build secure attachment and trust.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Uses gestures, facial expressions, or early words to express emotions and seek help; begins to calm with support from familiar adults.	Expresses emotions such as frustration, excitement, or affection through actions like stomping, clapping, hugging, or using early words (e.g., “no,” “yay”); may imitate others’ emotional expressions, and begins to calm with adult support.	Introduce consistent gestures and short phrases for emotions (e.g., “happy,” “sad,” “all done,” “help”). During play or transitions, model and label these feelings. Respond supportively to emotional cues, showing children how to calm with touch or rhythmic rocking.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Begins to use familiar self-soothing strategies and associates emotions with expressions or simple words.	Uses simple words, gestures, or facial expressions to express feelings (e.g., “I mad,” frowning, crying) and begins to respond to others’ emotions by offering comfort, showing concern, or mirroring emotional cues.	Create a cozy area with soft toys, mirrors, and pictures of familiar emotions. Model calm-down techniques like hugging a stuffed toy, taking deep breaths, or asking for help. Encourage children to visit when they need comfort and name their emotions as you guide them (“You’re mad—let’s breathe together”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Expresses a broader range of emotions and shows awareness of others' emotional responses in shared routines and interactions.	Uses familiar self-regulation strategies such as deep breathing, hugging a toy, seeking a quiet space, or requesting a caregiver to manage emotions; expresses a variety of feelings including pride, embarrassment, frustration, or excitement, and begins to respond to others' emotional cues, such as comforting a peer or laughing with others.	Show children photos of people expressing different emotions. Ask them to imitate faces or match them to story scenes (“How does this friend feel?”). Discuss how actions can make others feel, using examples from the classroom (“You shared your toy—that made Ava happy!”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Expresses a wide range of emotions with increasing complexity and begins to label, explain, or manage feelings in self and others during play, routines, and social interactions.	Uses words, gestures, or facial expressions to describe emotions—such as saying “I’m sad,” “You’re happy,” or “That’s scary,” and begins to explain causes or reactions (e.g., “I cried because it was loud”); may attempt to manage emotions by seeking comfort, using calming strategies, or helping others feel better during play or group routines.	During small group discussions or story time, pause to ask questions, such as “How do you think the bear feels?” or “What can we do when we feel sad?” Provide puppets or dolls for role-play scenarios about friendship, frustration, and empathy. Encourage children to use feeling words to solve problems in play.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Manages emotions with increasing independence and seeks an adult for help resolving strong emotions.	May use strategies like taking deep breaths, counting to 10 and/or asking for a hug when strong emotions arise.	Introduce the idea of taking three deep breaths as a calming technique. Use the mantra, “smell the flower” (inhale) and “blow out the candle” (exhale) to teach deep breaths. Teach and practice when children are calm and coach them when they’re upset.



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Development is the increasing understanding that children gain of themselves and others, and includes their emerging ability to build positive relationships with others.

Standard 1.8 Interaction with Adults

Children show trust, develop emotional bonds, and interact comfortably with adults.

Wilson's Trail Check-In

Story

In the infant room at Bitterroot Early Learning Center, the floor is set up like a mini Montana trail—soft mats, wooden blocks, and nature-themed toys scattered like stepping stones. Eleven-month-old Wilson, newly mobile, crawls toward a stack of pinecone-shaped blocks. He pauses, looks back, and crawls quickly to Ms. Annie, his caregiver, who's sitting nearby. He places a hand on her knee and beams up at her. "Hi there, Wilson," she says warmly, offering a gentle touch. Reassured, Wilson turns and heads back to the blocks, ready to explore again.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Establishes and maintains positive interactions with caregivers.
Seeks connection and reassurance during exploration.

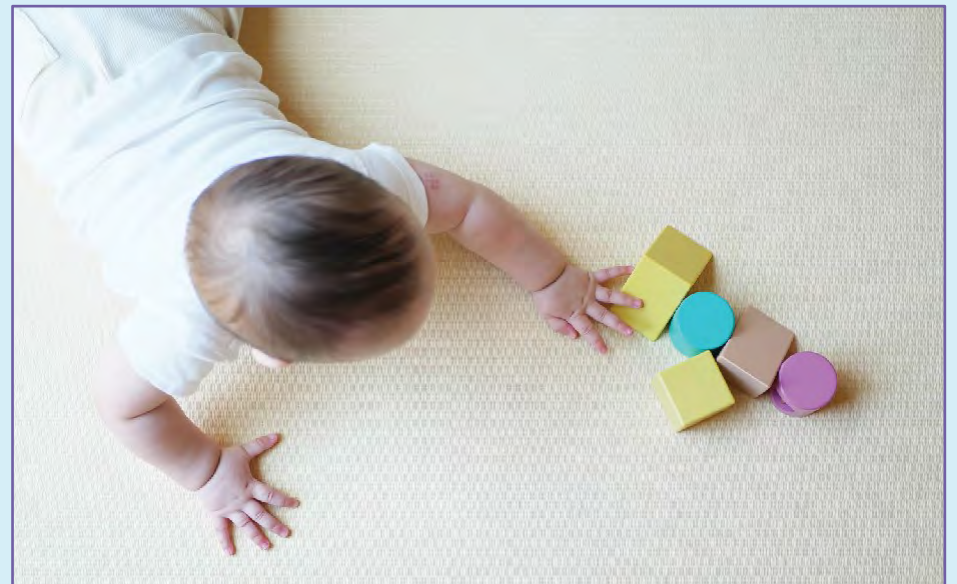
Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This moment reflects the secure base Wilson has formed with his caregiver. His brief check-in shows trust and emotional connection, which supports confident exploration. The Montana-

themed environment adds a sense of place and wonder, encouraging curiosity while nurturing relationships.

Try It!

Design classroom spaces that reflect local culture or natural surroundings to spark interest and comfort. Encourage caregivers to stay present and responsive, offering consistent emotional support as children explore their world.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Shows preference for and seeks comfort from familiar adults through facial expressions, gestures, or body movement—demonstrating a sense of safety and trust.	Seeks proximity to familiar adults, calms when comforted by them, and explores the environment more freely when they are nearby—showing trust that their needs will be met.	During daily care routines, caregivers respond promptly to infants’ cues with warm eye contact, a soothing tone, and gentle touch. Repeat comforting words or songs from the family’s home language to strengthen familiarity and trust. Document how the infant responds differently to familiar vs. unfamiliar adults.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Engages in warm, back-and-forth interactions with familiar caregivers, including joint attention, turn-taking vocalizations, and expressions of affection.	Seeks proximity to familiar adults, calms when comforted by them, and explores the environment more freely when they are nearby—showing trust that their needs will be met. Reaches for, moves toward, or calls out to a familiar adult when distressed, tired, or in unfamiliar situations, and is comforted by their presence or soothing.	During one-on-one play, imitate the child’s babbles, gestures, or claps. Encourage back-and-forth exchanges—turn-taking vocalizations or shared looks at toys. This playful mirroring helps build secure attachment, early communication, and emotional attunement.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Begins responding to simple requests and cues from familiar adults through actions, words, or gestures—especially during routines and play.	Child responds to simple verbal prompts—such as “Come here,” “Give me the ball,” or “Sit down”—by following the request with gestures, movement, or emerging verbal responses, especially when delivered by a trusted adult.	Incorporate songs with movement directions (“Clap your hands,” “Wave goodbye”) during routines like cleanup or transitions. Provide gentle prompts and praise for following cues. Encourage children to lead the song or gesture next, fostering connection and cooperation.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses pretend play to explore familiar relationships, routines, and caregiving roles—demonstrating understanding and emotional connection.	Imitates everyday experiences—such as feeding a baby doll, pretending to go to work, or reenacting a family meal—using toys, props, or gestures to represent familiar people and routines.	Set up a dramatic play area with baby dolls, toy dishes, blankets, and pretend foods. Encourage children to feed, rock, or comfort the dolls, mirroring family routines. Use language that reflects their home culture (“You’re cooking rice like your grandma does!”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Initiates and maintains interactions with adults using conversation, gestures, or play. Expresses affection and preferences in ways that reflect their unique relational style.	Looks to a trusted adult for reassurance—such as smiling after completing a task, saying “I did it!” while watching for a response, or asking “Did I do good?”—and responds positively to praise or encouragement.	During small group or one-on-one time, invite children to share stories about family routines or favorite activities (“What do you cook at home?”). Respond with interest and warmth, modeling conversation and extending language. Validate each child’s unique communication style—verbal, gestural, or expressive.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Engages in and maintains positive relationships and interactions with children and adults.	Plays the same game with the same friends for several days. Enjoys spending time with adults they know well, often showing affection or choosing to be near them.	Engage in play and exploration based on children’s interests to create positive attachment/relationships. Arrange playdates with peers to practice sharing, communication, and exploring social dynamics.

Comfort Corner Conversations

Story

When 16-month-old Ben trips on a block and starts to cry, his caregiver, Mr. Ethan, sits beside him on the rug. “You fell down—that was a big surprise,” he says softly. Ben leans into him, resting his head. Mr. Ethan rubs his back gently, waiting until Ben looks up again. “You’re ready to play again?” he asks. Ben nods and toddles back to the blocks, this time carrying one at a time.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses trusted adults for comfort and reassurance in times of stress.

Begins to recover from distress with support from familiar caregivers.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates co-regulation—the foundation of emotional development. The caregiver’s calm tone, attuned pacing, and patience help the child feel safe enough to re-engage in play.

Try It!

Design a “comfort corner” with soft lighting, sensory toys, and family photos. Model for families and new staff how consistent, warm responses build resilience and trust.



Standard 1.9 Interaction with Peers

Children interact and build relationships with peers as they expand their world beyond the family and develop skills in cooperation, negotiation, and showing empathy.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Shows interest in other children through eye contact, facial expressions, and movement—especially during caregiving routines and shared play spaces.	Watches other babies closely, smiles or coos in response to their sounds or movements and may reach toward or vocalize when near another child.	Place two infants near each other during tummy time or seated play with simple toys between them. Narrate their actions (“You’re looking at your friend!” or “She’s smiling at you!”) to reinforce awareness and connection. Use mirrors or photos of peers to extend recognition.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Responds to peers’ actions and emotions using sounds, gestures, or movement; may look to adults for support when navigating peer conflicts or discomfort.	Engages in simple parallel or interactive play with peers; observes others’ emotional expressions or behaviors—such as crying, laughing, or sharing—and responds by offering comfort, joining in, imitating, or adjusting their own behavior; may seek adult support when unsure or distressed.	Model and encourage imitation games such as clapping, tapping, or waving. When one child initiates an action, invite others to copy. Narrate emotions that arise (“Liam is laughing—he likes when you clap!”). Offer gentle guidance if tension occurs, building early empathy.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Plays side by side with peers during routines and activities, beginning to take turns and share space with adult support.	Engages with familiar peers by initiating or responding to social interactions—such as offering a toy, imitating actions, joining in play, or using simple words or gestures to communicate—and begins to take turns with adult support and modeling.	Provide sets of blocks or stacking cups for two children to use near each other. Model short phrases (“Your block,” “My turn,” “Together”) and celebrate parallel play moments. Gradually introduce turn-taking with adult assistance.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Initiates simple interactions with familiar peers, uses gestures or words to communicate during play, and begins to prefer certain playmates.	Engages in play near a peer such as building with blocks, drawing, or playing with cars while occasionally observing or imitating; may use gestures or words to initiate interaction and show preference for familiar playmates.	Pair children with a familiar peer and offer shared materials (large paper, crayons, stickers). Encourage cooperation (“Let’s draw together!”). Model and praise positive interactions—offering tools, asking for a turn, or commenting on a friend’s work.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Demonstrates warm bonds with peers, engages in early cooperative play, and uses social strategies (turn-taking, problem-solving) with adult guidance.	Participates in cooperative play—such as sharing materials, taking turns, or assigning roles—and uses simple strategies like protesting, negotiating, or seeking help when conflicts arise; may comfort peers or adjust behavior in response to others’ emotions.	Offer small groups of children a shared task—such as building a tower or setting up a pretend kitchen. Encourage collaboration through problem-solving prompts (e.g., “What can we use for a door?” or “Who will cook today?”). Highlight teamwork and emotional understanding when conflicts arise.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Forms trusting relationships with familiar adults and increasingly engages with peers to build friendships and practice cooperation, negotiation, and empathy. Begins to express needs, take on roles, and resolve minor conflicts using words and social strategies, relying less on adult intervention over time as their social world broadens beyond family.</p>	<p>Forms trusting relationships with familiar adults (e.g., seeking comfort when upset) and increasingly engages with peers to build friendships (e.g., inviting others to play), practicing cooperation (e.g., sharing toys), negotiation (e.g., asking “Can I have a turn?”), and empathy (e.g., comforting a sad friend). As their social world grows, they express needs (e.g., asking for help), take on play roles (e.g., “doctor” or “teacher”), and resolve minor conflicts with words and social strategies (e.g., “Let’s take turns”), needing less adult support over time.</p>	<p>Invite children to form a “band” using simple instruments (shakers, drums, tambourines) or household items like pots and wooden spoons. Encourage cooperation by saying, “Let’s all play the song together!” Model negotiation: “You want the drum. What can you say to your friend?” Highlight empathy: “Our friend looks sad because they don’t have an instrument. What can we do?” Support role-taking: “Who wants to be the conductor?” Music and movement activities promote social connection, turn-taking, and emotional awareness, while giving children a joyful way to practice communication and problem-solving.</p>

Core Domain 2: Physical

Infant/Toddler



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical development is the progression of children’s bodily growth and health as well as the emerging ability to use their bodies with increasing purpose, skill, and control.

Standard 2.1 Fine Motor Skills

Children develop small muscle strength, coordination, and skills.

Josie’s Pinecone Pick-Up

Story

On a crisp fall morning at Little Bear Explorers Preschool in Bozeman, the toddlers head outside for nature play. Thirteen-month-old Josie toddles across the grassy yard, bundled in a cozy fleece jacket. She spots a cluster of tiny pinecones beneath a lodgepole pine. With curiosity, she crouches down and carefully picks one up using her thumb and forefinger. Then another. Ms. Lauren kneels beside her. “You’ve got your forest fingers today, Josie!” she says with a smile. Josie beams and places the pinecones gently into a small bucket, proud of her growing collection.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses thumb and forefinger (pincer grasp) to pick up small objects. Demonstrates increasing fine motor control and coordination in natural settings.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

Josie’s ability to use a pincer grasp outdoors shows how fine motor skills develop across environments. The natural materials

and open-ended play support both physical development and sensory exploration. The educator’s encouragement reinforces confidence and curiosity.

Try It!

Incorporate nature walks or outdoor scavenger hunts using small, safe items like leaves, pebbles, or pinecones. These activities naturally support fine motor development while connecting children to their Montana surroundings.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Grasps fingers and familiar objects. Explores toys and surroundings by touching and mouthing, building early sensory-motor coordination.	Uses hands and mouth to learn about toys and other items, such as sucking on hands and fingers and reaching for toys, objects, and people. Curls fingers around a finger placed on the palm.	Offer safe, textured objects (rattles, soft fabrics, teething rings). Encourage infants to reach for your fingers or grasp items during caregiving routines. Describe what they feel and do (“You’re holding the soft blanket—so smooth!”). Rotate materials to engage all senses.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Manipulates toys and objects in varied ways, showing growing control and curiosity in hand use.	Shows emerging ability to grasp and release objects, pass items between hands, bang toys together, or explore by poking, patting, or squeezing. Begins to use a pincer grasp to pick up small items, attempt to feed themselves, or manipulate toy features like buttons or spinning parts.	Provide toys that respond to touch or motion—stacking cups, pop-up boxes, and blocks. Encourage children to explore how their hands make things happen (“You pushed the button—it popped up!”). Encourage persistence and curiosity.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Uses hands and fingers with increasing skill to engage in self-help tasks and explore materials with purpose.	Typically holds a crayon or marker and make intentional marks on paper, such as scribbles, lines, or circles. Often experiments with different motions, such as back-and-forth strokes or circular movements.	Encourage children to use their hands during mealtime (holding a spoon, pouring water) or dressing (pulling up socks, zipping). Provide finger-friendly sensory bins (rice, beans, or sand) for purposeful scooping and pouring. Celebrate independence (“You did it yourself!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
25–30 months	Exhibits a variety of fine motor skills by using tools like crayons or markers to make marks and perform actions requiring hand-eye coordination.	Demonstrates emerging self-help and fine motor skills by beginning to use utensils to eat with some assistance, attempting to pour liquids from a small container with support, partially dressing and undressing (e.g., removing shoes or pulling down pants), gluing small collage pieces with guidance, stringing large beads, turning several book pages at a time, and opening and closing blunt scissors with two hands or assistance.	Provide crayons, markers, and chunky paintbrushes for open-ended drawing. Encourage circular motions, lines, and dots. Introduce simple stencils or stamps to strengthen grip and coordination. Display children’s art to build pride and fine-motor confidence.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>31–35 months</i>	Coordinates eyes and hands to complete increasingly complex tasks, demonstrating control, planning, and precision.	Demonstrates increased fine motor control and independence by using utensils to eat with minimal spills, pouring liquids from a small pitcher with greater accuracy, independently managing simple dressing tasks (e.g., putting on shoes, unzipping a jacket), accurately gluing small collage pieces, stringing smaller beads, turning book pages one at a time, and opening and closing blunt scissors with one hand. Shows greater planning and control in self-help routines and when using tools during play and art activities.	Set up fine-motor activity centers where children use both hands and visual focus to complete purposeful tasks—threading large beads, transferring pom-poms with tongs, or building detailed block structures. Encourage children to plan (“Which bead comes next?”) and celebrate persistence.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Manipulate a range of objects, such as blocks or books.	Stacks taller block towers with more balance and control, sometimes copying simple patterns. Turns pages carefully and may use child-safe scissors to make short cuts across paper.	Provide pictures with building ideas and numbers of how many blocks it takes to stack different patterns.

Standard 2.2 Gross Motor Skills

Children develop large muscle strength, coordination, and skills.

Rolling Races

Story

In the infant room at Mountain Meadow Early Learning, a group of 10-month-olds gathers for tummy time on soft mats. Ms. Rose places a colorful ball just out of reach. “Ready, set, roll!” she cheers. Two babies rock forward, reaching for the ball. One rolls onto his back and squeals with surprise. Nearby, Ava, who uses a supportive positioning wedge due to low muscle tone, smiles as she lifts her head and reaches with one hand. Ms. Rose gently encourages her: “You’re stretching so strong, Ava!” She claps for each child’s effort, celebrating every movement. Later, she documents their progress to share with families.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses large muscles to roll, reach, and crawl.

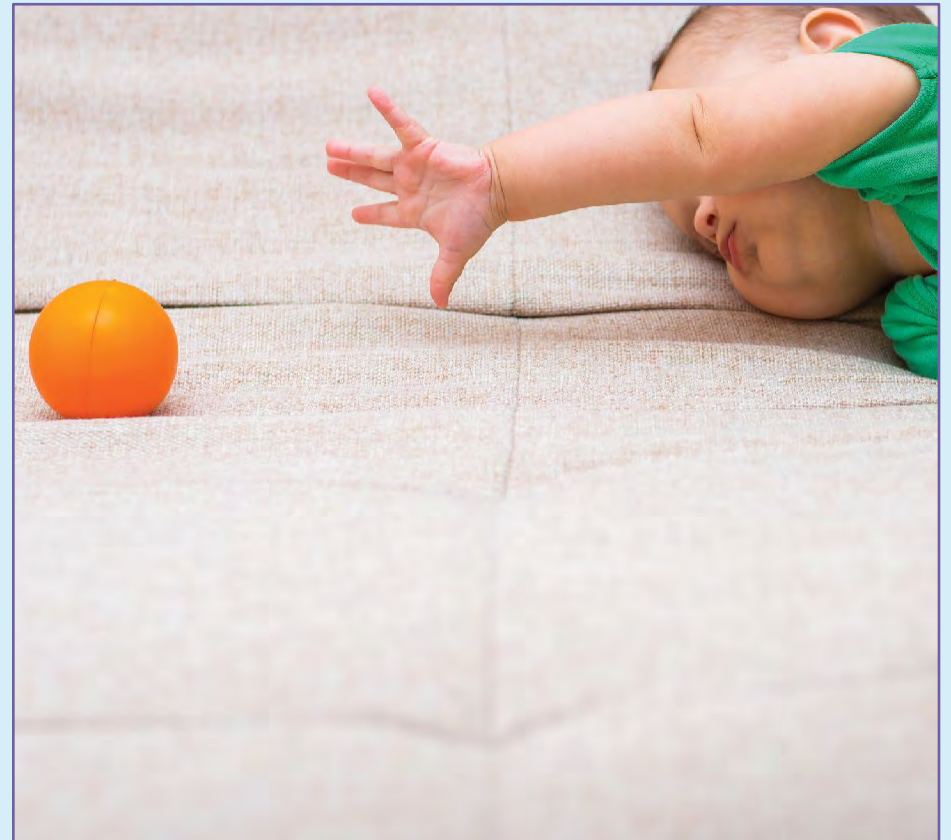
Gains control and coordination through active exploration, with or without adaptive support.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive environments support all children’s physical development. Ms. Rose adapts materials and positioning to meet individual needs, ensuring every child can participate meaningfully. Her encouragement and documentation reflect a strengths-based approach to growth and learning.

Try It!

Provide adaptive supports like wedges, bolsters, or textured mats to include children with varying physical abilities in movement play. Celebrate effort and progress equally—every stretch, roll, or reach is a step toward confidence and coordination.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Exhibits reflexive movements such as kicking, reaching, or turning toward stimuli in response to touch or sound. Begins developing trunk and neck control.	Responds to sensory input by turning toward sounds or movement, and begins to use hands to explore the environment by reaching for, holding, and grasping objects placed in their hands. May use a reflexive grasp at first, progressing to purposeful holding and releasing of toys or other small items.	Provide short, frequent tummy time sessions on a soft mat. Place colorful toys or mirrors within reach and encourage reaching or turning. Offer gentle verbal encouragement and adjust positioning for comfort. This strengthens muscles for later movement milestones.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Uses developing motor skills to roll, scoot, or crawl with increasing independence. Begins coordinating movements to grasp and interact with toys.	Pushes up on hands and knees in preparation to crawl, scoots on bottom or belly, rolls from back to stomach or vice versa, and pivots or turns body to reach toys; grasps and transfers objects between hands, brings toys to mouth; and uses both hands together to explore items.	Create a simple obstacle path with soft pillows or tunnels. Place favorite toys just out of reach to encourage movement. Celebrate progress and effort, supporting the child’s independence and spatial exploration.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Demonstrates emerging movement skills by crawling, cruising, or walking to explore the environment; engages in active play and begins rough-and-tumble movement.	Crawls or walks to reach toys, picks them up and manipulates them by stacking, shaking, or pushing; may wave, clap, or hand toys to others during play, showing growing coordination and social engagement.	Set up an outdoor area where toddlers can walk, climb, and ride or push riding toys safely. Play music and encourage dancing, running, and chasing bubbles. Label their movements (“You’re running fast!”) to build body vocabulary and coordination.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Combines and refines movements to play with toys and interact with others. Begins to show balance by standing on one foot or shifting weight during play.	Demonstrates emerging balance and coordination by walking up stairs, walking backward, standing or hopping on one foot, or walking on a balance beam; uses large muscle movements during play (e.g., throwing or catching a ball, or swinging a bat at a ball on a tee stand) to interact with peers and objects with growing control and purpose.	Provide large balls for rolling, kicking, and gentle tossing. Incorporate simple balance activities like standing on one foot or walking along a taped line. Offer encouragement and model movements. Pair activities with familiar songs for rhythm and fun.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Manipulates objects using large muscles. Performs large motor movements showing coordination and control.	Engages in active physical play with growing coordination and confidence (e.g., rolling on the floor, crawling over soft objects, gently climbing on caregivers or peers, playfully bumping or leaning into others, and laughing or smiling during interactions). Demonstrates emerging gross motor skills, such as marching, kicking a ball, jumping forward with both feet, and may begin to walk, run, hop, gallop, slide, skip, or leap with increasing control.	Design an indoor or outdoor obstacle course where children climb over cushions, under chairs or tables, jump into hoops, throw beanbags, and balance on low beams. Encourage planning (“What comes next?”) and teamwork with peers. Celebrate control and coordination through play.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Moves with growing control and coordination, such as running without falling, climbing playground steps, or hopping.</p>	<p>Demonstrates emerging control and coordination by walking, running, changing direction, and navigating around people and objects; begins to apply these movement skills in varied play contexts (e.g., simple games like tag, follow-the-leader, basic dance movements, and navigating low obstacle courses), showing increasing body awareness and purposeful movement.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities and ample space with a variety of elevations and surfaces for children to practice motor skills.</p>



Standard 2.3 Sensorimotor Skills

Children use all the senses to explore the environment and develop skills through sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Responds to touch, movement, and sound through reflexes and early reactions; focuses on near and far objects by tracking them with their eyes.	May visually follow a moving object or person across their field of vision, focusing intently on faces or toys held at different distances, and shifting their gaze smoothly between near and far objects; may also reach for or respond to objects they see moving.	Engage infants with gentle movement and sensory play—slowly swaying, softly singing, or moving a bright rattle across their line of sight. Describe sensations as you go (“You’re watching the red ball move!”). This promotes visual tracking, comfort with touch, and early perception skills.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Explores the environment using mouth and hands; responds to different textures and manipulates materials to explore sound and sensation.	May seek out and explore new textures, shapes, and materials within the environment. May become calm when given a familiar blanket or a gentle massage on the skin.	Provide sensory baskets with safe items that vary in texture and sound (wooden spoons, soft cloth, rattles). Encourage children to shake, bang, and feel the items. Describe their sensory discoveries (“That’s smooth,” “You made a loud sound!”).
<i>19–24 months</i>	Demonstrates awareness of their body in space by adjusting movements to reach for objects or avoid obstacles during play and routines.	May walk around a table without bumping into it or stand an appropriate distance when talking with another person (not too close or too far).	Set up a soft obstacle path with cushions, tunnels, and toys. Encourage children to crawl, reach, or climb safely around barriers. Label body parts and actions (“You’re ducking under the tunnel!”). This promotes spatial awareness and coordination.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Practices sensory integration by tolerating and adapting to new sensations with support from familiar adults.	Touches different textures calmly, tries new tastes, adjusts to changes in light or sound without getting upset, and shows curiosity when experiencing new environments.	Offer a choice of sensory experiences and bins (sand, water, playdough) and encourage children to explore with hands, spoons, or small tools. Support children who are hesitant by modeling and introducing sensations slowly. Use language that acknowledges their comfort level (“You’re trying something new!”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses sensory and motor coordination to explore materials and environments with purpose—showing increasing control, adaptability, and curiosity.	May use their senses to make sense of objects, activities, and people around them. They adjust what they do based on what they notice (e.g., pressing harder on clay than on playdough when making something or hiding their face when meeting someone new).	Invite children to explore open-ended materials—water tables with floating objects, clay for molding, or light tables with translucent shapes. Ask guiding questions (“What happens when you squeeze it?”). Encourage observation, prediction, and flexible problem-solving.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Begins to show more intentionality in their exploration. Combines sensory input with motor planning and begins to test ideas or repeat actions.</p>	<p>Intentionally explores new objects or environments using multiple senses (e.g., looks, touches, and shakes to figure out how something works); compares sensory properties through experimentation (e.g., presses clay and playdough differently and comments on it); and adjusts behavior based on past experiences (e.g., approaches hot sand carefully). Describes sensory input with more specific language (e.g., “It feels scratchy”); shows clear preferences and self-regulation (e.g., covers ears in loud spaces); revisits and varies exploration (e.g., uses scoops with sand); uses sensory input to guide social interactions (e.g., moves closer to music or steps back when overwhelmed); and begins connecting sensory experiences to emotions or memories (e.g., “That smells like pancakes at Nana’s house”).</p>	<p>Provide sensory-rich materials that invite exploration and problem-solving (e.g., scooping rice, feeling textured fabrics, examining leaves with magnifiers). Ask questions such as, “What do you notice?” to encourage observation and language. Support children as they adjust actions based on sensory input (e.g., stepping carefully on bumpy surfaces) and connect experiences to emotions or memories (e.g., “That’s soft like my teddy bear”).</p>

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND PERSONAL CARE

Children demonstrate healthy and safe behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being.

Standard 2.4 Daily Living Skills

Children demonstrate personal health and hygiene skills as they develop and practice basic care routines.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Recognizes and responds to daily routines such as feeding, diapering, or bedtime. Communicates needs through fussing, cooing, or facial expressions.	May smile and vocalize during feeding and diaper changing. May establish associations for falling asleep, such as holding a special blanket or being rocked and signal needs through fussing, cooing, or changes in facial expression.	Maintain consistent, calm routines for feeding, diapering, and sleep. Use the same comforting words, songs, or gestures from the child’s home culture. Narrate each step (“Now we’re changing your diaper.”) to help the infant anticipate and feel secure.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Indicates physical needs—such as hunger, comfort, or play—through gestures, sounds, or expressions. Begins to show interest in familiar routines.	Communicates needs by asking for a bottle, rubbing eyes, fussing, or crying. Shows recognition of routines like diapering or bedtime by anticipating or participating in them.	Display visual cards showing mealtime, naptime, and playtime. As children gesture or vocalize, connect their cues to the card (“You’re pointing to the bottle—you’re hungry!”). Encourage choice-making during transitions to strengthen self-awareness.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Shows emerging interest in meeting physical needs with adult support; participates in healthy routines with guidance.	May begin to know when they need certain needs met, such as saying “I pee,” or “I poopy,” or getting a clean diaper out. May wash and dry their hands, wipe their nose with a tissue, and brush their teeth with adult assistance.	Invite children to help wipe tables, wash hands, or throw away napkins after meals. Model each step slowly and celebrate participation (“You’re helping keep things clean!”). Reinforce the routine with a short cleanup song.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Communicates with adults when not feeling well or needing help. Begins participating in bathroom routines with growing independence.	Verbally shares health status (e.g., “My tummy hurts,” “I’m tired”), and begins using the toilet, washing hands, or dressing, and may ask for help when needed.	Establish a predictable bathroom routine. Encourage children to tell or gesture when they need help. Use simple feeling charts to help identify discomfort (“My tummy hurts,” “I’m tired”). Provide praise for attempts to use the toilet or wash hands independently.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Demonstrates increasing independence in self-care routines (e.g., washing hands, dressing, toileting) and expresses preferences related to physical well-being.	Uses the toilet with minimal assistance, washes and dries hands independently, brushes teeth with guidance, and may explain or anticipate health routines (e.g., “I wash my hands so they are clean”). Shows pride in completing self-care tasks.	Create daily opportunities for children to make choices during self-care (selecting clothing, choosing between soap scents, etc.). Offer gentle guidance and celebrate success (“You put on your shoes all by yourself!”). Incorporate songs for sequencing steps like handwashing or dressing.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Begins to develop foundational self-care skills by attempting to use utensils, pouring with support, and removing simple clothing. Participates in hygiene routines, such as handwashing and toothbrushing, with adult assistance, and begins to recognize basic healthy habits with guidance.</p>	<p>Begins to show interest in participating in daily routines, such as mealtime and dressing. Is learning to feed themselves using child-sized utensils, though coordination is still developing. With support, attempts to pour water from a small pitcher and can put on or remove simple clothing items like hats or coats. Begins to assist with dressing tasks, such as pulling up pants or trying to zip with help.</p>	<p>Introduce family-style dining and encourage children to serve themselves and help others.</p>



Standard 2.5 Nutrition

Children eat and enjoy a variety of nutritional foods and develop healthy eating practices.

Snack Time Helpers

Story

At the snack table, Ms. Joanie places small cups of yogurt and spoons in front of each child. “You can do it!” she encourages. Two-year-old Avery grins, carefully scooping and bringing the spoon to her mouth—most of it lands there! The director, visiting the room, praises the group: “I see strong hands and focused faces!” The children beam, proud of their effort.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses hands and fingers with growing control during self-help routines.

Demonstrates increasing independence in eating and hygiene.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

Daily routines are powerful learning moments. This vignette captures how mealtimes build fine motor control, autonomy, and confidence—especially when adults model encouragement rather than correction.

Try It!

Partner with families to share strategies that build independence (child-sized utensils, consistent routines). Frame everyday self-care as an opportunity for agency and celebration.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Shows hunger and fullness cues, and responds to feeding routines with comfort and satisfaction.	May indicate when hungry and full by squirming, pulling away from the nipple, or fussing.	Respond to infants’ hunger cues promptly—rooting, turning head, or fussing. Maintain calm eye contact, speak softly, and hold the infant securely. Use family feeding rituals or songs to build familiarity and trust. Respect cues when they signal fullness by turning away or slowing down.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Explores food using fingers and mouth. Begins self-feeding and shows interest in new textures, tastes, and mealtime routines.	May begin to use hands and fingers to pick up and hold foods and put them in mouth, and explores different textures and tastes. May show excitement or curiosity during mealtimes and begin to mimic adult eating behaviors.	Offer soft, safe finger foods of different textures and colors (e.g., mashed fruit, cooked vegetables). Allow children to explore with hands before using utensils. Narrate sensory experiences (“That banana is smooth and sweet.”) to build vocabulary and curiosity about food.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Feeds self with fingers and utensils. Communicates hunger or fullness, and begins to recognize familiar foods and preferences.	Uses fingers or utensils to feed self, expresses hunger or fullness through words or gestures, and begins to identify and prefer certain foods, such as asking for fruit or refusing disliked items.	Encourage children to serve small portions using child-sized utensils. Teach simple phrases such as “more” or “all done.” Reinforce independence by praising effort and labeling familiar foods (“You like apples—crunchy and red!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Participates in mealtime routines. Begins identifying healthy food choices with adult support.	Expresses thirst or hunger (e.g., asking for water or milk), helps set the table, selects and serves food with guidance, and begins to recognize healthy options when prompted (e.g., choosing fruit over candy with adult encouragement).	Use picture cards or pretend foods to sort items into “everyday foods” and “sometimes foods.” Involve children in setting the table and serving snacks. Connect foods to energy and feelings (“Carrots help our eyes see!”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Demonstrates increased independence in eating and communicates food preferences. Begins engaging in mealtime conversations and making healthy choices.	May ask for specific foods by name or refuse to try unfamiliar foods. Asks for more of a favorite or communicates when they are full and engages in mealtime conversations. May choose healthy options independently and show pride in self-feeding and food-related decisions.	Encourage children to serve themselves from shared bowls and talk about what they’re eating. Ask open-ended questions (“What color is your fruit?” or “What do you like best today?”). Reinforce positive habits and peer modeling during group meals.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Feeds self with minimal assistance. Begins to try new foods. Engages in simple mealtime conversations and follows basic routines.	Sits at the table for meals and snacks with adult support; begins to follow simple mealtime routines (e.g., waiting to be served, passing food, helping to clean up); uses basic table manners with reminders (e.g., saying “please” or “thank you,” using utensils); tries familiar foods, and shows curiosity about new ones with encouragement; and recognizes and communicates feelings of hunger or fullness.	Provide dramatic play kitchen materials for children to practice preparing and serving meals.

Standard 2.6 Physical Fitness

Children demonstrate healthy behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being through physical activity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
Birth–8 months	Shows interest in movement by kicking, reaching, or turning; responds to physical activity with alertness and pleasure.	May crawl, stand up, or eat with fingers and may need adult assistance trying out these skills.	Lay infants on a soft blanket with gentle music playing. Encourage movement by wiggling fingers and toes, holding toys just out of reach, or singing simple action songs (“Kick, kick, kick!”). Respond to smiles and coos to reinforce joy in movement.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Participates in simple movement games and explores active play through crawling, cruising, or dancing.	May imitate simple motions to songs, such as “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” or “Pat-A-Cake,” walks or climbs to explore surroundings, reaches for toys, moves to follow people or objects, and joins in simple games like peekaboo or chase.	Play upbeat, rhythmic music and model simple movements—clapping, crawling, rocking, or bouncing. Encourage children to imitate or move freely to the beat. Join in with positive expressions and gentle guidance.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Attempts new large and small motor activities and begins engaging in outdoor play with adult support.	May actively engage in physical games and activities that build stamina, strength, and skills.	Provide safe outdoor spaces for climbing, sliding, and running. Offer adult guidance as children test new movements like stepping up or balancing. Narrate their actions (“You climbed the hill!”) to boost confidence and body awareness.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Engages in physically active games with peers and begins participating in simple group movement activities like dancing or chasing games.	May play physical games—both with and without rules—with peers, such as “Ring Around the Rosie” and “Duck, Duck Goose.”	Lead short, active games, such as “Ring Around the Rosie,” “Follow the Leader,” and simple chasing games. Encourage laughter, cooperation, and safe boundaries (“We stop when the music stops.”). Celebrate teamwork and shared joy in movement.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Tries new movement skills with minimal adult assistance and expresses positive feelings during and after physical activity.	May express how great they feel after playing an active game, looking down from the top of the slide, or running across the playground.	Invite children to lead short movement sequences (“Jump like a frog,” “Spin like the wind”). Rotate leaders to encourage confidence and creativity. Afterward, ask children how their bodies feel (“Tired?” “Happy?”) to build self-awareness.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Shows growing confidence when exploring new movement activities with support, such as climbing, jumping, or balancing. May hesitate at first but is increasingly willing to try with encouragement.	Participates in group movement activities like dancing, marching, or simple obstacle courses. Follows basic movement directions in games such as “Simon Says” and “Follow the Leader.” Imitates actions modeled by adults or peers, shows enthusiasm during active play with others. Begins to wait for turns or share space during physical games with adult support.	Model physical fitness. Play, dance, and move with the children. Take advantage of opportunities to modify the environment to help individualize the experience for each child, such as raising the basket for children who are able to throw the ball higher.

Standard 2.7 Safety Practices

Children develop an awareness and understanding of safety rules as they learn to make safe and appropriate choices.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
Birth–8 months	Shows preference for familiar people and differentiates between familiar and unfamiliar adults through gaze, vocalizations, or body movement.	Smiles or reaches for familiar people, turns toward their voice, shows excitement when they appear, and may become shy, fussy, or pull away from strangers.	Display family and caregiver photos near the infant’s play area. Use gentle, predictable routines and familiar songs to strengthen recognition and trust. When new adults are present, maintain the infant’s sense of security by staying close and offering reassuring touch or voice cues.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Looks to trusted adults for cues during unfamiliar or potentially unsafe situations. Begins responding to redirection with support.	Watches caregiver’s face or body language in unfamiliar situations, pauses before acting, stays close to caregiver, and may seek comfort or reassurance before exploring and may respond to redirection with guidance.	During play, guide children gently through boundaries (e.g., when exploring new toys or spaces) and model stopping and checking in (“Wait, look at me first.”). Reinforce trust by providing calm direction and positive redirection instead of “no,” “don’t,” or “stop.”
<i>19–24 months</i>	Recognizes and begins to follow basic safety instructions and responds to warnings with emerging consistency.	Avoids danger and accepts redirection (e.g., stopping when told “hot” or “no”), but still requires close supervision. Begins to show understanding of basic safety cues and adult instructions.	Play interactive movement games that introduce simple safety cues—“Stop.” “Go.” “Slow.” Reinforce the meaning during transitions (stopping before doors, waiting for adult signals). Use songs and visuals for consistency and fun.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Identifies or communicates when someone has hurt or upset them. Begins to understand cause-and-effect related to rules and unsafe choices.	Follows simple safety rules (e.g., walking indoors, holding hands near streets), and may test boundaries to observe consequences. Communicates when hurt or upset and begins to understand why rules exist.	During circle time or play, use puppets or dolls to role-play gentle touch, sharing, and expressing discomfort (“Stop, that hurts!”). Teach short safety phrases or signs, such as “Help, please” or “I don’t like that.” Reinforce empathy by modeling comforting responses.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>31–35 months</i>	Demonstrates growing responsibility by following simple rules, expressing safety concerns, and recognizing that actions have consequences.	Uses words, gestures, or facial expressions to express when hurt or upset, seeks comfort from adults, and may point to the person or action that caused distress. Follows safety rules with increasing independence and begins to explain or anticipate consequences of unsafe behavior.	Create a “Safety Helper” role in the classroom. Children can help identify safe and unsafe actions (e.g., walking inside, picking up toys). Discuss cause-and-effect (“If we run inside, we might fall.”). Celebrate responsibility with verbal praise or helper badges.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Recognizes basic safety rules with adult help and says simple reasons for the safety rules.	Follows simple rules with adult reminders, such as “We walk inside.” or “Take turns.” When asked why, they begin to explain with simple reasons like “So we don’t get hurt.” They can repeat safety rules when prompted, like “We sit when we eat,” and use basic language to describe cause and effect, such as “We clean up so we don’t trip.” The child starts to understand how rules help keep themselves and others safe.	Allow children the opportunity to create rules, modify them based on group discussion, and post them as a reminder.

Core Domain 3: Communication

Infant/Toddler



COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Communication is the process of exchanging information through a common system of signs, gestures, symbols, and behaviors. Language development is the emerging ability of children to communicate with others to build relationships, share meaning, and express needs.

Standard 3.1 Receptive Communication

Children use listening and observation skills to make sense of and respond to spoken language and other forms of communication. Children enter into the exchange of information around what they see, hear, and experience. They begin to acquire an understanding of the concepts of language that contribute to further learning.

Preston's Gentle Hands

Story

At Apsáalooke Morning Circle Center, toddlers gather in a sunlit room decorated with Crow beadwork patterns and family photos. A caregiver gently lays an infant on a soft star quilt nearby. Twenty-two-month-old Preston, a Crow child, toddles over with excitement. As he reaches toward the infant, Ms. Clara calmly says, "Gentle hands, Preston." He pauses, then softly pats the infant's back, his touch slow and careful.

"Good job, gentle hands," Ms. Clara affirms.

Preston smiles proudly, then sits beside the infant, humming along to a lullaby playing in the background—one sung in Crow by a local elder and recorded for the classroom.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Follows simple one-step directions related to immediate and



visible context.

Demonstrates understanding of social expectations and emerging empathy.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This moment highlights how responsive environments support communication and emotional growth. Preston's ability to respond to a familiar phrase shows his growing understanding of language and behavior expectations. The use of Crow cultural elements—like the star quilt and lullaby—strengthens self and belonging.

Try It!

Incorporate local tribal languages, songs, and symbols into daily routines. Use consistent, respectful language to guide behavior, and create opportunities for children to practice kindness and care in meaningful, familiar ways.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Responds to familiar voices, sounds, and gestures through gaze, movement, or vocalization. Begins to anticipate routine actions and recognize familiar words.	May gaze at a familiar face, turn head toward a familiar voice, or become quiet when they hear a comforting sound. May look at or turn toward an object in response to a request (such as “Look at the ball”), imitate an action (such as clapping their hands when you do), or make a vocalization when someone walks near.	During caregiving routines (feeding, diapering), speak softly using the infant’s name and short, repeated phrases (“Milk time,” “All done”). Pause for the infant’s coos, smiles, or movements, reinforcing turn-taking. Repeat familiar songs or rhymes to build recognition of tone and rhythm.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Reacts to familiar words and actions by turning, looking, smiling, vocalizing, or following simple directions. Engages with songs, rhymes, or stories in individualized ways.	May look at, point to, or retrieve a familiar object when the object is named or they are asked, “Where is Daddy?” or “Where is your blanket?” May show interest, laugh, and/or smile when told a silly rhyme or an engaging story.	Incorporate songs with motions (“If You’re Happy and You Know It,” “Pat-A-Cake”) and short, repetitive storybooks. Pause before key words to let children anticipate or react (clapping, smiling, babbling). Use gestures and expressive tone to strengthen word–action connections.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Responds appropriately to simple statements, questions, or one-step directions within their immediate surroundings. Begins using gestures or words to answer basic questions.	May follow simple directions. Responds appropriately to the meaning of words or signs, such as by looking or pointing at a person or object that has been named.	During play, give short, clear one-step directions (“Get your hat,” “Give the baby a hug”). Use gestures to support comprehension. When the child responds, celebrate understanding with smiles and descriptive language (“You brought the hat—great listening!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Follows simple, related two-step directions with emerging consistency. Demonstrates understanding of spatial concepts through actions or responses.	May correctly answer simple questions, such as “What is this picture?” with “Dog” or “What are you doing?” with “Eating a cracker”; “Who is this?” with “Mommy”; “Whose coat is this?” with “Mine”; and “Where is the ball?” with “Here it is!”	Incorporate movement-based games that use two-step directions (“Pick up the block and put it in the box”). Model spatial concepts like “under,” “on,” or “beside” through dramatic play or building activities. Reinforce understanding with visual modeling and praise.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses words, gestures, or other methods to respond to “where” questions and express understanding. Shows growing comprehension of sequencing and relational language.	Answers “where” questions using short phrases or complete sentences (e.g., “It’s under the couch” or “In the toy box”). With growing use, understands sequencing and relational language, such as “first,” “next,” “last,” “behind,” and “beside” during conversations, routines, and play.	Read picture books that encourage children to identify or describe locations (“Where is the puppy?” “Under the table!”). Extend into play by hiding objects and prompting “where” or “what happens next” questions. Celebrate effort and expand responses with descriptive language.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Understands and participates in conversations, beginning to learn from interactions with others.	Maintains simple back-and-forth exchanges with peers or adults (e.g., responding to “Hi” with “Hi”). Shows understanding by following simple directions during play (“Get your shoes”).	Encourage small-group discussions and role-play activities to support turn-taking and active listening. Reinforce understanding through simple directions (“Pick up the ball and put it in the basket”). Model reciprocal dialogue (“You said you like blocks—tell me what you’re building.”). Use songs, stories, and movement directions to strengthen comprehension.

Standard 3.2 Expressive Communication

Children develop skills in using sounds, facial expressions, gestures, and words for a variety of purposes, such as to help adults and others understand their needs, ask questions, express feelings and ideas, and solve problems.

Skylar's Big Word

Story

At Big Sky Sprouts Early Learning in Miles City, toddlers are busy playing in the “Montana Ranch” dramatic play area, complete with toy animals, barns, and tractors. Two-year-old Skylar spots another child holding a toy horse he wants. He walks over, then turns to Ms. Erin and says, “Mine!” with determination. Ms. Erin crouches beside him. “You want a horse too,” she says gently. She helps Skylar find a similar one from the toy bin. “Here’s another horse just for you.” Skylar grins, takes the toy, and gallops it across the pretend pasture, making cheerful “neigh” sounds.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses single words to communicate.

Expresses wants and needs using emerging language.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

Skylar’s use of a single word to express his desire shows growing confidence in using language to communicate. The educator’s calm, supportive response models respectful interaction and helps build vocabulary. The Montana-themed play area adds familiarity and excitement, encouraging language-rich play.

Try It!

Create themed play areas that reflect local culture—ranches, forests, or wildlife. Use these spaces to spark conversation and support toddlers in using words to express their needs and ideas.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Explores and experiments with making different sounds. Uses vocalizations, facial expressions, or gestures to respond to people and environmental cues.	May use distinguishable sounds or cries when hungry, uncomfortable, sleepy, gassy, or afraid.	Engage in back-and-forth “conversations” during routines. When babies coo or babble, mimic their sounds and expressions (“Ba-ba!” “Oh, I hear you!”). Pause for their response, reinforcing turn-taking and imitation. Use exaggerated facial expressions and tone.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Uses consistent sounds, gestures, or signs to refer to familiar people or objects. Begins to respond to simple requests or comments with actions or vocalizations.	May say “Mama” when reaching for their mother or point to a toy when asked, “Where’s your bear?”	Point to familiar people or objects and label them clearly (“Mama,” “Ball”). Pause to let them repeat the sound, gesture, or sign. Respond with enthusiasm to all attempts, expanding slightly (“Yes, ball! Big, red ball!”). Incorporate songs that name familiar objects.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Uses single words, gestures, or signs to express needs, wants, or ideas. May ask others to name unfamiliar objects or people.	May say “Dada” to mean Daddy or sign “apple” by making a fist, placing the knuckle of the right index finger against their cheek, and pivoting their hand back and forth.	Provide a variety of objects during play or snack time. Encourage children to name items or point to them (“What’s this?”). Reinforce attempts by expanding (“Yes, apple—red apple!”). Introduce new vocabulary naturally through routines.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Combines two words, gestures, or signs to communicate ideas. Begins to express feelings using words or other forms of communication.	May say “want juice” or “go park,” and begin to express feelings like “I’m mad” or “I’m happy.”	During routines or play, model two-word phrases (“More juice,” “Mommy go”). Introduce simple feeling words with visuals or songs (“Happy,” “Sad”). Praise children for using combinations or words to share emotions, connecting their experiences to language.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>31–35 months</i>	Begins to use multi-word phrases or short sentences to express thoughts and feelings. Initiates brief exchanges with others using gestures, words, or short sentences.	May use words appropriately to express emotions, such as happy, excited, sad, tired, or scared. May communicate using correct sentence structure, such as “I’m wearing my birthday shoes.”	Invite children to share short stories about their day or play (“I go park,” “My dog run fast”). Use prompts (“What happened next?”) and expand on their ideas using correct sentence structure. Encourage turn-taking and peer listening.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Engages in short back-and-forth conversations with peers and familiar adults, using simple sentences and responding to questions or comments.	With increasing independence, initiates simple exchanges (“Want to play?” “Look at my toy”). Takes turns speaking during brief back-and-forth conversations.	Support play-based conversation through dramatic play, story retelling, and partner games. Reinforce turn-taking by modeling pauses and responses. Model conversation starters and responses (“You can say, ‘Can I have a turn?’”). Use songs, greetings, and sharing time to build confidence in speaking.

Standard 3.3 Social Communication

Children develop skills that help them interact and communicate with others in effective ways.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Gazes at familiar adults and responds to voices, facial expressions, and name being said. Participates in early back-and-forth interactions using cooing, smiling, and body language.	May gaze at familiar adults, smile in response to a smile, or coo when spoken to.	During feeding, diapering, or floor play, make gentle eye contact, smile, and respond to coos or movements with an expressive tone (“Hi there, I see you!”). Mirror facial expressions and wait for a response to create natural conversational rhythm.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Uses gestures, sounds, and emerging words to respond to familiar cues and simple questions. Shows understanding of names, routines, and common words through actions and expressions.	May wave when someone says “bye-bye,” or go to the sink when asked to wash hands.	Play familiar games like “Where’s [child’s name]?” or “Peekaboo!” Include gestures, clapping, or waving. Ask simple questions (“Where’s your ball?”) and respond enthusiastically when children point or vocalize. Reinforce understanding by connecting language to routine actions.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Uses simple words and gestures to initiate and respond in short back-and-forth interactions. Connects language to actions and begins to understand conversational turn-taking.	May shrug their shoulders and stand by the door when asked a question such as “Go outside?”	During pretend play or routines, model short conversational exchanges (“You wash, I dry!”). Wait for a verbal or nonverbal response, and continue the exchange. Reinforce turn-taking with clear pauses and gentle prompts (“My turn, your turn!”).
<i>25–30 months</i>	Responds to others using words and simple questions. Makes requests and comments based on personal experiences, and engages others by pointing out meaningful objects or ideas.	Might point out colorful flowers on a walk or an animal in a book in order to draw your attention to it.	During small group or circle time, encourage children to share something meaningful (a toy, picture, or story). Prompt with open-ended questions (“What do you like about it?”). Model active listening and follow-up comments (“You love your truck—it’s red!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>31–35 months</i>	Understands and responds to multi-step directions and a growing range of vocabulary. Participates in simple conversations, showing attention to others' ideas, emotions, and interests.	May get a toy and place it on the shelf. When asked, will tell you about something that was interesting to them, such as playing with a friend. Might ask a crying child if they are sad.	Hold short group conversations about daily experiences (“What did you build?”). Encourage children to listen and respond to peers with prompts (“Maya said she built a tower—what did you make?”). Reinforce social listening skills and emotional awareness through positive feedback.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Follows multi-step directions involving familiar routines and activities; uses an expanding vocabulary to express needs, ideas, and feelings. Engages in short back-and-forth conversations, showing awareness of others' emotions, interests, and perspectives.	Independently follows multi-step directions during play or daily routines (e.g., “Put your shoes on, then line up at the door”). Uses descriptive language to share observations or experiences (e.g., “The truck is big and loud”). Engages in brief conversations by taking turns speaking and responding to others' comments or feelings.	During small group story time, the educator reads a book with rich vocabulary and emotional themes. After reading, children are invited to retell parts of the story using props or puppets. The educator prompts with multi-step directions (e.g., “Pick a puppet, then tell us what happened first in the story”). Children are encouraged to describe characters' feelings and respond to peers' ideas, fostering expressive language and conversational turn-taking.

Standard 3.4 English Language Learners

Children develop competency in their home language while becoming proficient in English.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Uses home language sounds, facial expressions, and body movements to communicate needs and engage in early interactions with familiar adults.	May predominantly—and sometimes exclusively—use their home language for some time as they become acquainted with the new language. May continue to respond spontaneously to familiar words in the home language, such as clapping their hands when they hear the word for “clap.”	Invite families to share songs, lullabies, or key phrases in their home language. Caregivers can use these familiar expressions during daily routines, responding to the infant’s sounds and gestures. This consistency supports comfort, trust, and early language recognition.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Uses gestures, sounds, or words in home language to express needs and respond to familiar cues. Begins to adjust to hearing and interacting in a new language.	May stop talking in either language while listening to the new language and focusing on learning the meaning of unfamiliar sounds and words.	Use familiar songs, greetings, and routines in both the child’s home language and English. Label objects or actions in both languages (example: “agua—water”) while using gestures or visuals. Celebrate all attempts to communicate—verbal and nonverbal.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Follows simple directions in home language or English. Uses emerging words or phrases in one or both languages to communicate wants and ideas.	May follow verbal directions in either the home language or in English when accompanied by gestures and cues, such as coming when adult signals with their hand while saying, “Come here, please.”	During mealtimes or transitions, use short, clear directions and label actions in both languages (example: “Wash hands—lavar las manos”). Encourage children to repeat or respond with gestures or single words. Reinforce understanding through modeling and repetition.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses short phrases in English or home language to initiate interactions, share ideas, and respond to questions. Continues to adjust to learning a new language.	May use short phrases or groups of words in English while still using the home language for longer sentences or more detailed explanations.	Read short stories or look at picture books in both languages. Pause to invite children to name familiar items or describe what’s happening using their home language or emerging English. Encourage code-switching naturally—respond to meaning, not grammar.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses home language and/ or English to participate in conversations, make requests, and comment on experiences. Engages others using meaningful words and phrases from one or both languages.	May talk about their morning routine in English, but use their home language to identify key family members.	Encourage children to share words or phrases from their home language during group time. Invite peers to learn and repeat them (“Amir says ‘shukran’—that means thank you.”). Use visuals and gestures to support understanding and promote inclusion and pride in their multilingualism.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Begins to use and understand English while continuing to grow in their home language.</p>	<p>May begin to show understanding of English by responding to familiar words and phrases during routines or play, often using gestures or actions. May use a mix of gestures, home language, and some English words to express needs and wants. Shows interest in English through songs, stories, and conversations, while continuing to rely primarily on and develop their home language. Exposure to English and comfort using it may vary depending on the setting and individual experiences.</p>	<p>Support early English understanding by using consistent routines, gestures, and visual cues (e.g., pointing to a toy while saying “ball” or using picture cards during snack time). Encourage children to express needs using a mix of gestures, home language, and emerging English words. Share simple songs, rhymes, and stories in both English and the child’s home language to build interest in English while continuing to support and value their home language development. Recognize that each child’s comfort with English may vary depending on their experiences and environment.</p>

LITERACY

Early or emergent literacy develops as children become aware of the relationship between the written and spoken word. Young children develop skills in using symbols, language, and images to become interested and competent in learning to read, write, and represent information.

Standard 3.5 Early Reading and Book Appreciation

Children develop an understanding, skills, and interest in the symbols, sounds, and rhythms of written language as they also develop interest in reading, enjoyment from books, and awareness that the printed word can be used for various purposes.

Story Blanket Under the Big Sky

Story

At Big Sky Sprouts in Helena, toddlers gather on a cozy flannel blanket patterned with bears, moose, and mountain peaks. Ms. Rita holds up *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* as the children settle in. She pauses after each line, and several toddlers shout, “Red bird!” One child flaps their arms like wings, another points excitedly to the bird on the page. Ms. Rita mirrors their movements, saying, “Yes! You’re flying just like the red bird over the mountains!” Outside the window, the snow-dusted peaks of the Elkhorn Range shimmer in the morning light. The center director snaps a photo for the family newsletter—every face lit with engagement.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Participates in songs, stories, and rhymes through gestures and words. Demonstrates understanding of familiar words and story sequences.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how shared reading becomes a full-body, joyful experience when paired with movement and repetition. The Montana-themed setting adds a sense of place and wonder, helping children connect language to their environment.

Try It!

Choose books with animals or nature themes familiar to your region. Add movement or sound cues to each page—like flapping wings or bear growls. Share the book and cues with families so reading at home becomes a shared, joyful Montana ritual.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Uses hands, mouth, gaze, and vocalizations to explore books as sensory objects. Responds to pictures or voices during shared reading with gestures, sounds, or facial expressions.	May grasp and bring a book to their mouth to suck and chew on it. May shake, bend, or wave a book, or pat the pictures.	Offer cloth or board books with bright images and different textures. Read aloud slowly, using expressive tone and facial cues. Encourage infants to touch and mouth books while describing pictures (“Here’s the baby—peekaboo!”). Respond to coos or gestures with smiles and repetition.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Shows interest in familiar books by pointing, vocalizing, or turning pages. Responds to stories with gestures, sounds, or emerging words.	May turn pages, point to pictures, and vocalize or gesture in response to familiar story elements.	Read short, repetitive books paired with songs or fingerplays (“Brown Bear, Brown Bear,” “Itsy Bitsy Spider”). Encourage pointing, clapping, or vocalizing at key parts. Allow children to turn sturdy pages and name familiar images as they appear.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Chooses familiar books and begins to repeat words, sounds, or actions from stories. Points to or names objects, animals, or people in pictures.	May make vocalizations while pointing to pictures and may eventually ask, “What’s that?” or use “book babble” imitating the sound of reading.	Provide a basket of familiar books within children’s reach. Encourage them to choose a book and sit with you. Pause to let them fill in words or make animal sounds. Reinforce connections (“Yes, that’s the dog—woof!”). Celebrate repeated reading to build confidence and memory.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses pictures and simple words to retell parts of a story or explain what is happening. Begins to sustain attention during shared book reading.	May point to pictures and label or describe them either independently or when prompted.	After reading a simple book, show picture cards or page spreads and invite children to explain what’s happening (“What’s the bear doing?”). Encourage them to use gestures or short phrases to retell events. Add puppets or other props for reenactment to deepen understanding.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Engages in conversations about books using short phrases or questions. Repeats songs, rhymes, or story elements and shows respect for book handling and use.	May open and close the book carefully, study the pictures, make sounds, and position the book correctly for reading. May sing familiar songs, recite simple poems, or relate relevant aspects of a story.	Read rhyming books and pause to let children finish predictable lines or phrases. Ask open-ended questions (“What do you think happens next?”). Encourage proper book handling and model turning pages gently. Encourage singing or retelling during play.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Demonstrates engagement with books by holding them correctly, turning pages, pretending to read, recognizing favorite stories, and noticing words, letters, and signs in everyday life.	Holds a book upright and turns pages front to back. Pretends to read by narrating from pictures or memory. Requests favorite stories repeatedly. Points to or comments on familiar letters, logos, or signs in the environment (“That says stop”).	Create cozy book areas with a variety of picture books. Encourage repeated readings of favorite stories. Talk about signs or labels during daily routines (“This box says milk”). Provide daily read-alouds with repetitive and predictable text. Model how to hold and turn pages. Encourage children to “read” picture books or retell stories in their own words. Use environmental print—labels, signs, and classroom charts—to highlight letters and words.

Standard 3.6 Print Development

Children develop interest and skills in using symbols as a meaningful form of communication.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Explores objects by reaching, grasping, and using fingers to pick up items. Begins using thumb and fingers together to hold small objects.	May grip a rattle or other toy and later a variety of drawing and writing tools using their fist and fingers.	Offer toys that promote hand-eye coordination and finger strength—soft blocks, rattles, and fabric tags. Encourage grasping, reaching, and releasing objects, describing their actions (“You grabbed the ball!”). These experiences lay the groundwork for holding writing tools later.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Watches others write or draw and begins to explore writing tools by making spontaneous marks or scribbles.	May watch with interest as an adult or another child draws, paints, or writes. May use a crayon, marker, or pencil to make marks and scribble on a piece of paper or other writing surface and eventually describe what the marks are meant to be.	Provide large crayons or chunky markers on paper taped to a low table or the floor. Allow free exploration and model simple mark-making while naming it (“You made lines!”). Celebrate all attempts without correction to promote curiosity and enjoyment.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Scribbles with a variety of tools and uses fingers and thumb with growing control to pick up and hold small items.	May use pencils, crayons, chalk, markers, pens, paints, sand, or write in the air with their finger. May pick up crayons, pencils, and even smaller objects using their thumb and forefinger.	Offer short drawing sessions with crayons, chunky pencils, or paintbrushes. Encourage the use of pinching grip by providing small stickers or manipulatives to pick up and place. Describe their actions (“You’re making circles!”). Focus on coordination and control.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Imitates drawing simple lines or shapes. Begins making intentional marks to represent ideas, objects, or actions.	May imitate what they have seen others write using traditional and non-traditional tools, such as making marks in the sand with a stick or drawing with a finger in pudding.	Invite children to draw during storytelling or after shared experiences (e.g., snack or outdoor play). Model drawing lines or circles and describe what’s happening (“You drew the sun!”). Encourage naming of their marks to promote symbolic thinking.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses more controlled lines and scribbles to express ideas or tell stories. Engages in drawing and writing with purpose and coordination.	May draw shapes and describe them as people, animals, or events, showing intent and coordination in their symbolic communication.	Provide journals or paper books for children to “write” about their day. Encourage them to tell what’s happening in their drawing (“This is me at the park”). Write down their dictated words beside their drawing to link spoken and written language.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Uses drawings, scribbles, and mock letters to share their ideas and messages.	Makes marks, scribbles, or letter-like shapes on paper and explains what they represent (“This says mommy”). Combines drawings with random lines or shapes to share meaning.	Create writing-friendly spaces with clipboards, notepads, and crayons. Encourage mark-making during pretend play (“Can you write the grocery list?”). Reinforce that writing communicates ideas, not perfection.

Standard 3.7 Print Concepts

Children develop an understanding that print carries a message through symbols and words, and that there is a connection between sounds and letters (the alphabetic principle).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Looks at books and pictures. Responds to stories or voices with sounds, gestures, or facial expressions. Explores books as sensory objects.	Looks at pictures, turns pages, vocalizes, points, or gestures while a story is being read aloud. May move closer, smile, or maintain attention during shared book reading with a familiar adult.	Offer cloth and board books with bold images, textures, or mirrors. Read aloud using expressive tone and facial cues. Let infants touch, mouth, or gaze at pages while you describe what they see (“Here’s a puppy—woof!”). Respond to their sounds as early conversation.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Shows interest when books are read aloud and when others write or draw. Imitates sounds or gestures while looking at pictures or listening to stories.	May duplicate simple sounds, words, or phrases when being read to or looking at familiar books.	Sit with toddlers and narrate simple pictures you draw (“Here’s a ball. It’s round!”). Read short books with rhythmic or repetitive text and encourage imitation of sounds or motions. Offer large crayons to let them “draw like you.”
<i>19–24 months</i>	Points to pictures, letters, or words in books during shared reading. Begins to repeat familiar sounds or words from stories.	May point to words when being read a book, although not necessarily the word being read.	During story time, invite children to point to pictures or letters as you name them. Pause to let them repeat simple words or sounds (“Moo,” “A”). Offer magnetic letters or picture cards to match story items. Celebrate all attempts to connect images and print.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Chooses familiar books and engages with print by pointing, naming, or asking questions. Shows growing interest in how books and writing work.	May look through the books on the shelf before choosing the same book they chose before. Asks what the page says while pointing to the words.	Take children on a “print walk” around the classroom. Point out signs, labels, and logos (“That says BLOCKS”). Encourage them to find letters or symbols in books and classroom materials. Support naming or describing what they see.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses pictures and print to retell parts of a story or share ideas. Points to words and letters with curiosity and participates in reading or writing routines.	May use the pictures to tell a story or point to the words and ask you what it says. May tell you what their writing says as they make marks on paper.	Invite children to retell familiar stories using picture cards or alphabet props. Encourage them to point to print while pretending to “read.” Incorporate name recognition by having them find the first letter of their name in books or signs.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Recognizes and names a few letters, especially those in their name. Identifies a few letter sounds.	Points to and names some letters in their first name. Recognizes familiar letters in the environment (e.g., “S” on a stop sign).	Display children’s names and alphabet charts at eye level. Point out letters during daily routines (“That cereal box has the letter M like your name”). Reinforce letter–sound associations casually (“S makes the /s/ sound like snake”). Practice identifying letters from the child’s name on mail, books, or signs. Use alphabet books and songs to strengthen recognition. Make it personal—trace the letters of their name together using paint, chalk, or magnets.

Standard 3.8 Phonological Awareness

Children develop an awareness of the sounds of letters and the combination of letters that make up words and use this awareness to manipulate syllables and sounds of speech.

Talk Together Time

Story

At Meadowlark Early Learning, Ms. Lacey uses diaper changes as a chance to connect with each child. She gently lifts 8-month-old Leo onto the changing table. Leo, who has a hearing impairment and wears soft pediatric hearing aids, watches her closely. “You’re kicking those strong legs! One sock on ... one sock off ...” she says clearly, using expressive gestures and pausing to let Leo respond. He babbles, “Ba! Da!” and pats her arm. Ms. Lacey smiles, “Yes, your toes are saying hello!”

A few minutes later, she changes 9-month-old Harper, who does not have a disability. “Wiggle, wiggle!” Ms. Lacey sings as Harper kicks her feet. Harper giggles and says, “Uh-oh!” when her sock falls off. Ms. Lacey laughs, “Uh-oh is right!” and repeats the word, encouraging more back-and-forth.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Engages in back-and-forth vocal interactions with familiar adults. Responds to tone, rhythm, facial expressions, and visual cues during communication.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how everyday routines can be rich with

language learning for all children. Ms. Lacey adapts her communication style to meet each child’s needs—using visual cues and clear speech with Leo, and playful repetition with Harper. Both children are active participants in joyful, responsive exchanges.

Try It!

Use diapering, feeding, and dressing times to build language through “serve and return” interactions. Adjust your communication style to support each child’s abilities—whether through gestures, facial expressions, or playful repetition.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Responds to the sound of voices and spoken language by turning, smiling, or vocalizing; begins to show interest in familiar rhythms and tones.	May focus on the person speaking and kick their feet or move their arms in response to the rhythms of spoken language.	Hold and gently sway infants while singing lullabies or rhythmic songs in their home language. Watch for smiles, coos, or movement responses. Repeat familiar songs daily so babies begin to anticipate rhythm and melody.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Imitates sounds heard in stories, songs, or rhymes. Engages in simple sound play, such as babbling or repeating familiar words.	May imitate a sound she has heard and say it over and over, such as “ba, ba” or “ga, ga.”	Sing short songs with clear rhythms (“La, la, la!” or “Ba-ba-ball!”). Pause for them to imitate a sound or gesture. Use rhymes with body movement (clapping, tapping) to help connect sound and action. Celebrate all sound attempts with smiles and repetition.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Participates in familiar word games, songs, or finger plays. Begins to repeat words or phrases with rhythm or rhyme.	May repeat rhythmic phrases or rhyming words from familiar songs (e.g., Pat-A-Cake) or finger plays, such as “roll it” or “bake it.”	Use repetitive songs and fingerplays (“The Wheels on the Bus,” “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”). Encourage children to join in on repeated lines or fill in last words. Emphasize rhymes and rhythm using clapping or tapping along.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Imitates rhyming patterns and simple phrases from songs or stories. Enjoys playful language and sound repetition.	May imitate rhyming patterns in songs, rhymes, and finger plays modeled by another.	During small group time, sing familiar rhyming songs and pause to let children fill in missing words (“The cat in the ____”). Add silly rhymes or rhythm sticks to reinforce listening and participation. Encourage laughter and language play.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses rhymes, songs, and word play to express ideas and join in group activities. Shows awareness of patterns in spoken language.	May respond with a missing word to a familiar song, such as Twinkle Twinkle Little ... “Star!” or begin to say words that rhyme, such as “bat mat hat cat.”	Invite children to listen for and identify rhyming pairs from short poems or rhyming stories. Encourage them to create their own silly rhymes (“cat–hat,” “dog–frog”). Incorporate movement (jump for a rhyme match) to deepen engagement and comprehension.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Begins to hear and create rhyming words and notice that sentences are made up of separate words.	Repeats or invents simple rhymes, sometimes with nonsense words. Shows awareness that spoken sentences have more than one word (e.g., pauses between words when repeating).	Play rhyming games with songs and chants (“Down by the Bay,” “Willoughby Wallaby Woo”). Emphasize word boundaries with clapping or marching (“We clap once for each word!”). Use predictable books and nursery rhymes to highlight sound patterns.



Core Domain 4: Cognition

Infant/Toddler



APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Children’s approaches to learning include the motivation, attitudes, habits, and cognitive styles that are demonstrated as they engage in learning and respond to different situations. The ways children express their approaches to learning may vary according to their temperament or cultural context. Temperament is unlikely to be changed; approaches to learning are more malleable.

Standard 4.1 Curiosity

Children develop imagination, inventiveness, originality, and interest as they explore and experience new things.

Treasure Baskets of Wonder

Story

In the infant room, Ms. Nita places a basket filled with safe, everyday objects—wooden spoons, scarves, shiny lids—on the rug. Six-month-old Evan reaches in, exploring each item with his mouth and hands. “That’s cold and smooth,” she says softly. Nearby, the assistant director kneels down, observing how the babies alternate between looking, tasting, and shaking the objects. “They’re little scientists,” she says, smiling.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses senses to explore objects and materials.
Observes and reacts to new sights, sounds, and textures with curiosity.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

Open-ended exploration is central to cognitive growth in infancy. The vignette demonstrates how intentional material selection and verbal engagement turn everyday objects into opportunities for discovery.

Try It!

Rotate treasure baskets weekly with natural, household, or seasonal materials. Invite families to contribute items from home—linking classroom exploration to familiar family environments.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Observes and copies simple gestures or actions. Repeats movements to see what happens, such as dropping a toy or kicking a mobile.	Imitates simple gestures during play or interactions (e.g., waving, clapping, pointing) and repeats actions with objects (e.g., dropping, banging, shaking) or pushes objects repeatedly to observe outcomes such as sounds, movements, or reactions.	Model simple actions—like shaking a rattle, waving, or clapping—and pause for the infants to imitate. Provide toys that respond to movement (mobiles, rattles) so they can see their impact. Repeat actions together, describing what’s happening (“You dropped it—down it goes!”).
<i>9–18 months</i>	Examines small objects with focus and curiosity. Explores how things move by shaking, rolling, or stacking.	Visually tracks and manipulates small objects by shaking, pushing, rolling, dropping, or stacking; explores how items bounce, spin, slide, or fall, showing focused attention and curiosity.	Offer baskets of safe objects that roll, stack, or make noise. Encourage children to explore how each one works (“What happens if you shake it?”). Support discovery by demonstrating cause and effect and using simple descriptive language.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Repeats actions to test outcomes and solve simple problems. Begins asking questions with gestures, sounds, or words.	Uses trial and error to solve simple problems and begins asking questions using gestures, sounds, or short phrases (e.g., “What’s that?” “Where go?” “More?”), especially during play, exploration, and daily routines.	Provide puzzles, containers with lids, and cause-and-effect toys. Encourage problem-solving by asking open-ended prompts (“What happens if you push it?”). Celebrate persistence and verbalize discoveries (“You opened it! You figured it out!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Explores materials to figure out how they work. Shows interest in new activities and tries different ways to use objects.	Demonstrates curiosity by experimenting with unfamiliar toys, materials, or routines—such as reaching for a new puzzle, imitating peers during a dance activity, or helping with a new classroom job. Tries different approaches to using objects.	Provide open-ended materials like tubes, scarves, and building blocks. Observe how children experiment—rolling, stacking, or combining items. Encourage trial and error (“What else could you use that for?”). Reflect together on what worked.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Asks simple questions to learn more. Experiments with tools, toys, and materials to solve problems and understand cause and effect.	Asks questions or uses trial and error to discover how everyday objects work (e.g., twists a jar lid to open it, presses buttons on a toy to see what happens, or stacks blocks in different ways to build a tower), and shows growing interest in cause-and-effect and problem-solving through exploration.	Set up hands-on science activities like water play, ramps, or color mixing. Encourage children to ask “why” and “how” questions, then guide them to test ideas (“What if we pour it faster?”). Discuss observations to build reasoning and vocabulary.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Show interest in and curiosity about objects, materials, or events.	Shows curiosity by moving closer and watching or touching new things (e.g., looking closely at bubbles, feeling a new texture, or listening to a new sound).	Offer small explorations, such as pouring water through funnels or comparing textures (smooth vs. rough). Engage children with simple prompts like, “What do you think will happen next?” Encourage curiosity in daily routines—watching toast pop up, laundry spinning, or rain puddles forming. Use open-ended talk: “You’re looking closely—what are you thinking?”

Standard 4.2 Initiative and Self-Direction

Children develop an eagerness to engage in new tasks and to take risks in learning new skills or information.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	<p>Uses sounds, gestures, and movements to communicate and connect with others. Shows curiosity by looking around and reaching for objects.</p>	<p>Expresses curiosity by using gestures, facial expressions, or vocalizations to seek information or attention (e.g., looks at an object and then back at a caregiver, or makes questioning sounds when noticing something new).</p>	<p>Respond warmly to the infant’s sounds and movements. Provide simple, sensory toys that invite reaching, grasping, and exploring. Narrate what they’re doing (“You’re looking at the shiny ball!”). Encourage exploration by following their gaze or motion to support joint attention.</p>
<i>9–18 months</i>	<p>Engages with familiar adults and children to explore, solve simple problems, and share experiences through play and interaction.</p>	<p>Uses eye contact, vocalizations, or gestures (e.g., reaching, babbling, smiling) to involve familiar adults in exploration. May look between a caregiver and a toy while reaching for it, giggle during peekaboo, or repeat actions to share discoveries.</p>	<p>Create an exploration area with everyday objects (spoons, boxes, scarves). Model curiosity (“What’s inside?”) and allow children to experiment freely. Join their play, following their lead and celebrating discoveries (“You found the lid fits here!”). Encourage peer imitation.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Expresses a desire to care for self, like trying to feed or dress independently. Shows interest in routines and personal well-being.	Attempts to do and be included in self-care tasks independently, such as putting on socks, washing hands with help, or insisting on feeding self with a spoon, and shows pride, persistence, or excitement when trying new routines or mastering familiar ones.	Invite children to participate in simple self-help routines such as washing hands or putting away toys. Offer encouragement (“You’re putting on your shoe!”) and allow time for independent attempts. Celebrate effort and persistence more than accuracy.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Approaches tasks with flexibility and creativity. Tries different ways to solve problems or use materials.	Tries different ways to solve simple challenges during play or daily routines (e.g., turns a puzzle piece to make it fit, uses a stool to reach a toy, or experiments with stacking blocks in new arrangements).	Offer materials for art and construction play (paper, tape, blocks, recycled items). Encourage children to experiment (“What else could we make with that?”). Model flexible thinking by trying new ideas alongside them. Encourage their effort and imagination.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Begins to take small risks and explore new ways of doing things. Shows confidence in trying unfamiliar activities or ideas.	Attempts new actions or approaches during play and routines (e.g., climbs onto a low structure for the first time, tries using a crayon with the other hand, or experiments with putting a toy in an unusual place to see what happens).	Create opportunities for safe risk-taking—like climbing, pouring, or new art techniques. Ask reflective questions (“What happens if ...?”). Offer encouragement for trying something new, and talk about the process (“You tried a new way!”). This builds resilience and self-confidence.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Demonstrating flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness in approaching tasks and activities.	Begins to demonstrate flexibility and imagination by using familiar toys or materials in new and creative ways (e.g., they might use a block as a phone, turn a box into a car, or use a spoon as a paintbrush during play).	Offer open-ended materials—blocks, scarves, cups, cardboard tubes—encouraging children to transform them (e.g., a block becomes a phone or a car). Educators, caregivers, and parents validate creative thinking: “You turned that block into a boat—what happens when it sails?” or “I wonder what else this spoon could be?”

Standard 4.3 Persistence and Attentiveness

Children develop the ability to focus their attention and concentrate to complete tasks and increase their learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
Birth–8 months	Tracks faces and objects with eyes or head as they move. Repeats actions that lead to interesting outcomes, like kicking a toy or dropping a spoon.	Shifts gaze or turns head to follow moving people, toys, or lights. Repeats simple actions like kicking, shaking, or dropping objects to observe outcomes such as sound, movement, or caregiver response.	Provide toys that respond to movement (rattles, mobiles, hanging toys). Encourage infants to kick or reach, then react with excitement (“You made it move!”). Repeat the same game to reinforce memory and cause-and-effect awareness.
9–18 months	Plays interactive, repetitive games with familiar adults or older children. Begins to anticipate what will happen next based on past experiences.	Repeats actions that produce a response, such as banging a toy to hear a sound, dropping food to see a reaction, or pressing buttons to activate lights or music. Shows anticipation by pausing or smiling before a familiar outcome.	Engage children in predictable games like “peekaboo,” “Pat-A-Cake,” or hiding toys under cups or material. Pause to let them signal anticipation (smile, lean forward, vocalize). Over time, vary the pattern slightly to encourage flexible thinking and recall.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Experiments with play materials using familiar actions on new objects. Begins to change behavior based on what has worked before.	Uses trial-and-error with toys and materials, such as banging, shaking, rolling, or dropping, to observe effects. Adjusts actions based on previous outcomes, showing early problem-solving and sustained attention.	Offer familiar materials in new ways (blocks in water, spoons with clay). Observe how children apply known strategies to explore. Ask prompting questions (“What happens if ...?”) to encourage experimentation and learning from memory.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses memory and observation to solve simple problems. Tries different approaches when exploring how things work.	Applies past experience to new challenges, such as turning puzzle pieces to fit, pressing different buttons on a toy, or stacking blocks in new ways after a tower falls. Shows persistence and focus during exploration.	Provide simple puzzles, latches, or cause-and-effect toys. Encourage persistence by asking questions (“Where does that piece go?”). When children try new approaches, acknowledge their strategies (“You turned it around—that worked!”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Applies past experiences to new situations. Shows flexible thinking by adjusting actions or strategies to reach a goal.	Intentionally repeats and adjusts actions to improve performance or achieve a goal (e.g., carefully re-threads beads onto a string after dropping them, revisits a drawing to add more detail, or climbs a play structure multiple times to get faster or try a new path/route).	Offer open-ended challenges that encourage reflection and recall (“How did we build the tall tower yesterday?”). Allow children to test new ideas and adjust based on outcomes. Reinforce problem-solving language (“You remembered what worked last time!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Develop skills through repeated practice.</p>	<p>Practices new self-help routines until more independent (e.g., puts on shoes, zips a coat, washes hands with less support). Insists on “doing it again” during play or learning tasks, showing persistence in practice.</p>	<p>Provide multiple opportunities for practice in movement and manipulation—stringing beads, pouring water, balancing blocks. Recognize effort: “You kept trying until it worked!” Encourage children to show their progress (“Can you show me how you did it this time?”). Celebrate persistence in daily routines—buttoning, using utensils, riding a tricycle. Use language like “You practiced and now you did it!” rather than focusing solely on outcomes.</p>



Standard 4.4 Reflection and Interpretation

Children develop skills in thinking about their learning in order to inform future decisions.

Stack, Fall, Laugh, Repeat

Story

At the sensory table in Bitterroot Buds Early Learning, 14-month-old Jun carefully stacks wooden blocks. Beside him, 15-month-old Nora, who uses a supportive seat due to low trunk tone, explores the blocks with her caregiver's help. Ms. Dee watches as Jun's tower wobbles. "Uh-oh ... what will happen next?" she wonders aloud. The blocks tumble, and Jun bursts into laughter. Nora claps her hands and smiles, then reaches for a block with assistance. Ms. Dee narrates, "You both tried something new—Jun, you built it tall, and Nora, you reached so far!" Jun starts stacking again, and Nora taps her block on the table, exploring its sound.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses exploration and repetition to discover cause and effect.
Shows persistence in trying new actions or solving simple problems.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive environments support all children's cognitive development. With adaptive seating and caregiver support, Nora participates meaningfully alongside her peers. Ms. Dee's narration celebrates both children's efforts, reinforcing the value of persistence and discovery.

Try It!

Offer accessible materials and adaptive supports so all children can explore cause and effect. Focus on the process—stacking, reaching, knocking down—and use descriptive language to help children connect action with outcome. Celebrate every "try again" moment, no matter how big or small.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Focuses on faces, objects, or pictures with sustained attention. Repeats actions that lead to a noticeable reaction, such as kicking a toy or dropping a spoon.	Gazes at faces, toys, or picture books for increasing amounts of time, showing interest through stillness, cooing, and other sounds, reaching, kicking, hand motions and facial expressions (e.g., watches a caregiver’s face while feeding, follows a moving rattle with their eyes, or points at images in a soft book).	Provide simple toys that respond to movement (rattles, hanging mobiles, soft balls). Encourage infants to repeat actions and respond with excitement (“You made it move again!”). This repetition supports sustained attention and understanding of cause and effect.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Engages in interactive, repetitive games with familiar adults or older children. Explores objects by repeating and varying how they interact with them.	Actively participates in familiar repetitive games with others, showing anticipation and enjoyment (e.g., drops a toy repeatedly for someone to pick up, claps during a song with hand motions, or initiates a round of peekaboo by covering their own face).	Play predictable games like “peekaboo,” “roll the ball,” or “stack and knock.” Encourage children to take turns and experiment (“What if we roll it fast?”). Maintain engagement through gentle variation and responsive feedback.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Stays focused during short activities and repeats actions to solve simple problems. Begins to try different approaches when something doesn't work.	Recognizes familiar routines and sequences, showing anticipation (e.g., smiles when seeing a bottle, lifts arms for a jacket). Experiments with actions and adjusts behavior based on previous outcomes (e.g., pauses before a ball rolls down a ramp after seeing it happen before).	Provide simple puzzles, shape sorters, or stacking blocks. Encourage persistence by narrating efforts ("That didn't fit—let's try another way!"). Offer time to experiment independently and celebrate small successes.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Chooses tasks or materials and sticks with them. Practices skills through repetition and shows pride in accomplishments.	Applies known actions to explore new objects (e.g., tries stacking new shapes like they do with blocks, rolls an unfamiliar toy across the floor, or pretends to feed a stuffed animal using a different spoon).	Offer open-ended materials, such as blocks, crayons, or musical instruments. Encourage repetition ("You built another tower!"). Recognize effort and persistence ("You kept trying until it worked!"). This builds pride and motivation to continue learning.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Demonstrates longer periods of attention during preferred activities. Refines skills through repeated practice and creative problem-solving.	Focuses and persists during short activities, repeating actions and adjusting strategies when initial attempts don't work (e.g., repositions puzzle pieces, stacks heavier blocks at the bottom after a collapse, or experiments with different tools to scoop sand); reflects on outcomes and adapts behavior.	Set up longer projects (building towers, art collages, sensory bins). Encourage focus through positive narration ("You're still working hard on that!"). Ask questions that extend thinking ("What will you add next?"). Encourage persistence and problem-solving effort.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Begins to adjust actions or try new ways to do things based on what they have learned from past experiences.</p>	<p>May tell a story of something that they experienced. Accurately recounts recent experiences in the correct order and includes relevant details.</p>	<p>Encourage storytelling and recall during group time—“What did we do on our walk yesterday?” Provide visual supports (photos, sequence cards) to help children retell events. Model narrative sequencing (“First we went outside, then we found leaves.”). Invite children to share “stories from their day” at dinner or bedtime. Support sequencing language (“What happened first?” “Then what?”) and acknowledge their recall (“You remembered what we did at the park!”).</p>



REASONING AND REPRESENTATIONAL THOUGHT

Reasoning (and logic) refers to the ability to think through problems and apply strategies for solving them. Children’s ability to think, reason, and use information allows them to acquire knowledge, understand the world around them, and make appropriate decisions.

Standard 4.5 Reasoning and Representational Thought

Children develop skills in causation, critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving and representational thought.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Manipulates objects to create sound or movement. Repeats simple actions to see what happens, like shaking a rattle or kicking a mobile.	Uses hands or body to explore how objects respond, repeating actions to create sound, movement, or other effects (e.g., shakes a rattle to hear the sound, bangs a spoon on a surface, or pushes a hanging toy to make it swing).	Provide toys that make sound or move when touched or kicked. Encourage repetition (“You made it jingle again!”). React positively to each discovery to help the infant connect their action to the result and strengthen focus and curiosity.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Searches for objects that disappear from view. Uses familiar people or objects to reach a goal, like pointing to a toy for help or using a stool to climb.	Looks for a toy or object after it’s been hidden or dropped (e.g., lifts a cloth to find a hidden rattle, peeks into a container where a ball was placed, or crawls to the other side of furniture where a toy rolled out of sight).	Play simple hide-and-seek games with toys under blankets or boxes. Encourage children to search, lifting covers or asking for help. Narrate their actions (“You found it!”). Add variety by hiding objects in different locations to extend attention and memory.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Experiments with cause and effect by repeating actions and noticing outcomes. Begins to use one object to represent another in play.	Engages in pretend play by substituting objects (e.g., uses a block as a phone, pretends a spoon is a microphone, or gives a stuffed animal “medicine” using a bottle cap) and repeats actions to test outcomes and adjust behavior accordingly.	Encourage symbolic thinking by providing pretend play items (spoons as microphones, boxes as cars). Use open-ended prompts (“What else could this be?”). Reinforce their creative choices and curiosity as they test ideas and imagine new uses.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Tries different strategies to make things happen. Uses tools, toys, or people creatively to solve simple problems.	Applies familiar strategies to solve problems such as handing a container to an adult for help, pushing a stool to reach a toy, or using a stick to retrieve something out of reach. Shows creativity and persistence in problem-solving.	Offer challenges like retrieving toys from containers or building bridges with blocks. Encourage creative use of tools (“What can we use to reach it?”). Support collaboration with peers, modeling persistence and flexible problem-solving.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Adjusts actions based on past results. Explores how things work by testing ideas and predicting outcomes.	Engages in purposeful experimentation—such as pouring water on different surfaces to observe absorption, pressing buttons to compare toy responses, or mixing paint colors to see the result. Uses past experiences to inform new strategies and predictions.	Set up science-based exploration (ramps, magnets, or mixing colors). Encourage children to predict outcomes (“What do you think will happen?”) and reflect afterward. Highlight trial and error as part of learning (“You tried again a different way!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Tries several methods to solve a problem before asking for assistance. Begins to use language to describe what happened after acting on an object.</p>	<p>May describe that a caterpillar turns into a butterfly after observing the process. Says simple explanations, such as “It fall down” and “Push make it go.”</p>	<p>Provide open-ended challenges that invite persistence and trial-and-error—such as stacking blocks to balance, using ramps to roll balls, or fitting puzzle pieces. Encourage exploration with everyday materials (containers with lids, pouring water, nesting cups). Allow them to make mistakes safely, stepping in only after multiple attempts. Support independence in problem-solving during routines—putting on shoes, opening containers, or tidying up. Model problem-solving language: “What else could you try?” or “That didn’t fit—what’s another way?”</p>



CREATIVE ARTS

Children explore and represent their ideas, reveal their inner thoughts and feelings, find ways to understand themselves, enrich their world, and bring beauty to their surroundings.

Standard 4.6 Creative Movement and Dance

Children produce rhythmic movements spontaneously and in imitation, with growing technical artistic ability.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Moves arms, legs, or body in response to music, rhythm, or voices. Shows excitement through movement and sound.	Responds to music, rhythm, or familiar voices by kicking feet, waving arms, smiling, cooing, or bouncing energetically, especially during singing, lullabies, or playful interaction with caregivers.	Play gentle music or sing familiar songs. Watch for the infant’s movements or vocalizations and imitate them (“You kicked your legs! Let’s do it again!”). Use soft rattles or scarves to enhance sensory connection and rhythm awareness.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Engages with others through movement, eye contact, and attention during music, rhythm, or playful interaction. Begins to explore how the body moves.	Participates in music, rhythm, or playful interactions by making eye contact, moving the body, and attending to others. Begins exploring body movements through bouncing, swaying, clapping, or other body movements in response to sounds and social cues.	Play songs with a steady beat and encourage dancing together, clapping, swaying, or tapping feet. Make eye contact and respond to children’s movements with enthusiasm (“You’re dancing fast!”). Encourage imitation and body movement games.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
19–24 months	Explores a variety of ways to move with and without music. Imitates simple gestures or sounds during songs, dances, or pretend play.	Moves in varied ways (e.g., spinning, stomping, tiptoeing, or swaying with and without music). Imitates simple gestures, movements, or vocal sounds during songs, dances, or simple pretend scenarios.	Model movements like “fly like a bird” or “stretch like a tree.” Encourage imitation and sound effects. Pair music or rhymes with the actions to connect rhythm and motion. Reinforce participation and creativity.
25–30 months	Uses movement, sound, and imitation to express ideas—such as acting like an animal or pretending to dance, cook, or drive.	Uses gestures, vocalizations, and body movements to act out familiar roles or scenarios during play (e.g., pretending to stir a pot, flapping like a bird, or making honking sounds while pretending to drive a car).	Provide props for pretend play—pots for cooking, scarves for dancing, or boxes as cars. Encourage children to express ideas through movement (“Show me how you stir the soup!”). Play music or narrate their actions to add rhythm and meaning.
31–35 months	Combines movement, gestures, and dramatic play to represent experiences, emotions, or stories. Shows creativity and imagination through expressive actions.	Uses movement, gestures, or props and dramatic play to creatively act out familiar experiences, stories, or emotions (e.g., pretending to be a parent, animal, or community helper).	Tell a short story (“A Day at the Park”) and invite children to act it out using movement, sound, and facial expressions. Incorporate music for rhythm and emotional tone. Encourage them to create new parts of the story through improvisation.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Explores different ways of moving, both with and without music, and participates in dance activities alone or with a partner.	Moves in different ways—such as jumping, spinning, or swaying—with or without music, and joins in simple dance activities alone or with a friend. Shows joy and creativity while exploring movement.	Provide opportunities for free dance and movement exploration with scarves, ribbons, and instruments. Play songs of varying tempos and invite children to move their bodies in response. Model joyful participation and name movements (“You’re twirling slowly like the breeze.”). Encourage children to express emotions through movement (“Show me how happy looks in your dance.”).

Standard 4.7 Drama

Children show appreciation and awareness of drama through observation and imitation, and by participating in simple dramatic plots, assuming roles related to their life experiences as well as their fantasies.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Copies simple facial expressions and movements. Engages in playful interactions like peekaboo or gentle rolling with caregivers.	Imitates simple facial expressions and movements (e.g., smiling, sticking out tongue, waving arms), and engages in playful routines with caregivers (e.g., peekaboo, or back-and-forth sounds or gestures).	Engage infants in face-to-face games—peekaboo, mirroring smiles, or gentle tickles. Describe what’s happening (“You smiled! I see your eyes!”). These responsive interactions build imitation skills, emotional connection, and the foundation for pretend play.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Imitates familiar actions, such as pretending to stir with a spoon or talk on a phone. Engages in short periods of independent play with toys or objects.	Engages in short periods of independent play, imitating everyday actions with toys or other items (e.g., stirring with a spoon, talking on a toy phone, or pretending to eat).	Provide household objects (toy spoons, cups, phones) for imitation. Model actions (“I’m stirring the soup—want to try?”). Celebrate attempts to imitate familiar routines. Encourage independent use of toys while joining in at intervals.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Acts out real-life experiences during play, like feeding a doll or sweeping with a toy broom. Enjoys early rough-and-tumble play like crawling, tumbling, or playful chasing.	Begins to re-enact real-life routines (e.g., feeding a doll, sweeping with a toy broom, offering a cup), and participates in early rough-and-tumble play (e.g., crawling, tumbling, chasing).	Set up a dramatic play area with familiar routines—mealtime, cleaning, or baby care. Model actions gently and encourage children to take over. Add movement-based play like gentle chasing or tumbling to express joy and energy.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses movement, voice, and props to pretend and re-enact familiar routines or stories. Begins to take on simple roles in play.	Acts out familiar roles (e.g., parent, animal, or helper), routines or stories (e.g., serving food, caring for a doll, or being a favorite character).	Create themed dramatic play areas—kitchen, doctor’s office, or grocery store. Encourage children to use voices, actions, and props to act out experiences. Model simple dialogue (“Can you check my heartbeat?”). Encourage imagination and cooperation.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>31–35 months</i>	Engages in dramatic play by re-enacting familiar or imagined stories. Combines gestures, voice, and props to express ideas, emotions, and relationships.	Re-enacts familiar or imagined stories through dramatic play, using gestures, voice, and props to express ideas (e.g., pretending to be a firefighter or animal), emotions (e.g., comforting a doll or acting surprised), and relationships (e.g., playing “family” or “friends”).	Invite children to act out favorite stories or daily routines using props and expressive movement. Encourage storytelling by asking, “What happens next?” or “Who are you pretending to be?” Introduce new materials to extend imagination and peer collaboration.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Engages in simple pretend play, such as cooking dinner or feeding a baby doll, beginning to use objects as symbols with occasional prompting.	With prompting, uses a variety of materials to create simple props, puppets, or costume pieces for dramatic play and guided drama experiences.	Offer a variety of open-ended materials (fabric scraps, boxes, hats, spoons) to inspire pretend play. Model and join in, saying, “You’re cooking dinner! What’s on the menu tonight?” Encourage children to use materials flexibly to represent real-world objects. Encourage pretend play at home by joining in (“I’d love to taste your soup!”). Offer simple costume items and praise imaginative substitutions (“You used a towel as a cape—that’s clever!”).

Standard 4.8 Music

Children engage in a variety of musical or rhythmic activities with growing skills for a variety of purposes, including enjoyment, self-expression, and creativity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Shows interest in sounds, music, and voices. May move arms, legs, or body in response to rhythm or tone.	Turns head, widens eyes, or quiets in response to music, singing, or voices. May smile, coo, or move arms, legs, or body when listening to familiar songs or engaging tones.	Play gentle lullabies or rhythmic songs. Sing or hum while rocking, bouncing, or clapping softly with the infant. Watch for responses like cooing, smiling, or kicking. Reinforce these actions by mirroring them and naming the sounds (“You’re moving to the music!”).
<i>9–18 months</i>	Experiments with a variety of sounds using voice, body, or objects. Responds to music and rhythm through movement or vocal play.	Uses voice and body to make rhythmic or playful sound (e.g., babbling to music, clapping hands, bouncing to a beat).	Offer instruments like shakers, bells, or drums. Model how to play, then let children experiment. Encourage vocal play (“la-la,” “boom-boom”) and join their rhythm. Respond to their music with joy and imitation to build turn-taking and confidence.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Claps, bounces, or moves to the beat of songs. Begins to echo simple rhythms or sounds during musical play.	Claps hands, bounces, sways, or steps to the musical beat. Begins to copy simple rhythms or sounds using voice or body.	Clap or tap a simple beat and invite children to imitate. Sing short songs and pause for them to fill in sounds or words (“Row, row, row your ___”). Encourage body movement—bouncing, stomping, or dancing—to match tempo and rhythm.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Shows interest in musical instruments and uses them to create sound. Participates in songs, fingerplays, or movement games.	Joins in familiar songs, fingerplays, movement games or making sounds with musical instruments (e.g., tapping a drum, shaking a maraca).	Lead group songs with props (scarves, shakers, drums). Encourage children to play along, take turns leading, or choose a favorite song. Include fingerplays like “Itsy Bitsy Spider” to connect fine motor and musical rhythm.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Expresses ideas and emotions through music, rhythm, and movement. Claps on beat, imitates patterns, and engages in musical storytelling or pretend play.	Combines gestures, voice and props to express ideas and emotions through music and movement (e.g., claps on beat, imitates rhythmic patterns, or dances to reflect a mood), musical storytelling and dramatic play.	Invite children to act out simple songs or stories through rhythm and movement (e.g., “Five Little Ducks,” “The Wheels on the Bus”). Encourage clapping on beat, echoing rhythmic patterns, and expressing feelings through tempo (fast for excitement, slow for calm).
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Creates and shares original musical ideas by combining rhythm, movement, and sound. Claps and moves to the beat, repeats and builds on patterns, and uses music to express feelings or tell stories during pretend play or group activities.	Sings, claps, or moves to music to show feeling and ideas, like stomping like a dinosaur during pretend play, clapping along to a song’s beat, or swaying slowly to calm music.	Sing short, familiar songs during transitions (e.g., cleanup songs, greeting songs). Use fingerplays and movement songs (“Itsy Bitsy Spider,” “If You’re Happy and You Know It”) to connect words with actions. Encourage singing throughout the day—while driving, cooking, or cleaning. Respond positively to spontaneous singing and join in to build confidence. Provide opportunities for children to choose favorite songs and lead the family sing-along.

Standard 4.9 Visual Arts

Children demonstrate a growing understanding and appreciation for the creative process as they use the visual arts to express personal interests, ideas, and feelings, and share opinions about artwork and artistic experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Gazes at photos, pictures, and mirror images. Uses hands and mouth to explore objects with different textures and shapes.	Stares intently at pictures, photos, and images in mirrors when presented with such items within an appropriate distance for their developing eyesight.	Provide high-contrast photos, mirrors, and safe textured objects for exploration. Encourage infants to touch and mouth-safe materials (soft cloths, smooth toys) while you describe textures and colors (“This one is bumpy. That one is smooth!”).
<i>9–18 months</i>	Begins grasping crayons, markers, or paintbrushes with growing control. Explores how tools make marks on surfaces.	Holds a crayon, marker, or paintbrush in their fist or whole hand and begins to make marks on paper.	Offer large crayons, washable markers, or chunky paintbrushes. Tape paper to a low surface and encourage children to explore making marks. Focus on the process (“You made lines!”) rather than the product.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Demonstrates interest in shapes, textures, and colors. Makes simple marks on paper using drawing tools.	Expresses preferences for certain colors, textures, or shapes and begins to make uncontrolled or controlled marks, circular figures, and scribbles on paper.	Provide crayons, chalk, and finger paint in various colors. Talk about what they see and feel (“You’re mixing red and blue!”). Encourage exploration of different textures by painting on smooth, rough, or bumpy surfaces.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses drawing tools to create lines, shapes, or patterns. Begins to talk about what is being drawn or explored.	Begins to use tools to make some lines, shapes, or patterns (e.g., scribbles, loops, spirals, horizontal or vertical lines) and talk about what is being created.	Encourage children to draw lines and circles with crayons or markers. Model language (“That’s a big circle!”) and ask simple questions (“Tell me about your picture.”). Focus on conversation and creativity, not accuracy.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
31–35 months	Expresses ideas through drawing and mark-making. Uses color, shape, and form to represent people, objects, or experiences.	Uses drawing tools to create recognizable shapes, forms, or color grouping that reflect people, objects, or events from daily life (e.g., “That’s a dog,” “I made rain,” or “This is my house”).	Invite children to draw or paint about daily experiences (“What did you do at the park?”). Provide diverse tools and colors to support self-expression. Encourage storytelling while they work (“Who’s in your picture?”). Display artwork to celebrate individuality.
3 years (36–42 months)	Explores a variety of art materials, begins to use different media with growing skill, and shows curiosity by asking simple questions about their own and others’ artwork.	When presented with art materials, may use the materials to explore cause and effect, such as mixing paint colors or using the tip of the marker to stamp dots all over the page.	Provide daily access to open-ended art materials—crayons, markers, paint, clay, collage items. Encourage curiosity by asking, “What happens if you mix these colors?” or “Tell me about your picture.” Focus on process over product. Encourage exploration—“You’re trying the brush in a new way!” Introduce sensory art like finger painting or textured stamping.



MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

Children develop the ability to explore ideas, make sense of the world, and find meaning in the physical environment as they increase their understanding and use of numbers and mathematical operations, such as measurement, geometry, and properties of ordering.

Standard 4.10 Number Sense and Operations

Children develop the ability to think and work with numbers, to understand their uses, and describe numerical relationships through structured and everyday experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Begins to develop an understanding of quantity by exploring objects one at a time. Signals desire for more through sounds, gestures, or facial cues.	Explores objects individually (e.g., looking at or reaching for one toy at a time), and uses sounds, gestures, or facial expressions to indicate interest in “more” of something (e.g., vocalizing when a toy is removed, reaching toward another item, or smiling in response to repetition).	Offer one toy at a time, naming each as it’s handed (“Here’s one ball!”). Pause to let the infant signal for more through reaching or vocalizing. Use songs and repetition (“More blocks!”) to connect experience with early quantity awareness.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Recognizes and expresses differences in quantity using gestures or words like “more” or “all done.” Imitates counting and begins using number words.	Gestures, signs, or uses early words to express “more,” “all done,” or similar concepts (e.g., reaching for another snack, shaking head when finished, putting finger tips of both hands together), and may begin to echo number words (e.g., saying “two!” while grabbing a handful).	During snack time, count aloud as you place items (“One cracker, two crackers”). Encourage children to signal “more” or say simple number words. Use rhythmic songs that include counting (“Five Little Ducks”) to build repetition and familiarity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Matches small quantities with number words like “one,” “two,” or “three.” Uses simple phrases to describe amounts or people.	Uses simple phrases to describe quantities (e.g., “more crackers,” “too many” or “two babies”), showing growing awareness of number concepts and groupings.	Offer small sets of toys (two bears, three cars) and count aloud as children point to or move them. Encourage simple counting (“Two bears—one, two!”). Reinforce early use of quantity language during play and routines.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses number words and gestures to count and compare quantities. Begins to understand basic math ideas like “more,” “less,” or “same.”	Uses words or points to objects to demonstrate an understanding of concepts associated with classification and comparison, such as “same,” “different,” “more,” or “less” (e.g., “You have more cookies than I do.”)	Provide groups of everyday items (two apples, three blocks). Ask simple questions (“Who has more?” “Are they the same?”). Encourage counting with fingers and visual comparisons. Use daily routines like cleanup or snack for counting practice.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Counts objects with one-to-one correspondence. Uses number words accurately, matches numerals to quantities, and begins exploring simple addition or subtraction through play.	Begins counting objects aloud while touching or pointing with some accuracy (e.g., might skip items, double-count, or use rote counting) and begin to match one item to another (e.g., one spoon per one bowl).	Tell short counting stories using real objects (“Three ducks went swimming—one swam away, how many are left?”). Encourage children to count each object, match to written numbers, and predict outcomes. Reinforce concepts with playful movement songs (“Five Little Monkeys”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Begins to build number sense by counting up to 10 and using one-to-one correspondence with small groups of up to 5 objects. Starts to understand basic quantities like “one,” “two,” and “more,” and recognize some numerals up to 5.</p>	<p>May count objects accurately up to 10 during everyday activities, such as counting cars or steps, and uses one-to-one correspondence with up to 5 objects. Begins to understand and use basic quantity words like “one,” “two,” and “more” in sentences (e.g., “I want one cookie.” or “I want more than two.”). Recognizes and names numerals up to 5 in the environment, such as on signs or in the classroom (e.g., “That’s a 5.”).</p>	<p>Include counting in play—snack time (“You have 3 crackers”), cleanup (“Put away 5 blocks”), or story time (“Let’s count the ducks”). Display numerals 1–5 around the room for environmental recognition. Use daily routines for number talk—counting stairs, shoes, or groceries. Reinforce understanding of “more” and “less” in natural contexts (“Do you want one cookie or two?”). Celebrate noticing numbers in the community (signs, buses, doors).</p>



Standard 4.11 Measurement

Children develop skills in using measurement instruments to explore and discover measurement relationships and characteristics, such as length, quantity, volume, distance, weight, area, and time.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Uses senses to explore objects of different shapes, textures, and weights. Begins to respond to changes in routines or environments.	Explores objects of varying shapes, textures, and weights through mouthing, grasping, and visual attention.	Provide a variety of safe objects with different textures and weights (soft, smooth, crinkly, light, heavy). Allow infants to hold, mouth, or shake them. Describe sensations aloud (“This one is soft,” “That one is heavy”). Include routine transitions (“Now it’s time for milk.”) to gently introduce time awareness.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Notices and compares sizes, explores height and order by stacking or lining up objects. Begins to understand simple time sequences through daily routines.	Explores general object sizes through play (e.g., choosing larger toys, fitting smaller items into containers); experiments with height and order by stacking or lining up 2 to 3 objects; and begins to recognize predictable sequences in the routine (e.g., reaching for bib before mealtime, calming when lights dim for nap).	Offer stacking rings, blocks, or nesting cups. Model language like “tall,” “short,” “big,” and “small.” Use simple sequencing during routines (“First snack, then play”) to build time awareness. Celebrate when children experiment with order and height.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Compares objects by length, height, or weight through hands-on play. Follows simple routines while developing awareness of time concepts like “after” and “soon.”	Begins stacking, lifting, or sorting (e.g., choosing taller blocks, moving things to an area with similar materials, noticing heavier items) and follow simple routines with growing awareness of time-related concepts (e.g., anticipating what comes “after” snack or recognizing that a walk happens “next” after putting on shoes).	Provide toys of varying sizes and weights (balls, stuffed animals, blocks). Ask guiding questions (“Which one is bigger?” “Which is heavier?”). Reinforce simple time concepts by narrating routines (“After lunch, we’ll go outside.”).
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses descriptive words to talk about size, weight, or order. Explores measurement tools through imaginative play, such as pouring water or using rulers.	Uses tools like rulers or measuring cups and some measurement terms (e.g., “heavy” and “light,” “full” and “empty,” “near” and “far”) in pretend play with or without full understanding of their purpose or meaning.	Provide containers, cups, and scoops for water or sand play. Encourage children to use measurement vocabulary (“full,” “empty,” “big scoop”). Integrate imaginative play (“Let’s make soup—pour more water in!”). Model comparing sizes and filling levels.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Begins to sort, organize, and compare objects.	Sorts and organizes objects based on one or more attributes (e.g., color, size, shape, function), and begins to compare groups or items using descriptive language (e.g., “bigger,” “same,” “more”).	Invite children to sort classroom objects (blocks, buttons, leaves) by size or color. Introduce informal measuring tools (rulers, string, cups) to compare length or capacity. Ask open-ended questions (“Which tower is taller?”). Reinforce comparison words like “shorter,” “heavier,” and “longer.”

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<p>3 years (36–42 months)</p>	<p>Sorts, organizes, compares object with minimal assistance. Uses appropriate terms/language to describe measurable attributes.</p>	<p>Begins to use basic words to compare objects, like big/little or heavy/light. Starts to notice the order of familiar daily events, saying things like “Playtime comes after snack.” Can sort objects by one thing, such as color or shape. With help, can make simple guesses about size or amount and explore measuring using everyday items like their hands or blocks, though not always accurately.</p>	<p>Invite children to sort classroom objects (blocks, buttons, leaves) by size or color. Introduce informal measuring tools (rulers, string, cups) to compare length or capacity. Ask open-ended questions (“Which tower is taller?”). Reinforce comparison words like “shorter,” “heavier,” and “longer.”</p>



Standard 4.12 Data Analysis

Children apply mathematical skills in data analysis, such as counting, sorting, and comparing objects.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Uses senses to explore objects of different shapes, textures, and weights. Begins to notice changes in routines and environments.	Puts hands or objects in mouth, turns head toward sounds, grasps finger or objects when placed in palm, and explores toys by mouthing, shaking, and banging.	Provide safe, varied sensory objects: soft fabric, smooth wood, crinkly paper, lightweight balls. Encourage infants to hold, touch, and mouth objects while describing attributes (“This one is soft ... that one is heavy!”). Reinforce awareness of change during routines (“Now it’s bath time—then bottle time”).
<i>9–18 months</i>	Explores size and space through movement and play. Begins to respond to simple time sequences in daily routines, like what happens before or after.	Smiles back at caregiver, kicks a toy repeatedly, noticing the movement of the toy, and displays a surprised expression or response when events occur that don’t follow expected sequences.	Set up a soft play area with tunnels, boxes, or cushions of different sizes. Use words like “big,” “small,” “under,” and “over” as children move through. Incorporate time cues (“First we crawl through, then we roll the ball!”) to connect spatial and temporal concepts.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Compares objects by size, stacks or lines up items to explore order and height, and begins to understand time-related words like “soon” or “later.”	Sorts objects by color, size, or shape; stacks blocks to explore height; begins to use or respond to time-related words like “later” or “soon.”	Offer blocks, cups, or nesting toys. Model stacking and use descriptive language (“This one is taller,” “That one is shorter”). Reinforce time understanding through daily sequencing (“We’ll read later after snack”). Encourage persistence as children experiment with balance and order.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses descriptive words to talk about size, weight, or order. Explores measuring tools through imaginative play, such as pouring water or using rulers.	Uses words like “big,” “heavy,” or “more” to describe objects. Engages in pretend play with measuring tools like cups or rulers.	Provide containers, measuring cups, and spoons for water or sand play. Encourage comparison language (“Your cup is full—mine is empty!”). Extend with imaginative play (“Let’s make soup—pour in more water”). Celebrate curiosity and experimentation with measurement tools.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses appropriate terms to describe measurable attributes. Organizes and compares objects, estimates size or amount, and begins to understand time as a sequence of events.	Uses terms like “long,” “short,” or “heavy.” Compares objects by size or amount. Anticipates events based on routine (e.g., goes to lunch area when food is being prepared).	Invite children to sort and measure classroom items (blocks, ribbons, cups). Model use of informal measuring tools like string or rulers. Ask open-ended questions (“Which one is longer?” “Which cup holds more?”). Reinforce time concepts during routines (“After circle time, we go outside”).
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Sort, organize, compare object with minimal assistance. Uses appropriate terms/language to describe measurable attributes.	Independently collects and groups objects based on a single attribute, such as color, size, or shape, and uses simple descriptive language (e.g., “These are all red,” “These blocks are big”).	Invite children to sort and measure classroom items (blocks, ribbons, cups). Model use of informal measuring tools like string or rulers. Ask open-ended questions (“Which one is longer?” “Which cup holds more?”). Reinforce time concepts during routines (“After circle time, we go outside”).

Standard 4.13 Algebraic Thinking

Children learn to identify, describe, produce, and create patterns using mathematical language and materials.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Looks at and reaches for nearby objects. Begins to notice how things are arranged or move in space.	Watches and imitates a short, familiar sequence involving movement, sound, or objects (e.g., claps-taps-claps during a hand game, mimics an adult’s “jump-turn-clap” routine, or repeats a scoop-pour-pat pattern in the sandbox), often with adult support.	Place colorful toys within reach, changing their position slightly over time. Encourage reaching, turning, and following with eyes and hands. Narrate their exploration (“You reached over to get the ball—it rolled away!”). This builds early spatial awareness and coordination.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Explores how objects fit together or stack. Begins to recognize simple patterns through routines or play.	Experiments with putting shapes in a shape bin and sometimes fits them in some of the correct openings.	Provide stacking rings, nesting cups, and shape sorters. Encourage children to explore how pieces fit or fall. Use pattern language during play (“First blue, then yellow!”). Reinforce through predictable routines and songs that have rhythmic patterns.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Matches and sorts objects by shape, size, or color. Begins to notice and repeat patterns in movement, music, or materials.	Plays with stacking containers and puts smaller ones in larger ones, but not in the correct sequence.	Offer colored blocks or toys and model sorting (“All the red ones here!”). Encourage matching by shape or size. Add movement (“Jump, clap, jump, clap!”) to highlight repeating patterns in rhythm or actions.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses blocks, toys, or everyday items to build, arrange, and compare. Begins to describe spatial relationships like “in,” “on,” or “under.”	May stack blocks on top of one another to build a small tower.	Provide blocks or boxes for building. Use spatial words naturally during play (“The car is on the bridge,” “The block fell under the table”). Encourage children to describe their creations or movements, strengthening geometry and vocabulary.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Recognizes and creates patterns. Uses spatial language to describe how things are arranged or move. Explores shapes and positions through play and conversation.	With adult support, may see a pattern and copy the pattern using a variety of materials, such as a green, purple, green, purple pattern of beads, repeated with assistance. With assistance, may repeat a single pattern clapped by an adult (clap, stomp, clap, stomp).	Invite children to create patterns with beads, blocks, or art materials (red, blue, red, blue). Use shape hunts to find circles, squares, or triangles around the room. Encourage conversation using positional language (“The circle is next to the square!”).
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Reproduces simple patterns of sound and movement.	Recognizes, copies, and begins to extend simple repeating patterns using colors, shapes, sounds, or movements (e.g., strings beads in a red-blue-red-blue pattern and adds the next color, continues a clap-stomp pattern, or arranges blocks in a repeated size or color sequence).	Incorporate pattern play into daily routines—alternating colored cups at snack, jumping, spinning, jumping during movement breaks. Encourage children to “copy what I do.” Use songs, instruments, and movement to model AB patterns. Make simple patterns together—laying socks by color or alternating fruit slices on a skewer.

Standard 4.14 Geometry and Spatial Reasoning

Children build the foundation for recognizing and describing shapes by manipulating, playing with, tracing, and making common shapes. Children learn spatial reasoning and directional words as they become aware of their bodies and personal space within the physical environment.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Develops awareness of shapes by exploring objects and materials. Begins to move body and reach for items in space.	Places objects in mouth and handles objects, reaching for objects within eyesight.	Provide safe, high-contrast objects in different shapes (balls, rings, soft blocks). Encourage infants to reach, grasp, and mouth objects. Use gentle narration (“You found the round ball!”). Move objects slightly out of reach to support spatial exploration.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Moves body and materials in space with growing coordination. Begins to notice and respond to differences in shape and size.	Reaches for and manipulates objects of different shapes and sizes. Begins to show preference or curiosity when encountering new forms.	Offer large blocks, cups, or shape sorters. Encourage children to fill, empty, and fit items together. Name attributes as they explore (“The square fits in the hole,” “The big one won’t fit!”). Include movement—rolling balls or crawling through tunnels—to reinforce spatial concepts.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Recognizes and names simple two-dimensional shapes like circles and squares. Explores how objects fit together or stack.	Uses materials to draw or build shapes; begins to describe features like sides or corners (e.g., “square has four sides”).	Provide blocks, puzzles, or foam shapes. Encourage children to name or point to shapes (“Find the circle!”). Build simple towers or structures and describe shapes during stacking. Reinforce recognition with songs and games (“Round and round goes the circle”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Describes two- and three-dimensional shapes and begins identifying characteristics like sides or corners. Uses materials to build or draw shapes.	May draw, construct, or copy simple shapes using materials like playdough or blocks, and begins to describe features such as sides or corners (e.g., saying “square has four sides” or pointing to the corners of a triangle).	Provide blocks, playdough, or drawing tools for children to form and describe shapes. Use prompts like “This square has four sides” or “Let’s make a tall triangle.” Encourage exploration of 3D forms by stacking or connecting materials.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Creates geometric shapes using blocks, drawing tools, or other materials. Uses spatial language to describe position, movement, and shape features.	Uses blocks, drawing tools, or other materials to create basic geometric shapes and begins to use spatial language (e.g., “under,” “next to,” “circle”) to describe their position or features.	Invite children to design using blocks or art materials (“Can you make a house with a triangle roof?”). Use positional and descriptive language during play (“The circle is on top,” “The long block is next to the cube”). Reinforce geometry concepts through shape hunts or sorting games.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Follows simple directions related to proximity. Identifies a few basic shapes.	Follows directions when positional and proximity words are used (e.g., in, on, beside, between). May point to, name, or describe common shapes, such as circle, triangle, rectangle, square.	Incorporate pattern play into daily routines—alternating colored cups at snack or jumping, spinning, jumping during movement breaks. Encourage children to “copy what I do.” Use songs, instruments, and movement to model AB patterns. Make simple patterns together—laying socks by color or alternating fruit slices on a skewer.

SCIENCE

Children develop an understanding and awareness of their environment (the natural world) and scientific concepts and practices as they develop skills in making predictions, testing their knowledge, and conducting scientific investigations. Children’s natural sense of wonder and delight in learning about their world fuels scientific exploration.

Standard 4.15 Scientific Thinking and Use of the Scientific Method

As children seek to understand their environment and test new knowledge, they engage in scientific investigations using their senses to observe, manipulate objects, ask questions, make predictions, and develop conclusions and generalizations. .

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Gazes at photos, pictures, and mirror images. Uses hands and mouth to explore objects and respond to sensory experiences.	Gazes at mirror images or photos. Explores objects by mouthing, grasping, or shaking. Imitates simple gestures in response to sensory stimuli.	Provide safe sensory materials (soft fabrics, rattles, mirrors). Encourage infants to look, touch, and mouth objects while narrating what they experience (“You’re touching something smooth!”). Repeat familiar sensory play to build recognition and awareness.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Observes objects and people in the environment. Uses touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste to examine objects in detail.	Explores objects and people using multiple senses, such as looking closely, touching, mouthing, shaking, or listening to sounds they make.	Create sensory bins with materials that vary in color, texture, and sound (rice, fabric scraps, plastic lids). Allow children to explore freely while describing what they notice (“That one’s rough,” “Listen to the sound it makes!”). Encourage use of multiple senses.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>19–24 months</i>	Explores features of materials and objects using all senses. Begins to notice and compare characteristics like soft vs. hard or big vs. small.	Examines small objects closely and begins to notice differences in texture, size, or shape (e.g., soft vs. hard, big vs. small).	Offer pairs of contrasting objects (smooth vs. rough, heavy vs. light). Encourage children to touch, lift, and talk about how they're different. Use descriptive language ("This one is heavier. That one is softer."). Reinforce comparison through repetition and conversation.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Investigates objects and simple processes through sensory play. Begins to ask questions or show curiosity about how things work.	Imitates real life experiences, asks simple questions, uses familiar objects to represent other things.	Provide materials like water, sand, or magnets for children to manipulate and observe changes. Model curiosity ("What happens if you add more water?"). Encourage repetition and simple problem-solving through sensory play.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses observation and sensory exploration to identify similarities and differences. Begins to describe features and make predictions during play.	May describe features of objects (e.g., size, texture, weight) and make simple predictions about outcomes, such as whether items will float or sink in water or roll down a ramp.	Invite children to explore materials that change (ice melting, color mixing, bubbles). Encourage them to describe what they see and predict what might happen next. Record or display their ideas to support reflection and vocabulary development.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Observes and asks simple questions about objects and events in their environment. Explores materials using senses and simple tools.	Shows curiosity by asking simple questions and making observations about the world around them (e.g., asks “What kind is that?” when seeing a bird, says “Why is the sky pink?” at sunset, watches water drip and says, “It’s going fast!”, notices a toy is missing and asks where it went, or points out a bug and says, “What’s it doing?”).	Provide hands-on materials for pouring, mixing, and sorting. Encourage children to share discoveries (“You saw the water drip fast—what might happen if we tilt the cup?”). Offer sensory and nature exploration centers (sand, water, magnifiers). Encourage observation and questioning with prompts like, “What do you notice?” or “What’s changing?” Model curiosity aloud.

Standard 4.16 Life Science

Children develop understanding of and compassion for living things.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
Birth–8 months	Shows interest in animals and other living things by watching them, reaching toward them, or reacting to their movements and sounds.	May attend to the sound of a bird chirping, dog barking or cat meowing, turn toward the source, or show excitement through movement or vocalization.	Provide opportunities for infants to observe pets, family members, or simple nature scenes (fish tank, birds outside). Describe what’s happening using gentle tones (“The puppy is wagging his tail”). Encourage reaching, cooing, or smiling responses to living movement and sound.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Explores basic characteristics of living things. Begins identifying familiar plants and animals in their home or neighborhood.	May reach out to a leaf floating by, pointing to a bird flying by.	Take short walks to observe birds, grass, flowers, or pets. Point and name what you see (“That’s a bird—listen to its song!”). Encourage children to imitate sounds or gestures. Use books or photos to reinforce recognition of familiar plants and animals.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Describes simple behaviors of animals, continues to explore and name common living things.	May identify familiar plants and animals and their characteristics, such as labeling dogs, making the sound of a dog, and pointing to the dog’s tail.	Read animal storybooks or sing songs like “Old MacDonald.” Encourage children to imitate animal behaviors and sounds (“How does a cat move?”). Discuss what animals do (“The duck swims,” “The cow eats grass”). Reinforce naming and describing with visual supports.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Engages with plants and animals in a gentle and respectful way, often without adult prompting. Begins to ask questions or show curiosity about how living things behave.	May express concern when an animal is sick or injured.	Provide small pots with soil and seeds to plant. Model gentle touch (“We use soft hands for the flowers”). Encourage children to water plants and observe growth daily. Use open-ended questions (“What do you think will happen next?”) to foster inquiry.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Observes and describes features and behaviors of animals and plants. Shows care and interest in living things through play, conversation, and exploration.	May generalize the needs of other living things, such as saying that the worm needs a home.	Invite children to explore outdoors or care for a class plant or pet. Encourage detailed observation and conversation (“The butterfly’s wings are colorful,” “The leaves are falling down”). Support prediction and empathy by asking, “What does the plant need to grow?”

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Identifies and explores characteristics of living things (plants, animals, and humans) and their basic needs.	<p>May pretend to care for a doll or animal.</p> <p>Example</p> <p>Says, “Dogs need food and water just like me.”</p> <p>Points to a plant and says, “It needs sun to grow.”</p> <p>Waters a class plant and says, “I’m helping it stay alive.”</p> <p>Sorts pictures into “living” and “non-living” categories and explains why.</p>	<p>Include pretend play that mirrors caregiving (feeding baby dolls, caring for toy pets).</p> <p>Explore outdoor spaces to notice and talk about living things (“The flowers are growing—they must like this sunny spot”).</p>

Standard 4.17 Physical Science

Children develop an understanding of the physical world (the nature and properties of energy, nonliving matter, and the forces that give order to nature).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
Birth–8 months	Uses all senses to explore objects and their properties—touching, mouthing, shaking, and looking. Begins to notice cause and effect, like dropping a toy or pushing a button to make a sound.	May explore texture, noise, weight, taste, or color of a ball by mouthing or shaking.	Provide safe toys that react when touched or moved (rattles, soft blocks, musical toys). Encourage infants to repeat actions such as shaking, pushing, or dropping, and describe what happens (“You pushed the button and it played music!”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Observes how objects move. Begins to explore natural forces like gravity, light, and sound through everyday play.	May roll a ball or throw it. May repeatedly drop a spoon from a highchair.	Offer objects that roll, reflect, or make noise. Demonstrate dropping or rolling a ball and encourage imitation. Use mirrors, flashlights, or simple shakers to explore reflection, brightness, and rhythm. Narrate discoveries (“The ball rolls fast!” “The light is shiny!”).
<i>19–24 months</i>	Uses simple tools to explore how objects behave. Begins to compare and describe characteristics like size, texture, and weight.	Uses objects like blocks or spoons to test how materials respond. Begins to notice differences in texture or sound.	Provide safe, simple tools like spoons, cups, or ramps. Encourage children to scoop, pour, or roll objects to observe how they move. Compare items by weight or texture (“This one is rough, that one is smooth”). Prompt with questions (“Which rolls faster?”).
<i>25–30 months</i>	Explores cause and effect more intentionally. Notices and describes qualities of sound and light, and begins to sort and contrast objects based on features.	Pulls string to move toy or object and watches its path. Begins to describe sounds (e.g., loud/soft) or sort objects by color or size.	Set up a small exploration area with flashlights, mirrors, and musical instruments. Encourage children to describe what they see or hear (“The drum is loud!” “The light shines on the wall”). Ask open-ended questions about what they notice changing (“What happens if you cover the light?”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
31–35 months	<p>Uses tools and observation to explore how things work. Compares, contrasts, and describes objects based on their characteristics. Investigates movement, sound, and light with curiosity and purpose.</p>	<p>Describes object features during play (e.g., “This rock is heavy”). Uses tools like magnifiers or ramps to explore how things move or sound.</p>	<p>Create exploration stations for rolling, stacking, and light observation. Encourage children to use magnifiers, prisms, or ramps to test ideas. Model scientific language (“It moved faster down the ramp!” “The light makes a rainbow!”). Invite them to predict outcomes before experimenting.</p>
3 years (36–42 months)	<p>Explores the properties of objects and observes simple changes.</p>	<p>May identify, sort or describe objects based on texture, weight, or other physical properties (e.g., “This rock is heavy, but the leaf is light”). Touches objects and describes them as “smooth,” “rough,” “soft,” or “hard.” Places various items in water and notes, “The coin sinks, but the feather floats.” Observes an ice cube melting and comments, “It’s turning into water.”</p>	<p>Provide sensory and science tables with materials of varying textures and weights (rocks, feathers, fabric). Encourage sorting by attributes and descriptive vocabulary (“Which is rough? Which is smooth?”). Model curiosity with open-ended questions (“What do you notice about these two?”). Use daily opportunities for sensory exploration—cooking, laundry, outdoor walks. Encourage descriptive talk (“The towel feels soft,” “The spoon is cold”). Observe melting, freezing, or color-mixing together and name changes.</p>

Standard 4.18 Earth and Space

Children develop an understanding of the earth and planets.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Begins to express a sense of wonder about the natural world by watching the sun, clouds, or sky. Responds to changes in light and weather.	May attend to a natural phenomenon, such as snow falling outside.	Invite infants to observe light and shadow during outdoor time. Talk about what they see (“The clouds are moving,” “The sun is bright”). Offer opportunities to feel a gentle breeze or warmth on their skin. Respond to their gaze or gestures with positive reinforcement.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Interacts with natural materials like leaves, water, or sand. Begins to notice and react to weather changes.	May play with snow, mud, water, sand, or other natural materials.	Provide opportunities to touch, scoop, and move natural materials like sand, water, or leaves. Comment on sensations and weather conditions (“The sand is warm,” “It’s windy today!”). Model gentle handling of plants and natural items.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Identifies simple characteristics of night and day. Begins naming types of weather and shows interest in natural features.	May say “It’s raining” or “The sun is out,” and connect daily routines to time of day (e.g., bedtime means night).	Introduce picture cards or songs about day and night, rain, or sun. Take short walks to observe the sky and discuss what they see (“It’s a sunny day!” “Look, the moon is out!”). Encourage naming and matching weather to experiences (e.g., “Umbrella for rain”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Investigates properties of natural objects like rocks, water, or dirt. Asks simple questions about the earth, sun, or moon. Begins using words like “sky,” “tree,” and “cloud.”	May describe rocks as “hard” or water as “wet,” and ask questions like “Where does the sun go?” while using words like “sky” or “tree.”	Offer natural materials (rocks, sticks, shells) for sorting, stacking, and washing. Model describing features (“The rock is rough,” “The water is shiny”). Use open-ended questions to prompt curiosity (“What do you see in the sky?” “Where does the water go?”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Explores and describes natural outdoor environments. Uses vocabulary to talk about weather, time of day, and natural features. Shows curiosity and care for the world around them.	May extensively explore a pond, creek, meadow, forest, or neighborhood park.	Encourage children to observe and describe outdoor changes over time (“The clouds are moving,” “The ground is wet”). Collect natural items for sorting or art. Foster environmental care by modeling gentle touch with plants and explaining their needs. Use weather charts and songs to reinforce daily changes.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Notices weather changes and basic environmental features.	May observe and point out objects in the sky, daily weather (e.g., says, “It’s raining—we need our umbrellas!”). Points to the sky and says, “Look, there are clouds today.” Notices wind by observing leaves moving and comments, “The wind is blowing the trees.” Identifies sunny or cloudy conditions during outdoor play. Observes puddles forming after rain and remarks, “The ground is wet now.”	Begin each day with weather discussions. Use visuals (weather charts, photos, or a class weather wheel) and invite children to describe what they see or feel outdoors. Use consistent language: sunny, cloudy, rainy, windy, cold, hot. Incorporate weather observation into outdoor play (“The wind is blowing the trees!”). Provide sensory play linked to weather—spraying water for “rain,” using fans for “wind,” or melting ice cubes for “snow.” Involve children in choosing clothing for the weather (“Do we need a jacket today?”). Encourage noticing natural changes (“The ground is wet after the rain”). Read simple books about the sky, clouds, and seasons.

Standard 4.19 Engineering

Children develop an understanding of the processes that assist people in designing and building.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Investigates surroundings by reaching for, grasping, and manipulating objects. Explores how things work through repetition and trial-and-error.	May shake their hand repeatedly when wearing a wrist rattle.	Provide varied materials (rattles, soft balls, blocks) for infants to shake, drop, or bang together. Encourage exploration by modeling curiosity and narrating (“You dropped the ball—it rolled away!”). Celebrate repeated efforts that reveal cause and effect.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>9–18 months</i>	Begins solving simple challenges during play, like fitting a puzzle piece or stacking blocks. Tries different approaches when something doesn't work.	Rotates a shape block to fit it into a shape-sorting toy.	Offer simple puzzles, stacking rings, or nesting cups. Model persistence when a piece doesn't fit and celebrate small successes. Use phrases like "You tried again and it worked!" to reinforce problem-solving and persistence.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Uses simple tools and materials—like ramps, containers, or pulleys—to explore how things move or fit together. Begins to design and test ideas through play.	May complete a simple puzzle and use ramps or containers to test how objects move or fit together during play.	Set up a ramp or incline for balls or cars. Encourage children to test different objects to see which move faster or slower. Ask open-ended questions ("What happens if we use a big ball?"). Encourage exploration and comparison through repetition.
<i>25–30 months</i>	Builds and adjusts simple structures or setups to solve problems. Uses materials purposefully to reach goals.	May repeatedly try to make a bridge out of blocks until a car rolls over it successfully.	Provide blocks, cardboard, or boxes for open-ended construction. Encourage children to build structures ("a bridge for the car") and make adjustments when things fall or tip. Ask guiding questions ("What can you do to make it taller?").
<i>31–35 months</i>	Designs, builds, and tests solutions during play. Uses creative thinking and persistence to solve challenges and explore how things work.	May continuously bang and manipulate an item to open it, trying many ways to get an item out of a container (e.g., shakes the container, pokes fingers into the container, bangs on the container).	Invite children to design and test solutions for simple problems ("How can we make a ramp for the truck?"). Encourage them to explain their thinking and try new ideas. Reinforce creative thinking ("You tried a new way—it worked!").

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years (36–42 months)	Builds structures using blocks and materials. Explores simple tools.	With increasing independence, explores and uses a variety of materials and tools to build, create, and discover how things fit and work together (e.g., stacks blocks to make towers, uses boxes or tubes to build, arranges objects to form bridges or enclosures, or uses simple tools like child-safe hammers during play).	Include construction zones with wooden blocks, cups, and cardboard. Support trial and error and curiosity—“What happens if you add one more block?” or “Can you make it longer?” Provide a variety of building materials (blocks, tubes, recycled boxes, magnets) and tools for exploration. Model descriptive language (“You stacked the blocks to make it taller!”) and encourage safe tool use. Offer guided play prompts (“Can you build something that holds your toy?”).



SOCIAL STUDIES

Children develop an awareness and understanding of how people interact and relate to each other and the world around them in the past, present, and future.

Standard 4.20 Time (History)

Children develop an understanding of the concept of time, including past, present, and future as they are able to recognize recurring experiences that are part of the daily routine.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Begins to anticipate predictable events and routines.	May begin to show excitement and anticipation of regular routines.	Engage infants in familiar caregiving routines (feeding, diapering, singing). Use consistent words, songs, or gestures before each step (“Time to eat!” “All done!”). Pause briefly before predictable actions to allow anticipation and recognition.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Starts to recognize when an event is beginning or ending through consistent cues.	May clap when the song is over or take off their bib when their bowl and spoon are removed.	Use songs or gestures to signal transitions (e.g., “Clean-Up Song,” “Goodnight Song”). Provide predictable cues for starting and ending activities. Reinforce by narrating what’s happening (“We’re washing hands now—playtime is all done”).
<i>19–24 months</i>	Recalls the immediate past and begins to anticipate recurring events in their day.	Displays recognition and excitement about a previously enjoyed activity when a regular schedule is followed.	Talk about what just happened and what comes next (“We played outside—now we’re eating lunch”). Use photos or simple picture sequences to recall daily events. Encourage children to recognize recurring routines (“After snack, we nap”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Experiments with general time-related terms and makes simple predictions based on familiar routines or experiences.	May say “after lunch we go outside” or adjust behavior based on past outcomes, showing early use of time-related concepts.	During transitions, use simple time words naturally (“Before lunch, we wash hands”). Encourage predictions about upcoming events (“What will we do after story time?”). Support understanding with visual cues like picture charts or clocks with colors for time blocks.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses basic time sequence language to describe events and begins to understand daily patterns and transitions.	May use terms such as “morning,” “yesterday,” “first,” and “last” when sharing details about their day or what may happen in the future.	Invite children to describe daily events using sequencing language (“First ... then ... next”). Create a simple “My Day” book with photos of their daily activities. Use consistent routines to reinforce understanding of time and sequence.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Begins to recognize and follow daily routines, use simple time-related words like “today” and “later,” and talk about recent events from their own experiences.	Begins to understand the order of daily events, using time-related cues like “after” or “next” (e.g., “After story, we go outside” or “We eat lunch after play”). Talks about recent experiences, mentioning familiar people, places, or events from the recent past (e.g., “Grandma came yesterday”).	Establish consistent daily routines and use visual schedules. Narrate the sequence of the day (“First circle time, then snack”). Encourage children to recall what they did earlier in the day and what will come next. Use consistent transitions marked by songs or signals. Discuss what’s happening now and what’s next (“We’re cleaning up now, then we’ll go outside”). Encourage simple recall of daily events (“What did we build this morning?”).

Standard 4.21 Places, Regions and Spatial Awareness (Geography)

Children develop an understanding that each place has its own unique characteristics. Children develop an understanding of how they are affected by—and the effect that they can have upon—the world around them.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Explores immediate environment through movement and sensory experiences. Begins to develop awareness of their body and the space it occupies.	May watch and reach for items all around them.	Encourage tummy time, gentle rolling, and reaching for toys placed nearby. Use language to describe movement (“You rolled over!” “The toy is close to you”). Allow safe floor space for free exploration and discovery of how their body interacts with the environment.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Moves through, around, under, and over objects. Begins to understand physical relationships like “in,” “out,” “near,” or “far.”	May crawl under furniture or objects, place toys “in” and “out” of containers or move toward objects that are “far” away.	Create tunnels or boxes to crawl through and around. Offer baskets or containers for filling and emptying. Use spatial words during play (“You went under the table!” “You put the ball in the box!”). Reinforce understanding through movement and repetition.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Explores spatial relationships by arranging or stacking objects. Begins to describe where things are or how they fit together.	May attempt to fit their hand into a tube or try to sit in a box or cupboard.	Provide blocks, cups, or nesting toys for stacking and sorting. Encourage children to describe their actions (“Block on top,” “Cup inside”). Model spatial language and celebrate persistence when they adjust or rebuild.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Demonstrates understanding of space and location through play. Begins creating simple representations of places.	May build a pretend house with blocks or arrange furniture in a dollhouse to represent familiar spaces.	Invite children to use blocks or toy figures to create simple representations (a house, a road). Ask open-ended questions (“Where does the car go?” “Who lives in the house?”). Reinforce spatial awareness by naming positions (“The car is next to the tree”).
<i>31–35 months</i>	Uses movement, materials, and language to describe and represent locations. Explores how people and objects relate to space in more complex ways.	May draw or build simple representations of familiar locations, such as their home.	Create simple obstacle courses or floor “maps” with tape lines. Encourage children to follow directions (“Step over the line,” “Stand next to the chair”). Later, invite them to draw or build representations of familiar spaces (like home or playground).
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Identifies common places (home, school, park) and shows awareness of immediate surroundings.	May point to or name familiar places in conversation or pictures (“That’s my school”). May recognize when they arrive at or leave a familiar location.	Encourage talk about familiar places during play (“We’re driving to the park,” “This block can be our school”). Use walks to discuss nearby landmarks and how to get there. Use classroom routines to reinforce location words (“We line up by the door,” “The library center is over here”). Guide children in identifying familiar community places using photo cards or picture books. Create a “community corner” with images of homes, stores, and playgrounds.

Standard 4.22 The Physical World (Ecology)

Children become mindful of their environment and their interdependence on the natural world; they learn how to care for the environment and why it is important.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Uses all senses to explore the environment. Shows interest in nature and responds to familiar sights and sounds, such as trees, animals, or sunlight.	May reach toward sunlight, respond to the sound of birds, or mouth natural objects like leaves or grass.	Take infants outdoors or near a window to experience sunlight, breezes, and natural sounds. Point out and name what they see (“That’s the tree,” “Do you hear the bird?”). Respond to their coos or gazes with warm, descriptive language.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Expresses curiosity about live animals and pictures of animals. Interacts with natural materials like leaves, water, or sand.	May tentatively explore new messy substances, such as wet sand or mud.	Provide opportunities for safe sensory exploration of natural materials—touching leaves, pouring water, or patting sand. Talk about textures and colors (“The leaf is green,” “The water is cool”). Reinforce curiosity and care through modeling gentle interactions.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Begins to notice changes in familiar places, such as their home or neighborhood. Takes simple actions to care for the environment.	May pick up litter during a walk, water a plant with help, or notice seasonal changes like falling leaves.	Engage children in simple care routines like watering plants or picking up small leaves. Talk about changes in the environment (“The flowers are growing,” “The sky is cloudy”). Encourage noticing differences over time to build observation and memory.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Demonstrates interest in caring for living things with adult support and begins using words to describe nature.	May say “the flower is thirsty” or help feed a pet, showing concern and using nature-related words.	Invite children to feed a class pet, water plants, or clean up outdoor spaces. Model language for describing nature (“The grass is soft,” “The bird is small”). Encourage gentle care and participation in group routines that protect nature.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Takes responsibility for caring for living things. Explores and describes natural features and changes in the environment with growing independence and vocabulary.	May take care of a plant by watering it regularly, or take care of a pet by feeding it and giving it fresh water every day.	Encourage children to participate in ongoing nature routines—watering, composting, or observing insects. Use rich language to discuss observations (“The caterpillar is crawling,” “The plant needs water because the soil is dry”). Support reflection by comparing changes over time.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Notices and explores nature, plants, and animals.	Points to or comments on animals, plants, rocks, or weather when outdoors. Asks simple questions about animals or plants (“What’s that bug?”).	Plan daily outdoor exploration and encourage noticing details in the environment. Prompt curiosity with open-ended questions (“What do you see on this leaf?”). Use picture books or nature walks to highlight local plants and animals. Provide sensory bins with natural materials (sand, leaves, shells) and engage children in nature-based play. Encourage observation and description (“The flower is yellow—what do you think it smells like?”).

Standard 4.23 Technology

Children become aware of technological tools and explore and learn the ways to use these resources in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>Birth–8 months</i>	Responds to lights, sounds, and movement from toys or devices. Gazes at images and reacts to changes in sound or rhythm.	May kick legs or wave arms when a musical toy plays or gaze at a screen showing moving images.	Offer toys or mobiles that move, flash, or play gentle sounds. Encourage visual tracking and reaching. Describe the sensory experience (“The lights are blinking!” “You hear the chime!”). Provide short, calm exposure with interaction to build trust and awareness.
<i>9–18 months</i>	Explores toys and objects that produce sound, light, or movement through technology. Begins to press buttons or touch screens to see what happens.	May request a favorite song on a device or repeat lyrics from familiar song heard on a device.	Provide toys or simple devices (like cause-and-effect apps or baby-safe keyboards) that respond to touch. Narrate actions (“You pressed the button and it made music!”). Encourage imitation and repeated exploration to strengthen cause-effect understanding.
<i>19–24 months</i>	Engages with music and sound through technology. Begins to show preferences for certain experiences.	May repeat the words of a familiar repetitive song.	Explore child-safe music apps, sound boxes, or electronic instruments. Encourage children to dance, clap, or vocalize along. Ask about preferences (“Do you want the drum song again?”) to build awareness of choice and agency.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>25–30 months</i>	Uses simple tools or devices to explore cause and effect. Begins to describe what they see or hear.	May persistently seek a way to make mechanical toy work, such as trying to turn the handle or asking an adult for help.	Provide interactive tools such as a tablet with toddler art or music apps. Encourage them to describe outcomes (“You made blue dots!” “The drum is loud!”). Support expressive language and early digital navigation with guided use.
<i>31–35 months</i>	Shows interest in music, movement, and interactive elements through technology. Begins to use digital tools (e.g., tablets, music players) in simple, purposeful ways during play.	Pushes buttons, taps, or swipes on devices with curiosity. Shows interest in cause-and-effect actions (e.g., pressing a button to make a toy light up).	Invite children to explore creativity using simple digital tools—like recording their voice, drawing on a touchscreen, or dancing to digital music. Discuss their actions and ideas (“You drew a circle!” “Let’s listen to your song again”). Reinforce balance between digital and hands-on experiences.
<i>3 years (36–42 months)</i>	Explores and uses simple tools and materials during play, including beginning use of basic technology (e.g., selects a digital story or uses a drawing app with support).	May draw a picture using a computer touch screen or talk to a family member using a phone.	Offer simple, interactive tools (light switches, magnifiers, calculators, or tablets with supervised use). Support exploration through questioning (“What happens when you press that?”). Use technology with children to explore learning apps, photos, or videos. Link technology to real-life concepts (“We pressed the button to call Grandma”). Encourage curiosity but emphasize safe, shared use.

Introduction to Preschool

Ages 3 to 5

Transition Into Preschool

Use Alongside Preschool Benchmarks, Indicators, and Suggested Learning Opportunities

As children move into preschool, consistent relationships and routines help them feel safe while they explore new group experiences, language growth, and independence. This guidance supports families, caregivers, home visitors, and educators in planning a smooth transition.

- **Developmental continuity:** Children bring forward secure relationships and co-regulation strategies that help them feel safe and ready to learn. Communication continues to grow from gestures and single words to short phrases and expanding vocabulary. Play shifts from parallel play toward simple turn-taking and budding interest in peers. Increasing mobility and fine-motor control support more complex exploration, and the beginnings of self-care—such as toileting readiness, feeding, and dressing—emerge as part of daily routines.
- **New opportunities in this age band:** Preschool opens space for cooperative and dramatic play with roles and props, alongside choice-based learning centers and small-group projects that deepen engagement. Emergent literacy develops through phonological play, book handling, print

awareness, and moving from drawing to early writing. Early math grows through counting, comparing, patterns, and shapes, while hands-on inquiry invites children into science. Visual schedules, simple classroom jobs, and self-care routines help children build independence and confidence.



- **Partnership actions (families and professionals together):** A smooth transition is built through a preschool orientation and classroom visit, plus an “About Me” and language profile that share toddler routines and comforts. When possible, a transition conversation with the prior caregiver or home visitor helps align supports. Families and educators co-set short-term goals (communication, peer play, self-care) and choose a reliable two-way communication method to stay connected during the first weeks.

Transition Considerations

- **Before transition:** Schedule a classroom visit; share a toddler routines/supports summary; identify a buddy educator/peer; plan a gradual start; prepare environmental and visual supports (labels, picture schedule, calm corner).
- **First six weeks:** Use a gentle entry; bridge familiar songs, visuals, and comfort items; monitor engagement in centers, peer interactions, and regulation; begin MELS-aligned observations (communication, play, attention, self-care); adjust supports; provide weekly family updates highlighting strengths and next steps.
- **From home or infant/toddler care to preschool:** Bridge home language, stories, and comfort routines; post a simple picture schedule; maintain consistent arrival/good-bye rituals; coordinate toileting and rest routines; embed supports from IFSP-to-IEP transition (as applicable); identify one primary contact adult for the family.
- **Into kindergarten (looking ahead):** Prepare a preschool portfolio and brief developmental summary aligned to MELS;

arrange a kindergarten visit and buddy/mentor; carry forward key visuals/rituals; emphasize oral language, executive-function routines (plan–do–review), and belonging.

Age-related guidance provided in the section is a reference, not a requirement—use a child’s developmental readiness and family knowledge to individualize care.

Preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) thrive when they are part of a caring community of learners that includes engagement and interaction with adults and other children. Meaningful and intentional play experiences in thoughtfully designed learning spaces support each child’s development in all domains. Predictable patterns of growth during the preschool years build on a child’s foundation of learning and set the path for success in formal school settings. NAEYC asserts, “Children enter preschool with different strengths. One child might love picture books and already know lots of letters but have trouble with social interaction. A classmate may find it easy to initiate play and share toys yet have almost no experience with books and reading.” Understanding each child’s individuality as an asset is essential to responsive teaching in preschool. Acknowledging, respecting, and responding to children’s and families’ individuality provides an important perspective that guides adult interaction with children during this stage of development.

Commonality

Children’s development and learning during the preschool years (ages 3 to 5) is built on long-standing theories of child development, but may vary. According to NAEYC (2020), a child’s early

interactions provide the framework for all development and learning. Adults must recognize that patterns of growth and development during preschool will look different for individual children. In preschool, some common play behaviors include joint attention, cooperation, and collaboration in problem-solving. For example, building a block structure and taking on roles in dramatic play using props and materials can help children at this stage practice fine and gross motor skills with increasing coordination.

Individuality

According to NAEYC (2020), early childhood educators are responsible for getting to know each child well—recognizing them as unique individuals within the context of their families and communities. This understanding is essential for creating meaningful, developmentally appropriate learning experiences. By identifying each child’s strengths and areas where support is needed, educators can ensure that every child is valued and nurtured as a whole person. For some, preschool may be their first experience in a group setting with same-age peers, while others may have participated in child care from an early age. Regardless of the path, all home, school, and community experiences shape a child’s development and learning journey.

Context

A child’s environment reflects the traditions and values of their family and primary caregivers, while their broader community reflects other experiences. Both impact children’s outcomes. When caregivers learn alongside families and community members, they uphold their professional and ethical responsibilities to children.

Emotional Social

Socially, children in this window of development might identify and describe similarities and differences between themselves and others. Children follow classroom rules with increasing independence and learn to adapt to new situations by working cooperatively with others.

Preschoolers express emotional development by showing confidence in their abilities and seeking support from trusted adults when needed. Children can name their emotions and also begin to notice the emotions of others.

Physical

Preschoolers use physical skills, such as playing with blocks and using writing/drawing tools, to build their fine motor strength. Coordinated movements, such as jumping, leaping, and balancing, are practiced through games and big body play.

Communication

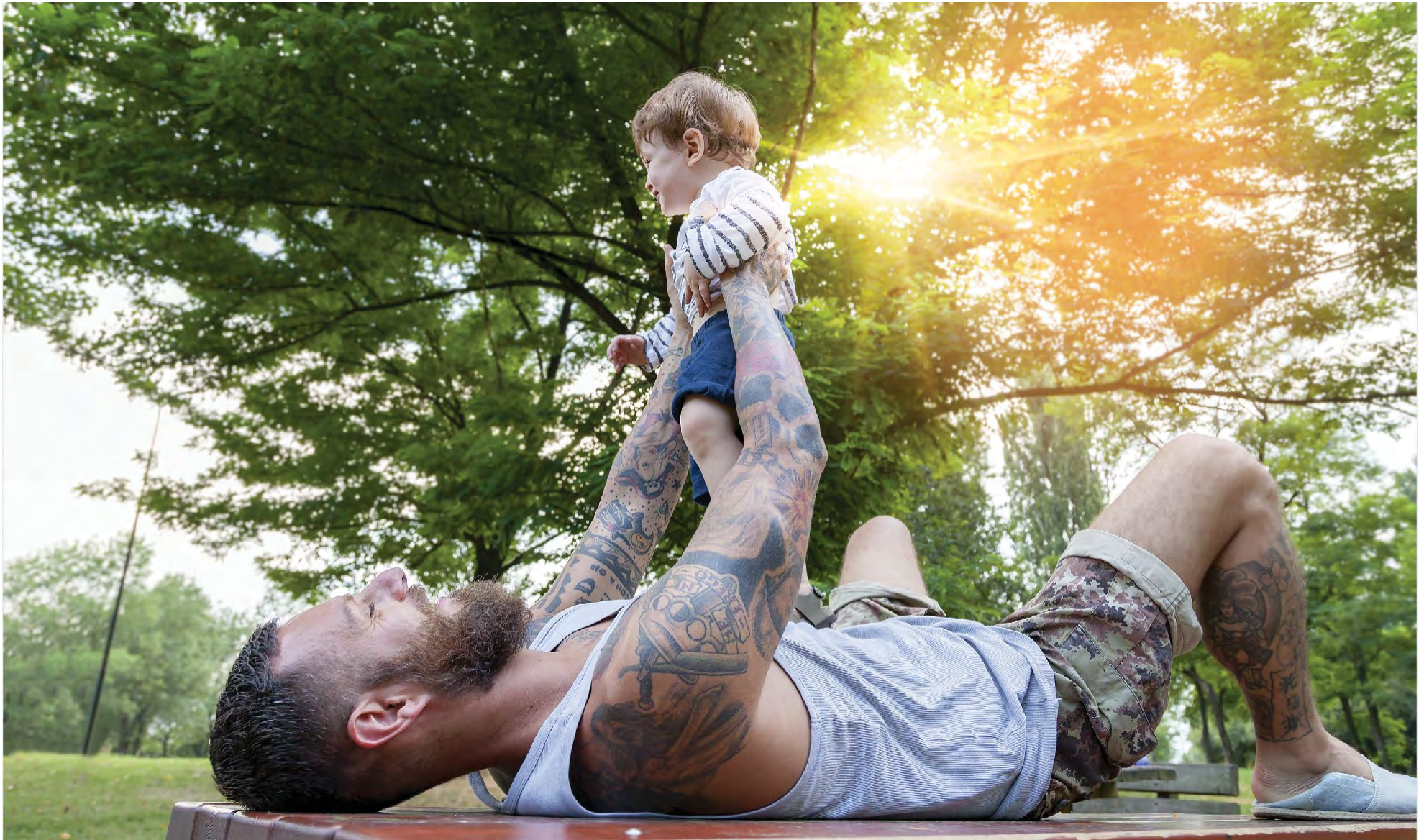
Language development from ages 3 to 5 involves participating in conversations with peers and adults and using new words in increasingly longer sentences. Children express ideas in writing by creating drawings, scribbles, and strings of letters. A milestone during this window of development is recognizing and learning to write their name.

Cognition

Cognitively, children from 3 to 5 years old approach learning new tasks with curiosity and begin to use observation and documentation to reflect on their learning, expressing complex knowledge and skills across all subject areas.

Core Domain 1: Emotional and Social

Preschool (Ages 3 to 5)



CULTURE, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

Culture may be broadly defined as the quality in a person or society that is based on shared behaviors, beliefs, traditions, and values. As children interact with their families and communities, they develop a feeling of belonging and begin to recognize and understand the value of differences among people. This awareness leads to an appreciation of differences and builds skills for interacting effectively with others.

Standard 1.1 Culture

Children develop an awareness of and appreciation for similarities and differences between themselves and others.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Identifies and describes similarities and differences between themselves and others.	Describes differences between people of different ages and stages based on strengths, challenges, and interests. Talks about what people can do and what they are still learning, such as saying “She can’t walk yet because she’s a baby.”	Encourage conversation by asking open-ended questions, acknowledging their curiosity about differences, and positively highlighting the unique characteristics that make everyone special. Ask family members and friends or classmates simple questions (e.g., “What is your favorite food?”) to explore similarities and differences in a fun way.
4 years	Demonstrates initial respect for similarities and differences between themselves and others.	Recognizes when something, like an action or picture, is unfair to a group of people and explains why, such as saying “That story might hurt someone’s feelings.”	Model caring and kindness by upholding human dignity in all situations with all people. Encourage and acknowledge a child who helps another child in a self-care activity or during routines. Encourage children to role-play for practice and problem solving.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates awareness and understanding of their own background, traditions, and experiences, while increasingly recognizing and appreciating the unique qualities, perspectives, and traditions of others.	Expresses themselves through play, art, and everyday interactions by sharing aspects of their own background—such as drawing a family celebration or pretending to cook a favorite meal—and by showing respect for others’ experiences. Recognizes and talks about how classmates’ abilities, interests, or traditions may be different from their own, and engages in kind, welcoming behaviors during group activities.	Invite families to share meaningful traditions, stories, songs, and poems—either in person or through video/audio recordings—to help children learn about different ways people live and celebrate. Create a rotating “Community Connections Corner,” where children can display drawings, photos, or objects that reflect their family’s experiences and interests. Use this space to spark conversations and guide imaginative play where children practice welcoming others, taking turns, and showing kindness and curiosity about one another’s experiences.

Standard 1.2 Family

Children develop an awareness of the functions, contributions, and varied characteristics of family.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Shows awareness of their role in the family and can name and talk about family members.	Names people in their family, like saying “That’s my mommy” or “My brother is big.” Talks about what family members do and how they’re connected, like “Daddy goes to work” or “I help Grandma bake cookies.”	Provide props for pretend play such as dolls, animals, kitchen supplies, and other home goods that reflect each child’s home life. Encourage imaginary scenarios to act out family roles.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Recognizes similarities and differences between their family and others.	Describes how their family is alike or different from other families, such as “My family is just me and my mom, but Tommy’s family has a mom and a dad and a stepmother.”	Read books about the variety of families and roles, such as “The Moccasins” by Earl Einarson. Along with discussing family similarities, encourage open dialogue about differences to assist each child in developing an appreciation for others.
5 years	Demonstrates self-awareness by describing their role within their family, identifying family members and their responsibilities, and recognizing familiar routines and traditions at home. Begins to understand how their contributions and relationships are part of a larger family structure.	Describes who lives in their home and talks about the roles and responsibilities of family members, including their own contributions—such as setting the table, feeding a pet, or comforting a sibling. Shares familiar routines and traditions with growing detail, showing pride in how they help and participate in family life.	Support children’s learning about families by creating drawings or collages of the people in their home, describing each person’s role (e.g., “My dad fixes things” or “My sister reads to me”). Use storytelling during drawing (e.g., “Let’s draw brother, who likes to play with you”) and invite children to share favorite family routines or traditions—like bedtime stories or taco night—using open-ended questions to reflect on what makes their family special.

Standard 1.3 Community

Children develop an understanding of the basic principles of how communities function, including work roles and commerce.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>3 years</i>	Recognizes and describes community workers and their roles.	Shows emerging ability to identify community workers—such as a firefighter, police officer, or cashier—and describes what they do.	Point out jobs in public or display pictures of community members in various roles, being mindful to avoid gender stereotypes.
<i>4 years</i>	Begins to understand basic ways communities work and how people contribute.	May begin to engage in dramatic play to enact different community worker roles (e.g., may assign himself the role of a bus driver and choose other children to assume the role of passengers).	Encourage children to role-play by providing toys or props that represent community places. A few items from places like a grocery store, a restaurant or a doctor's office can spark imagination.
<i>5 years</i>	Demonstrates community-building skills.	Shares toys and supplies, waits for their turn when playing with others, and says or does kind things, such as helping a friend or giving a compliment.	Assign children responsibilities that require cooperation, such as setting up a learning center, setting the table for snack time, cleaning up after an activity, or building a common structure in the block area.

Standard 1.4 Self Concept

Children develop an awareness and appreciation of themselves as unique, competent, and capable individuals.

The Friendship Garden

Story

In Ms. Lopez’s preschool classroom at Mountain View Early Learning, the children are buzzing with excitement—they’re planting marigold seeds in small pots for their “Friendship Garden.” Before they begin, Ms. Lopez gathers everyone on the rug. “We’re growing more than flowers,” she says. “We’re growing kindness!”

Each child pairs up to share a watering can and take turns filling soil. Talia, who uses a small, adapted scoop due to fine motor challenges, works with her friend Sam. When Talia spills some dirt, Sam gently helps her scoop it back in. “That’s teamwork,” Ms. Lopez smiles.

Nearby, Mateo, who is autistic and prefers quieter spaces, works with his buddy Ava at a table near the window. Ava softly narrates each step: “Now we put in the seed ... now we water.” Mateo nods and carefully presses the seed into the soil.

Later, the children decorate plant markers with their names and draw a “Friendship Garden” mural for the hallway. Some use crayons, others use stickers or stamps. Ms. Lopez ensures everyone has a way to contribute. The center director stops by,

snapping photos for the family newsletter—every child engaged, every face glowing with pride.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates empathy, cooperation, and care for others in group settings.

Participates in shared routines and collaborative play, showing awareness of others’ needs.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive, purpose-driven play fosters emotional social growth. By offering flexible tools and peer partnerships, Ms. Lopez ensures that all children—regardless of ability—can participate meaningfully. The activity nurtures belonging, responsibility, and kindness, while reinforcing home–school connections.

Try It!

Create a classroom garden or kindness display that grows with each act of empathy. Offer multiple ways for children to participate—adaptive tools, visual supports, or peer modeling. Encourage families and staff to contribute notes, photos, or drawings to make kindness visible throughout the program.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Shows awareness of self, including own body, abilities, thoughts, and feelings.	Knows the name of some body parts, says how they feel and what they like, and talks about things they can do, like jumping or drawing. They may say things like, “I’m sad because I dropped my ice cream” or “I’m happy when I play with my friends.”	Encourage children to express their feelings with simple words, engage in puppet play or participate in obstacle courses.
4 years	Express confidence in own skills and positive feelings about self.	Chooses to try new activities like climbing or painting without help, and talks positively about their abilities, such as “I did it!” or “Look at me.”	Express delight and excitement to celebrate each child’s accomplishments each day. Replace generic praise, such as “Good job,” with recognition of what they accomplished, such as “You are hopping on one foot!”
5 years	Recognizes themselves as a unique individual with their own abilities, emotions, characteristics, and interests. Identifies and expresses feelings with growing independence, begins using simple coping strategies, and follows learning environment rules with adult support while participating in group settings.	Describe interests, abilities, and emotions with increasing detail—such as saying, “I’m good at running” or “I feel nervous when it’s loud.” Recognizes and names basic emotions in themselves and others, and begins to use simple strategies, such as deep breathing or taking a break to manage their feelings, with occasional support from adults.	Offer meaningful choices and ask open-ended questions (e.g., “What do you like about the snack you picked?” or “Why did you choose that toy?”). Guide children in playful calm-down challenges—such as deep breathing, yoga poses, or stretching—during classroom time, outdoor play, or community wellness events. Facilitate puppet role-plays in settings like classrooms, libraries, or digital spaces, where characters model strategies such as taking a break or using a feelings chart.

Standard 1.5 Self Efficacy

Children demonstrate a belief in their abilities.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Develops an awareness and appreciation of themselves as a unique, competent, and capable individual, and demonstrates growing confidence in their abilities.	Demonstrates increasing awareness of personal preferences, abilities, and accomplishments. Begins to take initiative, persist in tasks, and express pride in efforts and achievements, showing confidence in trying new or challenging activities.	Engage children in a “Try-It Station” where they choose from new or challenging tasks (e.g., buttoning a shirt, building a tall tower, or drawing a self-portrait), take initiative to start and stick with the activity (e.g., “I’m going to try again”), and share their accomplishments with others (e.g., “Look what I made!”), building confidence, persistence, and awareness of their own abilities and preferences.
4 years			
5 years			



Standard 1.6 Self Regulation

Children manage their internal states, feelings, and behavior and develop the ability to adapt to a variety of situations and environments.

The Great Blanket Fort

Story

It's a chilly morning in Helena, and Ms. Miller's preschoolers are busy building a giant blanket fort in the dramatic play area. "Let's make a cozy space where everyone can fit," she says. The children work together, draping blankets over chairs and using clothespins to hold them in place. When the roof keeps slipping, Patrick suggests, "Let's use the big clips!" and hands one to Ava.

Inside the fort, the children take turns pretending it's a cabin in the woods. "You be the moose, I'll be the ranger," says Ava. When two friends want the same flashlight, Ms. Miller gently guides them: "How can we solve this together?" They decide to take turns, counting to ten before passing it on.

Later, the children invite Ms. Miller in for "hot cocoa" made from felt cups and cotton balls. "This is our Montana cabin," they say proudly.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates empathy, cooperation, and care for others in group settings.

Participates in shared routines and collaborative play, showing awareness of others' needs.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how imaginative play can nurture emotional social growth. Through collaboration, problem-solving, and role-play, children practice empathy, communication, and inclusion—skills that build strong foundations for relationships and community.

Try It!

Create a "Cozy Corner Challenge" where children work together to build forts, cabins, or tents using open-ended materials. Encourage them to name their space and decide how to share it. Add Montana-themed props like animal puppets, ranger hats, or storybooks to spark connection and creativity.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Follows classroom rules and routines with increasing independence.	Uses environmental cues (e.g., music, lights, visual signs) and peer or adult guidance to transition between activities, take turns, and participate in group rules and limits (e.g., waiting for a turn at the water table, cleaning up when music plays, going to the rest area when lights dim).	Create a few simple rules for daily routines; use children’s words and simple picture cues that can be posted in the environment. Recognize and respect that a child’s protests to limits are a normal part of development.
4 years	Recognizes personal needs and begins to take appropriate actions to meet them with increasing confidence in familiar situations.	Is able to recognize their physical needs, such as “being hungry,” and take actions to meet that need, such as getting in the cupboard for a cracker or asking for a snack.	Provide children with opportunities to identify and meet their own needs, such as flexibility at snack time or when dressing themselves.
5 years	Manages actions, words, and behavior with increasing independence by following rules and routines, using words to express feelings, staying focused on tasks for short periods, and beginning to control impulses with occasional adult support.	Uses words to express feelings and needs, demonstrates self-control by waiting for a turn during games or activities, follows familiar rules and routines (such as putting toys away), and begins to adjust behavior in response to the environment—such as slowing down when moving too quickly indoors.	Play games, such as Simon Says or Freeze Dance, where children are challenged to control impulse and hold information in mind and use it to perform tasks.

Standard 1.7 Emotional Expression

Children express a wide and varied range of feelings through their facial expressions, gestures, behaviors, and words.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Manages emotions with increasing independence and seeks an adult for help resolving strong emotions.	Begins to use strategies like taking deep breaths, counting to 10 and/or asking for a hug when strong emotions arise.	Introduce the idea of taking three deep breaths as a calming technique. Use the mantra, “smell the flower” (inhale) and “blow out the candle” (exhale) to teach deep breaths. Teach and practice when children are calm and coach them when they’re upset.
4 years	Expresses a broad range of emotions and begins to notice more subtle or complex emotions in self and others.	Begins to recognize that someone could be “happy to see a friend, but also a little nervous about the new situation.”	Read books to children about complex emotions. Provide opportunities for dialogue about emotions and feelings that naturally occur during the day.
5 years	Learns to adapt to new environments and diverse situations by showing appropriate emotions and behaviors, with guidance as needed.	Explores new environments, e.g. a new playground and may feel shy at first, but with support from a caregiver or trusted adult, begins to explore the equipment, play with other kids, and feel comfortable and have fun.	Anticipate what might happen in a new situation and provide reassurance that will help children manage emotions. Do not try to change the child’s feelings but rather listen/validate the feelings and then support them.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Development is the increasing understanding that children gain of themselves and others, and includes their emerging ability to build positive relationships with others.

Standard 1.8 Interaction with Adults

Children show trust, develop emotional bonds, and interact comfortably with adults.

The Feelings Market

Story

In Ms. Carter’s preschool classroom, a pretend farmers’ market has popped up in dramatic play. The children have baskets, play money, and colorful signs they created together. When two children reach for the same bunch of toy carrots, a brief conflict unfolds. Ms. Carter pauses nearby and says, “It looks like both of you want the carrots—what can we do?” Ella suggests, “We can take turns.” Malik adds, “I can get the apples first!” The educator models calm problem-solving language, and the play continues smoothly. Later, during circle time, they read “The Color Monster” by Anna Llena and talk about what feelings they noticed at the market.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Identifies and expresses a range of feelings in self and others. Uses problem-solving and negotiation skills to resolve conflicts with peers.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how pretend play offers authentic

opportunities for emotional learning. By guiding reflection through storytelling and shared discussion, the educator strengthens empathy and social understanding.

Try It!

Design dramatic play themes that invite social collaboration (e.g., restaurant, clinic, garden stand). Use real-world tools like clipboards and price tags to deepen the play and support language and social reasoning.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Engages in and maintains positive relationships and interactions with children and adults.	Plays the same game with the same friends for several days. Enjoys spending time with adults they know well, often showing affection or choosing to be near them.	Engage in play and exploration based on children’s interests to create positive attachment/relationships. Arrange playdates with peers to practice sharing, communication, and exploring social dynamics.
4 years	Engages cooperatively in small groups and manages separations without distress by building trust and positive relationships with familiar adults.	Shows emerging ability to use a variety of skills for entering social situations with other children, such as suggesting something to do together, joining an existing activity or sharing a toy. May wave good-bye to mom and join classroom activities.	Model ways children can invite themselves into a group (e.g., watching the group play first and then suggesting an idea or asking to join). Show children their presence is valued by offering a warm personal greeting when you see them and let them know they were missed when the child was absent.
5 years	Engages with trusted adults to share ideas, interests, and seek support, while also participating in group activities where they begin to follow rules with guidance. Uses basic problem-solving skills to resolve peer conflicts, shows respect in interactions, responds to others’ emotions, and builds early friendships through cooperative play.	Engages in meaningful conversations with trusted adults—such as sharing daily experiences or reflecting on past events—and participates in group activities with growing independence. Follows rules with occasional reminders, takes turns, expresses empathy, and uses respectful language and actions while building early friendships and practicing in cooperative play.	Encourage children to build social skills by offering simple turn-taking games, structured group play like Simon Says or Freeze Tag, and collaborative activities such as block-building or group art to promote listening, cooperation, and inclusion.

The Bridge Builders

Story

In Ms. Thompson’s first-grade classroom at Prairie Winds Elementary, children gather for morning meeting to talk about what it means to be part of a classroom community. The class includes children from many backgrounds, including several from the Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) and Sioux (Dakota) tribes. Today’s design challenge is to build a bridge using blocks and natural materials, like sticks and stones collected during a nature walk near the Milk River.

During small-group time, two children—Talia, a Gros Ventre child, and Jace, who is Sioux—disagree about how to begin. Talia wants to build a wide, low bridge like the ones she’s seen near her family’s ranch. Jace wants to make a tall arch, inspired by a traditional story his grandfather told about crossing rivers during buffalo hunts. Their voices rise as they each try to explain.

Ms. Thompson kneels beside them and listens carefully. “You both have strong ideas,” she says. “What do you think might happen if we combine them?” Talia sketches a sturdy base, and Jace adds an arching top. They work together, testing and adjusting. When their bridge stands strong, they cheer and high-five. Later, they proudly present it to the class, explaining how they blended both ideas—and how their bridge is “stronger together.”

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates respect for individual differences and collaborates with peers to solve problems constructively.

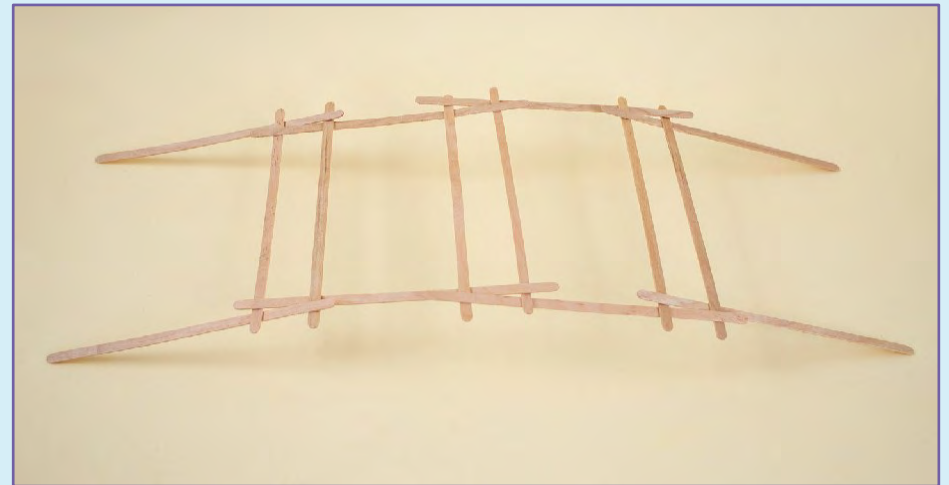
Identifies emotions in self and others and uses strategies to manage frustration or conflict.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how honoring family perspectives and encouraging collaboration builds both emotional social and cognitive skills. Ms. Thompson’s approach—listening, validating, and guiding—helps children navigate conflict and celebrate shared success. The inclusion of natural materials and personal connections deepens engagement and meaning.

Try It!

Incorporate materials and design ideas that reflect children’s families and regional experiences. Use collaborative projects to explore problem-solving and emotional regulation. Encourage children to share stories or traditions that inspire their ideas, building bridges in individual and shared learning.



Standard 1.9 Interaction with Peers

Children interact and build relationships with peers as they expand their world beyond the family and develop skills in cooperation, negotiation, and showing empathy.

The Story Lodge

Story

In Ms. Espinoza’s preschool classroom in Helena, a group of children—including several from the Chippewa Cree and Little Shell tribes—gather around a small, fabric-covered space they’ve helped create called the “Story Lodge.” Inside are animal puppets, natural materials, and picture cards inspired by Montana landscapes and tribal stories.

Ms. Espinoza begins, “In many communities, stories are shared to teach lessons and bring people together. Today, we’ll make our own story as a team.” She invites the children to choose characters and build a story together. Four-year-old Elsie, who is Little Shell, picks the turtle puppet and says, “Turtle is slow but smart.” Her friend Jay, who is Chippewa Cree, adds, “Eagle helps Turtle fly over the mountains.”

As the story unfolds, the children take turns, listen to each other’s ideas, and negotiate roles. When two children want to be the narrator, Ms. Espinoza encourages them to talk it through. “We can both tell the story,” one suggests. “You do the beginning, I’ll do the end.” They agree and continue with excitement.

Later, the children draw scenes from their story and record their voices retelling it. Ms. Espinoza uploads the audio to a digital portfolio to share with families, celebrating their collaboration and creativity.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Forms trusting relationships with familiar adults.

Increasingly engages with peers to build friendships and practice cooperation, negotiation, and empathy.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how responsive, collaborative storytelling fosters emotional social growth and 21st-century skills. Children build trust with adults, engage meaningfully with peers, and express themselves through language and art.

Try It!

Create a “Story Lodge” or “Community Circle” in your classroom with puppets, natural materials, and story prompts. Include books and visuals that represent children’s families and community.

Encourage children to co-create stories, record their voices, and share them with families to strengthen home–school connections and pride.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Forms trusting relationships with familiar adults and increasingly engages with peers to build friendships and practice cooperation, negotiation, and empathy. Begins to express needs, take on roles, and resolve minor conflicts using words and social strategies, relying less on adult intervention over time as their social world broadens beyond family.	Forms trusting relationships with familiar adults (e.g., seeking comfort when upset) and increasingly engages with peers to build friendships (e.g., inviting others to play), practicing cooperation (e.g., sharing toys), negotiation (e.g., asking “Can I have a turn?”), and empathy (e.g., comforting a sad friend). As their social world grows, they express needs (e.g., asking for help), take on play roles (e.g., “doctor” or “teacher”), and resolve minor conflicts with words and social strategies (e.g., “Let’s take turns”), needing less adult support over time.	Offer pretend play with flexible roles and props (e.g., teacher, helper, puppets). Encourage children to invite peers using words, gestures, or picture cards, share materials, and take turns. Provide visual cues and calming spaces for those who need support. Model comforting behaviors and simple problem-solving phrases (e.g., “My turn, your turn”). Set up a “Classroom Play Area” with small chairs, books, crayons, and a few props like a pointer or name tags. Invite children to choose roles (teacher, student, helper) and act out a short “class.” Support them in asking for turns, sharing materials, and inviting others to join using words or gestures.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Builds trusting relationships with adults and forms deeper, more complex friendships with peers, demonstrating growing skills in cooperation, negotiation, empathy, and perspective-taking as they navigate social interactions beyond the family.	Builds trusting relationships with adults (e.g., seeking advice or comfort when needed) and forms deeper, more complex friendships with peers (e.g., choosing to play with close friends). Demonstrates growing skills in cooperation (e.g., working together on group projects), negotiation (e.g., discussing and agreeing on game rules), empathy (e.g., recognizing and responding to a friend's feelings), and perspective-taking (e.g., understanding another child's point of view during conflicts) as they navigate social interactions beyond the family.	Have children work together to create a pretend town called "Friendship Town," where they decide what places to include (a school, a park, a fire station), take turns choosing jobs (builder, designer, speaker), and talk about how people in the town help each other (cheering up a sad friend, agreeing on playground rules). Children build friendships, work as a team, solve problems together, and understand how others feel.

Core Domain 2: Physical

Preschool (Ages 3 to 5)



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical development is the progression of children’s bodily growth and health as well as the emerging ability to use their bodies with increasing purpose, skill, and control.

Standard 2.1 Fine Motor Skills

Children develop small muscle strength, coordination, and skills.

Rolling Builders

Story

On the playground, Mr. Drew sets up ramps made from wooden planks and tubes. “Today we’re engineers!” he announces. Children rush to test different-sized balls, cars, and even pinecones. They crouch low, eyes wide, watching which objects roll fastest. The school director, passing by, joins in: “What happens if we lift this end higher?” Together they experiment, cheering when the ball zooms across the sidewalk. Afterward, children draw what they built and talk about “steep” and “slow.”

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates balance, coordination, and spatial awareness during active play.

Uses strength and control to manipulate materials and tools safely.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how physical exploration can also nurture cognitive and language development. The educator’s setup encourages full-body engagement, scientific thinking, and joyful teamwork—with leadership modeling curiosity alongside children.

Try It!

Create a “Maker Move” zone outside with loose parts—boards, crates, tubes—and invite children to design courses or challenges. Rotate roles so children take turns as “testers,” “builders,” and “observers.”



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Manipulate a range of objects, such as blocks or books.	Stacks taller block towers with more balance and control, sometimes copying simple patterns. Turns pages carefully and may use child-safe scissors to make short cuts across paper.	Provide pictures with building ideas and numbers of how many blocks it takes to stack different patterns.
4 years	Uses writing, drawing, and cutting tools with control and purpose during play and work.	With increasing independence, grasps tools such as markers, crayons, paintbrushes, and draws shapes and begins to add details. Uses child-safe scissors with growing accuracy and control, and practices fastening clothing.	Model writing and drawing in everyday activities and provide a variety of materials and opportunities for children to freely practice these skills.
5 years	Uses writing and art tools with growing strength, control, and purpose to create detailed and meaningful work.	Uses a variety of writing and art tools with increasing precision and independence—forming most uppercase and lowercase letters legibly, cutting along curved and zigzag lines accurately, and using tools like glue sticks, paintbrushes, and hole punchers with control and intent to complete more complex creative tasks.	Engage children in daily routines and creative activities that strengthen fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. For example, invite them to set the table, zip jackets, or button clothing during transitions; offer opportunities to cut along lines or shapes during art projects like masks or collages; and provide materials such as interlocking cubes, LEGO®, or snap beads to build hand strength. Encourage threading beads, buttons, or pasta to make jewelry or patterns during craft time at home, in classrooms, or at community events.

Standard 2.2 Gross Motor Skills

Children develop large muscle strength, coordination, and skills.

Obstacle Day in the Adventure Forest Story

Every Friday morning, the preschool gym at Elk River Early Learning transforms into a themed obstacle course designed by the teaching team—and often inspired by the children. Today’s theme is “Adventure Forest,” drawing on the natural landscapes familiar to many families in Montana.

Tree-stump cushions mark the winding trail, hula hoops become “rivers to leap,” and balance beams serve as “fallen cottonwood logs.” Four-year-old Lila, who is Northern Cheyenne, pretends she’s crossing the Tongue River like her uncle does when fishing. Her friend Jaxon, a Crow child, crawls under a tunnel, calling it a “buffalo cave.” Nearby, Emma and Lucas pretend they’re forest rangers on a mission to rescue a lost bear cub. The center director joins in, playfully growling and chasing the children through the course as the “bear.”

Afterward, the class cools down with gentle stretches and a shared snack of berries, apples, and water. Ms. Tori leads a short circle time where children share their favorite part of the course.



“I was fast like a deer!” says Lila. “I jumped the river!” says Emma. “We saved the bear!” Lucas adds proudly.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates coordination, balance, and control in large-motor play.

Participates safely and confidently in movement games and group activities.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how physical development and imaginative play can bring children of all backgrounds together. By incorporating home

references and local nature themes, the activity becomes both physically engaging and personally meaningful. The shared experience fosters connection, creativity, and confidence.

Try It!

Host a monthly “Movement Morning” with themes inspired by local landscapes or community stories—like river crossings, buffalo trails, or forest adventures. Involve children in designing the course and invite families to share stories or traditions that connect movement to their home lives and communities.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Moves with growing control and coordination, such as running without falling, climbing playground steps, or hopping.	Demonstrates emerging control and coordination by walking, running, changing direction, and navigating around people and objects; begins to apply these movement skills in varied play contexts (e.g., simple games like tag, follow-the-leader, basic dance movements, and navigating low obstacle courses), showing increasing body awareness and purposeful movement.	Provide opportunities and ample space with a variety of elevations and surfaces for children to practice motor skills.
4 years	Demonstrates increased ability to coordinate movements and skills used for balancing.	Moves with strength and coordination by jumping forward and landing steadily on two feet, leaping over small objects with growing confidence, balancing on one foot for several seconds, climbing stairs or playground equipment using both hands and feet, and joining in movement games like hopping, tiptoeing, or skipping with smooth and controlled motions.	Introduce a variety of surfaces both indoors and outdoors for children to explore and use to balance on.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates strength, coordination, and body awareness by identifying and performing basic locomotor movements (e.g., hopping, galloping, walking) with control. Moves safely and confidently through spaces during active play, distinguishing between personal and general space.	Demonstrates body control and spatial awareness by moving safely and confidently through spaces—walking, running, hopping, and galloping with emerging coordination. Follows movement directions such as “over,” “under,” or “around.” Adjusts speed and direction during play, and uses strength to push, pull, climb, or stretch. Begins and stops movement on cue and navigates shared spaces without bumping into others.	Provide daily outdoor time and access to parks or playgrounds where children can use large spaces and varied equipment to build whole-body strength and coordination. Support movement control and spatial awareness through active games that respond to cues (e.g., Red Light, Green Light, Freeze Dance) and by setting up movement paths with cones or chalk (e.g., galloping, hopping, or running around obstacles), encouraging children to navigate space with purpose and control.

Standard 2.3 Sensorimotor Skills

Children use all the senses to explore the environment and develop skills through sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Begins to show more intentionality in their exploration. Combines sensory input with motor planning and begins to test ideas or repeat actions.	Intentionally explores new objects or environments using multiple senses (e.g., looks, touches, and shakes to figure out how something works); compares sensory properties through experimentation (e.g., presses clay and playdough differently and comments on it); and adjusts behavior based on past experiences (e.g., approaches hot sand carefully). Describes sensory input with more specific language (e.g., “It feels scratchy”); shows clear preferences and self-regulation (e.g., covers ears in loud spaces); revisits and varies exploration (e.g., uses scoops with sand); uses sensory input to guide social interactions (e.g., moves closer to music or steps back when overwhelmed); and begins connecting sensory experiences to emotions or memories (e.g., “That smells like pancakes at Nana’s house”).	Provide sensory-rich materials that invite exploration and problem-solving (e.g., scooping rice, feeling textured fabrics, examining leaves with magnifiers). Ask questions such as, “What do you notice?” to encourage observation and language. Support children as they adjust actions based on sensory input (e.g., stepping carefully on bumpy surfaces) and connect experiences to emotions or memories (e.g., “That’s soft like my teddy bear”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Uses sight, touch, hearing, smell, and/or taste to compare and describe materials or experiences.	Uses their senses to explore and describe the world by noticing differences in texture, temperature, and sound, and naming what they see, hear, or feel. Shows preferences based on how things feel or taste and uses sensory words such as “spicy,” “yucky,” “crunchy,” to talk about food and drinks.	Use senses to explore, describe, and express preferences about the world around them by going on a discovery walk—touching items like rough bark, soft grass, or smooth stones; listening to sounds like chirping birds or crunching gravel; and observing colors and shapes in nature. Participate in a sensory snack time with foods like crunchy pretzels, juicy orange slices, chewy raisins, and smooth cheese cubes, using words like “sweet,” “sour,” “yummy,” or “too squishy” to describe what they taste and feel. During group reflection, children share their sensory experiences and chart the descriptive words they used, building vocabulary and awareness through hands-on exploration.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>5 years</i>	<p>Uses sensory input to explore the environment, respond to cues, and adapt movements with increasing control and purpose; makes predictions, solves problems, and expresses ideas based on sensory observations.</p>	<p>Uses their senses to explore and describe the world around them, making choices based on how things look, feel, sound, taste, or smell. Responds to simple verbal and visual cues like “stop,” “go,” and “jump” during group activities and transitions, and adjusts their movements based on what they see or hear—such as stopping when a peer is nearby or turning toward a sound. Builds curiosity, awareness, and engagement across learning settings through hands-on sensory experiences with materials like sand, water, and textured objects.</p>	<p>Support the development of self-regulation and sensory processing by leading engaging games that require children to respond to visual and verbal cues (e.g., Simon Says, color-coded stop/go signs), helping them practice focus, listening, and impulse control. Provide opportunities for hands-on exploration with textured sensory bins (e.g., sand, water, rice) using tools like scoops, funnels, and molds to encourage fine motor development, problem-solving, and creative play in both classroom and community settings.</p>

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND PERSONAL CARE

Children demonstrate healthy and safe behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being.

Standard 2.4 Daily Living Skills

Children demonstrate personal health and hygiene skills as they develop and practice basic care routines.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Begins to develop foundational self-care skills by attempting to use utensils, pouring with support, and removing simple clothing. Participates in hygiene routines, such as handwashing and toothbrushing, with adult assistance, and begins to recognize basic healthy habits with guidance.	Begins to show interest in participating in daily routines, such as mealtime and dressing. Is learning to feed themselves using child-sized utensils, though coordination is still developing. With support, attempts to pour water from a small pitcher and can put on or remove simple clothing items like hats or coats. Begins to assist with dressing tasks, such as pulling up pants or trying to zip with help.	Introduce family-style dining and encourage children to serve themselves and help others.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	<p>Demonstrates growing independence by using utensils with control, pouring with minimal spilling, and managing most clothing with some help. Follows hygiene routines with occasional reminders and begins to explain the importance of healthy behaviors with support.</p>	<p>Demonstrates increasing independence in managing personal care. Washes their hands with soap and water with minimal adult support and brushes their teeth when encouraged. Is learning to blow their nose and may begin to dispose of tissues on their own. Dressing is becoming more manageable, including handling fasteners with little assistance. Starts to recognize and respond to their own physical needs. Begins to initiate hygiene routines with only occasional reminders.</p>	<p>Include necessary self-care materials in the learning environment, such as hand towels, toothbrushes, and tissues, with visual aids to show how to complete each self-care routine.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Demonstrates increasing independence in personal health and hygiene by correctly using utensils, pouring, dressing and undressing, and beginning to tie shoes; follows routines such as handwashing, toothbrushing, and nose care with minimal support, and encourages healthy habits among peers.</p>	<p>Increasingly manages personal care routines with confidence and independence. Follows hygiene practices, such as handwashing, toothbrushing, and nose blowing—often without reminders—and begins to recognize and respond to their physical needs, such as feeling tired or thirsty. Dresses and undresses with minimal help, using buttons, zippers, and snaps, and takes responsibility for their belongings by hanging up coats or organizing backpacks. Mealtime skills are well-developed, including using utensils and pouring liquids with control, while still accepting support when needed.</p>	<p>Support children in building healthy habits by creating photo charts to guide self-care routines (e.g., brushing teeth, washing hands), modeling hygiene through songs and puppet role-play (e.g., sneezing into elbows), and offering dramatic play experiences like grocery stores where they sort pretend foods into “healthy” and “treats.”</p>

Standard 2.5 Nutrition

Children eat and enjoy a variety of nutritional foods and develop healthy eating practices.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Feeds self with minimal assistance. Begins to try new foods. Engages in simple mealtime conversations and follows basic routines.	Sits at the table for meals and snacks with adult support; begins to follow simple mealtime routines (e.g., waiting to be served, passing food, helping to clean up); uses basic table manners with reminders (e.g., saying “please” or “thank you,” using utensils); tries familiar foods, and shows curiosity about new ones with encouragement; and recognizes and communicates feelings of hunger or fullness.	Provide dramatic play kitchen materials for children to practice preparing and serving meals.
4 years	Explores a variety of foods, and shows interest in making healthy choices. Participates in mealtime routines with growing independence and social engagement.	Willingly tries new foods from various food groups and begins to describe foods using sensory details, such as color, texture, or taste (e.g., “crunchy,” “sweet,” “cold”), demonstrating growing curiosity and vocabulary about healthy eating.	Encourage children to taste and try new foods in a “tried it, liked it, loved it” taste test.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Demonstrates growing understanding of healthy habits by identifying basic food groups, making nutritious food choices, and following hygiene and wellness routines (e.g., handwashing, toothbrushing) with increasing independence. Seeks support when needed and begins to understand how healthy eating supports the body.</p>	<p>Shows growing understanding of healthy habits by naming nutritious foods and their benefits, helping with simple food tasks like pouring or spreading, following hygiene and mealtime routines with more independence, and recognizing personal needs like hunger or tiredness, asking for help when needed.</p>	<p>Create a “Healthy Choices Café” dramatic play area with play foods, menus, and utensils. Invite children to sort foods into basic groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins) and “order” or “serve” balanced meals. Encourage discussion about why certain foods help our bodies grow strong. Include handwashing before and after play, and prompt children to notice how their bodies feel after active play (e.g., “My legs feel tired from running!”).</p>



Standard 2.6 Physical Fitness

Children demonstrate healthy behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being through physical activity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Shows growing confidence when exploring new movement activities with support, such as climbing, jumping, or balancing. May hesitate at first but is increasingly willing to try with encouragement.	Participates in group movement activities like dancing, marching, or simple obstacle courses. Follows basic movement directions in games such as “Simon Says” and “Follow the Leader.” Imitates actions modeled by adults or peers, shows enthusiasm during active play with others. Begins to wait for turns or share space during physical games with adult support.	Model physical fitness. Play, dance, and move with the children. Take advantage of opportunities to modify the environment to help individualize the experience for each child, such as raising the basket for children who are able to throw the ball higher.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Independently attempts a variety of new movement skills with persistence, adjusting movements as needed and showing confidence through repeated practice or encouraging peers to join.	Attempts new physical tasks independently (e.g., hopping, skipping, climbing); shows confidence trying unfamiliar games or equipment (e.g., balance beams, tricycles); adjusts movements to improve performance (e.g., changing speed or posture); persists in learning new skills (e.g., throwing a ball, jumping rope); and participates in unfamiliar group physical activities with minimal hesitation.	Discuss the positive benefits of an active life with the children as they reflect on their engagement in movement activities, such as “Doesn’t it feel great to stretch your muscles like that?” or “Wow, that fresh air sure feels good!”



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates healthy behaviors by participating in a variety of physical activities and beginning to understand that being active helps the body stay strong and healthy for life.	Actively joins in physical play like running, dancing, and climbing, shows growing awareness of safety and personal space; talks about how exercise helps their body (e.g., “My heart is beating fast!”); and tries new movement activities with support, following basic safety rules, such as taking turns and walking indoors.	Provide daily opportunities for children to build physical coordination, social skills, and healthy habits through active, hands-on experiences. Engage them in noncompetitive movement games, such as “Follow the Leader,” “Red Light, Green Light,” or “Freeze Dance” to support body control, stamina, and safe movement. Encourage outdoor play and exploration on playgrounds or in open spaces to promote gross motor development. Offer fine-motor activities such as cutting shapes, threading beads, or building with cubes in classrooms, libraries, or home kits to strengthen hand coordination. Model and practice hygiene and safety routines—like handwashing, covering coughs, or walking indoors—through role-play during classroom transitions, family events, or community health fairs.

Standard 2.7 Safety Practices

Children develop an awareness and understanding of safety rules as they learn to make safe and appropriate choices.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Recognizes basic safety rules with adult help and says simple reasons for the safety rules.	Follows simple rules with adult reminders, such as “We walk inside.” or “Take turns.” When asked why, they begin to explain with simple reasons like “So we don’t get hurt.” They can repeat safety rules when prompted, like “We sit when we eat,” and use basic language to describe cause and effect, such as “We clean up so we don’t trip.” The child starts to understand how rules help keep themselves and others safe.	Allow children the opportunity to create rules, modify them based on group discussion, and post them as a reminder.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Developing an increased awareness and understanding of safety rules and routines.	<p>Follows daily routines and safety rules with fewer reminders, such as washing hands and staying with the group. Uses words to state rules during play or transitions, like saying, “Only one at a time on the ladder.”</p> <p>Notices unsafe behaviors and suggests safer choices. Joins class discussions about how rules help everyone stay safe and fair and adjusts their actions to follow rules, especially in new or challenging situations.</p>	Offer each child meaningful choices throughout the day, such as “Do you want to sit next to me or next to Sierra?” or “Which book would you read if you were the educator today?”



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Clearly describes safety rules and shows growing responsibility by applying them in new situations, reminding others, and making safe choices without being told.	Identifies and follows basic safety rules in familiar settings, recognizes common hazards, and begins to explain why certain choices are safe or unsafe. Shows growing independence by making safe decisions without adult reminders, balancing curiosity with caution, and taking age-appropriate risks—such as trying new equipment or solving peer conflicts—while respecting personal limits and safety boundaries.	Create a supportive environment where children feel safe to take risks, try new things, and learn from mistakes. Encourage persistence by praising effort (e.g., “You worked really hard on that!”) and celebrating progress, not just outcomes. Model and practice safety routines—such as walking in hallways, lining up for recess, or using materials carefully—through role-play in classrooms, outdoor areas, or community spaces. Guide children in identifying potential hazards using picture cards or safety walks, and prompt them to explain, with support, why safety rules matter (e.g., “We walk inside so no one gets hurt”) during group discussions or family safety talks.

Core Domain 3: Communication

Preschool (Ages 3 to 5)



COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Communication is the process of exchanging information through a common system of signs, gestures, symbols, and behaviors. Language development is the emerging ability of children to communicate with others to build relationships, share meaning, and express needs.

Standard 3.1 Receptive Communication

Children use listening and observation skills to make sense of and respond to spoken language and other forms of communication. Children enter into the exchange of information around what they see, hear, and experience. They begin to acquire an understanding of the concepts of language that contribute to further learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Understands and participates in conversations, beginning to learn from interactions with others.	Maintains simple back-and-forth exchanges with peers or adults (e.g., responding to “Hi” with “Hi”). Shows understanding by following simple directions during play (“Get your shoes”).	Encourage small-group discussions and role-play activities to support turn-taking and active listening. Reinforce understanding through simple directions (“Pick up the ball and put it in the basket”). Model reciprocal dialogue (“You said you like blocks—tell me what you’re building.”). Use songs, stories, and movement directions to strengthen comprehension.
4 years	Uses and responds to “how,” “why,” and “when” questions appropriately, showing deeper understanding.	Answers questions about familiar events with short sentences (“Why are you sad?” → “Because I fell”). Asks simple “how” or “why” questions during play or learning (“Why is it raining?”).	Use daily routines and science or art activities to prompt reasoning (“How do we make this color?”). Reinforce question words through songs or games (“Who, What, When, Where, Why”). Model curiosity (“I wonder what would happen if ...”). Encourage children to ask peers questions about their ideas and experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Understands and uses an expanding vocabulary, responds appropriately to complex questions, and follows directions that include two or more steps.	Communicates clearly using descriptive and action words in conversations and play; speaks in complete sentences with connecting words (e.g., and, because, so); and responds to “how” and “why” questions with relevant explanations. Follows two- to three-step directions with minimal reminders, answers multi-part questions appropriately, and shows growing independence in understanding and carrying out increasingly complex instructions. Engages in conversations with peers and adults by restating questions and expressing ideas clearly.	Encourage children to explain their thinking and play (e.g., “Tell me how you built that tower”) and ask open-ended questions like “how” and “why” during stories, outdoor exploration, or community activities. Use sequencing games and shared reading to build comprehension of multi-step ideas, and support vocabulary growth through conversation and exposure to new words. Provide opportunities for children to follow and give multi-step directions during cooking, crafts, or play (e.g., “Put away the blocks, then get your journal”), and invite them to repeat directions in their own words. Promote clear, audible responses in group settings—such as circle time, dramatic play, or digital meetings—and celebrate their efforts to use new or unfamiliar words.

Standard 3.2 Expressive Communication

Children develop skills in using sounds, facial expressions, gestures, and words for a variety of purposes, such as to help adults and others understand their needs, ask questions, express feelings and ideas, and solve problems.

Neighborhood News

Story

Each Monday, the preschool gathers for “Neighborhood News.” A large easel paper reads: What’s happening this week? Children share observations—“I saw snow on the mountains!” “My grandma visited!” Ms. Ellis jots down their words precisely, reading them back with expression. Later, the director stops by to deliver the school newsletter and notices the board. “I love hearing your news!” she says. The children proudly point out their names on the chart, practicing recognition and ownership of written language.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Engages in conversations by sharing information and listening to others.

Recognizes that print carries meaning and connects spoken and written words.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how authentic communication can build both literacy and community. The educator and leader co-construct a culture where children’s words matter—and where early writing serves a real audience.

Try It!

Post a “Classroom News Board” in a hallway or family area. Invite leaders and families to respond to entries with comments or photos to extend the dialogue beyond the classroom.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Engages in short back-and-forth conversations with peers and familiar adults, using simple sentences and responding to questions or comments.	With increasing independence, initiates simple exchanges (“Want to play?” “Look at my toy”). Takes turns speaking during brief back-and-forth conversations.	Support play-based conversation through dramatic play, story retelling, and partner games. Reinforce turn-taking by modeling pauses and responses. Model conversation starters and responses (“You can say, ‘Can I have a turn?’”). Use songs, greetings, and sharing time to build confidence in speaking.
4 years	Uses complete sentences and descriptive language to share ideas, ask questions, and provide details during conversations and storytelling.	Incorporates newly learned vocabulary into play and conversations. Uses complete sentences of five to eight words (e.g., “I built a tall tower with blocks.”).	Introduce new words through reading and exploration activities (“This tool is called a stethoscope—what do you think it does?”). Encourage children to use new words in context. Expand on children’s statements (“You built a tall tower—was it sturdy or wobbly?”). Encourage use of descriptive words during show-and-tell or storytelling.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses different types of language depending on the situation, such as speaking quietly in the library, using polite words with adults, or using a louder voice when playing outside. Takes turn in group conversations, stays on topic, speaks clearly, and begins to use more precise vocabulary while self-correcting pronunciation or word choice.</p>	<p>Communicates effectively by adjusting voice and tone to match the setting and situation (e.g., speaking quietly in the library or excitedly sharing a story), and participates in conversations by waiting for a turn, responding to others, and speaking clearly enough to be understood. Attempts new vocabulary, including words from cultural stories or traditions, and expresses ideas using words, gestures, visuals, or assistive tools as needed. Demonstrates growing confidence in sharing personal experiences and understanding others in both group and one-on-one settings.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for children to explore tone, mood, and purpose in dramatic play (e.g., “Say it like you’re a teacher.” or “Say it like you’re excited.”), and give gentle feedback on voice level during group activities. Support small group conversations in varied settings—like circle time, outdoor play, or library visits—by encouraging turn-taking and responses to peers or adults. Invite children to speak clearly during puppet shows, storytelling, or games, and celebrate their efforts as they try new words in songs, rhymes, pretend play, or digital story activities, even if pronunciation isn’t perfect.</p>

Standard 3.3 Social Communication

Children develop skills that help them interact and communicate with others in effective ways.

The Benchmark, Indicators, and Learning Opportunities have been integrated with the age band criteria within the Emotional Social domains to streamline interpretation.

Standard 3.4 English Language Learners

Children develop competency in their home language while becoming proficient in English.

Many Languages, One Grocery Store

Story

During play, children gather in the pretend grocery store. Luna points to a toy fruit and says, “Manzana ... apple!” Nearby, Amir holds up a vegetable and says, “Kheyar ... cucumber!” Amina adds, “Aniga rabaa caano—I want milk!”

Ms. Rivera smiles and repeats their words in English, gently modeling and encouraging. Later, when a visitor stops by, Luna says, “We’re shopping for dinner. I need rice and beans!” The children proudly help label items in English and their home languages. Luna grins and says, “We speak lots of languages here!”

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates increasing understanding and use of English while continuing to develop home language.

Uses language to express needs, ideas, and experiences in play-based settings.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how play supports multilingual development. Through meaningful interactions and role play, children like Luna build confidence in English while maintaining their home language. The educator’s affirming responses and familiar materials create a space where all languages are valued.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	<p>Begins to use and understand English while continuing to grow in their home language.</p>	<p>Begin to show initial signs of understanding of English by responding to familiar words and phrases during routines or play, often using gestures or actions. Starts to utilize a mix of gestures, home language, and some English words to express needs and wants. Shows interest in English through songs, stories, and conversations, while continuing to rely primarily on and develop their home language. Exposure to English and comfort using it may vary depending on the setting and individual experiences.</p>	<p>Support early English understanding by using consistent routines, gestures, and visual cues (e.g., pointing to a toy while saying “ball” or using picture cards during snack time). Encourage children to express needs using a mix of gestures, home language, and emerging English words. Share simple songs, rhymes, and stories in both English and the child’s home language to build interest in English while continuing to support and value their home language development. Recognize that each child’s comfort with English may vary depending on their experiences and environment.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Uses more English to express themselves while continuing to grow in their home language.	Begins to use simple English words and short phrases to participate in play, routines, and conversations, while continuing to grow in their home language. They begin to respond to questions in English with short answers or gestures and may code-switch between languages to express themselves more clearly. English use may increase with exposure and familiarity, though they may still rely on their home language to express more complex thoughts. Confidence using English can vary across situations and with different communication partners.	Support children’s growing understanding of English by using familiar routines, visuals, and simple questions (e.g., “What do you need?” or “Can you show me?”). Encourage them to express ideas using a mix of home language and English, and provide opportunities to hear and use new words through songs, stories, and pretend play. Celebrate their efforts to use English while continuing to honor and include their home language in classroom conversations and activities.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Confidently uses English in many situations while continuing to understand and use their home language.</p>	<p>Demonstrates ability to speak in full English sentences to express ideas, ask questions, and share stories, especially in familiar settings. May follow multi-step directions in English and engage in back-and-forth conversations with peers and adults, using English primarily. While confidence in using English varies depending on exposure and context, may continue to grow in their home language and may use it with peers, family members, or in other meaningful situations. Demonstrates an emerging multilingualism and flexibility in using both languages across various settings.</p>	<p>Encourage children to express ideas and ask questions in full English sentences during familiar routines, play, and storytelling (e.g., “Tell me what happened at the park” or “Why do you think that happened?”). Support back-and-forth conversations with peers and adults by modeling turn-taking and asking follow-up questions. Provide multi-step directions in English (e.g., “Put your book away, then line up at the door”) and invite children to repeat or act them out. Celebrate the use of both English and home language in meaningful ways—such as during cultural stories, family role-play, or peer interactions.</p>

LITERACY

Early or emergent literacy develops as children become aware of the relationship between the written and spoken word. Young children develop skills in using symbols, language, and images to become interested and competent in learning to read, write, and represent information.

Standard 3.5 Early Reading and Book Appreciation

Children develop an understanding, skills, and interest in the symbols, sounds, and rhythms of written language as they also develop interest in reading, enjoyment from books, and awareness that the printed word can be used for various purposes.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Demonstrates engagement with books by holding them correctly, turning pages, pretending to read, recognizing favorite stories, and noticing words, letters, and signs in everyday life.	Holds a book upright and turns pages front to back. Pretends to read by narrating from pictures or memory. Requests favorite stories repeatedly. Points to or comments on familiar letters, logos, or signs in the environment (“That says stop”).	Create cozy book areas with a variety of picture books. Encourage repeated readings of favorite stories. Talk about signs or labels during daily routines (“This box says milk”). Provide daily read-alouds with repetitive and predictable text. Model how to hold and turn pages. Encourage children to “read” picture books or retell stories in their own words. Use environmental print—labels, signs, and classroom charts—to highlight letters and words.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Demonstrates understanding how books work by talking about favorite stories, asking and answering questions, pretending to read with expression, and retelling stories in order.	Names characters, settings, or events from familiar stories. Asks or answers simple questions about what happened in the story. Pretends to read aloud with tone and expression (“Once upon a time ...”). Retells a story with beginning, middle, and end using pictures or memory.	Engage children in interactive story discussions (“Who was your favorite character?” or “What happened next?”). Model expressive reading and invite children to join. Use picture sequencing cards or dramatization to retell stories in order.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Demonstrates understanding of how print works by using books for different purposes, pointing to words while reading, and discussing story events, problems, and details with increasing comprehension. Actively engages in conversations about a variety of shared reading materials.</p>	<p>Engages with books for a variety of purposes—such as learning, enjoyment, or storytelling—by choosing texts independently, pointing to words while “reading,” and beginning to match spoken words to print. Identifies key story elements like main events, problems, and solutions, and makes simple inferences or personal connections (e.g., “He was sad because he lost his toy” or “My grandma tells stories too”). Participates in group discussions about shared texts by asking and answering questions, making predictions, and relating stories to personal or cultural experiences, including those reflected in culturally relevant texts like Native American stories.</p>	<p>Create themed book baskets (e.g., animals, weather, construction) and model print tracking during shared reading by pointing to each word. Ask comprehension and reasoning questions (e.g., “Why did she do that?”), and encourage predictions (“What do you think will happen next?”). Facilitate group discussions in varied settings—like classroom read-alouds or outdoor story circles—where children ask and answer questions about pictures, characters, or events. Invite them to connect stories to their own lives during classroom or family literacy activities.</p>

Standard 3.6 Print Development

Children develop interest and skills in using symbols as a meaningful form of communication.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Uses drawings, scribbles, and mock letters to share their ideas and messages.	Makes marks, scribbles, or letter-like shapes on paper and explains what they represent (“This says mommy”). Combines drawings with random lines or shapes to share meaning.	Create writing-friendly spaces with clipboards, notepads, and crayons. Encourage mark-making during pretend play (“Can you write the grocery list?”). Reinforce that writing communicates ideas, not perfection.
4 years	Begins to write their name and use drawings, dictation, and early spelling to share ideas, using letters to represent sounds and creating simple stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end.	Draws pictures and adds letter strings or letter-like marks to represent words. Tells an adult what to write (dictation) to accompany their drawings. Begins to connect letters with sounds in familiar words (e.g., writes “M” for mom).	Offer daily opportunities to write or dictate (e.g., “Let’s make a card for your friend”). Use magnetic letters or letter stamps for playful exploration of print. Model writing during shared activities (morning message, labeling classroom objects). Support dictation by recording children’s words under drawings. Provide alphabet charts and encourage identifying letters in their names.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Begins to write their name and use drawings, dictation, and early spelling to share ideas, using letters to represent sounds and creating simple stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end.</p>	<p>Expresses ideas through a combination of drawings, early writing, and inventive spelling (e.g., “KT” for cat), showing an understanding that spoken words can be written down. Creates short, meaningful written messages such as labels, notes, or story captions, and uses beginning and ending sounds to spell words. Writes familiar words like names or high-frequency words, and tells or writes simple stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end, often supported by pictures and labels.</p>	<p>Incorporate writing into daily routines (e.g., labeling bins, thank-you notes) and play (e.g., menus, signs), while encouraging storytelling through drawings and words. Support name-writing with varied materials like sand or chalk, and provide daily writing invitations such as journals or science notebooks. Model sentence writing with invented spelling, encourage use of beginning and ending sounds (e.g., KT for cat), and offer chances to write familiar words and create simple stories with a beginning, middle, and end.</p>

Standard 3.7 Print Concepts

Children develop an understanding that print carries a message through symbols and words, and that there is a connection between sounds and letters (the alphabetic principle).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Recognizes and names a few letters, especially those in their name. Identifies a few letter sounds.	Points to and names some letters in their first name. Recognizes familiar letters in the environment (e.g., “S” on a stop sign).	Display children’s names and alphabet charts at eye level. Point out letters during daily routines (“That cereal box has the letter M like your name”). Reinforce letter–sound associations casually (“S makes the /s/ sound like snake”). Practice identifying letters from the child’s name on mail, books, or signs. Use alphabet books and songs to strengthen recognition. Make it personal—trace the letters of their name together using paint, chalk, or magnets.
4 years	Recognizes and names up to 10 letters, especially those in their name. Produces sounds of 10-20 letters.	Identifies and names letters in different contexts (books, puzzles, signs). Begins to connect letter names to words that start with the same sound (“B is for ball”).	Use magnetic letters for matching uppercase and lowercase pairs. Play sound games (“Find something that starts with /b/”). Encourage noticing letters in books and daily print (“Let’s find the letter that starts banana!”). Create alphabet scavenger hunts around the house or outdoors. Focus on letter–sound connections naturally (“What letter do you hear at the start of your name?”). Practice identifying familiar letters through favorite stories or snack labels.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Recognizes all uppercase and lowercase letters, produces more than 20 letter sounds, identifies spaces and punctuation, and follows print from left to right during reading and writing activities.	Demonstrates growing alphabet knowledge by accurately identifying and naming all uppercase and lowercase letters, matching letters to their corresponding sounds (e.g., “D is for dog”, “/d/”), and using this knowledge during reading and writing activities. Recognizes that print is read from left to right and top to bottom, identifies spaces between words, and begins to notice basic punctuation marks, such as periods, question marks, and exclamation points. Points to letters in words, labels drawings, and engages with print in meaningful ways during shared reading and writing experiences.	Support letter–sound learning through multisensory activities (e.g., writing in sand, tracing, forming letters with clay) and embed alphabet practice in meaningful contexts like signing in or labeling artwork. Use games, songs, and scavenger hunts to help children identify and name uppercase and lowercase letters, and sort them by sound or case. Model print tracking during shared reading, pointing out spaces and punctuation, and encourage children to notice punctuation through voice changes and pauses during read-alouds.

Standard 3.8 Phonological Awareness

Children develop an awareness of the sounds of letters and the combination of letters that make up words and use this awareness to manipulate syllables and sounds of speech.

The Story Parade

Story

The preschool classroom buzzes with excitement—it’s the day of the annual Story Parade. Families gather in the hallway as children, dressed as favorite storybook characters, proudly carry their homemade books. Ms. Nguyen announces, “Today we’re the authors!” Each child takes a turn “reading” their story—some with invented words, others with detailed pictures and dictated text. When Ayana reads her story about a flying puppy, her dad joins her on the rug to help hold the book. The director thanks families for coming and reminds them, “When you tell stories at home, you’re helping children grow as readers and thinkers.”

Linked Benchmark(s)

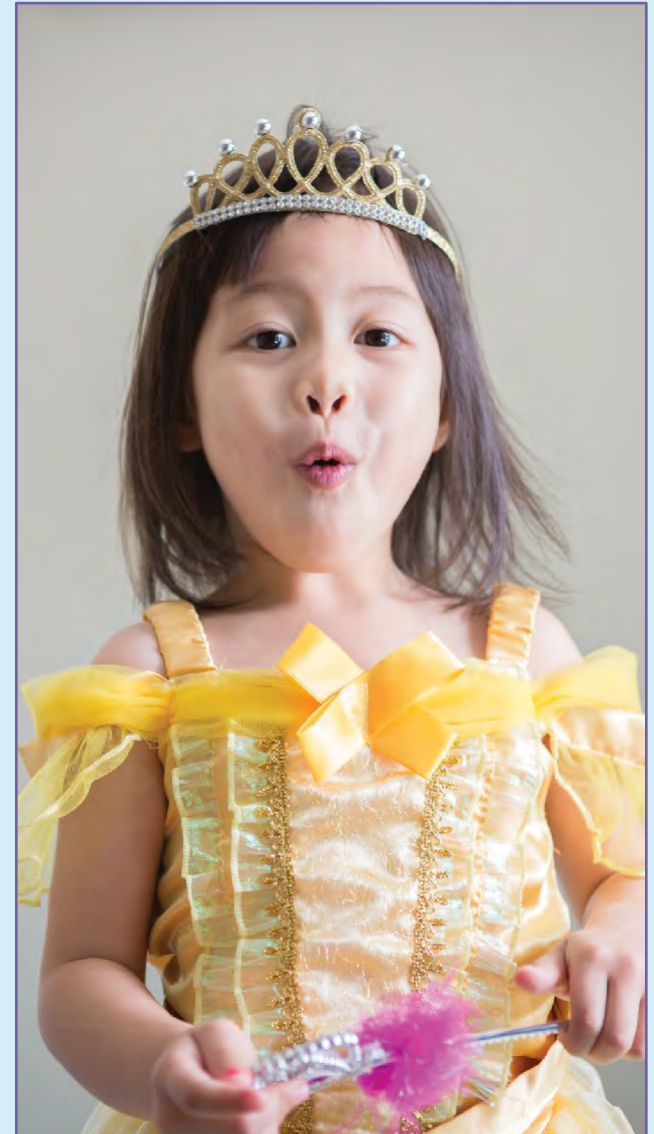
Uses language and emerging writing to communicate ideas, stories, and experiences. Listens and responds to others during storytelling and group discussions.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates joyful literacy grounded in children’s voices and family engagement. By celebrating storytelling as both art and relationship, the educator and leader model literacy as a shared, living experience.

Try It!

Organize a “Story Parade” or “Author Day” that invites families to participate as listeners, readers, or illustrators. Provide props and costumes to make the celebration playful and inclusive.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Begins to hear and create rhyming words and notice that sentences are made up of separate words.	Repeats or invents simple rhymes, sometimes with nonsense words. Shows awareness that spoken sentences have more than one word (e.g., pauses between words when repeating).	Play rhyming games with songs and chants (“Down by the Bay,” “Willoughby Wallaby Woo”). Emphasize word boundaries with clapping or marching (“We clap once for each word!”). Use predictable books and nursery rhymes to highlight sound patterns.
4 years	Determines if words rhyme, hears parts of words (syllables), and begins to understand that letters in a certain order make up spoken words.	Answers whether two words rhyme (“Do cat and hat rhyme?”). Begins to isolate first sounds in simple words (“/b/ is at the start of ball”).	Include daily rhythm and sound play—clapping names, sorting objects by beginning sounds, and making sound collages. Reinforce letter–sound connections through story time and alphabet games.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Begins to rhyme, blend sounds, and decode simple words by using letter-sound knowledge. Identifies beginning, middle, and ending sounds in CVC words, reads familiar words in patterned texts, and uses phonetic spelling and high-frequency words to express ideas in writing.</p>	<p>Demonstrates early reading and writing skills by producing rhyming word groups independently (e.g., “cat, hat, sat”), blending sounds to form words (e.g., /c/ + ‘at’ = cat), and identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds in CVC words. Matches letters to common sounds, blends sounds to read familiar CVC and high-frequency words, and tracks print from left to right while reading patterned texts. In writing, uses letters to represent sounds, applies inventive spelling for CVC words (e.g., “kat” for cat), writes familiar high-frequency words with support, and labels drawings or writes short phrases to express ideas.</p>	<p>Support phonological awareness by playing rhyming games and oral blending activities (e.g., “/d/ + /og/ = dog”), and connect sounds to letters through writing practice. Guide children to identify beginning, middle, and ending sounds in CVC words and match letters to sounds using songs, games, or outdoor chalk play. Encourage blending sounds to read simple words and recognizing high-frequency words in patterned texts. Provide writing opportunities using invented spelling, labeling drawings, or composing short phrases in journals or digital storytelling tools.</p>

Core Domain 4: Cognition

Preschool (Ages 3 to 5)



APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Children’s approaches to learning include the motivation, attitudes, habits, and cognitive styles that are demonstrated as they engage in learning and respond to different situations. The ways children express their approaches to learning may vary according to their temperament or environmental context. Temperament is unlikely to be changed; approaches to learning are more malleable.

Standard 4.1 Curiosity

Children develop imagination, inventiveness, originality, and interest as they explore and experience new things.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Show interest in and curiosity about objects, materials, or events.	Shows curiosity by moving closer and watching or touching new things (e.g., looking closely at bubbles, feeling a new texture, or listening to a new sound).	Offer small explorations, such as pouring water through funnels or comparing textures (smooth vs. rough). Engage children with simple prompts like, “What do you think will happen next?” Encourage curiosity in daily routines—watching toast pop up, laundry spinning, or rain puddles forming. Use open-ended talk: “You’re looking closely—what are you thinking?”
4 years	Demonstrates eagerness to explore, learn about, and discuss a range of topics, ideas, and tasks.	May take something apart to see what makes it work. May start to gather objects to complete activities or tasks.	Set up “maker bins” with loose parts (buttons, lids, tape, yarn). Encourage children to collect materials to complete a project, such as building a bridge for toy animals. Ask, “What do we need to make this stronger?” or “What can roll down the ramp fastest?” Celebrate persistence by highlighting effort, not just result.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Asks increasingly complex questions about the world and explores new activities with curiosity and enthusiasm.	Shows curiosity about the world by asking “what,” “where,” “how,” and “why” questions during play and learning (e.g., “Why is the moon round?”). Explores new materials and experiences with or without encouragement, shares observations about their environment (e.g., ‘It’s raining!’), and makes connections to stories or experiences—especially when engaging with nature or ancestral materials like animal tracks or Native plants. With support as needed, communicates their observations using words, gestures, or visual supports.	<p>Encourage children to ask simple “what,” “where,” and “who” questions during classroom lessons, outdoor explorations, or community walks by modeling curiosity aloud.</p> <p>Provide new materials, topics, or activities (e.g., magnifying glasses, building tools, musical instruments) in play centers, libraries, or outdoor learning spaces, and celebrate children’s excitement as they explore.</p> <p>Prompt children to share observations about their immediate environment in multiple spaces (e.g., “It’s raining,” “That bug is big”) through science journals, circle discussions, or digital recordings.</p>

Standard 4.2 Initiative and Self-Direction

Children develop an eagerness to engage in new tasks and to take risks in learning new skills or information.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Demonstrating flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness in approaching tasks and activities.	Begins to demonstrate flexibility and imagination by using familiar toys or materials in new and creative ways (e.g., they might use a block as a phone, turn a box into a car, or use a spoon as a paintbrush during play).	Offer open-ended materials—blocks, scarves, cups, cardboard tubes—encouraging children to transform them (e.g., a block becomes a phone or a car). Educators, caregivers, and parents validate creative thinking: “You turned that block into a boat—what happens when it sails?” or “I wonder what else this spoon could be?”
4 years	Begins to take risks and try new ways of doing things.	<p>Is able to try a different way of doing ordinary things or take on a challenge, such as piling up pillows and climbing on top or carrying a plate of sandwiches to the table.</p> <p>Is willing to participate in new activities or experiences even if they are perceived as challenging.</p>	Introduce problem-solving experiences—such as building a taller block tower, mixing colors, or balancing objects. Highlight perseverance: “You tried a new way—it didn’t work the first time, but you kept going.” Create safe physical and creative challenges (e.g., obstacle courses, trying a new art material, exploring new music). Emphasize process over perfection by commenting on effort: “You tried a new move on the balance beam!” Support risk-taking through real-life tasks—pouring juice, dressing independently, or using a tool with guidance.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Begins to make plans and decisions to explore how things work, showing increasing independence in choosing how to investigate and solve problems.</p>	<p>Begins to make plans and decisions to explore how things work by asking questions (e.g., “What will happen if I ...?”) and predicting outcomes before testing ideas. Suggests multiple ways to solve simple problems, imagine future solutions (e.g., “Next time we can ...”), and engage in multi-step tasks like puzzles or building. Represents their thinking through drawings, talk, or pretend play, and explores abstract ideas, such as cause and effect through hands-on experimentation.</p>	<p>Build children’s curiosity, planning, and problem-solving skills by exploring real-world investigations and group challenges. They plan steps (e.g., “What do we need to test what sinks or floats?”), make predictions, and reflect on outcomes (e.g., “Was your guess right?”). Support by asking guiding questions (e.g., “What’s your plan?”), encouraging multiple solutions (e.g., “We could take turns”), and helping children document their thinking through drawings or photos. Children apply ideas in new ways during puzzles, building tasks, or pretend play, and imagine future solutions during group reflection.</p>

Standard 4.3 Persistence and Attentiveness

Children develop the ability to focus their attention and concentrate to complete tasks and increase their learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Develop skills through repeated practice.	Practices new self-help routines until more independent (e.g., puts on shoes, zips a coat, washes hands with less support). Insists on “doing it again” during play or learning tasks, showing persistence in practice.	Provide multiple opportunities for practice in movement and manipulation—stringing beads, pouring water, balancing blocks. Recognize effort: “You kept trying until it worked!” Encourage children to show their progress (“Can you show me how you did it this time?”). Celebrate persistence in daily routines—buttoning, using utensils, riding a tricycle. Use language like “You practiced and now you did it!” rather than focusing solely on outcomes.
4 years	Persists in meeting a challenge, despite distractions or frustrations.	Is able to manipulate pieces until a puzzle is completed or show determination in learning to zip a zipper. Completes tasks that are challenging or less preferred despite frustration, either by persisting independently or seeking help from an adult or other child.	Provide moderate challenges such as threading small beads or assembling toys with guidance. Normalize mistakes by modeling coping (“Oops, that didn’t work. Let’s try again together!”). Involve children in longer tasks like helping cook or cleaning up. When frustration appears, coach persistence through encouragement: “This is tricky, but you’re staying with it—want to take a deep breath and try again?” Encourage seeking help appropriately: “Who could you ask for an idea?”

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Stays focused on tasks for increasing periods, even with distractions or interruptions, and returns to complete activities, showing growing persistence and attention span.	Listens and watches attentively during group activities like story time or games, sustaining focus on adult-directed tasks for 10–15 minutes or more. Returns to activities after brief interruptions, remains mostly unaffected by typical learning environment distractions, and completes simple, engaging tasks with a clear beginning, middle, and end.	Children build focus, persistence, and planning skills by engaging in projects that unfold over time, such as growing plants, creating murals, or collecting data for a class graph. Support this by reminding children of previous steps and setting simple goals (e.g., “Yesterday we painted the background; today we’ll add our animals”), and by encouraging reflection (e.g., “You’ve been working on this all week—what will you add next?”). Children return to ongoing tasks like puzzles, building sets, or garden care after short breaks, using visual cues, timers, or gentle reminders. They practice focusing on educator-led activities (stories, games, centers) for 10 to 15 minutes and engage in tasks with a clear beginning, middle, and end—such as storytelling, art projects, or outdoor learning circles—while learning to notice and manage distractions.

Standard 4.4 Reflection and Interpretation

Children develop skills in thinking about their learning in order to inform future decisions.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Begins to adjust actions or try new ways to do things based on what they have learned from past experiences.	Demonstrates an initial ability to tell a story of something that they experienced. Accurately recounts recent experiences in the correct order and includes relevant details.	Encourage storytelling and recall during group time—“What did we do on our walk yesterday?” Provide visual supports (photos, sequence cards) to help children retell events. Model narrative sequencing (“First we went outside, then we found leaves.”). Invite children to share “stories from their day” at dinner or bedtime. Support sequencing language (“What happened first?” “Then what?”) and acknowledge their recall (“You remembered what we did at the park!”).
4 years	Relates an experience from the past to guide present behavior.	Begins to expect to wash hands before eating. Successfully follows detailed, multi-step directions, sometimes with reminders.	Integrate cause-and-effect reminders (“You remembered to put your cup on the tray so it doesn’t spill!”). Provide multi-step directions tied to familiar experiences, prompting recall (“After snack, where do the napkins go?”). Encourage children to connect experiences with choices (“Last time we forgot the umbrella—what should we bring today?”). Provide chances to plan for transitions, using memory to guide preparation (“Before bed, what do we always do after brushing teeth?”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses everyday experiences to solve problems in steps, explains what might happen next, and understands how their actions can change things around them.</p>	<p>Expresses thoughts and feelings through art, body language, or symbolic play (e.g., using a paper plate as a steering wheel). Confidently explores new tools and materials, attempts multiple strategies to solve problems like puzzles or building tasks, and persists even when initial efforts are unsuccessful. Communicates their thinking using gestures, drawings, or simple words to explain what they tried or created.</p>	<p>Explore real-world materials and make observations, predictions, and comparisons as children sort through objects, like buttons, leaves, or utensils and are encouraged to make simple hypotheses (e.g., “You think the big rock will sink—why?”) and reflect on outcomes (e.g., “What did you notice?”). Through shared activities like cooking (“What happens when we stir the batter?”), building (“Why do you think this tower fell?”), and nature walks (“Why are these leaves different colors?”), children use reasoning to explain what they observe. They notice and name patterns (e.g., day/night, weather changes, AB patterns in blocks), make predictions (e.g., “It’s cloudy, so it might rain”), and apply past learning to new situations (e.g., “If I stack blocks like yesterday, my tower won’t fall”) during play, science talks, or outdoor exploration.</p>

REASONING AND REPRESENTATIONAL THOUGHT

Reasoning (and logic) refers to the ability to think through problems and apply strategies for solving them. Children’s ability to think, reason, and use information allows them to acquire knowledge, understand the world around them, and make appropriate decisions.

Standard 4.5 Reasoning and Representational Thought

Children develop skills in causation, critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving and representational thought.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	<p>Tries several methods to solve a problem before asking for assistance.</p> <p>Begins to use language to describe what happened after acting on an object.</p>	<p>May describe that a caterpillar turns into a butterfly after observing the process. Says simple explanations, such as “It fall down” and “Push make it go.”</p>	<p>Provide open-ended challenges that invite persistence and trial-and-error—such as stacking blocks to balance, using ramps to roll balls, or fitting puzzle pieces. Encourage exploration with everyday materials (containers with lids, pouring water, nesting cups). Allow them to make mistakes safely, stepping in only after multiple attempts. Support independence in problem-solving during routines—putting on shoes, opening containers, or tidying up. Model problem-solving language: “What else could you try?” or “That didn’t fit—what’s another way?”</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Experiment with cause and effect by changing variables. Begins predicting outcomes of actions, not just describing results.	May try out different behaviors to explore the actions of objects and the reactions of people. Says things like, “If I push harder, it will go faster.” Tests ideas in play, like building a longer ramp to make a car roll farther.	Offer science and sensory explorations that show visible results—mixing colors, using magnets, or comparing what sinks and floats. Encourage curiosity about social cause and effect: “How did your friend feel when you shared that toy?” Use daily experiences to highlight cause and effect—“When we water the plants, they grow” or “When you push the button, the light turns on.” Prompt prediction and reasoning: “What do you think will happen if ...?” and invite children to describe changes they observe.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses everyday experiences to recognize patterns, make predictions, and apply strategies to new situations. Explains how actions affect objects and demonstrates flexible, multi-step problem-solving with increasing independence.</p>	<p>Observes, categorizes, and explains their thinking using reasoning and causal language (e.g., “If I don’t water the plant, it will die.”). Sorts objects by attributes like shape, size, or color, recognizes and creates simple patterns, and makes predictions based on past experiences. When exploring nature or stories, identifies patterns and makes connections. Shares ideas and solutions using words, gestures, or supports, and may plan ahead when solving problems (e.g., “I’ll put the big block on the bottom so it won’t fall.”).</p>	<p>Create a “Ramp and Roll Challenge” where children use everyday materials (blocks, cardboard tubes, balls) to design ramps. Encourage them to predict what will happen (e.g., “Which ball will roll farthest?”), test their ideas, and adjust designs to improve results. Ask questions like, “What could make it go faster?” or “Why did it stop?” Support children in noticing patterns (e.g., smooth vs. rough surfaces), making comparisons, and applying past learning (e.g., “Last time the ramp was too short—what can we do now?”).</p>

CREATIVE ARTS

Children explore and represent their ideas, reveal their inner thoughts and feelings, find ways to understand themselves, enrich their world, and bring beauty to their surroundings.

Standard 4.6 Creative Movement and Dance

Children produce rhythmic movements spontaneously and in imitation, with growing technical artistic ability.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Explores different ways of moving, both with and without music, and participates in dance activities alone or with a partner.	Moves in different ways—such as jumping, spinning, or swaying—with or without music, and joins in simple dance activities alone or with a friend. Shows joy and creativity while exploring movement.	Provide opportunities for free dance and movement exploration with scarves, ribbons, and instruments. Play songs of varying tempos and invite children to move their bodies in response. Model joyful participation and name movements (“You’re twirling slowly like the breeze.”). Encourage children to express emotions through movement (“Show me how happy looks in your dance.”).
4 years	Moves with balance and coordination by adjusting to changes in music and begins to improvise dance that starts and stops on cue.	Moves with balance and coordination by adjusting movements to match changes in music. Begins to create simple dance moves that start and stop with the beat, showing growing body control and rhythm awareness.	Offer structured group movement activities, such as moving to rhythm instruments or following an educator’s cues to start, stop, and change tempo. Introduce guided improvisation with simple prompts (“Move like a leaf blowing in the wind.”). Encourage games like “Follow the Leader.”

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Participates in guided movement activities and explores self-directed movement sequences using more complex gestures and rhythms, responding to suggestions and improvising new ways to move.	Explores and expresses ideas through creative movement by joining guided activities, trying new ways to move (e.g., changing speed, direction, or shape), and imitating or creating simple rhythmic patterns. Uses body control and imagination to act out animals, weather, or stories, and may use gestures, visuals, or adaptive tools to participate with support as needed.	Provide opportunities for children to express ideas, emotions, and creativity through movement by participating in dance and dramatic movement activities. They interpret stories or poems with their bodies (e.g., “How would a butterfly move?”), explore different ways of moving (big/small, fast/slow, high/low) in classrooms, playgrounds, or outdoor spaces, and create short movement sequences (e.g., “move like an animal,” or “show the wind”). Children imitate and invent simple rhythmic patterns during music circles, dance games, or family celebrations. Support independence by offering broad suggestions, encouraging children to choose and adapt their movements, and providing props or simple costumes to inspire imaginative expression.

Standard 4.7 Drama

Children show appreciation and awareness of drama through observation and imitation, and by participating in simple dramatic plots, assuming roles related to their life experiences as well as their fantasies.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Engages in simple pretend play, such as cooking dinner or feeding a baby doll, beginning to use objects as symbols with occasional prompting.	With prompting, uses a variety of materials to create simple props, puppets, or costume pieces for dramatic play and guided drama experiences.	Offer a variety of open-ended materials (fabric scraps, boxes, hats, spoons) to inspire pretend play. Model and join in, saying, “You’re cooking dinner! What’s on the menu tonight?” Encourage children to use materials flexibly to represent real-world objects. Encourage pretend play at home by joining in (“I’d love to taste your soup!”). Offer simple costume items and praise imaginative substitutions (“You used a towel as a cape—that’s clever!”).
4 years	With prompting and support, expresses original ideas and roles in dramatic play or guided drama experiences, using props and actions to explore familiar scenarios.	May recall elements of a story or situation, use different voices to portray various characters, and use props in an imaginative way to identify place/setting as they act out a story or theme.	Offer props or puppets that connect to stories children know. Invite them to retell or adapt the story with their own twist (“What would happen if the bear was friendly?”). Provide support for role-taking and turn-taking in small group play.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Engages in pretend play by imitating characters and real-life roles, and with guidance, expresses emotions and social understanding through dramatic or imaginative play.	Engages in rich, collaborative dramatic play by developing themes or plots, assuming and switching roles, using props, and directing or responding to peers. Acts out everyday roles (e.g., parent, educator, firefighter); uses voice, facial expressions, and gestures to portray familiar characters; and invents simple pretend scenarios that support shared storytelling with others.	Develop imagination, communication, and social skills through group storytelling and dramatic play. Children invent characters and storylines together in drama circles or pretend play (e.g., “Let’s play house” or “You be the firefighter!”), take turns assigning roles, and suggest what happens next. Children act out everyday roles in dramatic play centers, outdoor spaces, or home reenactments, using voice and gestures to imitate familiar people or characters during puppet shows, circle time stories, or digital recordings. Support this by offering prompts that connect emotion to action (e.g., “Show me how your character feels when the tower falls down.”) and encouraging role-switching and collaboration with peers.

Standard 4.8 Music

Children engage in a variety of musical or rhythmic activities with growing skills for a variety of purposes, including enjoyment, self-expression, and creativity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Creates and shares original musical ideas by combining rhythm, movement, and sound. Claps and moves to the beat, repeats and builds on patterns, and uses music to express feelings or tell stories during pretend play or group activities.	Sings, claps, or moves to music to show feeling and ideas, like stomping like a dinosaur during pretend play, clapping along to a song's beat, or swaying slowly to calm music.	Sing short, familiar songs during transitions (e.g., cleanup songs, greeting songs). Use fingerplays and movement songs ("Itsy Bitsy Spider," "If You're Happy and You Know It") to connect words with actions. Encourage singing throughout the day—while driving, cooking, or cleaning. Respond positively to spontaneous singing and join in to build confidence. Provide opportunities for children to choose favorite songs and lead the family sing-along.
4 years	Experiments with musical sounds and words by singing, chanting, or tapping rhythms. Begins to explore pitch, tempo, and patterns to express ideas through.	Creates expressive musical patterns using voice, instruments, or movement to show ideas or emotions (e.g., repeating a fast rhythm to show excitement or using words to rhyme or make up words to familiar tunes.	Encourage word play and improvisation—invite children to change verses in songs ("Old MacDonald had a zoo!") or make up silly rhymes. Offer simple rhythm instruments to accompany singing. Emphasize exploration: "That's a funny new verse! Let's try it together." Create music corners with shakers, drums, or xylophones. Support experimentation with tempo and sound ("Can we sing this song slowly?"). Encourage children to invent new lyrics about daily routines.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Participates in singing, dancing, and rhythm activities by imitating and creating rhythmic patterns, exploring musical instruments, and engaging with familiar songs through movement and sound.	Participates in musical activities by joining in group singing, moving their body to the beat, and exploring rhythm through clapping, stomping, and using classroom instruments. May imitate simple rhythmic patterns and engage with music expressively, even if their pitch or timing is approximate.	Build rhythm, coordination, and musical awareness through playful experiences like call-and-response clapping games (e.g., “Clap-clap-stomp—now it’s your turn!”), tapping to the beat of a song, or dancing to music with different tempos. They join in group singing during circle time, family events, or community gatherings, with encouragement to participate regardless of pitch. Children move their bodies to music during classroom dances, playground games, or community celebrations, and explore instruments like shakers, drums, or xylophones in music centers or outdoor play. Support learning by modeling simple rhythms and celebrating children’s efforts to listen, imitate, and express themselves through sound and movement.

Standard 4.9 Visual Arts

Children demonstrate a growing understanding and appreciation for the creative process as they use the visual arts to express personal interests, ideas, and feelings, and share opinions about artwork and artistic experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Explores a variety of art materials, begins to use different media with growing skill, and shows curiosity by asking simple questions about their own and others' artwork.	When presented with art materials, may use the materials to explore cause and effect, such as mixing paint colors or using the tip of the marker to stamp dots all over the page.	Provide daily access to open-ended art materials—crayons, markers, paint, clay, collage items. Encourage curiosity by asking, “What happens if you mix these colors?” or “Tell me about your picture.” Focus on process over product. Encourage exploration—“You’re trying the brush in a new way!” Introduce sensory art like finger painting or textured stamping.
4 years	Uses colors, shapes, and textures to create meaningful artwork, expresses basic feelings and ideas through art, and begins to notice and discuss similarities and differences in visual works.	Chooses colors and shapes intentionally to represent people, objects, or feelings (e.g., draws a red circle to show the sun, uses scribbles to show “fast”). Represents real or imagined objects with emerging accuracy but still symbolic (e.g., stick figures, houses, animals).	Provide thematic art invitations (“Let’s make something from our nature walk.”) and support experimentation with shape and texture (sponges, string prints, tissue paper). Encourage describing choices (“You picked green for the grass—why that color?”). Introduce examples of art from various cultures and artists for comparison.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses art tools with increasing control and purpose to express ideas, emotions, and stories; explores colors, textures, and shapes through drawings and collages; and begins to create and appreciate artwork that reflects diverse cultures and ways of life.</p>	<p>Creates drawings, paintings, and models using a variety of materials, colors, shapes, and textures to represent people, objects, or scenes (e.g., making a clay pizza or drawing a house) and begins to reflect on their work (e.g., “Next time I’ll make the tree bigger”). Explores primary colors, basic shapes, and textures through stamping, rubbing, layering, and simple design-making.</p>	<p>Develop creativity and fine motor skills through longer-term art experiences like multiday projects or story illustrations, using a variety of materials such as pastels, clay, or weaving. They explore textures by rubbing, stamping, or layering with natural objects, fabric, or found materials, and create drawings that represent people, objects, or scenes. Children are encouraged to name and experiment with primary colors and basic shapes through finger painting, block play, or outdoor chalk drawing. They use crayons, paint, and collage materials to design simple artworks in classrooms, libraries, or home art corners. Support this process by asking open-ended questions (e.g., “How does this artwork make you feel?” or “What do you want your picture to tell others?”) to help children reflect on and express their ideas.</p>

MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

Children develop the ability to explore ideas, make sense of the world, and find meaning in the physical environment as they increase their understanding and use of numbers and mathematical operations, such as measurement, geometry, and properties of ordering.

Standard 4.10 Number Sense and Operations

Children develop the ability to think and work with numbers, to understand their uses, and describe numerical relationships through structured and everyday experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Begins to build number sense by counting up to 10 and using one-to-one correspondence with small groups of up to 5 objects. Starts to understand basic quantities like “one,” “two,” and “more,” and recognize some numerals up to 5.	May count objects accurately up to 10 during everyday activities, such as counting cars or steps, and uses one-to-one correspondence with up to 5 objects. Begins to understand and use basic quantity words like “one,” “two,” and “more” in sentences (e.g., “I want one cookie.” or “I want more than two.”). Recognizes and names numerals up to 5 in the environment, such as on signs or in the classroom (e.g., “That’s a 5.”).	Include counting in play—snack time (“You have 3 crackers”), cleanup (“Put away 5 blocks”), or story time (“Let’s count the ducks”). Display numerals 1–5 around the room for environmental recognition. Use daily routines for number talk—counting stairs, shoes, or groceries. Reinforce understanding of “more” and “less” in natural contexts (“Do you want one cookie or two?”). Celebrate noticing numbers in the community (signs, buses, doors).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Counts verbally up to 20 and matches numbers to quantities with one-to-one correspondence for groups up to 20. Can quickly recognize small sets of up to 5 items without counting and is able to identify and connect numerals to the objects they count.	May count verbally up to 20 during activities like jumping jacks or counting objects. Matches numbers to quantities using one-to-one correspondence with sets up to 20 (e.g., touches or points to each dot when counting 6 to 10 items). Instantly recognizes small sets of objects up to 5 without counting. Begins to identify and connect numerals to counted objects up to 10 (e.g., when shown the numeral 9, places 9 candles on a cake).	Offer manipulatives that invite counting and comparison—counters, dice, dot cards, counting mats, or number puzzles, or beads. Include numeral labels (1–10) in centers and routines. Reinforce number recognition in real-world play (“Find the number 7 on the mailbox”). Incorporate movement-based counting (“Do 10 jumps!”) and small group math talks about comparing sets. Encourage subitizing by briefly showing small quantities and asking, “How many did you see?”



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Counts with one-to-one correspondence to 20 and beyond, understands that the last number said represents the total, creates and compares sets using terms like more, less, or equal, recognizes and writes numerals 0–20, and begins to connect numerals to quantities up to 10.	Counts aloud to 20 with one-to-one correspondence, accurately counting sets of objects and understanding that the last number said represents the total. Matches numerals to groups of objects (up to 20), recognizes and write numerals 0–20, and compares quantities using terms like “more,” “less,” or “equal.” Identifies which of two numbers is greater and may count by ones to 100. Uses number knowledge to solve simple problems and explain their thinking.	Build number sense by playing games with cards, dice, or everyday objects to count, group, and compare sets (e.g., “Roll the dice—who has more?” or “Make a group of 5 buttons”); they explain their thinking (e.g., “How do you know that’s more?”), recognize and write numbers 0–20 using chalk, tracing tools, or number cards, match numbers to sets of objects (e.g., “Find 8 rocks to match this number”), and compare quantities using real-life situations like sharing snacks fairly, setting the table (e.g., “We need 4 forks”), or organizing toys (e.g., “Put 10 cars on the shelf”)—while also practicing counting by ones to 100 through songs, movement games, or outdoor play.

Standard 4.11 Measurement

Children develop skills in using measurement instruments to explore and discover measurement relationships and characteristics, such as length, quantity, volume, distance, weight, area, and time.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Sorts, organizes, compares object with minimal assistance. Uses appropriate terms/language to describe measurable attributes.	Begins to use basic words to compare objects, like big/little or heavy/light. Starts to notice the order of familiar daily events, saying things like “Playtime comes after snack.” Can sort objects by one thing, such as color or shape. With help, can make simple guesses about size or amount and explore measuring using everyday items like their hands or blocks, though not always accurately.	Invite children to sort classroom objects (blocks, buttons, leaves) by size or color. Introduce informal measuring tools (rulers, string, cups) to compare length or capacity. Ask open-ended questions (“Which tower is taller?”). Reinforce comparison words like “shorter,” “heavier,” and “longer.”

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	<p>Recognizes time as a sequence of events that relates to the routines of daily life. Begins to estimate and measure objects. Organizes objects without assistance.</p>	<p>Uses more specific words to compare objects, such as taller, shorter, or heavier. Describes daily routines using words like “first,” “next,” and “then.” Sorts and organizes objects by two or more things, such as size and color. Begins making simple, reasonable guesses about size or quantity, like “I think it will take five scoops to fill this.” Starts measuring length by lining up items, like cubes, to see how long something is.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities to build, sort, and measure by stacking blocks to compare which is taller or heavier, using words like “first,” “next,” and “then” to describe routines, sorting objects by size and color, making simple guesses like “I think it will take five scoops to fill this cup,” and measuring items by lining up cubes—such as using linking cubes to see how long a toy truck is.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Uses appropriate language to describe size and shape. Estimates and measures length using units and compares objects by length, weight, and capacity using terms like “longer,” “shorter,” “heavier,” and “lighter.”	Uses comparative language (e.g., “bigger/smaller,” “heavier/lighter,” “more/less”) to describe and compare objects by size, weight, length, or capacity. Measures using nonstandard tools like blocks or hands and may record or talk about their findings. Sorts and groups objects based on observable traits and explains their reasoning. Predicts what comes next in familiar routines and uses what they know to make guesses and check their ideas.	<p>Encourage children to use comparative language (longer/shorter, heavier/lighter, more/less) when exploring classroom tools, outdoor objects, or items from home.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to place objects side by side to compare length or height and to lift or balance objects for informal weight comparisons.</p> <p>Facilitate play where children fill and empty containers to compare capacity in sand tables, water play, or outdoor sensory bins.</p>

Standard 4.12 Data Analysis

Children apply mathematical skills in data analysis, such as counting, sorting, and comparing objects.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Sort, organize, compare object with minimal assistance. Uses appropriate terms/language to describe measurable attributes.	Independently collects and groups objects based on a single attribute, such as color, size, or shape, and uses simple descriptive language (e.g., “These are all red,” “These blocks are big”).	<p>Invite children to sort and measure classroom items (blocks, ribbons, cups). Model use of informal measuring tools like string or rulers.</p> <p>Ask open-ended questions (“Which one is longer?” “Which cup holds more?”). Reinforce time concepts during routines (“After circle time, we go outside”).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	<p>Recognize time as a sequence of events that relates to the routines of daily life. Begins to estimate and measure objects. Organize objects without assistance.</p>	<p>With increasing independence, recognizes and describes daily routines as a sequence of events; begins to estimate and measure objects; and independently collects and groups objects based on two or more characteristics, such as color, size, or shape (e.g., groups all the small, red triangles together, sorts buttons by size and number of holes, or organizes toys by color and texture).</p>	<p>Encourage children to independently sequence daily routines using time-related language (e.g., first, next, last), make thoughtful estimates and measure familiar objects using non-standard units (e.g., “How many paperclips long is the book?”), and sort or classify collections of objects based on two or more attributes—such as color, size, shape, or texture—while explaining their reasoning (e.g., “I put these buttons together because they are small and have two holes”).</p>
5 years	<p>Uses appropriate language to describe attributes and characteristics, such as size and shape. Estimates measurement characteristics of familiar objects or events. Measures length by laying units end to end.</p>	<p>Describes how objects are grouped using multiple characteristics and explains reasoning, while estimating or measuring objects (e.g., “I put all the small, red rectangles together because they are the same size and color,” or “This block is as long as two hands”).</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for children to explore and communicate sorting and measurement by grouping objects using more than one characteristic—such as saying, “I put all the shiny, big buttons together because they are the same color and texture”—and explaining their reasoning. They also estimate or measure using familiar references, such as saying, “This ribbon is as long as my arm,” or using blocks to measure how tall a book is.</p>

Standard 4.13 Algebraic Thinking

Children learn to identify, describe, produce, and create patterns using mathematical language and materials.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Reproduces simple patterns of sound and movement.	Recognizes, copies, and begins to extend simple repeating patterns using colors, shapes, sounds, or movements (e.g., strings beads in a red-blue-red-blue pattern and adds the next color, continues a clap-stomp pattern, or arranges blocks in a repeated size or color sequence).	Incorporate pattern play into daily routines—alternating colored cups at snack, jumping, spinning, jumping during movement breaks. Encourage children to “copy what I do.” Use songs, instruments, and movement to model AB patterns. Make simple patterns together—laying socks by color or alternating fruit slices on a skewer.
4 years	Reproduces simple patterns of concrete objects.	Identifies and predicts what comes next in simple repeating patterns seen in the environment or created by others (e.g., sees a green, purple, green, purple pattern and says what color comes next, or listens to and repeats an adult’s clap, stomp, clap, stomp rhythm).	Provide materials to continue and complete patterns (beads, colored counters, shape tiles, leaves, shells, blocks). Ask guiding questions like, “What comes next?” or “How do you know?” Integrate musical or movement patterns into circle time games.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Creates more complex patterns using sound, movement, and objects, and begins to understand basic addition and subtraction through the use of concrete materials and drawings.	Creates and describes repeating patterns using objects, drawings, or movement, and explains the pattern rule (e.g., “red, blue, red, blue”). Represents and solves simple addition and subtraction problems using fingers, drawings, or manipulatives, and may match story problems to number sentences (e.g., $3 + 2 = 5$). With support, begins writing equations, identifies missing numbers, and explains their thinking using words, models, or visuals.	Build early math and reasoning skills by using open-ended materials like buttons, beads, or stamps to create and extend multi-step or repeating patterns (e.g., AAB, ABB, ABC), while asking questions like, “Tell me your pattern—what comes next?” These patterning experiences connect to rhythm and early math concepts. Children also explore addition and subtraction by acting out simple number stories (e.g., “Three children went down the slide, then two more joined—how many are there now?”), matching them to number sentences like $3 + 2 = 5$. With support, they write their own equations using tools like outdoor chalk or whiteboards (e.g., counting beanbags tossed into a bucket and writing $4 + 1 = 5$), and solve for missing numbers using objects, drawings, or fingers (e.g., $4 + \underline{\quad} = 6$).

Standard 4.14 Geometry and Spatial Reasoning

Children build the foundation for recognizing and describing shapes by manipulating, playing with, tracing, and making common shapes. Children learn spatial reasoning and directional words as they become aware of their bodies and personal space within the physical environment.

The Great Bubble Experiment

Story

Outside on the playground, Ms. Nguyen’s preschoolers gather around three bubble wands of different sizes. “Which one do you think makes the biggest bubble?” she asks. Children shout predictions: “The giant one!” “No, the small one—because it’s faster!”

Everyone takes turns dipping and blowing. Elijah holds a wand while his friend Zoe helps him dip it into the solution. “Ready?” Zoe asks. Elijah nods, and they blow together, laughing as a bubble floats away. Nearby, Fatima, who uses a communication device, taps a button: “Big bubble!” Ms. Nguyen smiles, “Yes, Fatima! Let’s measure it!”

She kneels with a clipboard, helping children use yarn to measure bubble diameters. Later, the director visits to see their “Bubble Lab” chart. The children proudly explain their findings, and the director smiles: “You’re real scientists!” Cheers erupt as they replay the experiment together.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses observation, inquiry, and comparison to investigate cause and effect.

Collaborates with peers to plan, test, and share findings in playful ways.

Engages in inclusive group experiences that support communication and participation for all learners.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive, play-based inquiry supports cognitive and social development for all children. With thoughtful facilitation, every child—regardless of ability or language background—has a voice in the learning process. Peer collaboration and adaptive tools ensure full participation and joyful discovery.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	<p>Follows simple directions related to proximity.</p> <p>Identifies a few basic shapes.</p>	<p>Follows directions when positional and proximity words are used (e.g., in, on, beside, between). May point to, name, or describe common shapes, such as circle, triangle, rectangle, square.</p>	<p>Incorporate pattern play into daily routines—alternating colored cups at snack or jumping, spinning, jumping during movement breaks. Encourage children to “copy what I do.” Use songs, instruments, and movement to model AB patterns. Make simple patterns together—laying socks by color or alternating fruit slices on a skewer.</p>
4 years	<p>Uses and responds appropriately to positional words with support Correctly name basic shapes (circle, square, rectangle, triangle) regardless of size and orientation.</p>	<p>Begins to use words such as “behind,” “backward,” “forward” with support. May point to, name, or describe common shapes, such as circle, triangle, rectangle, square, rhombus, or oval, regardless of orientation or size.</p>	<p>Provide materials to continue and complete patterns (beads, colored counters, shape tiles, leaves, shells, blocks). Ask guiding questions like, “What comes next?” or “How do you know?” Integrate musical or movement patterns into circle-time games.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses and responds to positional words, and begins to identify, compare, and sort two- and three-dimensional shapes by attributes such as size, shape, and other characteristics, describing their similarities and differences.</p>	<p>Uses spatial language (e.g., behind, forward, backward) and identifies common 2D and 3D shapes by their attributes. Describes shapes using informal terms like sides, corners, curves, or faces, and may sort or compare shapes by size or number of sides. Begins to recognize shapes in everyday objects (e.g., “That ball is a sphere” or “The sign is a triangle”) and may use touch or observation to explain their reasoning.</p>	<p>Invite children to build early math and reasoning skills by creating and extending patterns with open-ended materials like beads, buttons, or natural items (e.g., AB, AAB, ABC). Ask, “What’s your pattern? What comes next?” to connect patterning to rhythm and math concepts. Children also explore addition and subtraction through real-life number stories (e.g., “Three children were on the climber, then two more joined—how many now?”), record equations with chalk or whiteboards (e.g., $4 + 1 = 5$) and solve missing-number problems using objects or drawings. Set up a “Pattern and Number Play Station” with beads, buttons, and beanbags. Children create patterns, explain what comes next, then act out number stories by tossing beanbags into buckets, writing equations, and solving simple math challenges.</p>

SCIENCE

Children develop an understanding and awareness of their environment (the natural world) and scientific concepts and practices as they develop skills in making predictions, testing their knowledge, and conducting scientific investigations. Children’s natural sense of wonder and delight in learning about their world fuels scientific exploration.

Standard 4.15 Scientific Thinking and Use of the Scientific Method

As children seek to understand their environment and test new knowledge, they engage in scientific investigations using their senses to observe, manipulate objects, ask questions, make predictions, and develop conclusions and generalizations.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Observes and asks simple questions about objects and events in their environment. Explores materials using senses and simple tools.	Shows curiosity by asking simple questions and making observations about the world around them (e.g., asks “What kind is that?” when seeing a bird, says “Why is the sky pink?” at sunset, watches water drip and says, “It’s going fast!”, notices a toy is missing and asks where it went, or points out a bug and says, “What’s it doing?”).	Provide hands-on materials for pouring, mixing, and sorting. Encourage children to share discoveries (“You saw the water drip fast—what might happen if we tilt the cup?”). Offer sensory and nature exploration centers (sand, water, magnifiers). Encourage observation and questioning with prompts like, “What do you notice?” or “What’s changing?” Model curiosity aloud.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Asks questions and investigates objects, materials, and events. Uses tools to gather information and make simple predictions.	Engages in hands-on exploration using their senses to investigate how things work, showing curiosity by asking questions, testing ideas, and trying different ways to explore (e.g., asks “What will happen if ...?”, pokes or mixes materials, suggests ideas like “Let’s see if this floats,” or revisits a question to test it again).	Offer loose parts and natural materials for exploration. Encourage repeating investigations and reflecting on results (“What changed when you stirred it?”). Foster curiosity at home by trying kitchen science—melting, freezing, or dissolving. Encourage children to test ideas safely (“Do you think this will float?”). Support revisiting earlier questions to see what they’ve learned.
5 years	Engages in hands-on scientific exploration by making observations, asking simple questions, using tools to collect information, and beginning to compare and contrast findings.	Gathers information through observation and hands-on exploration, using tools like magnifiers, droppers, or ramps to investigate. Asks questions such as “what,” “why,” or “how,” and notice changes over time—like a plant growing, ice melting, or how objects move. Uses their senses to make detailed observations, test ideas, and share findings through drawings, comparisons, or simple explanations.	Engage in extended inquiry by observing insects, growing seeds, or exploring natural materials using basic tools, such as magnifiers and rulers. Children use their senses—sight, touch, smell, and hearing—to notice details (e.g., the smell of pine needles or the feel of tree bark) and are encouraged to ask and explore simple “what” or “why” questions (e.g., “Why is the puddle gone?”). Through hands-on experiences with materials like sand, water, and blocks, children describe outcomes, compare results, and draw simple conclusions (e.g., “What stayed the same? What changed?”). Support learning by guiding documentation through drawings, journals, or digital tools and encouraging children to share their observations and thinking.

Standard 4.16 Life Science

Children develop understanding of and compassion for living things.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Identifies and explores characteristics of living things (plants, animals, and humans) and their basic needs.	May pretend to care for a doll or animal. <i>Example</i> Says, “Dogs need food and water just like me.” Points to a plant and says, “It needs sun to grow.” Waters a class plant and says, “I’m helping it stay alive.” Sorts pictures into “living” and “non-living” categories and explains why.	Include pretend play that mirrors caregiving (feeding baby dolls, caring for toy pets). Explore outdoor spaces to notice and talk about living things (“The flowers are growing—they must like this sunny spot”).



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Recognizes differences between living and non-living things, identifies simple life cycles, and discusses habitats.	<p>May classify things by habitat using found objects, toys or illustrations.</p> <p>Example: Says, “That rock doesn’t move or grow, it’s not alive.” Points to pictures of a butterfly life cycle and says, “First it’s a caterpillar, then a chrysalis, then a butterfly.” Describes a desert habitat: “Snakes live where it’s hot and sandy.” Matches animals to their homes (e.g., bird to nest, fish to water).</p>	<p>Create themed sensory bins (forest, ocean, desert) for habitat sorting. Encourage cause-and-effect thinking (“What happens if the caterpillar doesn’t get leaves to eat?”). Introduce visuals and hands-on materials showing life cycles (frog, butterfly, plant). Guide sorting and classification games (“Let’s put the animals that live in water together”). Support use of new vocabulary—grow, change, habitat, life cycle.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Explores how living things grow and change, identifies their basic needs, recognizes differences between living and non-living things, and begins to understand how living things relate to and depend on their environments.</p>	<p>Observes and describes how living things grow, change, and interact with their environment. Notices and talk about changes over time—such as plants sprouting, animals growing, or trees losing leaves—and may draw or describe these changes. Identifies basic needs of living things (like water, food, and shelter), recognizes simple life cycles (e.g., seed to plant, egg to butterfly), and sorts plants or animals by visible traits like fur, feathers, or leaves. Also understands that young animals and plants resemble their parents but are not exactly the same.</p>	<p>Engage in ongoing investigations by growing plants from seeds or observing caterpillars transform into butterflies, recording their observations through drawings or journals and explaining changes over time. Explore what living things need to survive—like food, water, air, and space—through songs, picture books, and outdoor observations. Children sort and classify objects as living or non-living using classroom items or natural materials, and explain their reasoning (e.g., “It moves and grows, so it’s living”). Guide discussions about environmental interdependence (e.g., “What happens if there’s no rain?”) and support children in describing how plants and animals meet their needs, such as a bird eating seeds or a flower needing sunlight. Comparing “before and after” observations helps children understand growth, change, and the connections between living things and their environment.</p>

Standard 4.17 Physical Science

Children develop an understanding of the physical world (the nature and properties of energy, nonliving matter, and the forces that give order to nature).

Measuring Mud Pies

Story

After a rainy morning, children discover puddles in the outdoor play yard. Ms. Jensen provides bowls, spoons, and measuring cups. “Let’s make mud pies!” she says. Soon, the children are busy comparing amounts—“I have more!” “Mine’s heavier!” Ms. Jensen kneels beside them: “How could we check?” Together, they scoop mud into cups and weigh them on a balance scale. The center director stops by and laughs as one child proudly explains, “We’re scientists and bakers today!”

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses measurement, comparison, and classification to explore properties of materials.

Applies reasoning to predict and test ideas through hands-on inquiry.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how spontaneous, sensory-rich play fosters early math and scientific reasoning. By following children’s curiosity, the educator turns a muddy morning into an investigation of quantity, balance, and observation.

Try It!

Keep “field kits” of clipboards, scales, magnifiers, and measuring tools near outdoor play areas. Encourage educators to capture children’s discoveries and share them in staff meetings as examples of joyful, inquiry-based learning.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Explores the properties of objects and observes simple changes.	<p>May identify, sort or describe objects based on texture, weight, or other physical properties (e.g., “This rock is heavy, but the leaf is light”).</p> <p>Touches objects and describes them as “smooth,” “rough,” “soft,” or “hard.” Places various items in water and notes, “The coin sinks, but the feather floats.”</p> <p>Observes an ice cube melting and comments, “It’s turning into water.”</p>	<p>Provide sensory and science tables with materials of varying textures and weights (rocks, feathers, fabric). Encourage sorting by attributes and descriptive vocabulary (“Which is rough? Which is smooth?”). Model curiosity with open-ended questions (“What do you notice about these two?”). Use daily opportunities for sensory exploration—cooking, laundry, outdoor walks. Encourage descriptive talk (“The towel feels soft,” “The spoon is cold”). Observe melting, freezing, or color-mixing together and name changes.</p>
4 years	Investigates how objects move, explores concepts like force (push and pull), and notices changes in materials (solid to liquid).	<p>May explore and describe how things move and change (e.g., pushes a toy car and observes, “It goes faster when I push harder”).</p> <p>Pulls a wagon and notes the effort needed to move it. Rolls balls of different sizes and compares how far they travel. Mixes cornstarch and water, commenting on the change in texture. Observes butter melting on warm toast and says, “It’s melting into a liquid.”</p>	<p>Set up ramps, pulleys, and rolling objects to explore speed and direction. Introduce words like “push,” “pull,” “fast,” and “slow.” Provide safe materials for observation of change (ice melting, butter softening). Create play-based physics centers—rolling different balls, pulling wagons, or sliding objects down inclines. Encourage experimenting with effort (“What happens if you push harder?”).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Explores how objects move and change, identifies properties like color, shape, and texture, and begins to understand cause and effect through observation and experimentation.</p>	<p>Observes and explores how things move, change, and react, using simple predictions, observations, and descriptive language. May guess what will happen, watch what does happen, and talk about what they notice. Describes objects using words like “color,” “size,” “shape,” and “texture.” Sorts items by physical properties, and explains how things are alike or different. Through hands-on exploration—like rolling balls, mixing substances, or building with blocks—begins to understand cause and effect and share their thinking with others.</p>	<p>Explore early science concepts through guided experiments with ramps, balance scales, and mixtures like baking soda and vinegar, using simple tools, such as measuring cups, droppers, and spoons. Prompt prediction and reasoning (e.g., “What do you think will happen?”), encourage safe experimentation with household materials (like mixing colors or testing textures), and support documentation through drawings or discussion. Children use descriptive words—such as “color,” “size,” “shape,” and “texture”—when observing objects (e.g., “The ball is round and smooth,” or “The leaf is green and bumpy”) and sort items by physical properties like size, shape, or color. They explore movement by pushing, pulling, rolling, or dropping objects (e.g., racing toy cars down ramps) and explain similarities or differences (e.g., “These rocks are both hard, but one is shiny and one is rough”), building observation, comparison, and reasoning skills through hands-on discovery.</p>

Standard 4.18 Earth and Space

Children develop an understanding of the earth and planets.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Notices weather changes and basic environmental features.	Begins to observe and point out objects in the sky, daily weather (e.g., says, “It’s raining—we need our umbrellas!”). Points to the sky and says, “Look, there are clouds today.” Notices wind by observing leaves moving and comments, “The wind is blowing the trees.” Identifies sunny or cloudy conditions during outdoor play. Observes puddles forming after rain and remarks, “The ground is wet now.”	Begin each day with weather discussions. Use visuals (weather charts, photos, or a class weather wheel) and invite children to describe what they see or feel outdoors. Use consistent language: sunny, cloudy, rainy, windy, cold, hot. Incorporate weather observation into outdoor play (“The wind is blowing the trees!”). Provide sensory play linked to weather—spraying water for “rain,” using fans for “wind,” or melting ice cubes for “snow.” Involve children in choosing clothing for the weather (“Do we need a jacket today?”). Encourage noticing natural changes (“The ground is wet after the rain”). Read simple books about the sky, clouds, and seasons.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Identifies simple weather patterns and natural features (mountains, rivers, trees) and discusses how they affect people.	May identify and discuss the world around them and how it impacts them (e.g., says, “It’s always hot in summer and cold in winter.”). Identifies mountains in pictures and says, “People climb those.” Recognizes rivers and comments, “Fish live in the water.” Discusses how trees provide shade on sunny days. Notices that rain makes the ground muddy and says, “We can’t play soccer when it’s muddy.”	Use globe, maps, or photos to introduce landforms and natural features. Prompt connections (“Why do we wear hats when it’s sunny?”). Observe and chart weekly weather to recognize simple patterns. Create collages of mountains, rivers, and forests. Discuss local weather patterns and natural landmarks during walks or field trips. Encourage descriptive talk about the environment (“The river is high after it rained”). Use art or sensory bins to represent features—sand for deserts, pebbles for rivers.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Observes weather patterns and seasonal changes, recognizes differences between day and night, and begins to understand how people and animals adapt to their environments.	Demonstrates early understanding of design and function by planning, building, and explaining how their constructions work—such as building a bridge for a toy car, testing materials for strength, or modifying designs based on results. Selects from available tools and materials (e.g., blocks, tape, scissors) to build or fix something, construct simple structures like towers or bridges using everyday items, and experiment with ways to make them stand, balance, or function as intended. Often collaborates with peers to solve building challenges and explains the purpose of their creations, showing persistence and flexibility as they test ideas and make changes.	Invite children to explore seasonal change and weather patterns by observing and recording daily conditions using drawings, charts, or symbols (e.g., “Today is cloudy and windy”) and tracking long-term changes through photos, temperature charts, or nature journals. They observe local environments like parks or gardens across seasons and discuss how people and animals adapt (e.g., “How do animals stay warm in winter?” or “What do we wear in summer vs. winter?”). Introduce global differences by comparing climates—such as snowy, dry, or tropical regions—and support role-play with props to explore how people use tools like fans, umbrellas, or boots to adapt. Children also compare day and night sky features (sun, moon, stars) and begin to notice simple weather patterns over time (e.g., “It snows in winter”), building awareness of environmental change and human-environment interaction.

Standard 4.19 Engineering

Children develop an understanding of the processes that assist people in designing and building.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Builds structures using blocks and materials. Explores simple tools.	With increasing independence, explores and uses a variety of materials and tools to build, create, and discover how things fit and work together (e.g., stacks blocks to make towers, uses boxes or tubes to build, arranges objects to form bridges or enclosures, or uses simple tools like child-safe hammers during play).	Include construction zones with wooden blocks, cups, and cardboard. Support trial and error and curiosity—“What happens if you add one more block?” or “Can you make it longer?” Provide a variety of building materials (blocks, tubes, recycled boxes, magnets) and tools for exploration. Model descriptive language (“You stacked the blocks to make it taller!”) and encourage safe tool use. Offer guided play prompts (“Can you build something that holds your toy?”).
4 years	Experiments with ways to make structures stronger or taller. Begins problem-solving with tools and materials.	With emerging understanding, uses simple problem-solving and hands-on exploration to figure out how things work and to improve constructions (e.g., adds wider bases to block towers for stability, uses tape or glue to connect materials, selects specific tools to achieve a goal, adjusts designs for better balance, or begins to talk about why some building methods work better than others).	Offer materials of varying weight and texture. Encourage comparison and testing (“Does this tower fall over easily? What can we change?”). Support collaborative building projects with peers. Encourage open-ended engineering play—“Can you build a garage for your car?” Provide materials like tape, glue, and cardboard for reinforcing designs. Discuss real-life examples of construction (“Why do tall buildings have wide bases?”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Engages in simple design and engineering processes by using tools and materials to solve problems and build structures, demonstrating creativity and persistence in creating solutions.	Demonstrates early understanding of design and function by planning, building, and explaining how their constructions work—such as building a bridge for a toy car, testing materials for strength, or modifying designs based on results. Selects from available tools and materials (e.g., blocks, tape, scissors) to build or fix something, constructs simple structures like towers or bridges using everyday items, and experiments with ways to make them stand, balance, or function as intended. Often collaborates with peers to solve building challenges and explains the purpose of their creations, showing persistence and flexibility as they test ideas and make changes.	Engage in early engineering by exploring the design process—planning, building, testing, and revising—through hands-on challenges like “Build a bridge for our animals to cross.” They select from available tools and materials (e.g., blocks, tape, cardboard, scissors) to create simple structures such as towers, bridges, or houses using everyday items like cups, sticks, or recycled boxes. Children are encouraged to draw blueprints, label parts, and explain what their structure is meant to do (e.g., “This bridge is for the cars to cross”). Support persistence and reasoning by asking questions like, “What did you change after testing it?” or “Which material worked best?” and guide children to try different strategies for balance and stability. Sharing and explaining their process helps children build confidence, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Children develop an awareness and understanding of how people interact and relate to each other and the world around them in the past, present, and future.

Standard 4.20 Time (History)

Children develop an understanding of the concept of time, including past, present, and future as they are able to recognize recurring experiences that are part of the daily routine.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Begins to recognize and follow daily routines, use simple time-related words like “today” and “later,” and talk about recent events from their own experiences.	Begins to understand the order of daily events, using time-related cues like “after” or “next” (e.g., “After story, we go outside” or “We eat lunch after play”). Talks about recent experiences, mentioning familiar people, places, or events from the recent past (e.g., “Grandma came yesterday”).	Establish consistent daily routines and use visual schedules. Narrate the sequence of the day (“First circle time, then snack”). Encourage children to recall what they did earlier in the day and what will come next. Use consistent transitions marked by songs or signals. Discuss what’s happening now and what’s next (“We’re cleaning up now, then we’ll go outside”). Encourage simple recall of daily events (“What did we build this morning?”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Identifies parts of the day; uses time-related words like yesterday, today, and tomorrow; recalls past experiences; talks about upcoming events; and begins to notice and discuss family routines and traditions.	Uses simple time-related language to connect events and routines, such as saying, “We eat breakfast in the morning” or “We go to school tomorrow.” Begins to describe personal experiences with some detail and sequence, using words like “and then” or “after that.” Also talks about what will happen next (e.g., “We’re going to the store later”) and shares familiar family routines, like reading before bed.	Mark time with consistent cues (music, lights, or routines). Encourage conversation about recent experiences and upcoming activities (“Yesterday we baked cookies; today we’ll deliver them”). Support storytelling with sequencing words. Facilitate discussions about routines, holidays, or celebrations. Talk about family traditions and routines (“We bake cookies every Sunday”). Use family photos to spark conversations about past events. Introduce simple planning (“Tomorrow we’ll visit Grandpa”).



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Describes events in order and begins to understand the concepts of past, present, and future.</p> <p>Explores personal and community history by recognizing family traditions, historical figures, and comparing past and present experiences.</p>	<p>Retells recent personal or classroom events with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and uses time-related language to describe past and future experiences (e.g., “We went to the park yesterday ... we will go to school tomorrow”). Shares personal history through words, drawings, or simple timelines (e.g., “When I was a baby, I crawled; now I can run”), and talks about how they have grown or changed. Identifies meaningful personal events or family traditions, such as birthdays or holidays, and notices similarities and differences when peers describe their own traditions. Also begins to recognize a few well-known historical figures, like George Washington or Martin Luther King Jr., and connect them to simple facts about their contributions.</p>	<p>Build an understanding of time, personal growth, and community by creating class timelines or memory walls to document shared experiences, using drawings, photos, or artifacts. Guide children in sequencing events and stories (e.g., “What happened first?”), and encourage them to reflect on personal growth (e.g., “When I was a baby, I crawled; now I can run”) using simple timelines or illustrated strips. Children share daily routines and seasonal activities through storytelling, sequencing charts, and drawings, while learning to distinguish past and future (e.g., “We planted seeds last week; we’ll water them again tomorrow”). They explore family traditions, important personal events like birthdays or the first day of school, and are introduced to historical figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr., through books, songs, or community events, connecting them to simple facts (e.g., “MLK helped people be treated fairly”).</p>

Standard 4.21 Places, Regions and Spatial Awareness (Geography)

Children develop an understanding that each place has its own unique characteristics. Children develop an understanding of how they are affected by—and the effect that they can have upon—the world around them.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Identifies common places (home, school, park) and shows awareness of immediate surroundings.	Begins to point to or name familiar places in conversation or pictures (“That’s my school”). May recognize when they arrive at or leave a familiar location.	Encourage talk about familiar places during play (“We’re driving to the park,” “This block can be our school”). Use walks to discuss nearby landmarks and how to get there. Use classroom routines to reinforce location words (“We line up by the door,” “The library center is over here”). Guide children in identifying familiar community places using photo cards or picture books. Create a “community corner” with images of homes, stores, and playgrounds.
4 years	Begins to recognize maps and simple representations of familiar places and notices changes in the environment.	Starts to locate familiar places on a simple map or diagram with support (e.g., “That’s our playground”). Increasingly comments on changes in the environment (“The leaves fell off the tree,” “The blocks are in a different spot”).	Use simple maps in play—treasure maps, block town layouts, or picture-based directions. Encourage observation of environmental changes indoors and outdoors (“The blocks moved—where are they now?”). Provide large classroom maps or floor diagrams showing familiar areas. Guide children to “find” places on maps and draw simple route lines. Compare photos of the playground in different seasons to discuss change over time.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Identifies basic geographic features such as rivers and mountains, recognizes familiar locations like home, school, and neighborhood, and begins to understand that maps are representations of real places.	Begins to recognize and name natural features, such as rivers, lakes, mountains, or hills, in books, pictures, or their surroundings. Understands that maps and globes “show where things are,” and can name or point to familiar places like home, school, or the park. Draws simple maps of known spaces—such as a classroom or playground—using basic symbols or pictures to represent places, and use positional words like “near,” “behind,” or “next to” to describe locations.	Explore early geography concepts through hands-on play with toy landscapes like sand tables, water bins, or small-world scenes, where they build and describe features such as mountains, rivers, and bridges. Using art or blocks, they create their own environments and begin using positional words like “next to,” “behind,” or “far” during play and routines. Introduce maps and globes, helping children recognize symbols and colors (e.g., “The blue is water—like the river we saw on our walk”) and connect them to real-world places. Children are encouraged to point to or name familiar locations—such as home, school, or the park—on classroom displays, walks, or digital maps, and to draw simple maps of familiar spaces like their bedroom or playground, labeling with pictures or symbols (e.g., a swing for the playground, a book for the library), building spatial thinking and real-world connections.

Standard 4.22 The Physical World (Ecology)

Children become mindful of their environment and their interdependence on the natural world; they learn how to care for the environment and why it is important.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Notices and explores nature, plants, and animals.	Points to or comments on animals, plants, rocks, or weather when outdoors. Asks simple questions about animals or plants (“What’s that bug?”).	Plan daily outdoor exploration and encourage noticing details in the environment. Prompt curiosity with open-ended questions (“What do you see on this leaf?”). Use picture books or nature walks to highlight local plants and animals. Provide sensory bins with natural materials (sand, leaves, shells) and engage children in nature-based play. Encourage observation and description (“The flower is yellow—what do you think it smells like?”).
4 years	Understands that people can help take care of nature (recycling, planting trees).	States simple ways people can help nature (“We pick up trash”). Shows care for living things (e.g., gently handling classroom pets or plants).	Engage children in classroom environmental routines—watering plants, composting, or recycling paper. Model care and explain the purpose (“We recycle to help the Earth”). Read books about taking care of nature and discuss how small actions help. Organize group or family activities like planting seeds or picking up outdoor litter. Encourage gentle care for classroom pets or plants.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Learns about conservation, how human actions affect the environment, and simple ways to protect nature.	Explains in simple terms how actions affect nature (“If we throw trash, animals can get hurt”). Suggests ways to protect the environment (turning off lights, saving water, recycling).	Support inquiry-based projects about conservation—sorting recyclables, measuring water use, or observing effects of pollution in sensory experiments. Guide discussions connecting cause and effect (“How does recycling help animals?”). Facilitate nature projects that show responsibility, such as caring for plants over time or cleaning up outdoor spaces. Encourage critical thinking (“What could we do to keep the park clean?”).

Standard 4.23 Technology

Children become aware of technological tools and explore and learn the ways to use these resources in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
3 years	Explores and uses simple tools and materials during play, including beginning use of basic technology (e.g., selects a digital story or uses a drawing app with support).	Is able to draw a picture using a computer touch screen or talk to a family member using a phone.	Offer simple, interactive tools (light switches, magnifiers, calculators, or tablets with supervised use). Support exploration through questioning (“What happens when you press that?”). Use technology with children to explore learning apps, photos, or videos. Link technology to real-life concepts (“We pressed the button to call Grandma”). Encourage curiosity but emphasize safe, shared use.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
4 years	Uses simple technology tools to complete tasks or explore ideas with growing purpose.	Selects and uses tools or devices (such as blocks, pencils, or a tablet) to complete a task or solve a problem, showing a growing understanding that technology (tool) helps make tasks easier.	Offer opportunities to choose between materials—puzzles, books, or digital story time. Encourage purposeful use (“Let’s use the camera to take a picture of your tower!”). Discuss how tools help us work, learn, or communicate. Reinforce that technology is one of many tools for learning and creating. Support balanced technology engagement—using a tablet to read stories or draw pictures. Model setting healthy limits for screen time.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Begins to understand how technology helps people by exploring simple digital tools to create and complete tasks, recognizes the importance of keeping personal information private, and identifies ways technology can make tasks easier.</p>	<p>Begins to understand and explain simple purposes of technology (e.g., “The phone lets us talk to Grandma”), and with support, explore and use basic tools like tablets, calculators, or digital cameras. Creates simple digital products such as drawings, photos, or voice recordings, and chooses appropriate tools with guidance to complete tasks. Also begins to understand digital safety by learning that personal information—like their name or address—should not be shared with strangers.</p>	<p>Explore creative and purposeful uses of technology by engaging in projects like recording class songs, taking photos of science observations, or creating digital storybooks. Guide children in reflecting on how technology helps them share their work and connect with others (e.g., “How did technology help us show our butterfly project?”), while emphasizing responsible use (e.g., “We use technology to learn and create, not just to watch”). Children learn that people design and use technology to solve problems and are encouraged to identify tools that help with everyday tasks, such as calculators, tablets, or digital cameras. With support, they choose appropriate tools to complete simple tasks—like using a drawing app to illustrate a story or a camera to capture a block creation. Through role-play, puppets, or digital stories, children also learn to protect personal information (e.g., name, address, passwords) and understand that it should not be shared with strangers, building both digital creativity and safety awareness.</p>

Introduction to Kindergarten to Third Grade

Ages 5 to 8

*Transition Into Kindergarten and Early Elementary Grades
Use Alongside K-3 Benchmarks, Indicators, and Suggested
Learning Opportunities*

As children move into the primary grades (K–3), steady relationships and predictable routines anchor a sense of belonging while they take on more complex learning, collaborative work, and increasing independence. This guidance supports families, caregivers, home visitors, and educators in planning a smooth transition and navigating the first six weeks of school.

- **Developmental continuity (from preschool):** Children carry forward classroom community and a sense of belonging, play- and inquiry-based habits, foundational literacy and numeracy, and self-regulation strategies that help them plan, persist, and reflect. Familiar routines (morning meetings, visual schedules, turn-and-talk, centers/workshops) continue to provide structure, while growing stamina allows for longer periods of focused learning. Growth remains individualized—skills emerge along different timelines—so instruction draws on prior strengths, interests, and family knowledge.
- **New opportunities in this age band:** Grades K–3 invite deeper comprehension and discussion, multi-step problem-solving, and longer projects that connect reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and the arts. Children expand



writing (ideas, organization, conventions), build math understanding (place value, addition/subtraction, early multiplication/division, measurement, data, geometry), and engage in hands-on inquiry and design. Executive-function routines (plan–do–review, goal-setting, self-monitoring) and collaboration structures (roles, think–pair–share, small-group investigations) strengthen independence, responsibility, and peer learning. Place-based experiences—including IEFA-aligned inquiry—help children connect new ideas to community, land, language, and history.

- **Partnership actions (families and professionals together):** A smooth K–3 journey grows from regular two-way communication and shared goal-setting. Teams hold end-of-year handoff conversations (K→1, 1→2, 2→3) using child portfolios, work samples, and brief MELs-aligned notes to highlight strengths, supports, and next steps. Families are invited to co-design simple home routines (daily reading, math-in-life, talk about school), share resources, and partner on strategies that support attention, organization, and confidence. When applicable, IEP/504 goals and classroom supports are reviewed together so services are embedded in everyday learning; multilingual learners receive home-language bridges alongside English development, with family stories and words woven into classroom talk and texts.

Transition Considerations

- **Before transition (end of year/summer):** Hold a brief handoff meeting (K→1, 1→2, 2→3) using the child’s portfolio, work samples, and MELs-aligned notes; preview classroom

routines and a simple daily schedule; offer a classroom visit or virtual tour; identify a buddy/mentor; share a short family survey (“About Us,” languages, strengths, hopes); confirm two-way communication.

- **First six weeks (start of school):** Use a soft launch focused on belonging (morning meetings, community norms); keep predictable routines and visual supports; embed light diagnostics in authentic tasks (read-aloud talk, writing samples, math talks); introduce plan–do–review and goal-setting; monitor engagement, regulation, and stamina; share weekly strengths-based updates with families and adjust supports as needed.
- From kindergarten to grades 1–3 (and between grades 1→2, 2→3): Bridge familiar structures (meeting routines, center/workshop time, calm/cool-down spaces); carry forward interests and strategies that worked; build independence with classroom jobs and collaborative roles; expand inquiry projects that connect reading, writing, math, science, social studies, arts, and place-based learning.

Age-related guidance provided in the section is a reference, not a requirement—use a child’s developmental readiness and family knowledge to individualize care.

Commonality

The journey through the primary grades is a period of remarkable growth and change. During these years, children follow predictable patterns of development as they refine their social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Between ages 5 and 8, children strengthen

their ability to read, write, reason mathematically, and engage in increasingly complex play and problem-solving. This stage represents a critical period of consolidating the foundations of brain architecture established in the early years, while also building the stamina and skills required for later schooling. Development is rapid and continuous; what began in preschool is extended and deepened through the early grades. The ladder of grade-level content standards reflects these predictable milestones, providing a clear structure for academic expectations across K–3. At the same time, the window of developmental opportunity reminds us that growth is not uniform, and that children of the same age may demonstrate a wide range of skills across domains such as Emotional Social, Physical, Communication, and Cognition.

Individuality

Even as children share broad developmental milestones, each child between ages 5 and 8 expresses growth in unique ways. Some thrive in group problem-solving while others prefer independent exploration. Children bring distinct interests, strengths, and identities into the classroom, drawing from their families, languages, and communities. The window image underscores this individuality, illustrating that within any age group, children demonstrate wide variation in how skills emerge and consolidate. For educators, this variability is a reminder to deepen their understanding of each child through observation, listening, and meaningful partnerships with families. Differences in pace, background, and ability are not deficits but assets—diverse ways of knowing and learning that enrich classroom communities and shape responsive instruction.

Context

Children’s development in grades K–3 is inseparable from the environments in which they live, learn, and grow. Family practices, community traditions, language, ability, and lived experiences all shape how children engage with school and learning. Educators have a responsibility to examine their teaching practices so all children have opportunities. Classrooms that honor children and their lived experiences foster belonging and resilience, helping children build the confidence to thrive academically and socially. In Montana, this includes a commitment to the IEFA mandate. When viewed together, the ladder and window illustrate how the MELS integrate both structure and context.



The Ladder and the Window: Complementary Views of Children’s Development

The accompanying illustrations highlight two complementary approaches to understanding children’s development. The ladder on the left represents Montana’s public school content standards, with each rung marking a grade-level benchmark from kindergarten through third grade. This ladder reflects the linear organization of academic expectations. In contrast, the window

on the right conveys developmental “windows of opportunity” spanning ages 4 through 8. Growth is not uniform—children of the same age may demonstrate a wide range of skills across domains such as language, cognition, and emotional social learning. Together, these images underscore how content standards and the Montana Early Learning Standards (MELS) work in tandem: The ladder provides benchmarks, while the window affirms developmental variability and individual pathways of growth.

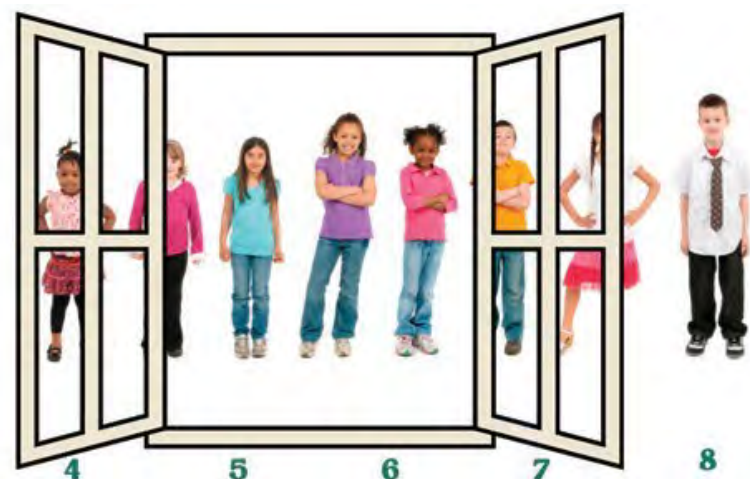


Image description: The ladder shows grade-level benchmarks (K–3 content standards), while the window highlights developmental variation from ages 4 to 8. Together, they illustrate how the MELS align academic expectations with individual pathways of growth.

DEVELOPMENT 5 TO 8 YEARS

Emotional Social

Between the ages of 5 and 8, children deepen their emotional awareness and social connections—learning to manage feelings, show empathy, and navigate friendships. As they grow, they become more attuned to fairness, group dynamics, and the perspectives of others, building resilience and a stronger sense of responsibility through shared experiences.

Physical

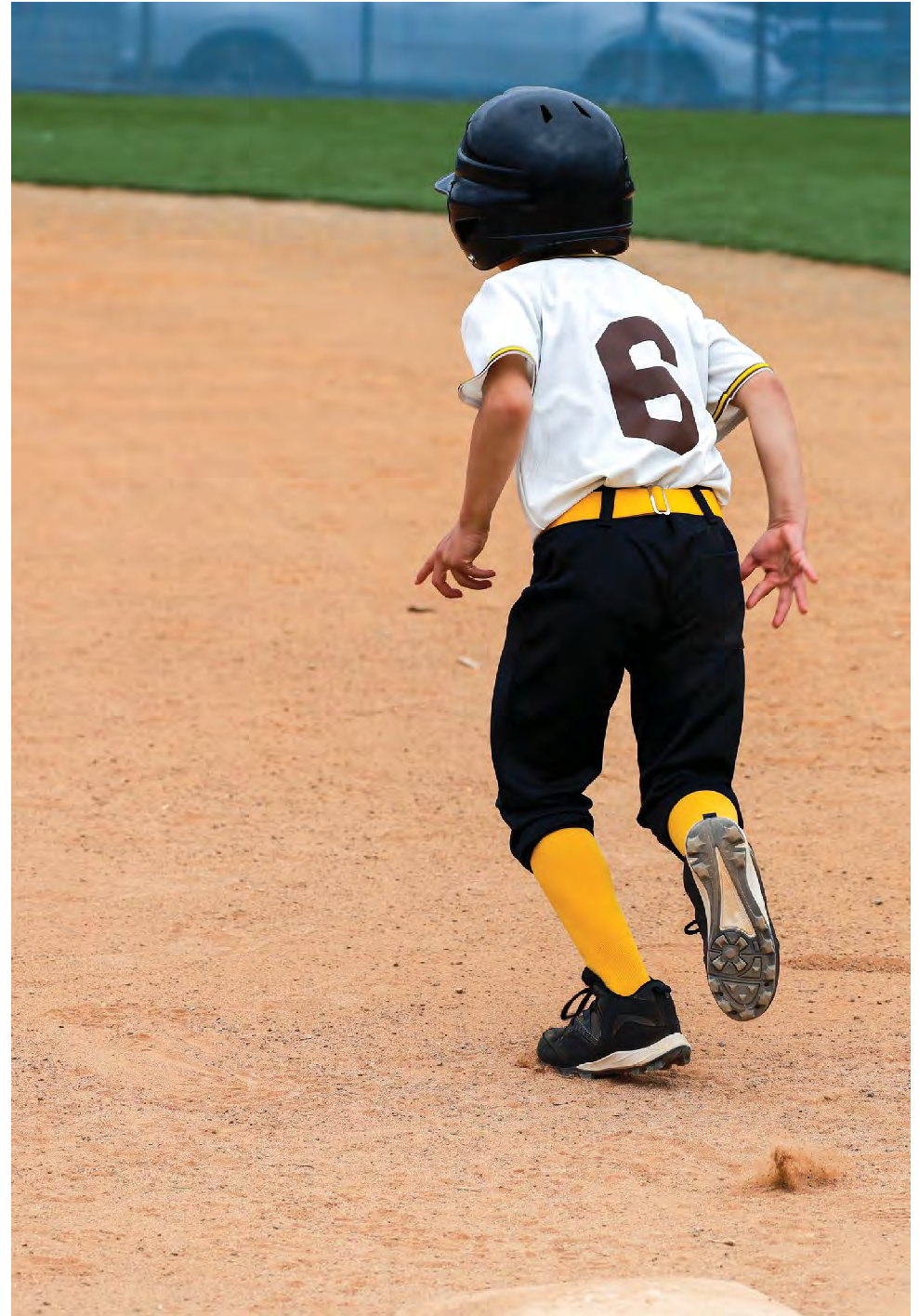
K–3 children refine both gross and fine motor skills. They use balance, coordination, and stamina to explore their environment through games, play, and physical education. Increasing dexterity supports handwriting, art, and the use of tools and technology.

Communication

Oral language flourishes as children engage in more complex conversations, storytelling, and explanations of their thinking. Vocabulary grows rapidly, supporting reading comprehension and written expression. Multilingual learners may move fluidly across languages, enriching classroom dialogue.

Cognition

Children approach new learning tasks with curiosity and a growing ability to plan, problem-solve, and persist. They begin to apply logic, connect ideas across domains, and engage in imaginative and critical thinking. These capacities are strengthened when classrooms blend play, inquiry, and purposeful instruction.



Core Domain 1: Emotional and Social

Ages 5 - 8



CULTURE, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

Culture may be broadly defined as the quality in a person or society that is based on shared behaviors, beliefs, traditions, and values. As children interact with their families and communities, they develop a feeling of belonging and begin to recognize and understand the value of differences among people. This awareness leads to an appreciation of differences and builds skills for interacting effectively with others.

Standard 1.1 Culture

Children develop an awareness of and appreciation for similarities and differences between themselves and others.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates awareness and understanding of their own background, traditions, and experiences, while increasingly recognizing and appreciating the unique qualities, perspectives, and traditions of others.	Expresses themselves through play, art, and everyday interactions by sharing aspects of their own background—such as drawing a family celebration or pretending to cook a favorite meal—and by showing respect for others' experiences. Recognizes and talks about how classmates' abilities, interests, or traditions may be different from their own, and engages in kind, welcoming behaviors during group activities.	Invite families to share meaningful traditions, stories, songs, and poems—either in person or through video/audio recordings—to help children learn about different ways people live and celebrate. Create a rotating “Community Connections Corner,” where children can display drawings, photos, or objects that reflect their family’s experiences and interests. Use this space to spark conversations and guide imaginative play where children practice welcoming others, taking turns, and showing kindness and curiosity about one another’s experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>6 years</i>	Recognizes and describes their connection to different communities and can talk about what makes those communities unique with increasing detail and specificity.	Recognizes and names the communities and traditions they are part of (family, language, celebrations) and shares specific examples of how these shape their experiences, values, and perspectives.	<p>Build connection boxes where children collect and present items (photos, foods, music, stories) reflecting their family traditions in classrooms, libraries, or community centers.</p> <p>Facilitate short dramatic skits in classrooms, on outdoor stages, or through digital recordings that model respectful curiosity about classmates' routines and traditions.</p>
<i>7 years</i>	Recognizes the connections between words, gestures, and emotions and how they vary based on context, background, and relationships.	Explains how tone of voice, body language, and word choice can communicate different emotions or intentions, and identifies how these signals might differ across settings.	<p>Use charades to highlight how communication styles differ across personal, social, and group experiences in classrooms, on playgrounds, or during community events.</p> <p>Engage children in literature circles with diverse texts in classrooms, libraries, or digital spaces, and invite them to dramatize scenes showing how characters communicate feelings differently.</p> <p>Practice role-playing conversations using varied "tones" in partner games, outdoor group work, or digital role-play spaces to experiment with how emotions are conveyed.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Recognizes and explores differing perspectives across groups, appreciating the richness of multiple contributions.	Compares and contrasts perspectives, traditions, or values across different environments or social groups and discusses how broad viewpoints and lived experiences enrich the classroom and community.	<p>Guide children to design and present group projects (like a “Shared Traditions Showcase”) that explore and compare customs, foods, or celebrations, emphasizing how a range of experiences contributes to community connection.</p> <p>Facilitate classroom debates in circle format in classrooms, outdoor spaces, or digital spaces where children weigh perspectives and discuss fair and inclusive solutions.</p>



Standard 1.2 Family

Children develop an awareness of the functions, contributions, and varied characteristics of family.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates self-awareness by describing their role within their family, identifying family members and their responsibilities, and recognizing familiar routines and traditions at home. Begins to understand how their contributions and relationships are part of a larger family structure.	Describes who lives in their home and talks about the roles and responsibilities of family members, including their own contributions—such as setting the table, feeding a pet, or comforting a sibling. Shares familiar routines and traditions with growing detail, showing pride in how they help and participate in family life.	Support children’s learning about families by creating drawings or collages of the people in their home, describing each person’s role (e.g., “My dad fixes things” or “My sister reads to me”). Use storytelling during drawing (e.g., “Let’s draw brother, who likes to play with you”) and invite children to share favorite family routines or traditions—like bedtime stories or taco night—using open-ended questions to reflect on what makes their family special.
6 years	Describes their own family structure and roles in greater detail. Begins to identify routines and traditions.	Identifies members of their family and describes each person’s role and responsibilities, providing examples of daily routines and family traditions they participate in.	Use Venn diagrams in small groups in classrooms, libraries, or digital spaces to compare family celebrations, then dramatize a classmate’s tradition through pretend play or outdoor performances. Facilitate partner interviews about family routines during classroom projects, family nights, or community events, and recreate them in block play, dramatic play centers, or digital storytelling spaces.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Compares and contrasts their family routines, roles, and celebrations with those of others, showing awareness and respect for a variety of ways people live and experience family life.	Describes similarities and differences between their family’s routines, roles, and celebrations and those of classmates, showing respect for and curiosity about diverse ways of living.	<p>Guide children to develop timeline posters that map family role changes (e.g., new sibling, grandparents moving in) in classrooms, homes, or community spaces.</p> <p>Encourage children to act out skits showing how roles shift within families and communities, using dramatic play centers, outdoor role-play, or digital recordings.</p> <p>Facilitate partner interviews about family routines in classrooms, at home, or during community-based projects, and recreate them in block play, dramatic play, or library makerspaces.</p>
8 years	Explains how family roles and responsibilities may change over time and vary across cultures and communities. Uses specific examples to show understanding.	Describes how family roles can shift due to changes like aging, new family members, or traditions, and provides examples from their own experience or classroom discussions to show understanding of these changes across different communities.	<p>Read picture books featuring shifting family dynamics in classrooms, libraries, or community reading circles, and prompt children to connect stories to their own lives.</p> <p>Support children in creating puppet shows that retell these stories, weaving in personal family experiences during classroom performances, community showcases, or in digital spaces.</p>

Standard 1.3 Community

Children develop an understanding of the basic principles of how communities function, including work roles and commerce.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates community-building skills.	Shares toys and supplies, waits for their turn when playing with others, and says or does kind things, such as helping a friend or giving a compliment.	Assign children responsibilities that require cooperation, such as setting up a learning center, setting the table for snack time, cleaning up after an activity, or building a common structure in the block area.
6 years	<i>The Benchmark, Indicators, and Learning Opportunities have been integrated with the age band criteria within the Cognition domain to streamline interpretation.</i>		
7 years			
8 years			



Standard 1.4 Self Concept

Children develop an awareness and appreciation of themselves as unique, competent, and capable individuals.

Kindness Captains

Story

Principal Daniels visits Mrs. Hall’s kindergarten class during their morning meeting. Together, they introduce a new idea—Kindness Captains. Each week, two children help notice and celebrate kind actions around the school. During recess, Ella spots a friend helping another zip up their coat and eagerly writes it on the “Kindness Board.” Later, the principal returns to read a few aloud during announcements: “Ella noticed that Aiden helped a friend!” The classroom bursts into applause. The children beam, knowing their kindness was seen and valued.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates empathy, cooperation, and responsible decision-making in daily interactions.

Recognizes and celebrates positive social behaviors within the school community.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates the partnership between educator and school leadership in reinforcing prosocial behavior through joyful recognition. By co-creating routines that elevate kindness, the school models a culture of belonging and emotional literacy.

Try It!

Partner with leadership to launch a “Kindness in Action” initiative—child-led recognitions, bulletin boards, or morning shout-outs that make social–emotional skills visible and celebrated schoolwide.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Recognizes themselves as a unique individual with their own abilities, emotions, characteristics, and interests. Identifies and expresses feelings with growing independence, begins using simple coping strategies, and follows learning environment rules with adult support while participating in group settings.	Describe interests, abilities, and emotions with increasing detail—such as saying, “I’m good at running” or “I feel nervous when it’s loud.” Recognizes and names basic emotions in themselves and others, and begins to use simple strategies, such as deep breathing or taking a break to manage their feelings, with occasional support from adults.	Offer meaningful choices and ask open-ended questions (e.g., “What do you like about the snack you picked?” or “Why did you choose that toy?”). Guide children in playful calm-down challenges—such as deep breathing, yoga poses, or stretching—during classroom time, outdoor play, or community wellness events. Facilitate puppet role-plays in settings like classrooms, libraries, or digital spaces, where characters model strategies such as taking a break or using a feelings chart.
6 years	Identifies a broader range of emotions, relates them to past and present experiences, and begins to manage their feelings and behaviors with increasing independence.	Describes a variety of emotions (e.g., frustrated, proud, nervous) and explains what caused them in past or current situations. Chooses and uses strategies such as journaling, asking for help, or using calming tools with minimal adult prompting.	Encourage children to journal or draw about a time they felt nervous, proud, or frustrated in classrooms, at home, or outdoors, then share coping strategies with a peer. Lead “Feelings Detective” games in classrooms, outdoor spaces, or community gatherings where children guess emotions based on body language and tone of voice.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Demonstrates growing ability to manage emotions in different situations.</p> <p>Reflects on feelings and adjusts behavior accordingly.</p>	<p>Identifies feelings in real-time, reflects on how those emotions affect behavior, and makes appropriate adjustments (e.g., walking away from conflict, using positive self-talk) to maintain focus and cooperation in class.</p>	<p>Use an “emotion wheel” during real-time play conflicts in classrooms, on playgrounds, or in afterschool programs, and support children in selecting strategies such as walking away or using positive self-talk.</p> <p>Facilitate cooperative board games in classrooms, homes, or libraries, and prompt children to reflect on how frustration, excitement, or disappointment shaped their play choices.</p>
8 years	<p>Shows strong self-control and emotional awareness.</p> <p>Considers multiple strategies to manage emotions and supports peers in using them.</p>	<p>Demonstrates consistent emotional awareness and self-control across varied situations, selects from a range of strategies to manage strong feelings, and offers suggestions or support to help classmates manage their emotions constructively.</p>	<p>Invite children to lead mindfulness activities (visualization, stretching) for peers in classrooms, outdoor wellness circles, or digital morning meetings.</p> <p>Guide small groups in classrooms, libraries, or makerspaces to design posters or digital strategy cards with calming tools and teach them to classmates through role-play or presentations.</p>

Standard 1.5 Self Efficacy

Children demonstrate a belief in their abilities.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Develops an awareness and appreciation of themselves as a unique, competent, and capable individual, and demonstrates growing confidence in their abilities.	Demonstrates increasing awareness of personal preferences, abilities, and accomplishments. Begins to take initiative, persist in tasks, and express pride in efforts and achievements, showing confidence in trying new or challenging activities.	Engage children in a “Try-It Station” where they choose from new or challenging tasks (e.g., buttoning a shirt, building a tall tower, or drawing a self-portrait), take initiative to start and stick with the activity (e.g., “I’m going to try again”), and share their accomplishments with others (e.g., “Look what I made!”), building confidence, persistence, and awareness of their own abilities and preferences.
6 years	Recognizes how emotions influence thoughts, behavior, and choices; applies internal strategies to manage emotions across settings; reflects on personal strengths and areas for growth; and builds positive peer relationships through empathy, perspective-taking, and responsible decision-making.	With increasing independence, identifies personal strengths, interests, and emotions; demonstrates persistence and pride in learning; uses words and creative expression to manage and communicate feelings; applies self-regulation strategies across settings; adjusts behavior based on context and feedback; and shows empathy and perspective, taking in peer interactions and recognizing how emotions influence behavior and choices.	Have children take on a “Challenge of the Day” (e.g., building, writing, or solving a puzzle), identify their emotions (e.g., “I felt frustrated but kept trying”), use self-regulation strategies (e.g., deep breathing, positive self-talk), respond to feedback (e.g., “I changed my idea after my partner’s suggestion”), and show empathy by encouraging peers (e.g., “Great job sticking with it!”), building confidence, persistence, and social awareness.
7 years			
8 years			

Standard 1.6 Self Regulation

Children manage their internal states, feelings, and behavior and develop the ability to adapt to a variety of situations and environments.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Manages actions, words, and behavior with increasing independence by following rules and routines, using words to express feelings, staying focused on tasks for short periods, and beginning to control impulses with occasional adult support.	Uses words to express feelings and needs, demonstrates self-control by waiting for a turn during games or activities, follows familiar rules and routines (such as putting toys away), and begins to adjust behavior in response to the environment—such as slowing down when moving too quickly indoors.	Play games, such as Simon Says or Freeze Dance, where children are challenged to control impulse and hold information in mind and use it to perform tasks.
6 years	Demonstrates growing self-awareness and emotional regulation by recognizing how emotions influence behavior and choices.	Shows increasing self-awareness by identifying emotions and how they influence behavior. Begins to use internal strategies (such as deep breathing, counting, or positive self-talk) to manage strong feelings. Demonstrates growing empathy by recognizing others' emotions and perspectives, and begins to use words and problem-solving skills to resolve peer conflicts and make fair choices.	Have children explore emotions through short stories and role-play, identifying how characters feel (e.g., left out or frustrated), how those feelings affect behavior (e.g., yelling or walking away), and practicing calming strategies (e.g., deep breathing, counting). They then act out empathetic responses and fair solutions (e.g., “You can join us” or “Let’s take turns”), building self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution skills.
7 years			
8 years			

Standard 1.7 Emotional Expression

Children express a wide and varied range of feelings through their facial expressions, gestures, behaviors, and words.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Learns to adapt to new environments and diverse situations by showing appropriate emotions and behaviors, with guidance as needed.	Visits a new playground and may feel shy at first, but with support from a caregiver or trusted adult, begins to explore the equipment, play with other kids, and feel comfortable and have fun.	Anticipate what might happen in a new situation and provide reassurance that will help children manage emotions. Do not try to change the child's feelings but rather listen/validate the feelings and then support them.
6 years	Develops an awareness and appreciation of themselves as a unique, competent, and capable individual; demonstrates confidence in their abilities; expresses a wide range of emotions in varied ways; and begins to manage their feelings and behaviors while adapting to diverse situations and environments.	Shows increasing self-awareness by identifying emotions and how they influence behavior; begins to use internal strategies (such as deep breathing, counting, or positive self-talk) to manage strong feelings. Demonstrates growing empathy by recognizing others' emotions and perspectives, and begins to use words and problem-solving skills to resolve peer conflicts and make fair choices.	Children participate in a "Feelings and Fix-It Circle," where they identify emotions (e.g., "I felt frustrated when I lost the game"), practice calming strategies (e.g., deep breathing, counting to 10, or saying "I can try again"), recognize how others feel (e.g., noticing a friend is sad and asking, "Are you okay?"), and work together to solve problems with words (e.g., "Let's take turns" or "How can we both be happy?"), which helps build self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution skills.
7 years			
8 years			

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Development is the increasing understanding that children gain of themselves and others, and includes their emerging ability to build positive relationships with others.



Standard 1.8 Interaction with Adults

Children show trust, develop emotional bonds, and interact comfortably with adults.

The Bridge Builders

Story

In Ms. Thompson’s first-grade classroom at Prairie Winds Elementary, children gather for morning meeting to talk about what it means to be part of a classroom community. The class includes children from many backgrounds, including several from the Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) and Sioux (Dakota) tribes. Today’s design challenge is to build a bridge using blocks and natural materials, like sticks and stones collected during a nature walk near the Milk River.

During small-group time, two children—Talia, a Gros Ventre child, and Jace, who is Sioux—disagree about how to begin. Talia wants to build a wide, low bridge like the ones she’s seen near her family’s ranch. Jace wants to make a tall arch, inspired by a traditional story his grandfather told about crossing rivers during buffalo hunts. Their voices rise as they each try to explain.

Ms. Thompson kneels beside them and listens carefully. “You both have strong ideas,” she says. “What do you think might happen if we combine them?” Talia sketches a sturdy base, and Jace adds an arching top. They work together, testing and adjusting. When their bridge stands strong, they cheer and high-five. Later, they proudly present it to the class, explaining

how they blended both ideas—and how their bridge is “stronger together.”

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates respect for individual differences and collaborates with peers to solve problems constructively.

Identifies emotions in self and others and uses strategies to manage frustration or conflict.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how honoring family perspectives and encouraging collaboration builds both emotional social and cognitive skills. Ms. Thompson’s approach—listening, validating, and guiding—helps children navigate conflict and celebrate shared success. The inclusion of natural materials and personal connections deepens engagement and meaning.

Try It!

Incorporate materials and design ideas that reflect children’s families and regional experiences. Use collaborative projects to explore problem-solving and emotional regulation. Encourage children to share stories or traditions that inspire their ideas, building bridges in individual and shared learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Engages with trusted adults to share ideas, interests, and seek support, while also participating in group activities where they begin to follow rules with guidance. Uses basic problem-solving skills to resolve peer conflicts, shows respect in interactions, responds to others' emotions, and builds early friendships through cooperative play.	Engages in meaningful conversations with trusted adults—such as sharing daily experiences or reflecting on past events—and participates in group activities with growing independence. Follows rules with occasional reminders, takes turns, expresses empathy, and uses respectful language and actions while building early friendships and practicing in cooperative play.	Encourage children to build social skills by offering simple turn-taking games, structured group play like Simon Says or Freeze Tag, and collaborative activities such as block-building or group art to promote listening, cooperation, and inclusion.
6 years	Responds to emotional cues, engages in cooperative play, and begins to form reciprocal friendships through social conversations and emerging perspective-taking skills.	Responds to peers' emotions with empathy and simple supportive actions, engages in cooperative play with shared goals, and begins to form reciprocal friendships through social conversations and emerging perspective-taking.	Facilitate simple class meetings in classrooms, outdoor circles, or digital check-ins where children suggest rules or routines and vote on activity ideas, building ownership and responsibility. Guide children in short partner or small-group activities in classrooms, playgrounds, or family settings that require sharing roles and solving problems collaboratively.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Demonstrates teamwork, empathy, and collaboration in peer interactions. Begins to resolve social conflicts independently, understand the consequences of actions, and take responsibility for mistakes.	Demonstrates teamwork and empathy by collaborating flexibly with peers, listening and sharing ideas, supporting inclusion, and resolving most conflicts fairly and independently; acknowledges mistakes, accepts responsibility, and considers the consequences of actions.	<p>Encourage children to engage in “think–pair–share” activities in classrooms, outdoor projects, or library groups, then extend with cooperative dramatic play where they solve social dilemmas together.</p> <p>Rotate leadership roles in long-term projects (e.g., tending the school garden, contributing to a class newsletter, creating digital presentations) so children practice balancing leading and following.</p>
8 years	Demonstrates confidence and independence in group settings by leading and following appropriately, applying moral reasoning, considering others’ perspectives, and making ethical decisions that balance personal goals with the needs of the group.	Shows growing confidence and independence in group settings by choosing when to lead or follow, beginning to explain decisions using fairness or kindness, and starting to consider others’ ideas when making choices that support both the group and their own goals.	<p>Support children in planning and carrying out service-learning projects (e.g., toy or food drives, community clean-ups) where they assign roles, collaborate on tasks, and reflect on fairness and teamwork in classroom, community, or digital spaces.</p> <p>Facilitate group discussions in classrooms, outdoor spaces, or community forums where children evaluate multiple perspectives and negotiate fair solutions in decision-making.</p>

Standard 1.9 Interaction with Peers

Children interact and build relationships with peers as they expand their world beyond the family and develop skills in cooperation, negotiation, and showing empathy.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Builds trusting relationships with adults and forms deeper, more complex friendships with peers, demonstrating growing skills in cooperation, negotiation, empathy, and perspective-taking as they navigate social interactions beyond the family.	Builds trusting relationships with adults (e.g., seeking advice or comfort when needed) and forms deeper, more complex friendships with peers (e.g., choosing to play with close friends). Demonstrates growing skills in cooperation (e.g., working together on group projects), negotiation (e.g., discussing and agreeing on game rules), empathy (e.g., recognizing and responding to a friend's feelings), and perspective-taking (e.g., understanding another child's point of view during conflicts) as they navigate social interactions beyond the family.	Have children work together to create a pretend town called "Friendship Town," where they decide what places to include (a school, a park, a fire station), take turns choosing jobs (builder, designer, speaker), and talk about how people in the town help each other (cheering up a sad friend, agreeing on playground rules). Children build friendships, work as a team, solve problems together, and understand how others feel.
6 years			
7 years			
8 years			

Core Domain 2: Physical

Ages 5 - 8



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical development is the progression of children’s bodily growth and health as well as the emerging ability to use their bodies with increasing purpose, skill, and control.

Standard 2.1 Fine Motor Skills

Children develop small muscle strength, coordination, and skills.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Uses writing and art tools with growing strength, control, and purpose to create detailed and meaningful work.	Uses a variety of writing and art tools with increasing precision and independence—forming most uppercase and lowercase letters legibly, cutting along curved and zigzag lines accurately, and using tools like glue sticks, paintbrushes, and hole punchers with control and intent to complete more complex creative tasks.	Engage children in daily routines and creative activities that strengthen fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. For example, invite them to set the table, zip jackets, or button clothing during transitions; offer opportunities to cut along lines or shapes during art projects like masks or collages; and provide materials such as interlocking cubes, LEGO®, or snap beads to build hand strength. Encourage threading beads, buttons, or pasta to make jewelry or patterns during craft time at home, in classrooms, or at community events.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Refines pencil grip and control. Manipulates small objects with increasing dexterity.	Maintains an efficient pencil grip and demonstrates increasing accuracy and automaticity in drawing, tracing, and independently writing uppercase and lowercase letters; manipulates small objects (e.g., buttons, beads, cubes) with refined control; and creates multi-step art or writing projects with attention to detail and planning.	<p>Encourage children to form letters, trace stencils, and fold origami animals in classroom writing centers, library makerspaces, or community art clubs to refine hand control.</p> <p>Introduce fine-motor games (tweezer races, pom-pom sorting, clothespin challenges) in classrooms, outdoor play areas, or during family game nights to build finger strength.</p>
7 years	Uses fine motor skills for detailed tasks.	Uses fine motor coordination to complete more complex tasks, such as writing full sentences within lines, cutting curved shapes, or threading small beads or laces; prints uppercase and lowercase letters with automaticity and accuracy; and begins to develop cursive writing skills.	<p>Support children in practicing cursive or detailed printing through journaling, note-taking during outdoor observations, or creative writing in community programs.</p> <p>Guide children in small model-making or diorama construction projects requiring precise cutting, gluing, and assembly in classroom makerspaces, outdoor STEM challenges, or library craft workshops.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Demonstrates precision in fine motor tasks.	Displays accuracy and control in fine motor tasks that require precision and endurance, such as cursive writing, shading in drawings, or constructing small, detailed models.	<p>Encourage children to create detailed illustrations, shading, or comic strips in classroom art projects, outdoor sketching activities, or digital design spaces to develop endurance and accuracy.</p> <p>Provide extended opportunities for fine-motor precision through multi-step projects, such as science models, class newspapers, or community displays that require sustained effort and accuracy.</p>



Standard 2.2 Gross Motor Skills

Children develop large muscle strength, coordination, and skills.

Jump Rope Journal

Story

During recess at Cottonwood Elementary, a group of second graders are learning to jump rope together. Kayla, who does not have a disability, struggles to time her jumps, often stopping the rhythm. Instead of giving up, she watches her peers carefully, counting softly to the beat. Her classmate Max, who uses a prosthetic leg, joins in with a modified jump—swinging the rope slower and hopping with one foot. “Try saying one-two-jump like me!” he encourages. Kayla nods and tries again. After a few attempts, she succeeds and beams with pride. Max gives her a thumbs-up, and they both laugh.

Back in class, Ms. Ellis invites children to write or draw in their “movement journals” about something they practiced and improved today. Kayla sketches her jump rope and writes, “I didn’t stop. I kept trying.” Max draws himself jumping with one leg and writes, “I made my own way to jump.”

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates coordination and balance while participating in structured and unstructured physical activities.
Identifies how practice improves strength, skill, and confidence.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive physical play supports

persistence, creativity, and self-efficacy. By encouraging adaptations and peer support, Ms. Ellis fosters a classroom culture where all children—regardless of ability—can participate, reflect, and grow.

Try It!

Incorporate “movement reflections” after physical play. Ask: “What did your body learn today?” Encourage children to share different ways they move or adapt. This builds awareness of progress, celebrates diverse abilities, and links physical skill with emotional and cognitive growth.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates strength, coordination, and body awareness by identifying and performing basic locomotor movements (e.g., hopping, galloping, walking) with control. Moves safely and confidently through spaces during active play, distinguishing between personal and general space.	Demonstrates body control and spatial awareness by moving safely and confidently through spaces—walking, running, hopping, and galloping with emerging coordination. Follows movement directions such as “over,” “under,” or “around.” Adjusts speed and direction during play, and uses strength to push, pull, climb, or stretch. Begins and stops movement on cue and navigates shared spaces without bumping into others.	Provide daily outdoor time and access to parks or playgrounds where children can use large spaces and varied equipment to build whole-body strength and coordination. Support movement control and spatial awareness through active games that respond to cues (e.g., Red Light, Green Light, Freeze Dance) and by setting up movement paths with cones or chalk (e.g., galloping, hopping, or running around obstacles), encouraging children to navigate space with purpose and control.
6 years	Combines movements (running, jumping, hopping, skipping). Improves stability and coordination.	Combines locomotor movements (e.g., running and jumping) in sequence with growing coordination. Maintains balance during transitions between movements, navigates around objects and people while changing speed or direction, and participates in group movement games with improved spatial and body awareness.	Design obstacle courses that include crawling, hopping, and zig-zagging in outdoor fields, classrooms, or community recreation spaces to improve coordination. Invite dramatic animal role-play (slither like a snake, hop like a frog) during playground play, outdoor nature walks, or community events to practice varied locomotor skills in meaningful contexts.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Displays fluid movement in various physical activities. Refines balance and agility.	Demonstrates fluid movement by combining locomotor skills with object control (e.g., dribbling a ball while running, tossing and catching while moving). Adjusts body position to maintain balance during quick changes in direction and speed, and shows agility when participating in cooperative games or activities requiring coordination with peers.	Teach skipping, sliding, and rope-jumping routines set to music in classrooms, PE sessions, outdoor spaces, or afterschool programs to build rhythm and coordination. Encourage children to choreograph partner sequences (skip, slide, jump) and perform them for peers in community showcases, outdoor festivals, or digital recordings.
8 years	Applies movement skills to complex physical activities.	Uses mature locomotor patterns with efficiency and control in games and structured activities. Adjusts speed, direction, and movement patterns to meet the demands of different physical tasks; demonstrates coordination and balance in dynamic environments, such as obstacle courses or relay games; and integrates gross motor skills into complex sequences used in group play or sports.	Organize relay races and cooperative team games in gymnasiums, playgrounds, community sports fields, or afterschool clubs where children adjust speed and direction to group goals. Facilitate advanced obstacle courses requiring balancing, climbing, and changing levels in outdoor adventure courses, playgrounds, or PE settings to build stamina and control.

Standard 2.3 Sensorimotor Skills

Children use all the senses to explore the environment and develop skills through sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>5 years</i>	Uses sensory input to explore the environment, respond to cues, and adapt movements with increasing control and purpose; makes predictions, solves problems, and expresses ideas based on sensory observations.	Uses their senses to explore and describe the world around them, making choices based on how things look, feel, sound, taste, or smell. Responds to simple verbal and visual cues like “stop,” “go,” and “jump” during group activities and transitions, and adjusts their movements based on what they see or hear—such as stopping when a peer is nearby or turning toward a sound. Builds curiosity, awareness, and engagement across learning settings through hands-on sensory experiences with materials like sand, water, and textured objects.	<p>Support the development of self-regulation and sensory processing by leading engaging games that require children to respond to visual and verbal cues (e.g., Simon Says, color-coded stop/go signs), helping them practice focus, listening, and impulse control.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for hands-on exploration with textured sensory bins (e.g., sand, water, rice) using tools like scoops, funnels, and molds to encourage fine motor development, problem-solving, and creative play in both classroom and community settings.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Uses what they see, hear, and feel to help them move and improve their coordination, like catching, throwing, or using tools.</p>	<p>Visually tracks moving objects and coordinates hand or foot movements to catch or kick during sports, games, and outdoor play. Responds to auditory cues in classroom routines or music activities, such as clapping to a beat or stopping on a signal. Sensory input is increasingly integrated with gross motor responses, like reacting to a whistle in a relay game or adjusting movement during a science experiment.</p> <p>Begins to recognize how sensory information affects their physical performance and participation.</p>	<p>Offer scarves, balloons, or bubbles for children to track and catch, coordinating vision and motor skills in classrooms, playgrounds, or home settings.</p> <p>Guide parachute games where children respond to auditory cues (e.g., “make small waves,” “lift high”) in PE classes, outdoor fields, or community gatherings.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Demonstrates spatial awareness and reacts to changes in environment.	Moves with awareness of their body in relation to people and objects, adjusting their path during group games, dance, or classroom movement breaks. Navigates changing environments—such as obstacle courses or crowded spaces—by adapting to visual and auditory changes. Maintains balance and orientation when responding to sensory input, like shifting tempo in music or changing direction in a game. Sensory information is used to plan and adapt movement strategies across learning experiences, including physical education, science exploration, and cooperative play.	<p>Incorporate music with changing tempos during movement games in classrooms, playgrounds, or community dance activities, encouraging children to adjust locomotor patterns.</p> <p>Introduce tag variations that require quick shifts in direction and pace on playgrounds, in gymnasiums, or in outdoor fields.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Uses their movement and coordination skills in different activities like sports, games, and obstacle courses.</p>	<p>Demonstrates precise coordination in tasks requiring timing and accuracy, such as dribbling a ball while moving, jumping rope to a rhythm, or manipulating tools during a science investigation. Integrates sensory feedback to refine motor performance in complex settings, adjusting movements based on what they see, hear, or feel. Maintains focus and orientation during multi-step physical activities like stations or routines, and uses visual and auditory cues to anticipate and respond in cooperative games, music ensembles, or team-based learning tasks.</p>	<p>Support children in dribbling balls while moving to integrate timing, accuracy, and sensory feedback in PE sessions, playground games, or community sports leagues.</p> <p>Rotate movement stations (jump rope, ball toss, balance beam) in gyms, playgrounds, or outdoor events, and encourage reflection on accuracy and improvement.</p>

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND PERSONAL CARE

Children demonstrate healthy and safe behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being.

Standard 2.4 Daily Living Skills

Children demonstrate personal health and hygiene skills as they develop and practice basic care routines.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>5 years</i>	Demonstrates increasing independence in personal health and hygiene by correctly using utensils, pouring, dressing and undressing, and beginning to tie shoes; follows routines such as handwashing, toothbrushing, and nose care with minimal support, and encourages healthy habits among peers.	Increasingly manages personal care routines with confidence and independence. Follows hygiene practices, such as handwashing, toothbrushing, and nose blowing—often without reminders—and begins to recognize and respond to their physical needs, such as feeling tired or thirsty. Dresses and undresses with minimal help, using buttons, zippers, and snaps, and takes responsibility for their belongings by hanging up coats or organizing backpacks. Mealtime skills are well-developed, including using utensils and pouring liquids with control, while still accepting support when needed.	Support children in building healthy habits by creating photo charts to guide self-care routines (e.g., brushing teeth, washing hands), modeling hygiene through songs and puppet role-play (e.g., sneezing into elbows), and offering dramatic play experiences like grocery stores where they sort pretend foods into “healthy” and “treats.”

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Independently initiates and completes personal hygiene and self-care routines throughout the school day, demonstrating understanding of their importance for health and safety, while beginning to take responsibility for personal well-being with minimal adult support.	Consistently initiates and completes hygiene and self-care routines with minimal reminders, demonstrates understanding of healthy behaviors, and begins to take responsibility for physical needs throughout the day (e.g., washes hands or uses tissues without prompting, explains that brushing teeth prevents cavities, independently puts on outdoor clothing and manages personal items like snack containers, asks for help when feeling unwell or needing assistance).	<p>Encourage independence in hygiene routines (washing, brushing, managing belongings) across settings—classroom transitions, outdoor play, and home routines.</p> <p>Discuss and illustrate why habits like hydration or rest keep the body strong in journals, outdoor reflection circles, or family literacy nights.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Makes choices that promote personal health and hygiene.	Independently chooses and consistently applies healthy habits (e.g., selecting fruits or vegetables, dressing appropriately for the weather); maintains hygiene routines without reminders (e.g., washing hands before meals, brushing hair); articulates connections between healthy behaviors and personal well-being (e.g., “Eating healthy gives me energy”); and manages personal materials and space in an organized, responsible way (e.g., keeping desk tidy, using hand sanitizer as needed).	<p>Guide children to set personal fitness or hygiene goals (e.g., drinking water, brushing teeth, stretching) and track them in journals, digital logs, or family charts.</p> <p>Encourage children to share reflections on progress during classroom meetings, outdoor wellness breaks, or at-home check-ins.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Consistently applies hygiene and self-care habits independently.	Consistently and independently follows established health and hygiene routines at school and home (e.g., brushing teeth, bathing, changing clothes regularly); explains the long-term benefits of these habits (e.g., “If I don’t brush my teeth, I could get cavities”); demonstrates awareness of social expectations for cleanliness (e.g., using deodorant as needed); and takes responsibility for physical well-being by staying hydrated and seeking help when sick or injured.	<p>Support children in setting and tracking fitness or hygiene goals independently using journals, digital tools, or peer feedback.</p> <p>Facilitate peer-led safety discussions during playground play, science experiments, outdoor walks, or community events where children explain and model safe practices.</p>

Standard 2.5 Nutrition

Children eat and enjoy a variety of nutritional foods and develop healthy eating practices.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Demonstrates growing understanding of healthy habits by identifying basic food groups, making nutritious food choices, and following hygiene and wellness routines (e.g., handwashing, toothbrushing) with increasing independence. Seeks support when needed and begins to understand how healthy eating supports the body.	Shows growing understanding of healthy habits by naming nutritious foods and their benefits, helping with simple food tasks like pouring or spreading, following hygiene and mealtime routines with more independence, and recognizing personal needs like hunger or tiredness, asking for help when needed.	<p>Create a “Healthy Choices Café” dramatic play area with play foods, menus, and utensils. Invite children to sort foods into basic groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins) and “order” or “serve” balanced meals.</p> <p>Encourage discussion about why certain foods help our bodies grow strong. Include handwashing before and after play, and prompt children to notice how their bodies feel after active play (e.g., “My legs feel tired from running!”).</p>
6 years	Explains how nutritious foods, rest, hygiene, and physical activity contribute to health. Follows personal care routines with increasing independence and begins to take ownership of wellness choices.	Describes how nutritious foods and balanced meals support growth, energy, and overall health. Identifies the role of healthy habits such as hygiene, rest, and physical activity in staying well. Follows daily routines for personal care with increasing independence and explains the reasons for these practices.	<p>Provide cooperative group games (parachute play, chase games) in classrooms, gyms, or outdoor fields to strengthen coordination and teamwork.</p> <p>Prompt children to reflect on which activities make them feel strong, tired, or energized during class discussions, outdoor cool-downs, or family wellness nights.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Demonstrates understanding of nutrition and makes informed food choices.	Makes healthy choices during the school day, like picking nutritious snacks and practicing good hygiene. Can explain how habits like eating well, getting enough sleep, and staying clean help them feel better and do their best in class. Notices when they're not feeling well and asks for help when needed, and begins to understand simple nutrition ideas introduced in class.	Organize fitness circuits (jumping jacks, hopscotch, balance beams) with child choice at each station in gymnasiums, playgrounds, or community recreation spaces. Encourage children to track progress on fitness tasks (e.g., jump rope counts, running laps) using journals, digital tools, or visual progress charts.
8 years	Applies knowledge of nutrition to maintain a healthy lifestyle.	The child makes thoughtful choices to stay healthy, like eating nutritious foods, staying clean, and getting enough rest. They understand how their habits—like washing hands or staying home when sick—help keep themselves and others well. They take care of their body and know that feeling good helps them learn and participate in school.	Support children in setting goals by logging activities and reflecting on improvements in journals, outdoor wellness logs, or digital apps. Teach warm-up and stretching routines before group play in PE, community sports, or outdoor activities, and invite children to explain why they matter for health and safety.

Standard 2.6 Physical Fitness

Children demonstrate healthy behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being through physical activity.

The Principal's Playground Challenge

Story

During a sunny Friday recess, Principal Nguyen joins the third graders for their "Playground Challenge." Children rotate through stations—jump rope, balance beam, and relay races—cheering each other on. The PE educator times each group, while the principal keeps score on the chalkboard. When teams finish, they compare strategies and reflect on what helped them work together. Back inside, Ms. Lee asks, "How did your body feel when you tried something new?" Children share: "My heart was pumping fast!" "It felt good to run with friends!"

Linked Benchmark(s)

Demonstrates coordination, endurance, and balance in varied physical activities.
Identifies how physical activity supports well-being and teamwork.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how leadership visibility in active play fosters joy, connection, and shared responsibility for child wellness. Integrating physical challenges into daily routines supports both health and community building.

Try It!

Invite school leaders or family members to join classroom

movement activities once a month. Turn everyday fitness into a community celebration—"Principal's Playground Challenge," "Family Fitness Fridays," or "Move with Me Mondays."



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Demonstrates healthy behaviors by participating in a variety of physical activities and beginning to understand that being active helps the body stay strong and healthy for life.</p>	<p>Actively joins in physical play like running, dancing, and climbing, shows growing awareness of safety and personal space; talks about how exercise helps their body (e.g., “My heart is beating fast!”); and tries new movement activities with support, following basic safety rules, such as taking turns and walking indoors.</p>	<p>Provide daily opportunities for children to build physical coordination, social skills, and healthy habits through active, hands-on experiences.</p> <p>Engage them in noncompetitive movement games, such as “Follow the Leader,” “Red Light, Green Light,” or “Freeze Dance” to support body control, stamina, and safe movement.</p> <p>Encourage outdoor play and exploration on playgrounds or in open spaces to promote gross motor development.</p> <p>Offer fine-motor activities such as cutting shapes, threading beads, or building with cubes in classrooms, libraries, or home kits to strengthen hand coordination.</p> <p>Model and practice hygiene and safety routines—like handwashing, covering coughs, or walking indoors—through role-play during classroom transitions, family events, or community health fairs.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Participates in structured and unstructured physical activities. Understands the importance of fitness.	Participates in both structured and free-play movement activities, showing coordination in skills like running, jumping, and throwing. Understands that physical activity helps their body stay strong and healthy and recognizes the need for both movement and rest. During group games, cooperates with others and shows awareness of personal space.	<p>Design simple obstacle courses and invite dramatic role-play activities (e.g., moving like animals) in playgrounds, classrooms, or outdoor nature areas to integrate locomotor skills with spatial awareness.</p> <p>Offer free-choice movement centers (jump ropes, hoops, beanbags) in gyms, playgrounds, or community recreation spaces to encourage coordination and discuss how activity strengthens the body.</p> <p>Encourage independence in hygiene routines and prompt reflection on the need for rest and hydration across classroom, outdoor, or home routines.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Demonstrates endurance and strength in physical tasks; explores personal fitness goals.	<p>Completes extended physical activities like fitness circuits or obstacle courses, showing increasing stamina. Demonstrates coordination and control in more complex skills, such as dribbling or skipping rope. Begins to reflect on their personal strengths and preferences in physical activity, sets goals like running more laps or learning new skills, and, with support, starts tracking their progress and noticing improvements.</p>	<p>Teach skipping, sliding, and jump rope sequences in gyms, classrooms, or outdoor spaces, and invite children to choreograph partner dances to music for performances or community showcases.</p> <p>Organize fitness circuits (hopscotch, balance beam, ball toss) in classrooms, playgrounds, or afterschool programs and introduce progress tracking with simple charts, drawings, or digital logs.</p> <p>Support goal-setting by prompting children to identify movement strengths and personal fitness goals during class discussions, outdoor wellness breaks, or digital reflection journals.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Develops personal fitness plans; applies fitness knowledge to daily life.	Sets personal fitness goals and works toward them by practicing skills and tracking their activity. Participates in sustained physical activities with good control and endurance. Applies fitness knowledge like warming up, stretching, and staying hydrated during daily routines. Can explain how physical activity helps their body, emotions, and focus at school.	<p>Facilitate relay races, team games, and advanced obstacle courses in gyms, playgrounds, or community sports fields requiring coordination, balance, and stamina.</p> <p>Guide children in setting and tracking personal fitness goals using journals, digital tools, or peer check-ins, and apply fitness concepts (warm-up, stretching, hydration) before activities in any setting.</p> <p>Encourage children to lead warm-ups or active play choices and reflect on how movement benefits the body, emotions, and learning in classrooms, outdoor spaces, or digital/virtual meetings.</p>

Standard 2.7 Safety Practices

Children develop an awareness and understanding of safety rules as they learn to make safe and appropriate choices.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Clearly describes safety rules and shows growing responsibility by applying them in new situations, reminding others, and making safe choices without being told.	Identifies and follows basic safety rules in familiar settings, recognizes common hazards, and begins to explain why certain choices are safe or unsafe. Shows growing independence by making safe decisions without adult reminders, balancing curiosity with caution, and taking age-appropriate risks—such as trying new equipment or solving peer conflicts—while respecting personal limits and safety boundaries.	Create a supportive environment where children feel safe to take risks, try new things, and learn from mistakes. Encourage persistence by praising effort (e.g., “You worked really hard on that!”) and celebrating progress, not just outcomes. Model and practice safety routines—such as walking in hallways, lining up for recess, or using materials carefully—through role-play in classrooms, outdoor areas, or community spaces. Guide children in identifying potential hazards using picture cards or safety walks, and prompt them to explain, with support, why safety rules matter (e.g., “We walk inside so no one gets hurt”) during group discussions or family safety talks.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Demonstrates safety awareness in home, school, and play environments.	Names and follows safety routines in different settings, like the playground, classroom, or kitchen. Identifies safe ways to use materials, equipment, and digital tools. Explains how behaviors should change to stay safe—such as using quiet voices indoors and wearing helmets outdoors. Consistently makes safe choices during both independent and group activities and begins to self-correct unsafe behaviors when reminded.	<p>Reinforce safety routines in multiple settings (kitchen dramatic play, playground activities, digital tools) through role-play and discussion.</p> <p>Encourage children to adjust behavior for different environments (quiet voices indoors, helmets outdoors) during role-play games or outdoor explorations.</p> <p>Invite children to self-correct unsafe behaviors with gentle reminders in classrooms, playgrounds, or at home.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Understands basic emergency procedures and follows safety rules on their own in familiar situations.	Describes emergency procedures, such as fire drills, earthquake safety, and lockdowns, and knows when and how to follow them. Participates in drills and safety events with appropriate behavior and little guidance. Identifies trusted adults and knows how to ask for help in an emergency. Recalls and shares important personal safety information, such as their address, phone number, or family contact. Begins to evaluate risks and make informed safety decisions.	<p>Teach and practice emergency drills (fire, earthquake, lockdown) through interactive simulations and reflection circles in classrooms, gyms, or community events.</p> <p>Encourage children to recall and share important personal safety information (address, phone number, trusted adults) during school, home, or community readiness activities.</p> <p>Guide children to make simple risk evaluations during science experiments, recess games, or outdoor projects.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Evaluates risks and makes informed safety decisions.	<p>Explains why they choose safe behaviors in new or changing situations. Uses what they've learned to evaluate risks during both structured and unstructured activities, like recess or science experiments. Shows growing independence by monitoring and adjusting their behavior to keep themselves and others safe.</p> <p>Takes responsibility for following safety rules and encourages their peers to do the same. Uses problem-solving skills to avoid or handle safety hazards.</p>	<p>Facilitate discussions and role-play scenarios where children explain reasons for safe choices in new or changing situations across settings (classroom, playground, community events, digital spaces).</p> <p>Support children in applying prior knowledge to evaluate risks during structured and unstructured activities (recess, PE, science labs, outdoor field trips).</p> <p>Encourage children to take leadership in safety by reminding peers, helping solve hazards, and reflecting on responsibility for themselves and others in classrooms, playgrounds, or community activities.</p>

Core Domain 3: Communication

Ages 5 - 8



COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Communication is the process of exchanging information through a common system of signs, gestures, symbols, and behaviors. Language development is the emerging ability of children to communicate with others to build relationships, share meaning, and express needs.

Standard 3.1 Receptive Communication

Children use listening and observation skills to make sense of and respond to spoken language and other forms of communication. Children enter into the exchange of information around what they see, hear, and experience. They begin to acquire an understanding of the concepts of language that contribute to further learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Understands and uses an expanding vocabulary, responds appropriately to complex questions, and follows directions that include two or more steps.	Communicates clearly using descriptive and action words in conversations and play; speaks in complete sentences with connecting words (e.g., and, because, so); and responds to “how” and “why” questions with relevant explanations. Follows two- to three-step directions with minimal reminders, answers multi-part questions appropriately, and shows growing independence in understanding and carrying out increasingly complex instructions. Engages in conversations with peers and adults by restating questions and expressing ideas clearly.	Encourage children to explain their thinking and play (e.g., “Tell me how you built that tower”) and ask open-ended questions like “how” and “why” during stories, outdoor exploration, or community activities. Use sequencing games and shared reading to build comprehension of multi-step ideas, and support vocabulary growth through conversation and exposure to new words. Provide opportunities for children to follow and give multi-step directions during cooking, crafts, or play (e.g., “Put away the blocks, then get your journal”), and invite them to repeat directions in their own words. Promote clear, audible responses in group settings—such as circle time, dramatic play, or digital meetings—and celebrate their efforts to use new or unfamiliar words.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Checks for understanding on increasingly more complex content and directions.	Demonstrates understanding of directions by pausing to repeat or paraphrase instructions, asks clarifying questions when uncertain (e.g., “Do we write it or just say it?”), uses adult feedback to revise or expand responses, and accurately begins or completes tasks by following assigned steps.	<p>Model and reinforce listening behaviors (looking at the speaker, nodding) during class discussions, outdoor circles, or community read-alouds.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to share personal thoughts or feelings in multiple contexts—morning meetings, family literacy nights, or outdoor reflection circles.</p> <p>Encourage children to use complete sentences when explaining learning experiences, personal thoughts, or emotions in varied spaces, speaking clearly and at an appropriate volume.</p>
7 years	Asks for clarification and restates directions to understand tasks, while using a growing range of academic and descriptive vocabulary in speech and writing.	Restates directions using sequential language (e.g., “first,” “next,” “last”), seeks clarification when instructions are unclear, uses descriptive vocabulary to explain tasks or ideas, and incorporates academic language from instruction (e.g., “predict,” “describe,” “summarize”) when responding or participating in discussions.	<p>Guide children to initiate and sustain conversations with peers and adults across settings (classroom projects, playground games, library visits, or virtual discussions), practicing clarifying or follow-up questions.</p> <p>Invite children to paraphrase or restate what a peer has said during partner activities, outdoor teamwork, or small-group library discussions.</p> <p>Encourage the use of body language, facial expressions, and gestures to enhance communication in presentations, performances, or dramatic play.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Independently monitors their understanding of complex directions and content, using advanced vocabulary to explain ideas, ask questions, and solve problems.	Demonstrates metacognitive awareness by identifying what they do or don't understand, self-corrects when misunderstanding directions or tasks, uses advanced or content-specific vocabulary to ask questions or explain thinking, and applies strategic questioning (e.g., "What if ...?", "Could we try ...?") to explore solutions and deepen understanding.	<p>Facilitate group discussions in varied spaces (circle time, outdoor learning, digital forums) where children contribute original ideas with details, examples, or evidence.</p> <p>Encourage children to expand on peers' ideas in collaborative projects or service-learning activities by offering new connections or perspectives.</p> <p>Guide children to adjust word choice for different audiences (e.g., role-playing conversations with peers vs. adults, presenting in class vs. at a community event).</p> <p>Support children in problem-solving conversations across contexts, applying questioning strategies ("What if ...?", "Could we try ...?") to extend group inquiry or address challenges.</p>

Standard 3.2 Expressive Communication

Children develop skills in using sounds, facial expressions, gestures, and words for a variety of purposes, such as to help adults and others understand their needs, ask questions, express feelings and ideas, and solve problems.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Uses different types of language depending on the situation, such as speaking quietly in the library, using polite words with adults, or using a louder voice when playing outside. Takes turn in group conversations, stays on topic, speaks clearly, and begins to use more precise vocabulary while self-correcting pronunciation or word choice.	Communicates effectively by adjusting voice and tone to match the setting and situation (e.g., speaking quietly in the library or excitedly sharing a story), and participates in conversations by waiting for a turn, responding to others, and speaking clearly enough to be understood. Attempts new vocabulary, including words from cultural stories or traditions, and expresses ideas using words, gestures, visuals, or assistive tools as needed. Demonstrates growing confidence in sharing personal experiences and understanding others in both group and one-on-one settings.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to explore tone, mood, and purpose in dramatic play (e.g., “Say it like you’re a teacher” or “Say it like you’re excited”), and give gentle feedback on voice level during group activities. Support small group conversations in varied settings—like circle time, outdoor play, or library visits—by encouraging turn-taking and responses to peers or adults.</p> <p>Invite children to speak clearly during puppet shows, storytelling, or games, and celebrate their efforts as they try new words in songs, rhymes, pretend play, or digital story activities, even if pronunciation isn’t perfect.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Takes turns speaking and listening during conversations, speaks clearly, and is learning to share their thoughts, feelings, and what they're learning.	Listens attentively by maintaining eye contact, nodding, or responding appropriately; shares personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences using complete sentences with clear pronunciation; and speaks at an appropriate volume during group discussions, presentations, or conversations. Uses connected sentences to explain learning experiences or emotions and begins making meaningful connections between classroom activities and personal experiences.	<p>Model and reinforce listening behaviors (looking at the speaker, nodding) during discussions across settings—classroom, outdoor reflection circles, or community story times.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to share personal thoughts and feelings during morning meetings, family literacy events, or storytelling circles held indoors or outside.</p> <p>Encourage children to use complete sentences when explaining experiences, making connections between classroom activities and personal life, and speaking at a clear volume in any space.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Joins in conversations with different partners, asks questions to better understand, and shows they are listening by restating what others say.	Initiates and responds in conversations with peers and adults using clear verbal communication and appropriate body language (e.g., facial expressions, gestures); asks clarifying or follow-up questions; restates or paraphrases others' ideas; and maintains conversations across multiple turns with different partners.	<p>Guide children in initiating and sustaining conversations with peers and adults during classroom projects, outdoor explorations, library visits, or virtual discussions, practicing clarifying or follow-up questions.</p> <p>Invite children to paraphrase or restate what a peer has said during partner work, outdoor team games, or small-group learning in community spaces.</p> <p>Encourage the use of body language, facial expressions, and gestures to enhance communication in presentations, dramatic play, or community performances.</p>
8 years	Clearly shares their own ideas and builds on others' ideas in conversations, using words that fit the listener and speaking in detail—even if they sometimes exaggerate.	Contributes original ideas to group discussions with supporting details; expands on peers' ideas by adding evidence, examples, or connections; adjusts word choice to suit the audience (e.g., peers vs. adults); and expresses ideas with rich detail, including appropriate use of playful exaggeration.	<p>Facilitate group discussions in varied settings (circle time, outdoor inquiry, digital forums, or community meetings) where children contribute original ideas with details and examples.</p> <p>Encourage children to expand on peers' ideas in collaborative projects (e.g., service learning, outdoor group work, digital collaboration) by offering new connections or supporting details.</p> <p>Guide children to adjust word choice for different audiences (e.g., peers vs. adults, presenting in class vs. presenting at a library or community event).</p>

Standard 3.3 Social Communication

Children develop skills that help them interact and communicate with others in effective ways.

The Benchmark, Indicators, and Learning Opportunities have been integrated with the age band criteria within the Emotional Social domains to streamline interpretation.



Standard 3.4 English Language Learners

Children develop competency in their home language while becoming proficient in English.

Feather Friends

Story

In Ms. Rivera’s kindergarten class, children are learning about Montana birds. During the morning meeting, she shows a photo of a great horned owl and asks, “What words can we use to describe this bird?” Hands shoot up—“Soft!” “Brown!” “Big eyes!” Mateo, who speaks both Spanish and English at home, quietly says, “Búho.” Ms. Rivera smiles and repeats, “Yes—búho means owl.” Together, the class practices saying the word, then draws their own birds using labels and invented spelling. Mateo writes b-o beside his owl and proudly adds feathers from the craft bin to finish his work.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses drawings, letters, and early writing to communicate ideas and information.

Participates in shared conversations, listening and responding to others’ ideas.

Demonstrates confidence using home language and English to express meaning.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how oral language, early writing, and family heritage intersect in a developmentally appropriate literacy experience. The educator honors each child’s language back-

ground while providing multiple ways to express understanding—through words, art, and conversation.

Try It!

During shared reading or writing, invite children to share words from their home languages connected to classroom themes (animals, family, nature). Record these on a “Words We Know” chart and revisit them during story time or center activities.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Confidently uses English in many situations while continuing to understand and use their home language.	<p>May speak in full English sentences to express ideas, ask questions, and share stories, especially in familiar settings. May follow multi-step directions in English and engage in back-and-forth conversations with peers and adults, using English primarily. While confidence in using English varies depending on exposure and context, may continue to grow in their home language and may use it with peers, family members, or in other meaningful situations. Demonstrates an emerging multilingualism and flexibility in using both languages across various settings.</p>	<p>Encourage children to express ideas and ask questions in full English sentences during familiar routines, play, and storytelling (e.g., “Tell me what happened at the park” or “Why do you think that happened?”).</p> <p>Support back-and-forth conversations with peers and adults by modeling turn-taking and asking follow-up questions.</p> <p>Provide multi-step directions in English (e.g., “Put your book away, then line up at the door”) and invite children to repeat or act them out.</p> <p>Celebrate the use of both English and home language in meaningful ways—such as during cultural stories, family role-play, or peer interactions.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators
6 years	<p>Demonstrates growing ability to use English to recount experiences, explain ideas, discuss topics, and begin to express opinions, while continuing to develop and use their home language across settings.</p>	<p>These language indicators reflect how children in this age band develop English skills across different situations. They show how children use English to share stories, explain their thinking, interact with others, express opinions, follow directions, and switch between languages depending on the setting—all important steps in becoming confident as multilingual communicators.</p> <p>Recount: Uses English to describe personal experiences, retell events, or share stories (e.g., “We went to the park and saw ducks.”).</p> <p>Explain: Uses English to explain steps in a process or reasoning (e.g., “I used glue because the paper wouldn’t stick.”).</p> <p>Discuss: Engages in asking and answering questions with peers and adults during shared activities or conversations.</p> <p>Justify (emerging): Begins to express preferences or opinions using simple comparative language (e.g., “I like this one better because it’s bigger.”).</p> <p>Follows multi-step directions in English with visual or contextual support.</p> <p>Uses both English and home language flexibly depending on the setting, audience, or task.</p>
7 years		
8 years		

Learning Opportunities

- Celebrate home language and culture.
 - Greet children in both English and their home language (e.g., “Hello!” and “Hola!”).
 - Use children’s home languages in classroom labels, songs, or story time.
 - Invite families to share songs, stories, or traditions from their culture.
 - Make language easy to understand.
 - Use pictures, gestures, and real objects when giving directions (e.g., hold up a pencil while saying, “Get your pencil.”).
 - Speak slowly and clearly, and repeat important words or phrases.
 - Talk about what children are doing (e.g., “You’re building a tall tower!”) to connect words to actions.
 - Create comfortable, low-pressure spaces to practice English.
 - Give children time to think and respond—don’t rush them.
 - Use songs, rhymes, and games with repeated words so they can join in (e.g., “If You’re Happy and You Know It”).
 - Celebrate all efforts to speak, whether in English, their home language, or a mix of both.
 - Use peer support.
 - Pair children with kind, talkative classmates during games or group work.
 - Encourage buddies to help each other with classroom jobs or reading activities.
 - Let children learn from each other through play and conversation.
 - Build vocabulary through everyday activities.
 - Use the same new words in different places (e.g., “pour” during snack time, science, and pretend play).
 - Show pictures or real items to help explain new words.
 - Use digital tools like story apps or picture dictionaries to support word learning.
 - Encourage language through play.
 - Set up pretend play areas with signs and props in both English and home languages (e.g., a pretend store with bilingual labels).
 - Use puppets, costumes, or storytelling apps to help children act out and tell stories.
- Let children take on classroom roles (e.g., line leader, weather reporter) where they can use language in fun, meaningful ways.

LITERACY

Early or emergent literacy develops as children become aware of the relationship between the written and spoken word. Young children develop skills in using symbols, language, and images to become interested and competent in learning to read, write, and represent information.

Standard 3.5 Early Reading and Book Appreciation

Children develop an understanding, skills, and interest in the symbols, sounds, and rhythms of written language as they also develop interest in reading, enjoyment from books, and awareness that the printed word can be used for various purposes.

The Story Studio

Story

In Ms. Whitaker’s first-grade classroom, storytelling is alive. Children spread across the rug with clipboards and crayons, sketching their ideas for short plays. “Today we’re authors and actors,” Ms. Whitaker reminds them. In the back corner, the instructional coach records video clips to share at the upcoming staff meeting on integrating literacy through play. Principal Smith stops by, watching as a group performs their story, *The Lost Moose of Missoula*. When the children finish, he claps and asks, “How did you decide who would narrate?” The children grin, explaining their plan together.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Expresses ideas clearly through speaking, listening, drawing, and writing.

Participates in collaborative storytelling, demonstrating creativity and shared planning.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This vignette captures literacy as a joyful, performative act. Leadership involvement underscores the school’s commitment to authentic, integrated learning—where children use language for real communication and community expression.

Try It!

Create a “Story Studio” week with educator–leader collaboration: Invite administrators, families, and older children to serve as audience members for child-created plays, podcasts, or storybooks.



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Demonstrates understanding of how print works by using books for different purposes, pointing to words while reading, and discussing story events, problems, and details with increasing comprehension. Actively engages in conversations about a variety of shared reading materials.</p>	<p>Engages with books for a variety of purposes—such as learning, enjoyment, or storytelling—by choosing texts independently, pointing to words while “reading,” and beginning to match spoken words to print. Identifies key story elements like main events, problems, and solutions, and makes simple inferences or personal connections (e.g., “He was sad because he lost his toy” or “My grandma tells stories too”). Participates in group discussions about shared texts by asking and answering questions, making predictions, and relating stories to personal or cultural experiences, including those reflected in culturally relevant texts like Native American stories.</p>	<p>Create themed book baskets (e.g., animals, weather, construction) and model print tracking during shared reading by pointing to each word. Ask comprehension and reasoning questions (e.g., “Why did she do that?”), and encourage predictions (“What do you think will happen next?”). Facilitate group discussions in varied settings—like classroom read-alouds or outdoor story circles—where children ask and answer questions about pictures, characters, or events. Invite them to connect stories to their own lives during classroom or family literacy activities.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Uses various types of books for their intended purposes.	Selects storybooks for enjoyment and informational books to learn facts; identifies the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book; uses illustrations, captions, or labels to understand content; and explains how different types of books are used (e.g., “This book tells a story, and this one gives facts”).	<p>Guide children to choose storybooks for enjoyment and informational texts to learn facts in settings such as classroom libraries, school media centers, or community libraries, then explain their choice.</p> <p>Introduce book parts (front cover, back cover, title page) and model how illustrations, captions, or labels add meaning during shared reading at school, outdoors, or in digital texts.</p> <p>Encourage children to explain the purpose of different books (stories vs. informational) across contexts such as home reading logs, classroom library talks, or book fairs.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Explains differences between types of text and begins to independently read select books.	Identifies key features of fiction (characters, setting, events) and nonfiction (facts, diagrams, headings); explains how storybooks and informational texts serve different purposes; reads simple fiction and nonfiction texts independently with comprehension; and selects books based on personal interest, articulating reasons for their choices.	<p>Support children in identifying features of fiction (characters, setting, events) and nonfiction (facts, diagrams, headings) through shared and independent reading across settings (classroom, library, or digital reading platforms).</p> <p>Guide discussions where children explain how texts serve different purposes during small groups in class, outdoor projects, or library sessions.</p> <p>Encourage children to select fiction and nonfiction books independently in multiple spaces (school library, classroom book bins, public library, or digital catalog) and state a reason for their choice.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Independently reads select books and uses text features and search tools to locate information related to a topic.	Independently selects and reads grade-appropriate books; uses text features (table of contents, glossary, index, headings) to locate information; with support, uses search tools (e.g., library catalog, digital search) to find books or information; and summarizes or explains information gathered from texts.	<p>Encourage children to independently select and read books at their grade level based on personal interests from classroom libraries, public libraries, or digital collections.</p> <p>Guide children to use text features (table of contents, glossary, index, headings) to locate information in print, outdoor field guides, or digital texts.</p> <p>Support children in summarizing or explaining information gathered from texts and in using search tools (e.g., school catalog, public library databases, digital search bars) with guidance.</p>



Standard 3.6 Print Development

Children develop interest and skills in using symbols as a meaningful form of communication.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Begins to write their name and use drawings, dictation, and early spelling to share ideas, using letters to represent sounds and creating simple stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end.	Expresses ideas through a combination of drawings, early writing, and inventive spelling (e.g., “KT” for cat), showing an understanding that spoken words can be written down. Creates short, meaningful written messages such as labels, notes, or story captions, and uses beginning and ending sounds to spell words. Writes familiar words like names or high-frequency words, and tells or writes simple stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end, often supported by pictures and labels.	Incorporate writing into daily routines (e.g., labeling bins, thank-you notes) and play (e.g., menus, signs), while encouraging storytelling through drawings and words. Support name-writing with varied materials like sand or chalk, and provide daily writing invitations such as journals or science notebooks. Model sentence writing with invented spelling, encourage use of beginning and ending sounds (e.g., KT for cat), and offer chances to write familiar words and create simple stories with a beginning, middle, and end.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Uses spelling patterns to write common words and create short stories or ideas that follow a clear order with some descriptive words.	Applies common spelling patterns (e.g., -at, -ing, -ed) when writing; constructs sentences that follow a logical sequence; uses descriptive words (e.g., colors, size, feelings) to add detail; and produces short stories or informational texts with a clear beginning, middle, and end.	<p>Guide children to apply common spelling patterns (e.g., -at, -ing, -ed) during classroom literacy centers, outdoor labeling activities, or interactive word walls.</p> <p>Encourage children to write sentences in logical order and use descriptive words (colors, size, feelings) in short stories, personal journals, or descriptions of community observations.</p> <p>Facilitate short story or informational projects where children sequence ideas clearly (e.g., creating class books, nature reports, or simple digital slide shows).</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Uses spelling patterns to spell more difficult words and write organized stories or explanations using descriptive and transition words to connect their ideas.</p>	<p>Spells longer or irregular words using known patterns and spelling rules; writes organized paragraphs including a clear topic sentence and supporting details; uses descriptive language such as adjectives and adverbs to expand ideas; and connects ideas smoothly with transition words (e.g., first, next, then, finally).</p>	<p>Support children in spelling longer or irregular words by applying known rules and patterns during classroom assignments, independent library research, or home writing projects.</p> <p>Guide children to write organized paragraphs with topic sentences and details when reporting on science experiments, documenting outdoor projects, or contributing to classroom newsletters.</p> <p>Encourage children to use descriptive language (adjectives, adverbs) and connect ideas with transition words (first, next, then, finally) across contexts such as field trip reflections, family letters, or digital blogs.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Spells most words correctly and write clear, organized pieces with linking words, supporting details, and a strong ending.	Spells grade-level words correctly, including irregular spellings; writes multiple organized and focused paragraphs; uses linking words and phrases (e.g., because, for example, in addition) to connect ideas; and includes supporting details with a conclusion that summarizes or reflects on the topic.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to spell grade-level words correctly, including irregular ones, in classroom essays, community reports, or digital presentations.</p> <p>Support children in writing multiple organized paragraphs using linking words and phrases (because, for example, in addition) for projects such as inquiry reports, outdoor journals, or school newsletters.</p> <p>Encourage children to develop writing pieces with supporting details and conclusions in authentic contexts (e.g., persuasive letters to the principal, reflective journal entries, or contributions to community publications).</p>

Standard 3.7 Print Concepts

Children develop an understanding that print carries a message through symbols and words, and that there is a connection between sounds and letters (the alphabetic principle).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Recognizes all uppercase and lowercase letters, produces more than 20 letter sounds, identifies spaces and punctuation, and follows print from left to right during reading and writing activities.	Demonstrates growing alphabet knowledge by accurately identifying and naming all uppercase and lowercase letters, matching letters to their corresponding sounds (e.g., “D is for dog”, “/d/”), and using this knowledge during reading and writing activities. Recognizes that print is read from left to right and top to bottom, identifies spaces between words, and begins to notice basic punctuation marks, such as periods, question marks, and exclamation points. Points to letters in words, labels drawings, and engages with print in meaningful ways during shared reading and writing experiences.	<p>Support letter–sound learning through multisensory activities (e.g., writing in sand, tracing, forming letters with clay) and embed alphabet practice in meaningful contexts like signing in or labeling artwork.</p> <p>Use games, songs, and scavenger hunts to help children identify and name uppercase and lowercase letters, and sort them by sound or case.</p> <p>Model print tracking during shared reading, pointing out spaces and punctuation, and encourage children to notice punctuation through voice changes and pauses during read-alouds.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Understands sentence structure and capitalization.	Writes and recognizes complete sentences containing a subject and verb; uses capital letters appropriately at the beginning of sentences and for proper nouns; consistently applies ending punctuation such as periods, question marks, and exclamation points; and demonstrates awareness of sentence boundaries when reading aloud or listening to text.	<p>Guide children to write and recognize complete sentences with subjects and verbs during interactive writing, sentence-building games, or outdoor labeling activities.</p> <p>Provide sentence editing activities where children apply capital letters and punctuation consistently in classroom writing centers, library writing stations, or digital platforms.</p> <p>Encourage children to demonstrate sentence boundaries by reading aloud with attention to pauses and intonation in a variety of contexts (small groups, outdoor presentations, or virtual story times).</p>
7 years	Recognizes more complex text features (paragraphs, headings).	Identifies paragraphs in printed text and understands their purpose; recognizes headings as signals for new sections or topics; groups related sentences into coherent paragraphs when writing; and uses indentation or spacing to clearly show paragraph structure.	<p>Introduce paragraphs in printed texts and discuss their purpose during shared reading in classrooms, libraries, or outdoor spaces.</p> <p>Encourage children to group related sentences into short paragraphs when writing class stories, science reports, or community newsletters.</p> <p>Model and guide the use of headings in writing, inviting children to create headings for their own reports, journals, or digital presentations to signal new sections.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Understands text organization (chapters, glossaries, index). Follows punctuation for expression.	Locates and uses chapters to navigate longer texts; utilizes glossaries and indexes to find word meanings or topics; reads aloud with expression by applying punctuation cues such as commas, quotation marks, and exclamation points; and effectively applies knowledge of text features to gather information or clarify meaning.	<p>Support children in locating and using chapters, glossaries, and indexes to navigate longer texts in classroom, library, and digital settings.</p> <p>Guide children to read aloud with expression, using punctuation as cues (commas, quotation marks, exclamation marks) during classroom performances, outdoor readings, or digital recordings.</p> <p>Encourage children to apply knowledge of text features (headings, chapters, indexes) to gather or clarify information across spaces—print books, library catalogs, field guides, and digital resources.</p>

Standard 3.8 Phonological Awareness

Children develop an awareness of the sounds of letters and the combination of letters that make up words and use this awareness to manipulate syllables and sounds of speech.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Begins to rhyme, blend sounds, and decode simple words by using letter-sound knowledge. Identifies beginning, middle, and ending sounds in CVC words, reads familiar words in patterned texts, and uses phonetic spelling and high-frequency words to express ideas in writing.</p>	<p>Demonstrates early reading and writing skills by producing rhyming word groups independently (e.g., “cat, hat, sat”), blending sounds to form words (e.g., /c/ + ‘at’ = cat), and identifying beginning, middle, and ending sounds in CVC words. Matches letters to common sounds, blends sounds to read familiar CVC and high-frequency words, and tracks print from left to right while reading patterned texts. In writing, uses letters to represent sounds, applies inventive spelling for CVC words (e.g., “kat” for cat), writes familiar high-frequency words with support, and labels drawings or writes short phrases to express ideas.</p>	<p>Support phonological awareness by playing rhyming games and oral blending activities (e.g., “/d/ + /og/ = dog”), and connect sounds to letters through writing practice. Guide children to identify beginning, middle, and ending sounds in CVC words and match letters to sounds using songs, games, or outdoor chalk play.</p> <p>Encourage blending sounds to read simple words and recognizing high-frequency words in patterned texts. Provide writing opportunities using invented spelling, labeling drawings, or composing short phrases in journals or digital storytelling tools.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Distinguishes between long and short vowel sounds, manipulates phonemes (substituting and deleting) in increasingly complex words, and reads short sentences fluently using familiar CVC and high-frequency words; writes phonetically with growing accuracy and begins applying basic spelling rules independently.	Demonstrates phonemic awareness by identifying and producing long and short vowel sounds, manipulating phonemes through substitution or deletion (e.g., changing “cat” to “cap”), and uses decoding strategies to read short sentences fluently with CVC and high-frequency words; reads aloud with phrasing and emerging expression; in writing, applies phonetic spelling with increasing accuracy, follows simple spelling rules (e.g., adding –s or –ing), and composes complete sentences using capitalization, punctuation, and descriptive language in short stories or informational texts.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to identify and produce short and long vowel sounds and manipulate phonemes by substituting or deleting sounds in words through songs, word games, and interactive literacy centers.</p> <p>Encourage children to read short sentences fluently using decoding strategies for unfamiliar words and to read aloud with emerging phrasing in classrooms, libraries, or outdoor spaces.</p> <p>Support writing development by guiding children to apply spelling rules (–s for plurals, –ing for actions), compose complete sentences with punctuation, and use descriptive words in stories, informational pieces, or outdoor observations.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Segments and blends multisyllabic words orally and reads longer texts with growing fluency and accuracy. Applies learned spelling rules to decode and spell unfamiliar words independently in writing.</p>	<p>Segments and blends multisyllabic words during reading and speaking, reads grade-level texts aloud with fluency and accuracy, and uses context clues to enhance word recognition and comprehension. Retells or summarizes main ideas and supporting details. In writing, spells unfamiliar words by applying known patterns and rules, composes organized paragraphs with clear topic sentences and supporting details, connects ideas using transition words (e.g., first, next, then, finally), and enriches writing with descriptive language in stories and explanations.</p>	<p>Guide children to segment and blend multisyllabic words when reading in varied settings (classroom, library, digital texts) and use context clues to support word recognition and comprehension.</p> <p>Encourage children to retell or summarize main ideas and details from texts in book discussions, outdoor reflections, or digital reading journals.</p> <p>Support writing by prompting children to spell unfamiliar words using known patterns, compose organized paragraphs with topic sentences and details, and connect ideas with transitions in classroom assignments, science reports, or community newsletters.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Reads fluently and comprehends texts across genres and purposes, applying phonemic awareness and spelling knowledge to decode unfamiliar words. Independently uses spelling and encoding strategies to support fluent, purposeful writing.</p>	<p>Decodes unfamiliar words using phonics, prefixes, suffixes, and syllable patterns; reads independently across genres (fiction, nonfiction, poetry) with comprehension; explains main ideas, supporting details, and author’s purpose; adjusts fluency, phrasing, and expression to reflect punctuation and meaning; spells most grade-level words correctly, including irregular words; applies spelling strategies independently during drafting; writes organized multi-paragraph texts using linking words and supporting details; and produces clear conclusions or strong endings in written work.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for children to decode unfamiliar words using phonics, prefixes/suffixes, and syllable patterns while reading independently across genres in classrooms, libraries, or digital platforms.</p> <p>Encourage children to explain main ideas, supporting details, and author’s purpose during classroom discussions, community presentations, or written responses, while adjusting fluency and expression to match punctuation and meaning.</p> <p>Support writing by guiding children to apply spelling strategies independently, compose multi-paragraph pieces with linking words and supporting details, and produce clear conclusions or endings in essays, letters, or digital blogs.</p>

Core Domain 4: Cognition

Ages 5 - 8



APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Children’s approaches to learning include the motivation, attitudes, habits, and cognitive styles that are demonstrated as they engage in learning and respond to different situations. The ways children express their approaches to learning may vary according to their temperament or cultural context. Temperament is unlikely to be changed; approaches to learning are more malleable.

Standard 4.1 Curiosity

Children develop imagination, inventiveness, originality, and interest as they explore and experience new things.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Asks increasingly complex questions about the world and explores new activities with curiosity and enthusiasm.	Shows curiosity about the world by asking “what,” “where,” “how,” and “why” questions during play and learning (e.g., “Why is the moon round?”). Explores new materials and experiences with or without encouragement, shares observations about their environment (e.g., ‘It’s raining!’), and makes connections to stories or experiences—especially when engaging with nature or ancestral materials like animal tracks or Native plants. With support as needed, communicates their observations using words, gestures, or visual supports.	<p>Encourage children to ask simple “what,” “where,” and “who” questions during classroom lessons, outdoor explorations, or community walks by modeling curiosity aloud.</p> <p>Provide new materials, topics, or activities (e.g., magnifying glasses, building tools, musical instruments) in play centers, libraries, or outdoor learning spaces, and celebrate children’s excitement as they explore.</p> <p>Prompt children to share observations about their immediate environment in multiple spaces (e.g., “It’s raining,” “That bug is big”) through science journals, circle discussions, or digital recordings.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Demonstrates curiosity by seeking new information.</p> <p>Asks deeper “why” and “how” questions.</p>	<p>With growing independence, generates thoughtful “why” and “how” questions about familiar and new experiences (e.g., “Why do leaves change color in fall?”); independently researches answers using a variety of sources, such as books, visuals, or discussions with adults and peers; extends learning by forming and testing predictions or providing detailed explanations; and purposefully revisits activities or materials to explore concepts more deeply and refine understanding.</p>	<p>Guide children to ask “why” and “how” questions about familiar experiences (e.g., “Why do leaves fall?”) during outdoor learning, classroom discussions, or family literacy nights.</p> <p>Provide access to books, visuals, digital resources, or experts (peers, adults) so children can seek additional information about their questions.</p> <p>Encourage children to extend learning by making predictions or offering explanations, and revisit materials or activities (e.g., science centers, outdoor projects) to deepen understanding.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Investigates topics of interest. Connects new knowledge to prior experiences.	<p>Selects topics of personal interest to research and gathers information from multiple sources (e.g., books, interviews, digital media).</p> <p>Makes meaningful connections between new ideas and prior knowledge or personal experiences (e.g., “This reminds me of when ...”).</p> <p>Organizes and communicates findings through detailed drawings, written notes, or oral presentations. Explains and reflects on new learning using their own words to inform or teach peers and adults.</p>	<p>Support children in selecting topics of personal interest (e.g., animals, space, local landmarks) to research using books, technology, or community interviews.</p> <p>Encourage children to connect new ideas to personal experiences (“This reminds me of when ...”) during classroom projects, outdoor observations, or home reflections.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to record or share findings through drawings, notes, oral reports, or digital storytelling, and explain learning in their own words to peers or adults.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Engages in independent research and exploration. Generates own questions for inquiry.	Independently formulates thoughtful questions to guide exploration (e.g., “What would happen if ...?”). Uses diverse resources—including books, technology, peers, and adults—to gather and evaluate information. Summarizes and explains findings with supporting details, making connections to prior knowledge. Designs and conducts small-scale investigations or projects that answer personal questions, documenting observations and reflecting on results.	<p>Guide children to independently formulate questions for exploration (“What would happen if ...?”) in classrooms, outdoor inquiry, or community projects.</p> <p>Support children in using multiple resources (books, technology, peers, adults) to gather information across contexts—classroom, library, digital tools, or family interviews.</p> <p>Encourage children to summarize findings with detail and design small investigations or projects (e.g., experiments, surveys, models) related to their own questions, then share outcomes in class, outdoor showcases, or community events.</p>

Standard 4.2 Initiative and Self-Direction

Children develop an eagerness to engage in new tasks and to take risks in learning new skills or information.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Begins to make plans and decisions to explore how things work, showing increasing independence in choosing how to investigate and solve problems.	Begins to make plans and decisions to explore how things work by asking questions (e.g., “What will happen if I ...?”) and predicting outcomes before testing ideas. Suggests multiple ways to solve simple problems, imagine future solutions (e.g., “Next time we can ...”), and engage in multi-step tasks like puzzles or building. Represents their thinking through drawings, talk, or pretend play, and explores abstract ideas, such as cause and effect through hands-on experimentation.	Build children’s curiosity, planning, and problem-solving skills by exploring real-world investigations and group challenges. They plan steps (e.g., “What do we need to test what sinks or floats?”), make predictions, and reflect on outcomes (e.g., “Was your guess right?”). Support by asking guiding questions (e.g., “What’s your plan?”), encouraging multiple solutions (e.g., “We could take turns”), and helping children document their thinking through drawings or photos. Children apply ideas in new ways during puzzles, building tasks, or pretend play, and imagine future solutions during group reflection.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Thinks through possible long-term solutions and takes on more abstract challenges.	Breaks tasks into smaller steps with minimal prompting; follows through on plans to complete classroom projects (e.g., finishing a book response, creating a poster); independently uses classroom tools and resources to complete work; and stays engaged in tasks for extended periods without redirection.	<p>Guide children to break tasks into smaller steps with visual supports (e.g., creating a checklist for finishing a poster or cleaning up materials) in classrooms or home routines.</p> <p>Encourage children to follow through on classroom projects (e.g., finishing a book response, making a poster, caring for a plant) across settings.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to use classroom tools and resources independently (e.g., rulers, scissors, digital tablets) and stay engaged in extended activities without redirection.</p>
7 years	Plans and completes grade-appropriate tasks and projects with minimal adult assistance.	Adjusts plans when routines or instructions change without becoming overly frustrated; suggests creative or unusual approaches to solve problems. Stays motivated and works persistently on multiday or multi-step projects; and reflects on work to improve or revise ideas after setbacks.	<p>Encourage children to adjust plans when instructions or routines change (e.g., moving a science activity outdoors when it rains) and practice managing frustration.</p> <p>Invite children to suggest creative or unusual approaches to solving problems in group projects, art, STEM challenges, or digital design.</p> <p>Guide children in reflecting on their work during writing workshops, science investigations, or service-learning projects, and revise ideas after setbacks.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Adapts to changes with minimal guidance, explores inventive ideas, persists through long-term challenges.	Develops and follows a plan to complete long-term projects over multiple days or weeks; applies flexible thinking when encountering unexpected challenges; explores original solutions and explains reasoning to peers or adults; and demonstrates persistence by overcoming obstacles to complete challenging tasks independently.	<p>Support children in creating and following a plan for long-term projects (e.g., class newspaper, garden design, digital slideshow) over multiple days or weeks.</p> <p>Encourage flexible thinking by prompting children to adapt strategies when faced with unexpected challenges in classroom, outdoor, or community tasks.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for children to explore original solutions, explain reasoning to peers or adults, and demonstrate persistence in completing challenging tasks independently.</p>



Standard 4.3 Persistence and Attentiveness

Children develop the ability to focus their attention and concentrate to complete tasks and increase their learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Stays focused on tasks for increasing periods, even with distractions or interruptions, and returns to complete activities, showing growing persistence and attention span.	Listens and watches attentively during group activities like story time or games, sustaining focus on adult-directed tasks for 10–15 minutes or more. Returns to activities after brief interruptions, remains mostly unaffected by typical classroom distractions, and completes simple, engaging tasks with a clear beginning, middle, and end.	Children build focus, persistence, and planning skills by engaging in projects that unfold over time, such as growing plants, creating murals, or collecting data for a class graph. Support this by reminding children of previous steps and setting simple goals (e.g., “Yesterday we painted the background; today we’ll add our animals”), and by encouraging reflection (e.g., “You’ve been working on this all week—what will you add next?”). Children return to ongoing tasks like puzzles, building sets, or garden care after short breaks, using visual cues, timers, or gentle reminders. They practice focusing on educator-led activities (stories, games, centers) for 10 to 15 minutes and engage in tasks with a clear beginning, middle, and end—such as storytelling, art projects, or outdoor learning circles—while learning to notice and manage distractions.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Selectively focuses attention based on task difficulty.</p> <p>Demonstrates concentrated effort.</p>	<p>Maintains focus for longer periods on more challenging tasks (e.g., decoding text, solving problems); selects strategies such as asking for help or rereading to sustain attention; adjusts effort based on the complexity of the task; and completes multi-step directions or assignments with minimal reminders.</p>	<p>Encourage children to sustain focus on more challenging tasks (decoding, problem-solving) across settings like classrooms, outdoor experiments, or digital platforms.</p> <p>Guide children to choose strategies (asking for help, rereading, using manipulatives) to maintain attention when tasks become difficult.</p> <p>Support completion of multi-step assignments or directions with few reminders in classrooms, playground projects, or family routines.</p>
7 years	<p>Concentrates on tasks for extended periods but may become restless, especially during activities viewed as less interesting. Repeatedly practices activities thought to be enjoyable.</p>	<p>Sustains engagement in academic tasks for 20–30 minutes with minimal redirection; persists through less-preferred tasks despite occasional restlessness; chooses to repeat enjoyable activities (e.g., rereads favorite books, plays a game multiple times); and demonstrates stamina by independently practicing skills such as math facts or writing.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for children to engage in academic tasks for 20–30 minutes (reading, writing, problem-solving) with minimal redirection in classrooms, libraries, or digital settings.</p> <p>Encourage children to persist through less-preferred tasks (math drills, handwriting) while supporting stamina with movement breaks or choice-based rewards.</p> <p>Support children in repeating enjoyable activities (rereading favorite books, playing strategy games) and practicing skills independently (math facts, writing practice) to build endurance.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Directs attention based on previous performance and concentrates on activities that require additional study.	Identifies areas of personal difficulty and independently devotes extra effort to improve; chooses to practice challenging skills without prompting; maintains concentration during extended assignments, projects, or assessments; and reflects on past performance to adjust strategies for future success.	<p>Guide children to recognize areas of personal difficulty and devote more effort to those tasks (e.g., focusing on math problem-solving or reading fluency).</p> <p>Encourage children to choose to practice skills needing improvement (typing, spelling, multiplication) in classrooms, home study, or digital tools without being prompted.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for children to concentrate on longer assignments or projects and reflect on past performance to adjust strategies for future tasks in classrooms, outdoor inquiry, or community projects.</p>

Standard 4.4 Reflection and Interpretation

Children develop skills in thinking about their learning in order to inform future decisions.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses everyday experiences to solve problems in steps, explains what might happen next, and understands how their actions can change things around them.</p>	<p>Expresses thoughts and feelings through art, body language, or symbolic play (e.g., using a paper plate as a steering wheel). Confidently explores new tools and materials, attempts multiple strategies to solve problems like puzzles or building tasks, and persists even when initial efforts are unsuccessful. Communicates their thinking using gestures, drawings, or simple words to explain what they tried or created.</p>	<p>Explore real-world materials and make observations, predictions, and comparisons as children sort through objects, like buttons, leaves, or utensils and are encouraged to make simple hypotheses (e.g., “You think the big rock will sink—why?”) and reflect on outcomes (e.g., “What did you notice?”).</p> <p>Through shared activities like cooking (“What happens when we stir the batter?”), building (“Why do you think this tower fell?”), and nature walks (“Why are these leaves different colors?”), children use reasoning to explain what they observe. They notice and name patterns (e.g., day/night, weather changes, AB patterns in blocks), make predictions (e.g., “It’s cloudy, so it might rain”), and apply past learning to new situations (e.g., “If I stack blocks like yesterday, my tower won’t fall”) during play, science talks, or outdoor exploration.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Uses trial and error to find solutions. Begins to verbalize reasoning.	Persists in trying multiple approaches when the first solution doesn't work; explains their thinking using simple language (e.g., "I did this because ..."); makes predictions before testing new solutions; and adjusts their approach based on observations from previous attempts.	<p>Encourage persistence by prompting children to try multiple attempts when an initial solution doesn't work in problem-solving centers, playground challenges, or science labs.</p> <p>Guide children to explain their thinking in simple terms ("I did this because ...") during classroom reflections or partner talks.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to make predictions before trying solutions and then adjust approaches after observing results in experiments, math activities, or digital games.</p>
7 years	Applies multiple strategies to problem-solving. Recognizes when a strategy isn't working.	Selects and uses multiple problem-solving strategies (e.g., drawing a picture, making a list, using manipulatives); recognizes when a strategy is ineffective and switches to another approach; articulates reasoning with peers or adults using academic vocabulary (e.g., "I compared," "I grouped"); and completes tasks more efficiently by choosing purposeful strategies.	<p>Support children in choosing from more than one problem-solving strategy (drawing, listing, using manipulatives) during math, writing, or inquiry projects.</p> <p>Encourage children to recognize when a strategy is ineffective and switch to another, reflecting on their process in journals, outdoor projects, or group tasks.</p> <p>Guide children to talk through reasoning with peers or adults, using academic vocabulary (e.g., "I compared," "I grouped") during classroom discussions or digital presentations.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Thinks critically to solve complex problems. Adapts strategies based on outcomes.	Explains reasoning using evidence, examples, or step-by-step logic; independently adjusts problem-solving strategies when results are unexpected; evaluates solutions to assess their validity or potential for improvement; and flexibly applies strategies to new or complex multi-step problems.	<p>Encourage children to explain reasoning with evidence, examples, or step-by-step logic during class debates, science fairs, or community showcases.</p> <p>Support children in independently adjusting strategies when results are unexpected in math, writing, or project-based tasks.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for children to evaluate solutions to determine if they make sense or could be improved, and apply strategies flexibly to new or complex, multi-step problems in classrooms, outdoor inquiry, or digital research.</p>



REASONING AND REPRESENTATIONAL THOUGHT

Reasoning (and logic) refers to the ability to think through problems and apply strategies for solving them. Children’s ability to think, reason, and use information allows them to acquire knowledge, understand the world around them, and make appropriate decisions.

Standard 4.5 Reasoning and Representational Thought

Children develop skills in causation, critical and analytical thinking, problem solving and representational thought.

The Shadow Detectives

Story

In Mr. Clark’s first-grade classroom at Sunridge Elementary, sunlight streams through the windows, casting long shadows across the floor. “Why is my shadow taller than me?” asks Zoe. Mr. Clark smiles and invites the class to become “shadow detectives.” Children begin tracing their shadows outside at different times of day, using sidewalk chalk and clipboards to record what they see.

To support all learners, Mr. Clark offers multiple ways to participate. Jordan, who has a learning difference that affects reading and writing, uses a tablet with voice-to-text to record his observations. “My shadow is shorter now!” he says excitedly. His partner, Lily, draws a picture of their morning and afternoon shadows side by side. Later, the class gathers to compare notes. “The sun moves!” “The light changes!” children shout. Mr. Clark helps them chart their findings and guides a discussion using sentence starters and visual aids.

Together, they create a hallway display titled Our Moving Shadows, featuring drawings, photos, and audio recordings. Every child’s contribution is included.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses observation, data, and inquiry to explore cause and effect in the natural world.

Applies prior knowledge and evidence to generate explanations for observed phenomena.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive science instruction supports all learners. By offering flexible tools and multimodal expression, Mr. Clark ensures that children with learning differences can fully engage in the inquiry process. The classroom becomes a space where curiosity, collaboration, and diverse strengths are celebrated.

Try It!

Offer multiple ways for children to document and share their discoveries—drawing, dictation, photos, or audio. Use visual schedules, sentence starters, and peer partnerships to support learners with disabilities. Inquiry becomes more meaningful when every child’s thinking is visible and valued.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses everyday experiences to recognize patterns, make predictions, and apply strategies to new situations. Explains how actions affect objects and demonstrates flexible, multi-step problem-solving with increasing independence.</p>	<p>Observes, categorizes, and explains their thinking using reasoning and causal language (e.g., “If I don’t water the plant, it will die.”). Sorts objects by attributes like shape, size, or color, recognizes and creates simple patterns, and makes predictions based on past experiences. When exploring nature or stories, identifies patterns and makes connections. Shares ideas and solutions using words, gestures, or supports, and may plan ahead when solving problems (e.g., “I’ll put the big block on the bottom so it won’t fall.”).</p>	<p>Create a “Ramp and Roll Challenge” where children use everyday materials (blocks, cardboard tubes, balls) to design ramps. Encourage them to predict what will happen (e.g., “Which ball will roll farthest?”), test their ideas, and adjust designs to improve results. Ask questions like, “What could make it go faster?” or “Why did it stop?” Support children in noticing patterns (e.g., smooth vs. rough surfaces), making comparisons, and applying past learning (e.g., “Last time the ramp was too short—what can we do now?”).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Conducts guided investigations using tools to gather data and begins using evidence to explain simple cause-and-effect relationships.	Uses classroom tools, such as magnifying glasses, rulers, balances, or thermometers with support; records simple data using drawings, tallies, or numbers; describes investigation outcomes by connecting evidence to explanations (e.g., “The ice melted because it was warm”); and participates in guided discussions about cause and effect relationships.	<p>Guide children to use classroom tools (magnifying glass, ruler, balance, thermometer) with support in science centers, outdoor investigations, or home exploration kits.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to record simple data with drawings, tallies, or numbers in journals, clipboards outdoors, or digital apps.</p> <p>Facilitate group discussions where children describe what happened in an investigation using evidence (“The ice melted because it was warm”) and practice cause-and-effect thinking.</p>
7 years	Collects and compares data from investigations, uses creative thinking and varied strategies to solve problems, and connects past learning to make predictions and understand new situations.	Collects and organizes data into charts, tables, or graphs; compares results from different trials or groups to identify patterns or differences; suggests multiple strategies to solve problems or answer questions; makes predictions by connecting new investigations to prior experiences; and explains cause-and-effect relationships using clear “because” statements.	<p>Support children in collecting and organizing data into charts, tables, or graphs during classroom experiments, outdoor projects, or digital activities.</p> <p>Encourage children to compare results from different trials or groups and suggest more than one way to solve a problem or answer a question.</p> <p>Guide children to make predictions by linking new investigations to prior experiences and explain cause-and-effect relationships using “because” statements.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Independently plans simple investigations, uses data and observations to build evidence-based explanations, and begins organizing information from multiple sources to connect ideas and create meaningful documents.	Designs simple investigations by formulating clear questions and planning how to collect data; uses collected data and observations to support conclusions; organizes information from multiple sources (e.g., books, charts, digital tools); writes or presents explanations that connect evidence to ideas; and revises explanations when new evidence or information is introduced.	<p>Facilitate opportunities for children to design simple investigations with a clear question and plan for collecting data in classrooms, outdoor science fairs, or community projects.</p> <p>Support children in using data and observations to draw conclusions and organize information from multiple sources (books, charts, digital tools, interviews).</p> <p>Encourage children to write or present explanations that connect evidence to ideas and revise explanations when new evidence is introduced in science discussions or digital collaboration.</p>



CREATIVE ARTS

Children explore and represent their ideas, reveal their inner thoughts and feelings, find ways to understand themselves, enrich their world, and bring beauty to their surroundings.

Standard 4.6 Creative Movement and Dance

Children produce rhythmic movements spontaneously and in imitation, with growing technical artistic ability.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Participates in guided movement activities and explores self-directed movement sequences using more complex gestures and rhythms, responding to suggestions and improvising new ways to move.	Explores and expresses ideas through creative movement by joining guided activities, trying new ways to move (e.g., changing speed, direction, or shape), and imitating or creating simple rhythmic patterns. Uses body control and imagination to act out animals, weather, or stories, and may use gestures, visuals, or adaptive tools to participate with support as needed.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to express ideas, emotions, and creativity through movement by participating in dance and dramatic movement activities. They interpret stories or poems with their bodies (e.g., “How would a butterfly move?”), explore different ways of moving (big/small, fast/slow, high/low) in classrooms, playgrounds, or outdoor spaces, and create short movement sequences (e.g., “move like an animal,” or “show the wind”). Children imitate and invent simple rhythmic patterns during music circles, dance games, or family celebrations.</p> <p>Support independence by offering broad suggestions, encouraging children to choose and adapt their movements, and providing props or simple costumes to inspire imaginative expression.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Follows movement patterns and sequences. Expresses emotions through dance.	Copies adult- or peer-led movement patterns with increasing accuracy and control; completes short movement sequences in the correct order (e.g., jump–spin–clap); uses facial expressions and body language to express emotions while dancing or moving; and responds to music by adjusting speed, force, and direction of movement based on rhythm and mood.	<p>Guide children to copy educator- or peer-led movement patterns with accuracy in classrooms, gyms, or community events.</p> <p>Provide activities where children complete short movement sequences in order, using visual prompts, music, or partner modeling.</p> <p>Encourage children to use facial expressions and body language to show feelings while dancing, and to respond to music by varying speed, force, or direction.</p>
7 years	Creates and performs short dance routines. Responds to music through movement.	Collaborates with peers to create and perform short dance routines with 3–5 planned movements; matches movement to the rhythm, tempo, or mood of the music; performs dances with a clear beginning, middle, and end; and reflects on movement choices by explaining how their actions connect to the music or story being expressed.	<p>Support children in collaborating with peers to create short dance routines (3–5 steps) in learning environments, playgrounds, or afterschool programs.</p> <p>Guide children to match movements to rhythm, tempo, or mood of music during lessons, community events, or outdoor performances.</p> <p>Encourage children to perform routines with a beginning, middle, and end, and reflect on their dance choices (e.g., “I moved slowly because the music was soft.”).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Choreographs and refines movement sequences.</p> <p>Understands varied community traditions and historical dance styles.</p>	<p>Independently choreographs multi-step movement sequences with attention to rhythm, space, and expression; revises or refines movements to improve clarity, timing, or emotional impact; identifies or demonstrates movements honoring established dance styles with family/community significance; and explains how dance can be used to represent stories, traditions, or emotions.</p>	<p>Facilitate opportunities for children to independently choreograph multi-step movement sequences in classrooms, gyms, or community programs.</p> <p>Support children in revising or refining movements to improve clarity, rhythm, or expression during rehearsals or peer feedback sessions.</p> <p>Introduce dance styles with meaningful origins and encourage children to recognize or perform characteristic movements while exploring how dance can convey stories, reflect traditions, or express emotions.</p>



Standard 4.7 Drama

Children show appreciation and awareness of drama through observation and imitation, and by participating in simple dramatic plots, assuming roles related to their life experiences as well as their fantasies.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Engages in pretend play by imitating characters and real-life roles, and with guidance, expresses emotions and social understanding through dramatic or imaginative play.	Engages in rich, collaborative dramatic play by developing themes or plots, assuming and switching roles, using props, and directing or responding to peers. Acts out everyday roles (e.g., parent, educator, firefighter); uses voice, facial expressions, and gestures to portray familiar characters; and invents simple pretend scenarios that support shared storytelling with others.	Develop imagination, communication, and social skills through group storytelling and dramatic play. Children invent characters and storylines together in drama circles or pretend play (e.g., “Let’s play house” or “You be the firefighter!”), take turns assigning roles, and suggest what happens next. Children act out everyday roles in dramatic play centers, outdoor spaces, or home reenactments, using voice and gestures to imitate familiar people or characters during puppet shows, circle time stories, or digital recordings. Support this by offering prompts that connect emotion to action (e.g., “Show me how your character feels when the tower falls down”) and encouraging role-switching and collaboration with peers.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Uses props and simple scripts. Retells familiar stories through dramatic play.	Selects and uses props (e.g., hats, toy food, books) to support role-play with intention; follows or improvises from a simple script or familiar story sequence; retells favorite storybooks or fairy tales through dramatic play; and begins to stay “in character” for short periods during play, using consistent voice, gestures, or expressions.	<p>Guide children to select props (hats, toy food, books) to support role-play in classrooms, libraries, or community storytelling spaces.</p> <p>Encourage children to follow or improvise from a simple script or story sequence during classroom activities, outdoor skits, or digital performances.</p> <p>Support children in retelling favorite stories or fairy tales through role-play, helping them begin to stay “in character” for short periods.</p>
7 years	Develops characters and settings in role-play. Participates in structured performances.	Creates characters with distinct voices, gestures, or mannerisms; helps design or describe simple settings for dramatic play or classroom performances; participates in short, structured skits with assigned roles or memorized lines; and collaborates with peers to plan dialogue, actions, and sequences for role-play or performance.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to create characters with distinct voices, gestures, or mannerisms during classroom projects, outdoor play, or community events.</p> <p>Encourage children to help design or describe simple settings for dramatic play or performances using classroom materials, outdoor spaces, or digital backgrounds.</p> <p>Facilitate short, structured skits where children collaborate to plan dialogue and action for role-play.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Writes and performs short plays. Uses voice, expression, and movement to convey emotions.	Contributes to writing simple scripts that include dialogue and stage directions; performs short plays or scenes with clear voice projection and appropriate pacing; uses facial expressions, body movement, and tone of voice to convey characters' emotions; and reflects on their own or peers' performances, offering thoughtful feedback and suggestions for improvement.	<p>Support children in contributing to simple scripts with dialogue and stage directions in classrooms, libraries, or digital tools.</p> <p>Guide children to perform plays with clear voice projection and pacing, using expressive tone, movement, and facial expressions to convey emotions.</p> <p>Encourage children to reflect on their own or peers' performances, offering supportive feedback and suggesting improvements during class, outdoor, or community showcases.</p>



Standard 4.8 Music

Children engage in a variety of musical or rhythmic activities with growing skills for a variety of purposes, including enjoyment, self-expression, and creativity.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
<i>5 years</i>	Participates in singing, dancing, and rhythm activities by imitating and creating rhythmic patterns, exploring musical instruments, and engaging with familiar songs through movement and sound.	Participates in musical activities by joining in group singing, moving their body to the beat, and exploring rhythm through clapping, stomping, and using classroom instruments. May imitate simple rhythmic patterns and engage with music expressively, even if their pitch or timing is approximate.	<p>Build rhythm, coordination, and musical awareness through playful experiences like call-and-response clapping games (e.g., “Clap-clap-stomp—now it’s your turn!”), tapping to the beat of a song, or dancing to music with different tempos. They join in group singing during circle time, family events, or community gatherings, with encouragement to participate regardless of pitch.</p> <p>Children move their bodies to music during classroom dances, playground games, or community celebrations, and explore instruments like shakers, drums, or xylophones in music centers or outdoor play. Support learning by modeling simple rhythms and celebrating children’s efforts to listen, imitate, and express themselves through sound and movement.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Follows simple rhythms and patterns. Sings songs with increasing accuracy.	Repeats and maintains simple rhythmic patterns using voice, clapping, or instruments; sings familiar songs with improved pitch accuracy and steady tempo; matches body movements to musical cues such as fast/slow or loud/soft; and participates in short call-and-response songs or musical activities with growing confidence and accuracy.	<p>Support children in repeating simple rhythmic patterns using voice, clapping, or instruments in classrooms, outdoor spaces, or digital music apps.</p> <p>Encourage children to sing familiar songs with improved pitch and steady tempo during morning meetings, school assemblies, or family literacy nights.</p> <p>Guide children to match movements to musical cues (fast/slow, loud/soft) and perform short call-and-response songs or activities with peers.</p>
7 years	Identifies and creates different tempos and beats. Explores simple composition.	Identifies differences in tempo (e.g., fast vs. slow) and variations in beat; creates and performs original short rhythm patterns using voice, body, or instruments; keeps a steady beat when clapping, tapping, or playing instruments with others; and arranges simple sound patterns (e.g., clap–tap–rest) to compose and perform short rhythmic sequences.	<p>Facilitate activities where children identify tempo differences and create and perform original short rhythm patterns using percussion instruments, claps, or body percussion.</p> <p>Support children in keeping a steady beat while clapping or playing an instrument with others in classroom ensembles, community programs, or outdoor performances.</p> <p>Encourage children to arrange simple sound patterns (clap-tap-rest) to begin “composing” music in journals, digital tools, or group projects.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Reads basic music notation.</p> <p>Expresses ideas and emotions through movement and performance.</p>	<p>Reads and performs basic rhythmic notation (e.g., quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests); sings or plays simple melodies with accurate rhythm and pitch; uses body movement, gestures, or facial expression to reflect the mood or character of the music; and performs individually or with a group to communicate emotion, story, or meaning through music.</p>	<p>Guide children to read and perform basic rhythmic notation (quarter notes, rests, eighth notes) in music classes or digital platforms.</p> <p>Support children in singing or playing simple melodies with accurate rhythm and pitch using classroom instruments, recorders, or community ensembles.</p> <p>Encourage children to use body movement or facial expressions to show the mood of music and perform individually or with groups to communicate emotion or story through music in class, assemblies, or community events.</p>



Standard 4.9 Visual Arts

Children demonstrate a growing understanding and appreciation for the creative process as they use the visual arts to express personal interests, ideas, and feelings, and share opinions about artwork and artistic experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses art tools with increasing control and purpose to express ideas, emotions, and stories; explores colors, textures, and shapes through drawings and collages; and begins to create and appreciate artwork that reflects diverse cultures and ways of life.</p>	<p>Creates drawings, paintings, and models using a variety of materials, colors, shapes, and textures to represent people, objects, or scenes (e.g., making a clay pizza or drawing a house) and begins to reflect on their work (e.g., “Next time I’ll make the tree bigger”). Explores primary colors, basic shapes, and textures through stamping, rubbing, layering, and simple design-making.</p>	<p>Develop creativity and fine motor skills through longer-term art experiences like multiday projects or story illustrations, using a variety of materials such as pastels, clay, or weaving. They explore textures by rubbing, stamping, or layering with natural objects, fabric, or found materials, and create drawings that represent people, objects, or scenes.</p> <p>Children are encouraged to name and experiment with primary colors and basic shapes through finger painting, block play, or outdoor chalk drawing. They use crayons, paint, and collage materials to design simple artworks in classrooms, libraries, or home art corners. Support this process by asking open-ended questions (e.g., “How does this artwork make you feel?” or “What do you want your picture to tell others?”) to help children reflect on and express their ideas.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Uses a variety of materials to create artwork. Begins to depict people, places, and emotions.	Explores and creates with primary and secondary colors and a variety of shapes; uses a range of materials (e.g., crayons, paint, collage) to produce more detailed designs; experiments with texture through techniques such as rubbing, stamping, and layering; and creates drawings or compositions that represent familiar objects, people, and scenes with increasing detail and intentionality.	<p>Guide children to select from varied art materials (paint, clay, collage, markers) to create classroom, outdoor, or community projects.</p> <p>Encourage children to draw recognizable figures and places with emerging detail and use color and line to show feelings (e.g., red for anger, blue for sadness).</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to share their artwork by explaining who/what is in the picture during gallery walks, family nights, or digital portfolios.</p>
7 years	Develops details in artwork. Explores symmetry, perspective, and composition.	Adds detail to drawings and paintings by incorporating patterns, textures, and features; creates symmetrical designs (e.g., butterflies, folded prints); shows emerging perspective by depicting objects as larger/closer or smaller/farther away; and thoughtfully arranges objects in artwork to create balanced compositions.	<p>Support children in adding detail to drawings and paintings (patterns, textures, features) and creating symmetrical designs (butterflies, folded prints) in classrooms or outdoor art.</p> <p>Guide children to show emerging perspective (larger/closer, smaller/farther) in their artwork and arrange objects thoughtfully for balanced composition.</p> <p>Encourage peer or family discussions where children explain how their design choices shape meaning in the artwork.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Experiments with artistic techniques. Conveys ideas and emotions through personal artistic style.	Explores techniques, such as shading, blending, and layering, to add depth and dimension to artwork; selects materials and artistic styles purposefully to convey intended ideas or moods (e.g., using soft pastels for calm scenes or bold colors for excitement); creates artwork that expresses personal feelings, ideas, or stories; and reflects on their work by describing artistic choices and the meaning behind their creations.	<p>Introduce techniques, such as shading, blending, or layering, to add depth in classroom studios, outdoor sketching, or digital drawing platforms.</p> <p>Support children in choosing materials and styles to fit an intended idea or mood in personal or group projects.</p> <p>Encourage children to produce artwork that communicates personal feelings, ideas, or stories and to reflect on their work, describing artistic choices in class discussions, community exhibits, or digital showcases.</p>



MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

Children develop the ability to explore ideas, make sense of the world, and find meaning in the physical environment as they increase their understanding and use of numbers and mathematical operations, such as measurement, geometry, and properties of ordering.

Standard 4.10 Number Sense and Operations

Children develop the ability to think and work with numbers, to understand their uses, and describe numerical relationships through structured and everyday experiences.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Counts with one-to-one correspondence to 20 and beyond, understands that the last number said represents the total, creates and compares sets using terms like more, less, or equal, recognizes and writes numerals 0–20, and begins to connect numerals to quantities up to 10.	Counts aloud to 20 with one-to-one correspondence, accurately counting sets of objects and understanding that the last number said represents the total. Matches numerals to groups of objects (up to 20), recognizes and write numerals 0–20, and compares quantities using terms like “more,” “less,” or “equal.” Identifies which of two numbers is greater and may count by ones to 100. Uses number knowledge to solve simple problems and explain their thinking.	Build number sense by playing games with cards, dice, or everyday objects to count, group, and compare sets (e.g., “Roll the dice—who has more?” or “Make a group of 5 buttons”); they explain their thinking (e.g., “How do you know that’s more?”), recognize and write numbers 0–20 using chalk, tracing tools, or number cards, match numbers to sets of objects (e.g., “Find 8 rocks to match this number”), and compare quantities using real-life situations like sharing snacks fairly, setting the table (e.g., “We need 4 forks”), or organizing toys (e.g., “Put 10 cars on the shelf”)—while also practicing counting by ones to 100 through songs, movement games, or outdoor play.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Counts to 120. Understands place value (tens and ones). Adds/subtracts within 20.	Counts, reads, and writes numbers up to 100; solves two-step addition and subtraction problems with numbers up to 20 (e.g., “I had 8 apples, got 5 more, and gave away 3”); uses drawings, number lines, or equations to represent and explain problem-solving steps; compares and orders numbers within 100; and begins to understand place value concepts (e.g., recognizing that 24 is 2 tens and 4 ones).	<p>Guide children to count forward and backward between 1 and 120 in classrooms, outdoor play, or community walks.</p> <p>Encourage grouping of objects into tens and ones using manipulatives, natural objects, or digital tools to represent numbers.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to read and write numerals up to 120 and solve addition and subtraction problems within 20 using strategies like counting on or making ten, with explanations through drawings, numbers, or objects.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Adds/subtracts within 100. Introduces multiplication concepts. Understands place value to 1,000.</p>	<p>Fluently adds and subtracts within 100 using a variety of strategies and algorithms; represents multiplication using arrays, equal groups, or repeated addition; reads and writes numbers to 1,000 in standard, expanded, and word form; explains the place value of digits in two- and three-digit numbers (hundreds, tens, ones); and solves word problems involving addition and subtraction within 100.</p>	<p>Support children in fluently adding and subtracting within 100 using strategies and algorithms in classroom math centers, outdoor challenges, or digital apps.</p> <p>Introduce arrays, equal groups, or repeated addition to represent multiplication through games, building activities, or real-life scenarios (e.g., rows of chairs).</p> <p>Encourage children to read and write numbers to 1,000 in standard, expanded, and word form, and to explain the value of digits in 2- and 3-digit numbers (hundreds, tens, ones).</p> <p>Guide children in solving word problems involving addition and subtraction within 100 in classroom projects, community activities, or outdoor tasks.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Fluently adds/subtracts within 1,000. Multiplies/divides within 100.</p> <p>Understands fractions as parts of a whole.</p>	<p>Accurately adds and subtracts multidigit numbers within 1,000; recalls basic multiplication and division facts within 100 with increasing fluency; uses models, such as arrays, equal groups, and number lines, to solve multiplication and division problems; represents fractions as parts of a whole, parts of a set, or on a number line; and compares fractions with the same numerator or denominator.</p>	<p>Facilitate practice in accurately adding and subtracting multidigit numbers within 1,000 in journals, projects, or digital programs.</p> <p>Encourage children to recall basic multiplication and division facts within 100 with increasing fluency through games, songs, or group competitions.</p> <p>Support problem-solving with models (arrays, equal groups, number lines) to represent multiplication and division in classroom, outdoor, or community contexts.</p> <p>Guide children to represent fractions as part of a whole, set, or on a number line and compare fractions with the same numerator or denominator using manipulatives, visuals, or digital tools.</p>

Standard 4.11 Measurement

Children develop skills in using measurement instruments to explore and discover measurement relationships and characteristics, such as length, quantity, volume, distance, weight, area, and time.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Uses appropriate language to describe size and shape. Estimates and measures length using units and compares objects by length, weight, and capacity using terms like “longer,” “shorter,” “heavier,” and “lighter.”	Uses comparative language (e.g., “bigger/smaller,” “heavier/lighter,” “more/less”) to describe and compare objects by size, weight, length, or capacity. Measures using nonstandard tools like blocks or hands and may record or talk about their findings. Sorts and groups objects based on observable traits and explains their reasoning. Predicts what comes next in familiar routines and uses what they know to make guesses and check their ideas.	Encourage children to use comparative language (longer/shorter, heavier/lighter, more/less) when exploring classroom tools, outdoor objects, or items from home. Provide opportunities to place objects side by side to compare length or height and to lift or balance objects for informal weight comparisons. Facilitate play where children fill and empty containers to compare capacity in sand tables, water play, or outdoor sensory bins.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Uses non-standard and standard measurement tools. Tells time to the hour and half-hour. Begins organizing data into three categories and asking questions about the data.</p>	<p>Measures length using non-standard units (e.g., cubes, paperclips) and begins to use rulers; identifies and uses analog and digital clocks to tell time to the hour and half-hour (e.g., “It’s 3 o’clock” or “Half past 4”); sorts objects or data into up to three categories (e.g., sorting animals by type and habitat); and asks and answers questions about simple data displays (e.g., “Which category has the most items? Which has the least?”).</p>	<p>Guide children to measure objects with non-standard units (cubes, paperclips) and begin using rulers in classrooms, playgrounds, or community spaces.</p> <p>Introduce analog and digital clocks to tell time to the hour and half-hour during daily routines, outdoor schedules, or family events.</p> <p>Support children in sorting objects or data into up to three categories and asking/answering questions about simple data displays (e.g., “Which has more?”) in classroom surveys or community projects.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Measures using appropriate units (inches, cm, feet).</p> <p>Tells Time to the nearest 5 minutes. Begins creating picture, bar, and line graphs based on collected data.</p>	<p>Selects appropriate standard units (e.g., inches, feet, centimeters) to measure objects accurately; reads and writes time to the nearest 5 minutes on analog and digital clocks (e.g., 3:25, 7:50); collects data and organizes it into charts or tables (e.g., recording daily weather or favorite fruits); creates picture graphs, bar graphs, and simple line plots to represent data visually; and interprets graphs by comparing categories or data points (e.g., “Which fruit is the most popular?” or “How many more children chose apples than oranges?”).</p>	<p>Encourage children to select standard units (inches, feet, centimeters) when measuring objects in classrooms, outdoor investigations, or home projects.</p> <p>Guide children to read and write time to the nearest 5 minutes on analog and digital clocks during school schedules or community activities.</p> <p>Support data collection in group projects and help children organize it into charts or tables, then create picture graphs, bar graphs, and simple line plots with classroom or digital tools.</p> <p>Facilitate interpretation of graphs by prompting children to compare categories or data points across classroom surveys, science experiments, or community events.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Solves problems involving elapsed time. Measures volume and mass. Interprets scaled graphs.	Solves word problems involving elapsed time by calculating start and end times (e.g., “If the movie starts at 3:15 and ends at 4:45, how long is the movie?”); measures and estimates liquid volume using liters and milliliters, and mass using grams and kilograms (e.g., estimating the weight of a backpack or volume of a water bottle); reads and interprets scaled picture and bar graphs where each symbol represents a set quantity (e.g., each star equals 5 votes); uses data from graphs to solve one- and two-step problems (e.g., “How many more children prefer apples than oranges?” or “What is the total number of votes for bananas and grapes combined?”); and chooses appropriate measurement strategies for real-world tasks (e.g., selecting whether to measure liquid volume or mass when cooking or packing).	<p>Guide children to solve word problems involving elapsed time (start and end times) using real-world routines like recess, lunch, or field trips.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to measure and estimate liquid volume (liters, milliliters) and mass (grams, kilograms) during classroom experiments, cooking projects, or outdoor investigations.</p> <p>Support children in reading and interpreting scaled picture/bar graphs (e.g., each symbol represents 5) and using data to solve one- and two-step problems.</p> <p>Encourage children to choose appropriate measurement strategies (e.g., rulers for length, scales for weight, timers for duration) when solving real-world tasks in class, outdoor, or community contexts.</p>

Standard 4.12 Data Analysis

Children apply mathematical skills in data analysis, such as counting, sorting, and comparing objects.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Uses appropriate language to describe attributes and characteristics, such as size and shape. Estimates measurement characteristics of familiar objects or events. Measures length by laying units end to end.	Describes how objects are grouped using multiple characteristics and explains reasoning, while estimating or measuring objects (e.g., “I put all the small, red rectangles together because they are the same size and color,” or “This block is as long as two hands”).	Provide opportunities for children to explore and communicate sorting and measurement by grouping objects using more than one characteristic—such as saying, “I put all the shiny, big buttons together because they are the same color and texture”—and explaining their reasoning. They also estimate or measure using familiar references, such as saying, “This ribbon is as long as my arm,” or using blocks to measure how tall a book is.
6 years	<p><i>The Benchmark, Indicators, and Learning Opportunities have been integrated with the age band criteria within Standard 4.11 to streamline interpretation.</i></p>		
7 years			
8 years			

Standard 4.13 Algebraic Thinking

Children learn to identify, describe, produce, and create patterns using mathematical language and materials.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Creates more complex patterns using sound, movement, and objects, and begins to understand basic addition and subtraction through the use of concrete materials and drawings.	Creates and describes repeating patterns using objects, drawings, or movement, and explains the pattern rule (e.g., “red, blue, red, blue”). Represents and solves simple addition and subtraction problems using fingers, drawings, or manipulatives, and may match story problems to number sentences (e.g., $3 + 2 = 5$). With support, begins writing equations, identifies missing numbers, and explains their thinking using words, models, or visuals.	<p>Build early math and reasoning skills by using open-ended materials like buttons, beads, or stamps to create and extend multi-step or repeating patterns (e.g., AAB, ABB, ABC), while asking questions like, “Tell me your pattern—what comes next?” These patterning experiences connect to rhythm and early math concepts.</p> <p>Children also explore addition and subtraction by acting out simple number stories (e.g., “Three children went down the slide, then two more joined—how many are there now?”), matching them to number sentences like $3 + 2 = 5$. With support, they write their own equations using tools like outdoor chalk or whiteboards (e.g., counting beanbags tossed into a bucket and writing $4 + 1 = 5$), and solve for missing numbers using objects, drawings, or fingers (e.g., $4 + \underline{\quad} = 6$).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Uses number sentences to represent problems. Solves for missing numbers (e.g., $4 + \underline{\quad} = 9$).</p>	<p>Solves two-step problems involving addition and subtraction within 20 (e.g., “I had 8, got 5 more, and gave away 3”), and represents problem-solving steps through drawings, number lines, or written equations to demonstrate understanding and reasoning.</p>	<p>Support children in solving two-step problems with numbers up to 20. You might say, “I had 8 apples, then picked 5 more, but we ate 3. How many now?” and use real or pretend fruit during dramatic play to make it hands-on.</p> <p>Encourage children to represent their thinking with drawings, number lines, or equations—such as solving $7 - 2 + 4$ by hopping along a chalk number line outdoors.</p> <p>Guide them to explain their solution strategies and use repeated addition to model multiplication. For instance, arrange chairs in 3 rows of 4 and have children explain, “$3 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 12$,” then record it as $3 \times 4 = 12$.</p> <p>Invite them to recognize patterns in addition and multiplication tables by clapping and chanting skip counting by fives while passing a ball around the circle. Support understanding of the commutative property by building arrays with tiles—showing 3 rows of 4 and 4 rows of 3—and discussing how both equal 12.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to model division as sharing or grouping, such as acting out, “We have 12 crackers to share among 4 friends. How many each?” during snack time or dramatic play.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Solves two-step word problems using addition and subtraction. Introduces multiplication.	Recognizes and explains patterns in addition and multiplication tables using words, numbers, or visual models (e.g., skip counting by 2s, 5s, 10s); demonstrates the commutative property of multiplication (e.g., $3 \times 4 = 4 \times 3$) through explanations and models; and models division as sharing or repeated subtraction using arrays, number lines, or grouping strategies (e.g., dividing 12 objects into equal groups), building on prior understanding to deepen number sense and early multiplication/division concepts.	<p>Encourage children to recognize patterns in addition and multiplication tables by clapping and chanting skip counting by fives while passing a ball around the circle, or by hopping along a number line drawn in chalk outdoors.</p> <p>Support their understanding of the commutative property by building arrays with tiles—showing 3 rows of 4 and then 4 rows of 3—and discussing how both arrangements equal 12.</p> <p>Use counters or blocks to create different arrangements and compare them.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to model division as sharing or grouping, such as acting out, “We have 12 crackers to share among 4 friends. How many does each person get?” during snack time or dramatic play.</p> <p>Use toy animals and pretend food to divide treats among them, making the concept playful and concrete.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Identifies and explains number patterns.</p> <p>Explores properties of multiplication and division.</p>	<p>Explains the relationship between multiplication and division using fact families (e.g., $6 \times 7 = 42$, $42 \div 7 = 6$, $42 \div 6 = 7$); applies the distributive property to solve multiplication problems (e.g., $6 \times 7 = (6 \times 5) + (6 \times 2)$); identifies and extends complex number patterns such as alternating sequences or multiplication table patterns; and solves real-world multiplication and division word problems with numbers up to 100.</p>	<p>Guide children to explain multiplication/division relationships using fact families. From $4 \times 5 = 20$, generate $5 \times 4 = 20$, $20 \div 5 = 4$, and $20 \div 4 = 5$. Use flash cards, cubes, or digital tools. (e.g., play “Fact Family Match” with flash cards, build arrays with cubes, or use a digital fact family app).</p> <p>Support children in applying the distributive property. Solve 6×7 by splitting: $(6 \times 5) + (6 \times 2)$. Represent with counters, base-ten blocks, or on a number line. Encourage children to identify complex number patterns and solve real-world problems. Track skip-count patterns on a hundreds chart (such as multiples of 9).</p> <p>Engage in a real-world problem: “Each table has 8 chairs. If we need to seat 72 people, how many tables?” Solve using multiplication/division and manipulatives (e.g., act it out with chairs and tables in the classroom).</p>

Standard 4.14 Geometry and Spatial Reasoning

Children build the foundation for recognizing and describing shapes by manipulating, playing with, tracing, and making common shapes. Children learn spatial reasoning and directional words as they become aware of their bodies and personal space within the physical environment.

The Great Garden Inquiry

Story

Outside on the playground, Ms. Nguyen’s preschoolers gather around three bubble wands of different sizes. “Which one do you think makes the biggest bubble?” she asks. Children shout predictions: “The giant one!” “No, the small one—because it’s faster!”

Everyone takes turns dipping and blowing. Elijah holds a wand while his friend Zoe helps him dip it into the solution. “Ready?” Zoe asks. Elijah nods, and they blow together, laughing as a bubble floats away. Nearby, Fatima, who uses a communication device, taps a button: “Big bubble!” Ms. Nguyen smiles, “Yes, Fatima! Let’s measure it!”

She kneels with a clipboard, helping children use yarn to measure bubble diameters. Later, the director visits to see their “Bubble Lab” chart. The children proudly explain their findings, and the director smiles: “You’re real scientists!” Cheers erupt as they replay the experiment together.

Linked Benchmark(s)

Uses observation, inquiry, and comparison to investigate cause and effect.
Collaborates with peers to plan, test, and share findings in playful ways.
Engages in inclusive group experiences that support communication and participation for all learners.

Educator Reflection / Evidence of Quality

This activity demonstrates how inclusive, play-based inquiry supports cognitive and social development for all children. With thoughtful facilitation, every child—regardless of ability or language background—has a voice in the learning process. Peer collaboration and adaptive tools ensure full participation and joyful discovery.

Try It!

Design “mini inquiry labs” with accessible materials—bubble trays at varied heights, adaptive tools, and visual supports. Encourage peer partnerships and model inclusive language. Invite families and administrators to observe and celebrate how all children contribute to shared learning.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	<p>Uses and responds to positional words, and begins to identify, compare, and sort two- and three-dimensional shapes by attributes such as size, shape, and other characteristics, describing their similarities and differences.</p>	<p>Uses spatial language (e.g., behind, forward, backward) and identifies common 2D and 3D shapes by their attributes. Describes shapes using informal terms like sides, corners, curves, or faces, and may sort or compare shapes by size or number of sides. Begins to recognize shapes in everyday objects (e.g., “That ball is a sphere” or “The sign is a triangle”) and may use touch or observation to explain their reasoning.</p>	<p>Invite children to build early math and reasoning skills by creating and extending patterns with open-ended materials like beads, buttons, or natural items (e.g., AB, AAB, ABC). Ask, “What’s your pattern? What comes next?” to connect patterning to rhythm and math concepts. Children also explore addition and subtraction through real-life number stories (e.g., “Three children were on the climber, then two more joined—how many now?”), record equations with chalk or whiteboards (e.g., $4 + 1 = 5$), and solve missing-number problems using objects or drawings.</p> <p>Set up a “Pattern and Number Play Station” with beads, buttons, and beanbags. Children create patterns, explain what comes next, then act out number stories by tossing beanbags into buckets, writing equations, and solving simple math challenges.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Partitions shapes into halves and quarters.</p> <p>Identifies congruent shapes.</p> <p>Understands halves and fourths in simple contexts.</p>	<p>Explores part-whole relationships by dividing shapes into equal parts and identifying halves and fourths in real objects (e.g., folding a paper into four parts, cutting fruit in half). Uses fraction words, such as “half” and “quarter” when describing parts. Recognizes and matches congruent shapes by tracing, folding, or overlapping, and begins to explain why shapes are the same or different based on size, sides, or angles.</p>	<p>Support children in solving two-step problems with numbers up to 20.</p> <p>“I had 8 apples, then picked 5 more, but we ate 3. How many now?” Use real or pretend fruit in dramatic play (e.g., act out the scenario with toy apples or counters).</p> <p>Encourage children to use drawings, number lines, or equations to represent steps.</p> <p>Solve $7 - 2 + 4$ by hopping on a chalk number line outdoors (e.g., draw a large number line on the playground and have children physically hop to show each step).</p> <p>Guide children to explain solution strategies and use repeated addition to model multiplication.</p> <p>Arrange chairs in 3 rows of 4 and have children explain: “$3 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 12$,” then record as $3 \times 4 = 12$ (e.g., set up real chairs or use blocks to build rows and discuss the pattern).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Recognizes symmetry.</p> <p>Classifies shapes by attributes. Recognizes and writes simple fractions.</p> <p>Understands fractions as equal parts of a whole.</p>	<p>Analyzes and sorts shapes based on attributes such as number of sides, angles, and parallel lines. Identifies and creates symmetrical figures, drawing lines of symmetry accurately. Uses fraction symbols ($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{3}$) to represent equal parts of shapes or sets and explains that equal parts can look different but have the same value (e.g., “These two pieces are shaped differently, but they’re both one-half”).</p>	<p>Encourage children to recognize patterns in addition and multiplication tables.</p> <p>Clap and chant skip counting by fives while passing a ball around the circle (e.g., turn it into a rhythm game or use music for engagement).</p> <p>Support children in demonstrating the commutative property.</p> <p>Build arrays with tiles—show 3 rows of 4 and 4 rows of 3—then discuss how both equal 12 (e.g., use grid paper or interactive digital array builders).</p> <p>Provide opportunities to model division as sharing or grouping.</p> <p>“We have 12 crackers to share among 4 friends. How many each?” Act it out during snack time or dramatic play (e.g., use real snacks or counters to model equal sharing).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Finds area and perimeter. Understands angles and properties of polygons and begins working with decimals.	Applies knowledge of geometry and measurement to explore and compare shapes and quantities. Uses square units to measure and compare area, and calculates perimeter by adding side lengths. Identifies and classifies angles as right, acute, or obtuse. Names and describes a variety of polygons based on sides and angles (e.g., triangle, quadrilateral, pentagon, hexagon). Connects fractions to decimals in familiar contexts (e.g., recognizing that $\frac{1}{2} = 0.5$ or $\frac{1}{4} = 0.25$ when using money or measuring).	<p>Guide children to explain multiplication/division relationships using fact families. From $4 \times 5 = 20$, generate $5 \times 4 = 20$, $20 \div 5 = 4$, and $20 \div 4 = 5$. Use flash cards, cubes, or digital tools (e.g., create a “Fact Family House” where children write related facts inside a house shape).</p> <p>Support children in applying the distributive property.</p> <p>Solve 6×7 by splitting: $(6 \times 5) + (6 \times 2)$. Represent with counters, base-ten blocks, or on a number line (e.g., draw two groups on paper and label each partial product).</p> <p>Encourage children to identify complex number patterns and solve real-world problems. Track skip-count patterns on a hundreds chart (e.g., color multiples of 9 and look for diagonal patterns).</p> <p>Explore a real-world problem: “Each table has 8 chairs. If we need to seat 72 people, how many tables?” Solve using multiplication/division and manipulatives (e.g., use counters or small objects to model tables and chairs).</p>

SCIENCE

Children develop an understanding and awareness of their environment (the natural world) and scientific concepts and practices as they develop skills in making predictions, testing their knowledge, and conducting scientific investigations. Children’s natural sense of wonder and delight in learning about their world fuels scientific exploration.

Standard 4.15 Scientific Thinking and Use of the Scientific Method

As children seek to understand their environment and test new knowledge, they engage in scientific investigations using their senses to observe, manipulate objects, ask questions, make predictions, and develop conclusions and generalizations.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Engages in hands-on scientific exploration by making observations, asking simple questions, using tools to collect information, and beginning to compare and contrast findings.	Gathers information through observation and hands-on exploration, using tools like magnifiers, droppers, or ramps to investigate. Asks questions such as “what,” “why,” or “how,” and notice changes over time—like a plant growing, ice melting, or how objects move. Uses their senses to make detailed observations, test ideas, and share findings through drawings, comparisons, or simple explanations.	<p>Engage in extended inquiry by observing insects, growing seeds, or exploring natural materials using basic tools, such as magnifiers and rulers. Children use their senses—sight, touch, smell, and hearing—to notice details (e.g., the smell of pine needles or the feel of tree bark) and are encouraged to ask and explore simple “what” or “why” questions (e.g., “Why is the puddle gone?”).</p> <p>Through hands-on experiences with materials like sand, water, and blocks, children describe outcomes, compare results, and draw simple conclusions (e.g., “What stayed the same? What changed?”).</p> <p>Support learning by guiding documentation through drawings, journals, or digital tools and encouraging children to share their observations and thinking.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Makes predictions and records observations.</p> <p>Sorts objects based on properties.</p>	<p>Makes predictions based on prior knowledge or observation (e.g., “The ice will melt because it’s warm”). Sorts and classifies objects by multiple attributes (e.g., size, color, texture). Records findings using drawings, tallies, or simple words. Describes and compares patterns, similarities, or differences noticed during exploration, showing growing reasoning skills.</p>	<p>Guide children to make predictions based on prior knowledge (e.g., “The ice will melt because it’s warm in the room”). Test with ice cubes in different spots.</p> <p>Encourage sorting and classifying objects by size, color, shape, or texture (e.g., group leaves, rocks, or shells collected outdoors).</p> <p>Provide opportunities to record observations with pictures, tallies, or short words in notebooks or clipboards.</p> <p>Support children in describing similarities and differences noticed during exploration (e.g., “These rocks are smooth, but those are rough”).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Conducts simple investigations. Tests predictions Begins recording data systematically.</p>	<p>Follows steps in a guided investigation to test predictions and compare outcomes. Records observations and data using simple tables, charts, or graphs. Describes cause-and-effect relationships based on results (e.g., “It melted faster in the sun because it was hotter”). Begins to reflect on how results support or change original ideas.</p>	<p>Facilitate child participation in educator-guided investigations with clear steps.</p> <p>Plant seeds in different conditions (light vs. dark, wet vs. dry) (e.g., set up labeled containers and have children observe daily).</p> <p>Encourage children to test predictions and compare results to initial ideas.</p> <p>Encourage children to record which seeds sprouted and revisit earlier predictions (e.g., use a simple chart to track growth and discuss outcomes).</p> <p>Guide children to use tables, charts, or graphs to record and display data. (e.g., create a bar graph showing how many seeds grew in each condition).</p> <p>Support children in describing cause-and-effect relationships. “The seed didn’t grow because it didn’t get water” (e.g., prompt children to explain what happened and why using observation notes).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Designs investigations. Draws conclusions based on evidence. Explains findings.</p>	<p>Independently asks a testable question and plans an investigation with appropriate tools and steps. Collects and organizes data to identify patterns or results. Uses evidence to draw conclusions and explains findings clearly through writing, visuals, or discussion (e.g., chart, model, or short report).</p>	<p>Encourage children to independently generate testable questions for investigation. “What would happen if we used salt water instead of fresh water to grow plants?” (e.g., provide visual prompts or sentence starters for children who need support, such as “What would happen if...?” cards).</p> <p>Guide children to plan steps and select tools (thermometers, rulers, measuring cups) needed to collect data. (e.g., use picture-based checklists and color-coded tools to help children with organization and memory challenges).</p> <p>Support children in drawing evidence-based conclusions from their data. “The sunflowers grew taller in the sunlight than in the shade” (e.g., offer graphic organizers or templates for recording observations to reduce cognitive load).</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities for children to explain findings clearly through oral presentations, written reports, models, or digital charts shared with peers, families, or community groups (e.g., allow multiple formats—verbal, visual, or digital—and provide assistive technology or peer support for children who need it).</p>

Standard 4.16 Life Science

Children develop understanding of and compassion for living things.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Explores how living things grow and change, identifies their basic needs, recognizes differences between living and non-living things, and begins to understand how living things relate to and depend on their environments.	Observes and describes how living things grow, change, and interact with their environment. Notices and talk about changes over time—such as plants sprouting, animals growing, or trees losing leaves—and may draw or describe these changes. Identifies basic needs of living things (like water, food, and shelter), recognizes simple life cycles (e.g., seed to plant, egg to butterfly), and sorts plants or animals by visible traits like fur, feathers, or leaves. Also understands that young animals and plants resemble their parents but are not exactly the same.	<p>Engage in ongoing investigations by growing plants from seeds or observing caterpillars transform into butterflies, recording their observations through drawings or journals and explaining changes over time. Explore what living things need to survive—like food, water, air, and space—through songs, picture books, and outdoor observations.</p> <p>Children sort and classify objects as living or non-living using classroom items or natural materials, and explain their reasoning (e.g., “It moves and grows, so it’s living”). Guide discussions about environmental interdependence (e.g., “What happens if there’s no rain?”) and support children in describing how plants and animals meet their needs, such as a bird eating seeds or a flower needing sunlight. Comparing “before and after” observations helps children understand growth, change, and the connections between living things and their environment.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Explores life cycles of plants and animals.</p> <p>Classifies organisms by characteristics.</p>	<p>Describes simple life cycles (like seed to plant or egg to butterfly/frog) and observes changes in living things over time. Sorts animals or plants into groups based on visible traits such as fur, feathers, leaves, or flowers. Explains that offspring look like their parents but are not exactly the same.</p>	<p>Facilitate exploration of simple life cycles (seed → plant, egg → butterfly/frog) using stories, videos, or live examples in classrooms or outdoor gardens.</p> <p>Encourage children to observe and record changes in living things over time (e.g., keep a plant journal or chick-hatching log).</p> <p>Guide children to sort animals or plants into groups by traits (fur, feathers, leaves, flowers) using pictures, manipulatives, or digital apps.</p> <p>Support children in explaining that offspring resemble but are not identical to parents through photos, drawings, or family animal studies.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Investigates habitats and ecosystems. Understands food chains.	Identifies and describes local habitats (forests, ponds, deserts, grasslands) and matches animals and plants to the habitats where they thrive. Explains simple food chains (e.g., sun → plant → rabbit → fox) and uses models, drawings, or role-play to show relationships within ecosystems.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to identify and describe local habitats (forests, ponds, deserts, grasslands) through field trips, community walks, or digital tours.</p> <p>Encourage children to match animals and plants to their habitats using cards, drawings, or models.</p> <p>Guide children to explain simple food chains (sun → plant → rabbit → fox) with visual charts, role-play, or digital simulations.</p> <p>Support children in using models, drawings, or dramatization to represent relationships in ecosystems.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Analyzes adaptations and interdependence in ecosystems. Explores human impact on environments.	Explains how specific traits help animals or plants survive (e.g., webbed feet for swimming, cactus spines for water retention). Describes how plants, animals, and humans depend on each other in ecosystems, identifies human impacts on the environment (like pollution or deforestation), and suggests ways people can help protect or restore natural habitats.	<p>Facilitate inquiry into how specific traits help plants and animals survive (e.g., webbed feet for swimming, cactus spines to store water).</p> <p>Guide children to describe interdependence between plants, animals, and humans in ecosystems through discussions, role-play, or graphic organizers.</p> <p>Encourage children to identify examples of human impact on environments (pollution, deforestation, conservation) using local news, books, or community projects.</p> <p>Support children in suggesting ways humans can protect or restore environments, such as recycling, planting trees, or reducing waste at school.</p>

Standard 4.17 Physical Science

Children develop an understanding of the physical world (the nature and properties of energy, nonliving matter, and the forces that give order to nature).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Explores how objects move and change, identifies properties like color, shape, and texture, and begins to understand cause and effect through observation and experimentation.	Observes and explores how things move, change, and react, using simple predictions, observations, and descriptive language. May guess what will happen, watch what does happen, and talk about what they notice. Describes objects using words like “color,” “size,” “shape,” and “texture.” Sorts items by physical properties, and explains how things are alike or different. Through hands-on exploration—like rolling balls, mixing substances, or building with blocks—begins to understand cause and effect and share their thinking with others.	Explore early science concepts through guided experiments with ramps, balance scales, and mixtures like baking soda and vinegar, using simple tools, such as measuring cups, droppers, and spoons. Prompt prediction and reasoning (e.g., “What do you think will happen?”), encourage safe experimentation with household materials (like mixing colors or testing textures), and support documentation through drawings or discussion. Children use descriptive words—such as “color,” “size,” “shape,” and “texture”—when observing objects (e.g., “The ball is round and smooth,” or “The leaf is green and bumpy”) and sort items by physical properties like size, shape, or color. They explore movement by pushing, pulling, rolling, or dropping objects (e.g., racing toy cars down ramps) and explain similarities or differences (e.g., “These rocks are both hard, but one is shiny and one is rough”), building observation, comparison, and reasoning skills through hands-on discovery.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Observes and compares materials based on properties (solid/liquid). Explores light, sound, and motion.</p>	<p>Classifies materials as solids or liquids based on what they observe (e.g., water pours, clay holds shape). Predicts and tests what happens when solids or liquids are moved, poured, or reshaped (e.g., pouring water into different containers). Describes sounds using words like “loud,” “soft,” “high,” “low,” and explores how sounds are made (e.g., tapping a drum, blowing a whistle). Observes how light interacts with objects by noticing shadows and reflections. Compares how objects move, describing speed (fast/slow) and path (straight/zigzag).</p>	<p>Guide children to classify materials as solid or liquid through hands-on exploration. Sort classroom items such as water, juice, blocks, and sand (e.g., provide labeled bins and picture cards for visual support; use tactile materials for sensory engagement).</p> <p>Encourage children to predict and test what happens when solids or liquids are moved, poured, or reshaped.</p> <p>Ask, “What happens when you pour water versus when you pour beans?” (e.g., break steps into a simple sequence with visuals; allow extra time for exploration and provide sensory-friendly containers).</p> <p>Provide opportunities to describe sounds (loud/soft, high/low) and explore how they are made. Use rubber bands, shakers, or classroom instruments_ (e.g., create a sound station with clear picture instructions; offer noise-reducing headphones for sensory-sensitive children). Support children in observing light interactions.</p> <p>Make shadows with flashlights and use mirrors for reflections (e.g., use large, easy-to-handle mirrors; provide step-by-step visual guides and allow children to work in pairs for support). Facilitate comparisons of how objects move.</p> <p>Roll marbles down straight versus zigzag ramps (e.g., color-code ramps for clarity; provide simplified recording sheets with pictures instead of text).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Investigates changes in matter. Experiments with forces and motion.	Observes and records simple changes in matter, such as melting, freezing, and dissolving (e.g., ice melting, sugar dissolving in water). Predicts what will happen when materials are mixed, heated, or cooled (e.g., what happens when water is heated). Explains how pushes and pulls cause movement or changes in speed and direction (e.g., pushing a toy car). Tests how force strength or surface texture affects how objects move (e.g., rolling a ball on carpet vs. tile). Investigates force and motion using simple tools like spring scales or ramps.	<p>Encourage children to observe and record changes in matter (melting, freezing, dissolving) (e.g., freeze and melt ice cubes, stir sugar or salt into water).</p> <p>Guide predictions of outcomes when materials are mixed, heated, or cooled (e.g., ask, “What will happen if we put chocolate chips in the sun?”).</p> <p>Support children in explaining pushes and pulls as causes of movement or changes in speed or direction (e.g., push swings lightly vs. strongly and compare outcomes).</p> <p>Facilitate tests of force strength or surface texture on movement (e.g., roll toy cars on smooth vs. rough surfaces).</p> <p>Provide simple tools for investigating force and motion in classroom or outdoor experiments (e.g., use spring scales to measure force or ramps to test how slope affects speed).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Understands states of matter. Explores heat transfer and magnetism. Applies knowledge of forces.	<p>Identifies and explains the three states of matter—solid, liquid, and gas—using examples like ice, water, and steam.</p> <p>Describes how heat causes changes such as melting and evaporation.</p> <p>Demonstrates how magnets attract and repel objects (e.g., using fridge magnets).</p> <p>Explains how balanced and unbalanced forces affect motion (e.g., why a rolling ball slows down or speeds up). Applies their understanding of motion and forces to solve real-world problems like, building ramps or exploring simple machines (e.g., pulleys or levers).</p>	<p>Guide children to classify materials as solid or liquid through hands-on exploration.</p> <p>Sort classroom items such as water, juice, blocks, and sand (e.g., provide labeled bins for sorting and discuss characteristics together).</p> <p>Encourage children to predict and test what happens when solids or liquids are moved, poured, or reshaped. Ask, “What happens when you pour water versus when you pour beans?” (e.g., let children experiment with different containers and record observations).</p> <p>Provide opportunities to describe sounds (loud/soft, high/low) and explore how they are made.</p> <p>Use rubber bands, shakers, or classroom instruments (e.g., create a sound station where children test and compare sounds).</p> <p>Support children in observing light interactions. Make shadows with flashlights and use mirrors for reflections (e.g., set up a light exploration area with flashlights, mirrors, and objects).</p> <p>Facilitate comparisons of how objects move. Roll marbles down straight versus zigzag ramps (e.g., build ramps of different shapes and measure how far marbles travel).</p>

Standard 4.18 Earth and Space

Children develop an understanding of the earth and planets.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Observes weather patterns and seasonal changes, recognizes differences between day and night, and begins to understand how people and animals adapt to their environments.	Demonstrates early understanding of design and function by planning, building, and explaining how their constructions work—such as building a bridge for a toy car, testing materials for strength, or modifying designs based on results. Selects from available tools and materials (e.g., blocks, tape, scissors) to build or fix something, construct simple structures like towers or bridges using everyday items, and experiment with ways to make them stand, balance, or function as intended. Often collaborates with peers to solve building challenges and explains the purpose of their creations, showing persistence and flexibility as they test ideas and make changes.	<p>Invite children to explore seasonal change and weather patterns by observing and recording daily conditions using drawings, charts, or symbols (e.g., “Today is cloudy and windy”) and tracking long-term changes through photos, temperature charts, or nature journals. They observe local environments like parks or gardens across seasons and discuss how people and animals adapt (e.g., “How do animals stay warm in winter?” or “What do we wear in summer vs. winter?”). Introduce global differences by comparing climates—such as snowy, dry, or tropical regions—and support role-play with props to explore how people use tools like fans, umbrellas, or boots to adapt.</p> <p>Children also compare day and night sky features (sun, moon, stars) and begin to notice simple weather patterns over time (e.g., “It snows in winter”), building awareness of environmental change and human-environment interaction.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Identifies natural resources. Explores seasonal changes.</p>	<p>Names common natural resources like water, soil, trees, and air, and matches them with their everyday uses (e.g., trees for wood, water for drinking). Describes how plants, animals, and clothing choices change with the seasons and records seasonal patterns using pictures or simple charts.</p>	<p>Introduce common natural resources (water, soil, trees, air) through classroom discussions, outdoor explorations, or picture cards (e.g., take a nature walk and identify resources, or use photo cards for sorting activities).</p> <p>Encourage children to match natural resources with their uses.</p> <p>“Trees give us wood for building.” “Water is for drinking.” (e.g., create a matching game with resource and use cards).</p> <p>Guide children to describe changes in plants, animals, and clothing choices across seasons with observations and drawings (e.g., keep a seasonal observation journal or draw pictures showing changes).</p> <p>Support children in recording seasonal patterns with simple data charts, weather wheels, or digital trackers (e.g., use a classroom weather chart or an interactive app to track daily conditions).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Examines landforms, water sources, and the water cycle. Tracks changes over time.	Identifies landforms, such as mountains, hills, and plains, and bodies of water like rivers, lakes, and oceans. Explains the basic water cycle using terms like evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. Uses observations and simple tools (e.g., thermometer, rain gauge) to track weather changes and compares data or landscapes over time to identify patterns and differences.	<p>Provide opportunities to identify landforms (mountains, hills, valleys, plains) and bodies of water (rivers, lakes, oceans) using maps, models, or community examples.</p> <p>Encourage children to explain the basic water cycle (evaporation, condensation, precipitation) with diagrams, role-play, or experiments.</p> <p>Guide children to use tools (rain gauges, thermometers) to track changes in weather or temperature.</p> <p>Support children in comparing landscapes or weather data over time to identify patterns or changes.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Studies Earth’s systems (weather, erosion, natural disasters) Introduces space systems (sun, moon, planets).	Describes how natural forces like wind, rain, or water can change landforms through processes such as erosion. Identifies types of natural disasters—such as floods, fires, earthquakes, and hurricanes—and tracks weather conditions using simple instruments and data. Names planets in the solar system and explains how the sun and moon affect life on Earth, including day and night, shadows, and moon phases.	<p>Facilitate discussions and experiments showing how wind, rain, or water can change landforms (erosion) (e.g., pour water over sand to show how rivers form valleys, or use a fan to demonstrate wind erosion).</p> <p>Introduce and identify different types of natural disasters (floods, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes) with books, videos, or community safety programs (e.g., read a picture book about storms, watch a short educational video, or invite a local safety expert to speak).</p> <p>Support children in tracking and explaining weather conditions using tools like barometers, thermometers, or weather apps (e.g., create a daily weather chart or use a simple classroom weather station).</p> <p>Guide children to name planets in the solar system and explain how the sun and moon affect Earth (day/night cycles, phases of the moon, shadows) (e.g., use a model of the solar system, act out rotations and orbits, or observe shadows at different times of day).</p>

Standard 4.19 Engineering

Children develop an understanding of the processes that assist people in designing and building.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Engages in simple design and engineering processes by using tools and materials to solve problems and build structures, demonstrating creativity and persistence in creating solutions.	Demonstrates early understanding of design and function by planning, building, and explaining how their constructions work—such as building a bridge for a toy car, testing materials for strength, or modifying designs based on results. Selects from available tools and materials (e.g., blocks, tape, scissors) to build or fix something, constructs simple structures like towers or bridges using everyday items, and experiments with ways to make them stand, balance, or function as intended. Often collaborates with peers to solve building challenges and explains the purpose of their creations, showing persistence and flexibility as they test ideas and make changes.	Engage in early engineering by exploring the design process—planning, building, testing, and revising—through hands-on challenges like “Build a bridge for our animals to cross.” They select from available tools and materials (e.g., blocks, tape, cardboard, scissors) to create simple structures such as towers, bridges, or houses using everyday items like cups, sticks, or recycled boxes. Children are encouraged to draw blueprints, label parts, and explain what their structure is meant to do (e.g., “This bridge is for the cars to cross”). Support persistence and reasoning by asking questions like, “What did you change after testing it?” or “Which material worked best?” and guide children to try different strategies for balance and stability. Sharing and explaining their process helps children build confidence, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Designs simple solutions to problems. Tests different materials for a purpose.</p>	<p>Identifies a problem and suggests possible solutions (e.g., how to keep a tower from falling). Chooses materials based on their properties (e.g., using cardboard for strength instead of paper), builds and tests a simple model, and describes what worked well and what could be improved.</p>	<p>Facilitate projects where children identify a problem and suggest possible solutions (e.g., “How can we stop the block tower from falling?”).</p> <p>Encourage children to choose materials to test based on properties (e.g., paper vs. cardboard for strength, foil vs. fabric for waterproofing).</p> <p>Guide children to build and test a simple model (e.g., paper airplanes, toy rafts, protective structures).</p> <p>Support children in describing what worked well and what could be changed after testing.</p>



Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Plans and tests designs using drawings and material properties, compares results, and makes improvements based on outcomes.	Plans a design using drawings, labels, or steps; tests materials for strength, flexibility, or durability; compares results of different designs or materials and explains why they differ; and modifies the design to improve how it works based on test outcomes.	<p>Provide opportunities for children to plan designs with drawings, labels, or step-by-step ideas before building (e.g., sketch a playground structure or garden planter; offer templates with visuals and large-print labels for children who need support).</p> <p>Encourage children to test materials for strength, flexibility, or durability (e.g., compare straws and sticks for bridge building; provide tactile materials and allow extra time for children with motor challenges).</p> <p>Guide children to compare outcomes of different designs or materials and explain differences during group discussions (e.g., display two bridges and discuss which held more weight; use sentence starters and visual charts for children with language or processing difficulties).</p> <p>Support revision by helping children modify designs to improve function based on test results (e.g., add supports to a tower or change materials for better stability; break steps into smaller tasks and provide sensory-friendly tools).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	Uses the engineering design process to solve real-world problems. Evaluates solutions.	Follows the steps of the design process—ask, imagine, plan, create, test, and improve—by designing and building solutions to real-world problems (e.g., creating a protective container for an egg, designing a tool to clean up water). Evaluates the success of their design using evidence from testing and explains how and why their design could be improved.	<p>Teach children to follow the steps of the design process: ask → imagine → plan → create → test → improve (e.g., display the steps on a classroom chart and refer to them during projects).</p> <p>Facilitate projects where children design and build solutions to real-world problems (e.g., egg drop challenge, building water filters, designing litter pick-up tools).</p> <p>Support children in evaluating the success of a design using evidence from testing (measurements, observations) (e.g., weigh objects to test strength, measure distance for speed, or record observations in a chart).</p> <p>Encourage children to explain how their design could be improved and why, presenting ideas in class, outdoor fairs, or digital showcases (e.g., create posters, slideshows, or short videos to share improvements).</p>

SOCIAL STUDIES

Children develop an awareness and understanding of how people interact and relate to each other and the world around them in the past, present, and future.

Standard 4.20 Time (History)

Children develop an understanding of the concept of time, including past, present, and future as they are able to recognize recurring experiences that are part of the daily routine.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Describes events in order and begins to understand the concepts of past, present, and future. Explores personal and community history by recognizing family traditions, historical figures, and comparing past and present experiences.	Retells recent personal or classroom events with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and uses time-related language to describe past and future experiences (e.g., “We went to the park yesterday ... we will go to school tomorrow”). Shares personal history through words, drawings, or simple timelines (e.g., “When I was a baby, I crawled; now I can run”), and talks about how they have grown or changed. Identifies meaningful personal events or family traditions, such as birthdays or holidays, and notices similarities and differences when peers describe their own traditions. Also begins to recognize a few well-known historical figures, like George Washington or Martin Luther King Jr., and connect them to simple facts about their contributions.	Build an understanding of time, personal growth, and community by creating class timelines or memory walls to document shared experiences, using drawings, photos, or artifacts. Guide children in sequencing events and stories (e.g., “What happened first?”), and encourage them to reflect on personal growth (e.g., “When I was a baby, I crawled; now I can run”) using simple timelines or illustrated strips. Children share daily routines and seasonal activities through storytelling, sequencing charts, and drawings, while learning to distinguish past and future (e.g., “We planted seeds last week; we’ll water them again tomorrow”). They explore family traditions, important personal events like birthdays or the first day of school, and are introduced to historical figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr., through books, songs, or community events, connecting them to simple facts (e.g., “MLK helped people be treated fairly”).

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Identifies key national symbols and holidays.</p> <p>Sequences events in history.</p>	<p>Recognizes national symbols such as the flag, bald eagle, or Statue of Liberty, and names key holidays like Independence Day or Martin Luther King Jr. Day, explaining their meanings. Places events in chronological order using words like “first” and “last,” and begins to create simple timelines to show events from history or their own life.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities to recognize national symbols (flag, bald eagle, Statue of Liberty, etc.) in the learning environment, outdoor displays, or community buildings (e.g., create a classroom display of symbols or take a walk to identify symbols in the community).</p> <p>Encourage children to name and describe the meaning of key holidays (Independence Day, Thanksgiving, MLK Day) through stories, dramatization, or art projects (e.g., read holiday-themed books, act out traditions, or make crafts related to each holiday).</p> <p>Guide children to place events in chronological order using first, next, last or past vs. present language (e.g., arrange picture cards of morning routines or historical events).</p> <p>Support children in creating simple timelines of personal or learning environment events (e.g., track school year milestones or birthdays on a timeline).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Compares life in the past to present.</p> <p>Explores contributions of historical figures.</p>	<p>Describes similarities and differences between life in the past and present—such as how people traveled, went to school, or communicated. Identifies important historical figures and explains their contributions in more detail. Using primary sources like photos, artifacts, or simple texts, gathers information about the past and explains how people in history helped shape their communities.</p>	<p>Encourage children to describe similarities and differences between past and present daily life. (e.g., compare transportation—horses vs. cars, schools—chalkboard slates vs. tablets, or communication—letters vs. texting).</p> <p>Guide children in identifying important historical figures and explaining their contributions with more detail. (e.g., “George Washington was the first U.S. president and helped lead the country during its founding.” “Jeannette Rankin was the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress and worked for peace and women’s rights”).</p> <p>Provide opportunities to use primary sources (photos, artifacts, simple texts) in classroom activities or museum visits to learn about the past (e.g., examine old photographs, handle replica artifacts, or read short historical texts).</p> <p>Support children in explaining how people in history helped shape communities through storytelling, role-play, or posters (e.g., act out historical events, create posters about community leaders, or share stories in small groups).</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Investigates local and national history. Examines different perspectives on historical events.</p>	<p>Researches and shares information about local or national historical events and explains how different groups may have experienced the same event in different ways. Uses tools, like maps, timelines, and historical documents, to explore the past and make connections between historical events and their impact on the present community or nation.</p>	<p>Facilitate projects where children research and present information about local or national historical events (e.g., Lewis & Clark, local tribal histories, community founders).</p> <p>Encourage children to explain how different groups experienced the same event differently.</p> <p>Engage children’s learning through comparing settler vs. Indigenous perspectives on land use.</p> <p>Guide children in using maps, timelines, and documents to explore history in learning environments, libraries, or digital platforms.</p> <p>Use role play to help children take on the perspective of a historical and a present-day figure to understand connections between past and present (e.g., act as a suffragist and explain, “Because of women’s voting rights, adults in our families can vote today”).</p>

Standard 4.21 Places, Regions and Spatial Awareness (Geography)

Children develop an understanding that each place has its own unique characteristics. Children develop an understanding of how they are affected by-and the effect that they can have upon-the world around them.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Identifies basic geographic features such as rivers and mountains, recognizes familiar locations like home, school, and neighborhood, and begins to understand that maps are representations of real places.	Begins to recognize and name natural features, such as rivers, lakes, mountains, or hills, in books, pictures, or their surroundings. Understands that maps and globes “show where things are,” and can name or point to familiar places like home, school, or the park. Draws simple maps of known spaces—such as a classroom or playground—using basic symbols or pictures to represent places, and use positional words like “near,” “behind,” or “next to” to describe locations.	Explore early geography concepts through hands-on play with toy landscapes like sand tables, water bins, or small-world scenes, where they build and describe features such as mountains, rivers, and bridges. Using art or blocks, they create their own environments and begin using positional words like “next to,” “behind,” or “far” during play and routines. Introduce maps and globes, helping children recognize symbols and colors (e.g., “The blue is water—like the river we saw on our walk”) and connect them to real-world places. Children are encouraged to point to or name familiar locations—such as home, school, or the park—on classroom displays, walks, or digital maps, and to draw simple maps of familiar spaces like their bedroom or playground, labeling with pictures or symbols (e.g., a swing for the playground, a book for the library), building spatial thinking and real-world connections.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Uses simple maps and globes. Identifies land and water features.	Reads simple maps using legends and symbols, identifies land and water on maps and globes, and names basic landforms (mountain, hill, plain) and bodies of water (lake, river, ocean). Creates simple maps that show land and water features in their local community.	<p>Guide children to read simple maps using a legend and symbols, practicing with classroom maps or treasure hunts.</p> <p>Encourage children to identify land and water on maps and globes using colors and labels.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to name basic landforms (mountain, hill, plain) and bodies of water (lake, river, ocean) through visuals, stories, or outdoor exploration.</p> <p>Support children in creating simple maps of the local community that show land and water features, such as a park with a pond or a river near school.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Explores how geography influences communities.</p> <p>Understands cardinal directions.</p>	<p>Uses cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) to describe location or movement and explains how geography influences daily life (e.g., mountains for skiing, rivers for fishing or transportation).</p> <p>Locates community features on maps (roads, rivers, schools) and compares physical environments of different communities such as urban, rural, coastal, and desert areas.</p>	<p>Encourage children to use north, south, east, and west to describe locations or movement (e.g., “The playground is east of the school”).</p> <p>Guide children to explain how geography affects daily life.</p> <p>Use examples such as “Mountains let people ski; rivers help people fish or move goods.</p> <p>Have children share what they observe.</p> <p>Support children in locating community features on a map (roads, rivers, schools, neighborhoods) during class projects or local field trips.</p> <p>Use open-ended questions to facilitate comparisons of physical environments across communities (urban, rural, coastal, desert) using books, digital tools, or community examples.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Explores how geography influences communities.</p> <p>Understands cardinal directions.</p>	<p>Uses maps with a compass rose to give and follow directions; explains how geography influences settlement, work, and culture in different regions; interprets more complex maps (political, physical, climate); and connects local geography to state, national, or world regions.</p>	<p>Guide children to use maps with a compass rose to give and follow directions in classrooms, outdoor scavenger hunts, or digital navigation activities (e.g., follow a playground map to find hidden items, or use an online map to plan a route).</p> <p>Encourage children to explain how geography shapes settlement, work, and culture in different regions (e.g., discuss why farming happens in plains, fishing in coastal towns, or tourism in mountain areas).</p> <p>Support interpretation of more complex maps (political, physical, climate) using atlases, globes, or online resources (e.g., compare state boundaries on a political map with mountain ranges on a physical map, or identify climate zones on a world map).</p> <p>Facilitate connections between local geography and larger regions (state, national, or world) (e.g., locate your town on a state map and show how it fits into the Rocky Mountain region).</p>

Standard 4.22 The Physical World (Ecology)

Children become mindful of their environment and their interdependence on the natural world; they learn how to care for the environment and why it is important.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Learns about conservation, how human actions affect the environment, and simple ways to protect nature.	Explains in simple terms how actions affect nature (“If we throw trash, animals can get hurt”). Suggests ways to protect the environment (turning off lights, saving water, recycling).	Support inquiry-based projects about conservation—sorting recyclables, measuring water use, or observing effects of pollution in sensory experiments. Guide discussions connecting cause and effect (“How does recycling help animals?”). Facilitate nature projects that show responsibility, such as caring for plants over time or cleaning up outdoor spaces. Encourage critical thinking (“What could we do to keep the park clean?”).
6 years	<i>The Benchmark, Indicators, and Learning Opportunities have been integrated with the age band criteria to streamline interpretation.</i>		
7 years			
8 years			

Standard 4.23 Technology

Children become aware of technological tools and explore and learn the ways to use these resources in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Begins to understand how technology helps people by exploring simple digital tools to create and complete tasks, recognizes the importance of keeping personal information private, and identifies ways technology can make tasks easier.	Begins to understand and explain simple purposes of technology (e.g., “The phone lets us talk to Grandma”), and with support, explore and use basic tools like tablets, calculators, or digital cameras. Creates simple digital products such as drawings, photos, or voice recordings, and chooses appropriate tools with guidance to complete tasks. Also begins to understand digital safety by learning that personal information—like their name or address—should not be shared with strangers.	<p>Explore creative and purposeful uses of technology by engaging in projects like recording class songs, taking photos of science observations, or creating digital storybooks. Guide children in reflecting on how technology helps them share their work and connect with others (e.g., “How did technology help us show our butterfly project?”), while emphasizing responsible use (e.g., “We use technology to learn and create, not just to watch”). Children learn that people design and use technology to solve problems and are encouraged to identify tools that help with everyday tasks, such as calculators, tablets, or digital cameras. With support, they choose appropriate tools to complete simple tasks—like using a drawing app to illustrate a story or a camera to capture a block creation.</p> <p>Through role-play, puppets, or digital stories, children also learn to protect personal information (e.g., name, address, passwords) and understand that it should not be shared with strangers, building both digital creativity and safety awareness.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	Recognizes the importance of keeping personal information private with less support.	Uses classroom technology with increasing independence, such as navigating a drawing app or digital storybook with minimal guidance. Avoids sharing personal information online, explains why it's important to keep that information private, and begins to identify safe and unsafe digital behaviors in familiar situations.	<p>Support children to independently avoid sharing personal details online or in digital activities, reinforcing safe habits during digital play.</p> <p>Guide children to explain why keeping personal information private is important through class discussions or story scenarios.</p> <p>Encourage identification of safe vs. unsafe technology behaviors in classroom role-plays or digital simulations.</p> <p>Invite children to design posters that show safe and unsafe technology practices for school and home (e.g., asking an adult before clicking a link, keeping passwords private, not chatting with strangers in online games).</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to use classroom technology (drawing apps, digital storybooks, voice recorders) with minimal guidance to complete learning tasks.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	Explains the importance of keeping personal information private and how to be safe online. Uses tools to create something that communicates an idea to others.	Describes in their own words why sharing personal information online is unsafe and gives examples of safe online practices, such as asking an adult before clicking a link. Uses digital tools like slideshows, drawing programs, or video recorders to share messages or ideas and present their digital work to others, such as classmates or family, with adult support.	<p>Encourage children to describe in their own words why it is unsafe to share personal information online during classroom discussions or journal reflections.</p> <p>Guide children to give examples of safe online practices (asking an adult before clicking, logging off after use).</p> <p>Support children in using digital tools (slideshows, drawing programs, video recorders) to create and share a message or idea.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to present digital work (e.g., a slideshow about animals, a video of a skit) to classmates or families with educator support.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Identifies ownership of information and acknowledges the work of others. Explores the accuracy, credibility, and relevance of sources. Uses strategies for remixing or repurposing resources to create new works.</p>	<p>Recognizes that online content—such as images, writing, and videos—belongs to its creator and gives credit when using others’ ideas or work. Begins to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources, and uses digital tools to combine or adapt text, images, or audio to create new products. Can explain their choices when remixing or repurposing digital content.</p>	<p>Introduce the idea that work found online belongs to its creator, and guide children to give credit to authors, artists, or classmates when using their ideas.</p> <p>Support children in distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources with guided examples (e.g., comparing a library site vs. a random ad).</p> <p>Encourage children to combine or adapt digital resources (text, images, audio) to create a new product (e.g., a class podcast, digital poster, or remix art).</p> <p>Facilitate reflection where children explain their choices in remixing or repurposing resources, using peer share-outs or digital portfolios.</p>

Standard 4.24 Civics and Government

Children recognize the purpose of rules and laws in their home, school, and community, begin to understand fairness and responsibility, and explore ways to participate in group decisions.

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
5 years	Recognizes and follows classroom and school rules. Understands that rules help keep people safe and organized. Identifies authority figures in the school. Begins to participate in group decision-making.	Follows Learning environment/ classroom routines and simple school rules with occasional reminders and can explain that rules help keep everyone safe and treated fairly. Identifies school or program adult authority figures and understands their roles. Participates in group decision-making by voting or raising their hand to help choose activities like games or stories.	<p>Encourage children to follow classroom routines and simple school rules with reminders through games, songs, and modeled practice. Guide children in explaining why rules are important for safety and fairness. (e.g., “We walk inside so no one gets hurt.”)</p> <p>Introduce authority figures (educator, principal) and explain their roles through class visits or role-play.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for children to vote or raise hands to make group choices, such as selecting a storybook or game.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
6 years	<p>Continues to recognize and follow classroom and school rules.</p> <p>Identifies authority figures in the wider community.</p> <p>Understands basic rights and responsibilities.</p> <p>Participates more actively in group decision-making and discussions.</p>	<p>Follows learning environment/ classroom and school rules with little prompting and identifies community helpers and leaders, such as police officers, the mayor, or librarians, along with their responsibilities. Names basic rights like the right to learn or play, and responsibilities such as sharing and cleaning up. Expresses opinions in group discussions and listens to the ideas of others.</p>	<p>Support children in consistently following rules at school with little prompting by reinforcing positive routines. Introduce community helpers and leaders (police, mayor, librarian) and explain their responsibilities through stories, videos, or visits. Encourage children to state basic rights and responsibilities.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for all children to design classroom agreements that express everyone's right to learn and responsibility to share materials.</p> <p>Facilitate opportunities to express opinions during group discussions and listen to peers' ideas during class meetings or collaborative play.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
7 years	<p>Understands the roles of leaders and authority figures in the school and local community. Explores how rules and laws help communities work together. Begins to discuss concepts of fairness and equity. Continues to participate in group decision-making and may engage in simple service-learning experiences.</p>	<p>Describes the roles of school and local leaders, such as the principal or community helpers. Explains how rules and laws help people cooperate and keep order. Identifies fairness and unfairness in real-life situations or stories and contributes to group decisions by offering solutions or compromises. Takes part in simple service-learning tasks, like helping clean up the playground or collecting items for those in need.</p>	<p>Guide children to describe the roles of school and local leaders (principal, city council, tribal elders, community leaders) with stories or guest speakers. Support children in explaining how rules and laws support cooperation and order in classroom or community contexts.</p> <p>Encourage identification of fairness and unfairness in stories, school events, or play situations. Facilitate participation in group decision-making by suggesting solutions or compromises in classroom debates or project planning.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for service-learning tasks such as helping clean the playground, planting flowers, or collecting food donations.</p>

Age Band	Benchmarks	Indicators	Learning Opportunities
8 years	<p>Examines the role and structure of local, state, and national governments. Explores civic responsibilities such as voting, helping others, and respecting differences. Engages in discussions about leadership, fairness, and how people can work for change. Begins to explore the ideas of taking action and contributing to community improvement through age-appropriate activities.</p>	<p>Identifies levels of government (local, state, national) and gives examples of leaders. Explains how voting helps groups make fair decisions and describe ways people show civic responsibility, such as volunteering or respecting others. Discusses fairness and leadership in current events or history and participates in age-appropriate community projects, like a recycling drive or writing letters to local leaders.</p>	<p>Introduce children to levels of government (local, state, national) and give examples of leaders through books, visuals, or digital resources.</p> <p>Guide children to explain how voting helps groups make fair decisions, practicing through mock elections or learning environment polls.</p> <p>Support children in describing civic responsibility with community examples.</p> <p>Facilitate discussions about leadership and fairness using age-appropriate examples.</p> <p>Encourage participation in championing improvement projects in various age-appropriate ways.</p> <p>Promote children’s agency by encouraging organizing a recycling drive, write letters to local leaders, or create posters promoting kindness.</p>



Conclusion

Building on the History of Montana Early Learning Standards

Montana’s Early Learning Standards (MELS) have evolved over more than two decades, reflecting the state’s sustained commitment to children’s growth from birth through age 8. The first statewide guidelines were developed for children ages 3 to 5 in 2004, followed by guidelines for infants and toddlers in 2009. These efforts were brought together in 2014 with the release of the first integrated standards for birth to age five. That revision marked a significant shift from “guidelines” to “standards,” aligning early learning with Montana’s K–12 framework, incorporating contemporary research on brain development, elevating cultural and linguistic diversity, and meaningfully integrating Montana’s constitutional commitment to Indian Education for All (IEFA)

The 2025 Revision Process

The 2025 update expands the MELS through age 8, supporting continuity. The revision was guided by:

- **Research** in brain science, child development, and early literacy
- **Indian Education for All** Essential Understandings
- **Alignment with key frameworks** (see references)
- **Partners** (see partner list)





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Mountain Peak
Preschool & Childcare



Munchkin Land
Daycare



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