



QUALITY EARLY LEARNING AND CARE— EQUITABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Quality is critical to designing Early Learning and Care settings that set the foundation for a child's future success in school and life. High-quality Early Learning has a positive impact on children's socio-emotional development, cognitive ability, and academic achievement both in the short- and long-term.¹ The years between birth and age 8 are critical for brain development, and how parents and caregivers interact with young children during this time makes a difference in all future learning, behavior, and health.

KEY ELEMENTS OF QUALITY

All children should have access to high-quality Early Learning and Care settings that incorporate the following key elements of quality and center the needs and experiences of diverse children, families, and members of the workforce to ensure quality is accessible to all. These quality elements are applicable across all Early Learning settings and are informed by a review of current research and input from members of Early Edge California's Parent, Educator, and Family, Friend, and Neighbor Advisory Groups, and organizational partners in the Early Learning field. We recognize that much of the infrastructure and resources needed to support several of these elements of quality require increased public investments.

Early Edge envisions a Early Learning and Care system that has the adequate funding and supports to provide all children access to Early Learning and Care settings that—whether in the home of a single caregiver or in a center or classroom—uphold and aspire to the following elements of quality.

Affirm, include, and support racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity

- Support the development of home-language in the program or care setting and at home, and can effectively communicate with parents and families
- Value, uplift, and celebrate the child and family's cultural identity
- Have program staff and educators that represent the diversity of the children and families served

Provide developmentally appropriate practice and environments

- Create a play-based learning environment that corresponds with the child's age, culture, and individual needs
- Guide children's learning across key domains of development including social-emotional, language, cognitive, and physical

Provide individualized supports and inclusion-based practices

- Provide individualized attention and a positive, trusting, and caring relationship between child and educator
- Conduct assessments to identify children's individual needs, including those with special needs, and provision of necessary supports

Embed family engagement, support, and partnership

- Have strategies or systems in place to encourage and establish a partnership with families
- Keep open lines of communication that is responsive to family and children's needs

Retain and recruit a workforce with livable wages and compensation, continuous improvement, professional development, and supportive resources

- Fairly compensate the workforce with livable wages, health and retirement benefits, and a working environment that supports mental health and wellness
- Provide ongoing professional development for the workforce including coaching and peer support to ensure the workforce is well-prepared
- Provide sufficient staffing coverage to ensure staff and educators can participate in professional development opportunities
- Include program and site leadership and/or administration in professional development to ensure deep understanding of Early Learning and Care and how to best support children, families, staff, and educators across the program or site

Meet the basic needs of children and families

- Have an environment that meets health and safety standards
- Provide nutritious food options for children
- Provide or connect children and families to mental health resources and/or consultation

To achieve this vision of quality, we need to advocate for additional federal and state investments to support the entirety of California's Early Learning and Care system. Increased investment in the infrastructure and workforce is critical to truly supporting a system where high-quality programs are equitable and accessible to all—meeting the needs and values of racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse families, parents, children, and educators.

¹ <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2018/05/early-childhood-is-critical-to-health-equity.html>

² The elements of quality included in this document were informed by the work of several reports, which include "The Early Childhood Essentials Framework" by Learning Policy Institute, the California Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, and the California Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education. These elements were also informed and vetted by Early Edge's Parent, Educator, and Family, Friend, and Neighbor Advisory Groups.

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