



# Program Quality Framework for Family Child Care Programs



## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The Program Quality Framework is designed to serve as a conceptual framework of quality practices for programs as they engage in continuous quality improvement. This framework can be used with the other resources in the Continuous Quality Improvement Playbook.




MASSACHUSETTS  
**Department of  
Early Education and Care**

The Program Quality Framework identifies six **categories** that contribute to quality improvement:

- ✓ Responsive & Supportive Interactions
- ✓ Curriculum & Assessment
- ✓ Family & Community Engagement
- ✓ Environment
- ✓ Leadership & Professional Learning, and
- ✓ Business Practices.

EEC identified **priority areas** within each category along with specific **practices** that family child care educators can use to address the priority areas. The practices in each priority area are not listed in order of importance, nor are they intended to indicate that one practice should be prioritized over another.

The Program Quality Framework is informed by the following:

- ✓ EEC Licensing Regulations (Practices that are connected to Licensing Regulations include the icon  ),
- ✓ Educator Competencies,
- ✓ NAEYC Accreditation Standards,
- ✓ the leading national research on early childhood quality; and
- ✓ the expertise and experience of EEC staff, programs, and community partners.

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*\*In this framework, **family child care educators** are individuals who work directly with children in a home-based setting and also serve as the business owners of the program. **Family child care assistants** are individuals who work directly with children in a family child care setting.*

# Category

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## RESPONSIVE & SUPPORTIVE INTERACTIONS

**PRIORITY AREA 1.A:** Use trauma-informed care practices to meet the needs of all children and families, especially children who are experiencing or have experienced trauma.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Ensure that children feel safe and supported by offering comfort, understanding, and recognition of their feelings.	✓
Respond or attend consistently to children's preferences and needs.	✓
Model and encourage children to use self-regulation strategies.	✓
Manage incidents of challenging behavior through positive and developmentally appropriate guidance, with consideration of children's survival and stress responses.	✓
Be aware of and responsive to children's emotional states and reactions with respect and empathy (rather than with judgment).	✓

**PRIORITY AREA 1.B:** Intentionally create opportunities for the development of positive relationships and a sense of community among children.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Encourage safe behavior and model respectful engagement with children, families, colleagues, and community.	✓
Encourage and recognize children's efforts, persistence, and accomplishment, regardless of the results.	✓
Engage with children warmly and enthusiastically (both physical and non-physical).	✓
Create opportunities for children to engage with and learn from each other.	✓

## CATEGORY 1: RESPONSIVE & SUPPORTIVE INTERACTIONS *continued*

Pay attention to children who aren't participating, find out why they are avoiding others or feeling left out, and encourage them to join group activities.	
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### **PRIORITY AREA 1.C:** Actively prompt and engage in conversations with children.

#### **Family Child Care Educators...**

Welcome, talk with, listen to, and check in with children regularly.	
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Create many opportunities to engage and talk with children, individually and in groups.	✓
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Have ongoing conversations with children about their play, thoughts, or relationships, where you both keep discussing and building on each other's ideas.	✓
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Provide additional information and ask questions to extend children's learning.	
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Share information freely and consistently respond to children's questions.	✓
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### **PRIORITY AREA 1.D:** Encourage children's autonomy, confidence, and willingness to try new things.

#### **Family Child Care Educators...**

Encourage independence in self-care, play, and learning activities, as developmentally appropriate.	✓
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Provide children with choices and input into their activities and interactions.	✓
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Scaffold children's learning through "just enough" help to succeed and/or support to fail and try again.	✓
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**PRIORITY AREA 2.A:** If the mission emphasizes “child-led learning and exploration,” prioritize open-ended materials and opportunities for children to make choices, rather than highly structured, teacher-directed activities.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Create learning activities based on key early education and care models, theories, and philosophies, focusing on child development and learning.	✓
Use plans for learning activities that are developmentally appropriate and evidence-based, with clear learning goals informed by learning standards.	✓
Involve children, families, and the community in the design and implementation of learning activities and curricula that are reflective of their culture and languages.	✓
Use screening tools to document children’s developmental progress, identify children’s unique strengths and needs (across all areas of development) and inform learning goals.	✓
Use shared and individualized learning goals for children to inform learning activities.	✓
Use formative assessments (observation) and documentation to capture children’s learning and development over time.	✓
Use information and data from observation, documentation, and assessment to inform decisions about instruction, supports for children, and use of learning materials.	✓

**PRIORITY AREA 2.B:** Use inclusive practices to meet the strengths and needs of all children, including multilingual learners, children facing challenges, children with disabilities, and children experiencing trauma.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Respect and value children’s strengths and differences.	✓
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## CATEGORY 2: CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT *continued*

Intentionally address the needs of any children facing challenges.	✓
Use modeling and scaffolding to support children's learning and development at all levels.	
Use learning materials that nurture positive identity and appreciation for diversity.	✓

**PRIORITY AREA 2.C:** Help children develop social-emotional skills, described in the learning standards and as guided by an intentional curriculum plan.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Offer activities to engage children in cooperative play.	✓
Guide children on how to handle social situations, make good choices, and build relationships with others.	✓
Provide opportunities for children to value themselves and others.	✓
Teach children to recognize and label feelings and use strategies to self-regulate emotions.	✓
Offer activities that help children with memory and recall.	✓
Provide opportunities for children to self-regulate through their choice of activities (independent vs. group) and practice impulse control.	✓
Integrate social-emotional learning across activities and interactions.	

**PRIORITY AREA 2.D:** Help children develop language and literacy skills as described in the learning standards and guided by an intentional curriculum plan.

### Family Child Care Educators...

## CATEGORY 2: CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT *continued*

Offer activities to engage children in singing, storytelling, and rhyming, to encourage play with language and sounds of language.	
Provide activities that help children improve their speaking, understanding, and listening skills.	✓
Offer both guided and free-play activities that help children build phonemic awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, knowledge of letters and sounds, and emergent writing.	
Read aloud to children from a variety of books using interactive strategies to spark their imagination, help them learn about the world, show how words and pictures work together.	✓
Use strategies that help multilingual learners and native English-speakers with language and reading.	

**PRIORITY AREA 2.E:** Help children develop knowledge and skills in mathematics as described in the learning standards and guided by an intentional curriculum plan.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Provide learning activities to support math thinking, reasoning, language, and problem-solving.	
Provide learning activities that include counting, recognizing numbers, how numbers relate (more/less), and addition and subtraction.	
Provide learning activities that include recognizing and naming shapes and understanding spatial relations (above, below, next to).	
Provide learning activities that include recognizing and making patterns, sorting, and classifying.	
Provide learning activities that include comparing sizes and making measurements.	
Integrate math learning across activities and interactions.	

**PRIORITY AREA 2.F:** Help children develop knowledge and skills in scientific inquiry as described in the learning standards and guided by an intentional curriculum plan.

**Family Child Care Educators...**

Offer learning activities that extend children's learning and help them develop conceptual thinking skills.

Provide play-based, hands-on, and open-ended activities that spark children's curiosity and help them make and test predictions.

Provide learning activities that help children make connections to prior learning and teach new science ideas and words.

Provide learning activities that teach about plant and animal life, the human body, and the world around them.

Integrate science learning across activities and interactions.

**PRIORITY AREA 2.G:** Help children develop knowledge and skills in understanding society and culture as described in the learning standards and guided by an intentional curriculum plan.

**Family Child Care Educators...**

Provide opportunities for children to learn about people and how they live.

Offer learning activities that reflect children's real lives and interests.

Offer learning activities that help children build awareness of the world around them, including different cultures and places.

Integrate learning about society and culture across activities and interactions.

**PRIORITY AREA 2.H:** Help children develop fine and gross motor skills as described in the learning standards and guided by an intentional curriculum plan.



**Family Child Care Educators...**

Provide a variety of opportunities for children to develop age-appropriate gross motor skills, body awareness, and physical movement.	✓
Provide a variety of opportunities for children to develop age-appropriate fine motor skills (especially related to writing) through planned activities, free play, daily routines, and self-help skills.	✓
Integrate opportunities to practice fine and gross motor skills across activities and interactions.	

**PRIORITY AREA 2.I:** Help children develop knowledge and skills in the arts as described in the learning standards and guided by an intentional curriculum plan.

**Family Child Care Educators...**

Provide learning activities that allow children to express themselves through a variety of ways (i.e., visual arts, music, movement and dance, and dramatic and imaginative play).	✓
Encourage children to discuss their own art and others' art, emphasizing the creative process rather than just the final result.	
Integrate the arts across activities and interactions.	

### **PRIORITY AREA 3.A:** Proactively communicate with families.

#### Family Child Care Educators...

Build and maintain mutual relationships with families.



Engage families in discussions about their children's progress.



Help prepare families for their children's ongoing growth, development, and future transitions.

Invite families to share about their traditions, cultural values, home language, and experiences.

Support families by identifying additional supports, resources, and services that might be helpful.



### **PRIORITY AREA 3.B:** Show respect for families.

#### Family Child Care Educators...

Use strategies appropriate to each family when communicating, including language and format, and showing sensitivity to families facing challenges.



Adapt children's goals, learning activities, and supports based on family input.

### **PRIORITY AREA 3.C:** Engage with the community.

#### Family Child Care Educators...

### CATEGORY 3: FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT *continued*

Establish and maintain relationships with agencies and institutions that can support the program in achieving its goals.	
Establish and maintain relationships with social service providers in the community and help families to access these services.	
Advocate for the needs of the program and its families in the community among service agencies and local government organizations.	
Stay informed about changes in policies related to early education and care and related family services.	
Cooperate on neighborhood interests and needs.	
Partner with local businesses and organizations to develop community-based learning experiences for children.	

**PRIORITY AREA 4.A:** Manage a physical environment that promotes all children’s learning, growth, development, health, and safety.

## Family Child Care Educators...

Make sure the environment is safe and appropriate for children's health and safety, including ease of supervision, preventing access to dangerous materials, and reducing risks for children.



Ensure that the environment is set up to allow children to explore, discover, and engage safely and freely.



Make the physical environment accessible and engaging for all children as they grow and develop.



Select and refresh learning materials to reflect children's interests, identities, learning needs, and cultural backgrounds.



Monitor and supervise children’s safety.



Demonstrate care for the environment and help children become environmentally responsible.

**PRIORITY AREA 4.B:** Use consistent routines and flexible schedules.

## Family Child Care Educators...

Use verbal and nonverbal cues and reminders about routines and classroom expectations.



Set a consistent schedule with efficient transitions and adequate time to engage in learning activities and play.



CATEGORY 4: ENVIRONMENT *continued*

Provide opportunities for eating, toileting, and sleeping that meet each child’s needs.	✓
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**PRIORITY AREA 4.C:** Follow a planned schedule that includes a balanced variety of different types of learning materials and activities.

Family Child Care Educators...	
Offer learning activities that can be done independently or in various-sized groups.	✓
Provide both indoor and outdoor learning activities.	✓
Offer a balance of both quiet and active learning activities.	✓



### **PRIORITY AREA 5.A:** Act ethically and responsibly as caretakers of children.

#### **Family Child Care Educators...**

Demonstrate good judgment and ability to handle emergency situations, mandated reporting, or other incidents appropriately.	✓
Follow practical, ethical, and legal considerations and professional guidelines in sharing information (protecting children's privacy), making referrals, communicating with colleagues, and supporting young children with specific learning needs.	✓
Create and implement policies and procedures that protect all staff, children, and families.	✓
Use child assessments appropriately to make referrals or access resources.	✓
Monitor and manage special education requirements.	✓
Continually reflect on and seek to address the impacts of structural racism and implicit bias in the classroom.	

### **PRIORITY AREA 5.B:** Pursue improvement and professional growth and engage in reflective practice.

#### **Family Child Care Educators...**

Engage in education, professional development, and self-reflection to stay updated on research and best practices, promote continuous learning, and improve practices.	✓
Pursue professional development in response to the unique needs/interests of children and families.	✓

Engage in a professional community of educators as part of ongoing professional learning and continuous improvement that helps to build collaborative professional relationships and supports reflective practice.	
Ensure that the program meets licensing regulations; responds to non-compliances with a plan on how to come into compliance, and improve the quality of practice.	✓
Work collaboratively with educators, families, EEC, other agencies, and community partners to improve program quality.	

## PRIORITY AREA 6.A: Lead with a mission/vision.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Develop a written mission/vision statement along with colleagues (when applicable) that communicates the program's core values and unique program features, philosophy, goals and objectives, ages of children served, and the services provided.



Guide employees in implementing the program's mission/vision. **(For providers with assistants).**

Engage families and colleagues (when applicable) in regularly reviewing and updating the mission/vision statement.

Consider the program's mission/vision statement when making decisions.

## PRIORITY AREA 6.B: Establish clear, consistent, and strategic policies/procedures.

### Family Child Care Educators...

Develop a projected one-year operating budget that estimates income and expenses.



Monitor the budget regularly to ensure adequate cash flow and revenue.

Engage in a needs assessment and goal-setting process as part of the program's annual budget planning, including forecasting at least two years into the future.

Establish a formal enrollment process.





## CATEGORY 6: BUSINESS PRACTICES *continued*

Provide families with an up-to-date handbook that includes the written policies/procedures.	✓
Develop and implement a formal marketing and outreach plan to enroll families and meet revenue targets.	
Review the effectiveness of marketing and outreach efforts annually to meet program enrollment and revenue goals and community needs.	
Identify and remove barriers to enrollment for marginalized and underserved groups.	
Ensure that the program meets all EEC requirements for securely storing budget and financial reports, personnel records and information, and key family and child-level records.	
Conduct regular data system quality-control checks to confirm financial data and staff/student records are complete and accurate.	

### PRIORITY AREA 6.C: Establish a positive working environment.

#### Family Child Care Educators...

Provide personnel policies to each employee, including job descriptions for all paid positions, the salary range for their position, and the procedure for determining the salary for their position. <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	✓
Establish a process to annually review the compensation plan, considering staff credentials, education, and experience levels. <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	
Review, reflect, and adjust the program's strategy annually for recruiting and retaining qualified staff, using feedback from educators. <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	
Coordinate staffing arrangements to ensure that children have continuity of educators to support their learning and development. <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	✓
Establish a safe, updated, and healthy physical work environment and facilities that meet the needs of adults.	

## CATEGORY 6: BUSINESS PRACTICES *continued*

Get feedback from educators annually on the working environment and workplace policies and practices. <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	
Promote teamwork and respect through your interactions with colleagues, valuing diverse perspectives. <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	
Promote educators' health and wellness (physical, emotional, social). <b>(For providers with assistants)</b>	