



*ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY*



**February 2009**

## AIM HIGH ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

On July 1, 1999, the Children, Youth and Families Department, Office of Child Development launched a new initiative called AIM HIGH to improve the quality of child care services to children and families. The Office of Child Development developed the AIM HIGH Essential Elements as a major part of the AIM HIGH initiative. The Essential Elements are specifically designed for early childhood programs and includes increasing levels of quality. Each level includes criteria that are nationally recognized to enhance the quality of services provided to young children, support for families accessing child care services, and improve working conditions for staff/caregiver that provide the services. The highest level of quality – Level 5 results in accreditation by a nationally recognized organization.

In planning for the new STAR Quality Rating System for child care licensing, the Children, Youth and Families Department made the decision to include the criteria of AIM HIGH Essential Elements into the child care licensing regulations. The new STAR Quality Rating System, called **Look for the STARS** contains five levels. The higher the STAR Level, the higher the level of quality.

Therefore, basic licensing regulations now include the criteria in Level One of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. All licensed programs are required to comply with the new regulations in order to receive a 1-STAR license signifying that the program meets minimum licensing regulations. 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-STAR license status is voluntary and corresponds with the AIM HIGH Essential Elements levels of quality. If you wish to obtain a 2-STAR license, you will need to maintain licensing regulations (1-STAR) and meet and maintain criteria in Level Two of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. If you wish to obtain a 3-STAR license, you will need to maintain licensing regulations, meet and maintain criteria in Level Two and criteria in Level Three of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. If you wish to obtain a 4-STAR license, you will need to maintain licensing regulations, meet and maintain criteria in Level Two, criteria in Level Three, and criteria in Level Four of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. If you wish to obtain a 5-STAR license, your program will need to maintain licensing regulations and maintain current national accreditation by an approved accrediting body. Registered family child care home providers must maintain current registration regulations.

**Please be aware that the Office of Child Development periodically revises the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. It is your responsibility to insure that you have a current copy of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements. Current copies of the AIM HIGH Essential Elements are available through the Office of Child Development, the Training and Technical Assistance Programs, or can be downloaded from [www.NewMexicoKids.org](http://www.NewMexicoKids.org).**

## AIM HIGH ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS AT A GLANCE

**Voluntary: Not Required for Basic Licensure**

2-STAR* (AIM HIGH Level Two) <i>Programs must meet all Child Care Licensing Regulations plus:</i>	3-STAR (AIM HIGH Level Three)	4-STAR (AIM HIGH Level Four)	5-STAR (AIM HIGH Level Five)
<p><b>2A) <u>Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></b></p> <p><b>Staff Qualifications</b> – No requirements for this level.</p> <p><b>Staff Evaluation</b>—No requirements for this level.</p> <p><b>Staff Communication</b>—No requirements for this level.</p>	<p><b>3A) <u>Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></b></p> <p>1. <b>Staff Qualifications</b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Effective July 1, 2010, all NEW staff/caregivers working directly with children must have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED)</li> <li>b) Group Child Care Home—Second caregivers have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in the career lattice.</li> <li>c) Out-of-School Time Care—All school-age staff have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in New Mexico's Early Care, Education and Family Support Career Lattice.</li> </ul> <p>2. <b>Staff Evaluation</b> – No requirements for this level.</p> <p>3. <b>Staff Communication</b> – No requirements for this level.</p>	<p><b>4A) <u>Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></b></p> <p>1. <b>Staff Qualifications</b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two and Level Three. No additional requirements for this level.</p> <p>2. <b>Staff Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A tool, which includes criteria for evaluation and the process of evaluation for staff/non-relative caregiver in a family child care home at least on an annual basis;</li> <li>b) A plan for improvement for each staff member and non-relative caregiver in a family child care home, if appropriate, based on evaluation results.</li> </ul> <p>3. <b>Staff Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Meetings are held on a regular basis, at least quarterly;</li> <li>b) Staff participation in developing agendas;</li> <li>c) Evidence that meeting provide a safe environment where staff members can ask questions, present alternative ideas, and share feelings.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5A) <u>Staff Qualifications, Evaluation and Communication</u></b></p> <p>Continue meeting requirements for Level Two, Level Three and Level Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
<p><b>2B) <u>Environment</u></b></p> <p>1. Physical Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Environment is organized into functional,</li> </ul>	<p><b>3B) <u>Environment</u></b> – Continue meeting Level Two requirements plus:</p> <p>1. Physical Environment:</p>	<p><b>4B) <u>Environment</u></b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two and Level Three plus:</p>	<p><b>5B) <u>Environment</u></b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two, Level Three and Level Four. No additional</p>

<p align="center"><b>2-STAR*</b> <b>(AIM HIGH Level Two)</b> <i>Programs must meet all Child Care Licensing Regulations plus:</i></p>	<p align="center"><b>3-STAR</b> <b>(AIM HIGH Level Three)</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>4-STAR</b> <b>(AIM HIGH Level Four)</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>5-STAR</b> <b>(AIM HIGH Level Five)</b></p>
<p>identifiable learning areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Dramatic Play</li> <li>– Creative Art</li> <li>– Books</li> <li>– Blocks and Accessories</li> <li>– Manipulatives</li> <li>– Music</li> <li>– Science</li> <li>– Math/Number</li> <li>– Sensory</li> </ul> <p>b) For Homes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A place for messy play</li> <li>– A place for loud, active play</li> <li>– A space for playing quietly</li> <li>– A place to pretend</li> <li>– A place to read</li> <li>– A place to eat</li> <li>– A place to rest or sleep</li> </ul> <p>c) Noisy and quiet areas are arranged so that children’s activities can be sustained without interruption.</p> <p>d) Materials are cleaned and well care for and organized by type and, where appropriate, are labeled with words and/or pictures. Adaptations to materials are made when needed to accommodate various abilities of all children. Unused materials are stored in inaccessible storage.</p> <p>e) Interest areas are functional with adequate space and are logically placed. The environment is set up so children are not continually interrupting one another.</p> <p>f) Examples of children’s individually expressed artwork are displayed in the environment or in the home.</p> <p>g) Floor surface is suitable for activities that will occur in each interest area or in the family child</p>	<p>a) Materials and equipment are rotated and adapted on a regular basis to conform to curriculum goals.</p> <p>b) Staff of the program are very familiar with the environment rating instrument and feel confident that they will score an average score of four.</p> <p>c) Evaluation of program’s environment requires the completion of a post rating scale*, scoring an average of 4.</p> <p><i>* See list of environment rating scales in Element 3B.</i></p> <p>2. Social- Emotional Responsive Environment – No additional requirements for this level.</p>	<p>1. Physical Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Outdoor space has some protection from the elements.</li> <li>b) Outdoor space has some play interest centers (refer to page 41 of the Essential Elements for a detailed list).</li> <li>c) Opportunities to develop motor skills.</li> </ul> <p>2. Social- Emotional Responsive Environment – No additional requirements for this level.</p>	<p>requirements for this level.</p>

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<p>care home.</p> <p>h) File and storage space is available for teacher/caregiver materials.</p> <p>2. Social-Emotional Responsive Environment:</p> <p>a) The environment reflects an atmosphere where all children feel accepted and able to be successful. The classroom/school-age space/home environment has a positive social atmosphere where staff/caregiver and children spend time talking and interacting with one another in general conversation during the day as well as at mealtimes and other scheduled activities. Various methods are used to communicate with nonverbal or language delayed.</p> <p>b) Staff/caregivers endeavor to establish a positive, caring relationship with every child in their care. Physical contact is used to comfort and/or positively support children in daily routines and interactions.</p> <p>c) Staff/caregivers encourage children to interact with one another in a positive manner. Staff/caregivers intentionally prepare (coach) children to interact positively with children of various abilities.</p> <p>d) Staff/caregivers are attuned to and respond promptly and consistently to children's needs and interests during regular routines and activities.</p> <p>e) Staff/caregivers facilitate children's growing independence and initiative by giving them many opportunities to make decisions, choose their own activities, and take charge of their own learning.</p> <p>f) Relationships among staff/caregivers are professional and do not interfere with their responsibilities in caring for and interacting with</p>			

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<p>children both indoors and outdoors.</p>			
<p>2C) <u>Observation and Documentation of Children's Progress and Curriculum Planning</u> – no requirements for this level.</p>	<p>3C) <u>Observation and Documentation of Children's Progress and Curriculum Planning</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a system teachers will use for observing &amp; documenting children's development, in all developmental domains, and used as a means to individualize curriculum planning in support of the whole child.</li> <li>2. Develop a basic understanding of key components of an early childhood curriculum and begin implementation by using an observation, documentation, and evaluation process- a continuous process of observing children, documenting, planning, implementing activities and routines, observing the activities and assessing outcomes. Demonstrate evidence that the director and/or curriculum coordinator have the knowledge to provide support to classroom teachers resulting in teachers using the information gained from the use of an assessment instrument to plan curriculum based on individual children's needs for 75 % of the classrooms.</li> <li>3. Describe how the program will communicate information with families regarding their child's growth and development.</li> <li>4. Posted weekly lesson plans organized around an appropriate curriculum that incorporate a posted daily schedule (one for parents and one for children) and a written description of the role of the</li> </ol>	<p>4C) <u>Observation and Documentation of Children's Progress and Curriculum Planning</u> – Continue meeting Level 3 requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A written curriculum that is carefully planned to meet both short-term and long-term goals for the program and for individual children and includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Knowledge of children's needs and interests based on observation and assessment completed in the classroom or in the family child care home program;</li> <li>b) Continued use of the curriculum development process of gathering information through observations for individual curriculum and program planning in every classroom or in family child care homes (evidence that the program ties assessment of children to curriculum)</li> <li>c) Reflection of ongoing implementation demonstrated in classroom environment or in the home;</li> <li>d) Social and Emotional teaching strategies;</li> <li>e) Variety of instructional strategies; small/large group activities, puppets, role play, visual supports, peer buddies, scripted stories, pictures prompts;</li> <li>f) Sequencing of activities from simple to complex;</li> <li>g) Support for children's thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. Teachers facilitate</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>5C) <u>Observation and Documentation of Children's Progress and Curriculum Planning</u> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Three and Level Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>

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	<p>teacher(s)/caregiver(s) and teaching/learning strategies used. Together with the children, teachers/caregivers develop classroom/program rules. They are posted and reviewed regularly with children.</p> <p>5. Develop a written curriculum that represents: Staff begins to implement the beginning stages of the items listed above.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Review and update mission, and philosophy statement. Curriculum planning and implementation should be consistent with the mission and philosophy statement, short-range and long-range goals;</li> <li>b) Knowledge of child development. Staff/caregivers are familiar with ages and stages of development. Evidence is demonstrated through appropriate expectations for all children including children with special needs;</li> <li>c) Activities are meaningful, developmentally appropriate, adapted/modified according to the needs and abilities of children;</li> <li>d) Facilitation of all areas of development; social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive. Some programs might also include a spiritual domain;</li> <li>e) Integrates foundations for the following content areas: Math, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts/Literacy, Health and Fine Arts;</li> <li>f) Variety of learning experiences;</li> <li>g) Variety of materials that range from</li> </ul>	<p>discussions to challenge (scaffold) children's thinking;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>h) Support for development of children's self-regulation using methods such as logical and natural consequences. Teacher/caregivers facilitate discussions to problem-solve conflict;</li> <li>i) Evidence that each child's language and culture are integral components of the daily program;</li> <li>j) Evidence of child participation in planning activities and developing program rules and routines;</li> <li>k) Evidence that teachers/ caregivers challenge children just beyond their current level of development (scaffold their learning);</li> <li>l) Documentation verifying at least a 3-month history of curriculum planning and preferably a year's history of planning.</li> </ul>	

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	<p>simple to complex;</p> <p>h) Active engagement of children;</p> <p>i) Opportunities to make choices;</p> <p>j) Ensures smooth transitions from one activity to another;</p> <p>k) Opportunities to experiment and explore;</p> <p>l) Large blocks of time for discovery and child-initiated learning activities;</p> <p>m) A balance of active/quiet, individual/small group/large group activities and indoor/outdoor time;</p> <p>n) Emphasis on the value of social interaction through peer learning;</p> <p>o) A positive social/emotional foundation is valued as essential for the development of lifelong positive interpersonal relationships and the growth in all other developmental domains;</p> <p>p) Social Skills are intentionally taught.</p> <p><i>Refer to pages 29 and 30 for curriculum for Infants and toddlers</i></p>		
<p><b>2D) <u>Staff/Caregiver Professional Development Plan</u></b></p> <p>1. Development of a written plan for ongoing professional development for each staff member, including the director or for each person working in the family child care home with the children. See sample forms in Element 2D.</p>	<p><b>3D) <u>Staff/Caregiver Professional Development Plan</u></b> – Continue meeting Level Two requirements plus:</p> <p>1. Evidence of progression of the professional development plan from Essential Element 2D. The progress should show evidence that the program is beginning to meet the professional development criteria in AIM HIGH Level 4 (if the program is planning on attaining AIM HIGH Level 4).</p> <p>Beginning <b>July 1st, 2010</b> at the time of annual visits, all classroom, administrative staff &amp; family caregivers have completed the 6-hour <u>Quality Early Childhood Programs for All</u> course</p>	<p><b>4D) <u>Staff/Caregiver Professional Development Plan</u></b>- Continue meeting Level Two and Level Three requirements plus:</p> <p>1. Evidence that individual professional development plans established at Level Two &amp; Level Three are progressing for each staff member, including the director or for each person working in the family child care home with the children.</p> <p>2. Evidence of career guidance to ensure that all training contributes to program and individual goals</p>	<p><b>5D) <u>Staff/Caregiver Professional Development Plan</u></b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two, Level Three and Level Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>

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	<p>developed by the Office of Child Development and offered at all Early Childhood Training &amp; Technical Assistance Programs or an equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development (e.g. Young Children with Diverse Abilities).</p>		
<p><b>2E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A statement supportive of family involvement is incorporated into the Family Handbook that includes an unrestricted open door policy to the classroom/school-age program/family child care home.</li> <li>2. Children and family members are acknowledged upon arrival and departure.</li> </ol>	<p><b>3E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u></b> – Continue meeting Level Two requirements plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide at least <b>two</b> family involvement activities including but not limited to:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Suggestion Box, Family Bulletin Board, Newsletter;</li> <li>b) Family meetings, Socials, Informational Workshops, minimum of one activity that encourages male participation</li> <li>c) Child developmental milestone information, Family/Staff Conferences</li> <li>d) Classroom and/or Field Trip volunteer, Support of program operation</li> <li>e) Daily (written) communication system between family member and teacher.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>4E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u></b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two and Level Three plus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide at least <b>three</b> family involvement activities (review list in Element 3E).</li> </ol>	<p><b>5E) <u>Family Involvement Plan</u></b> – Continue meeting requirements for Level Two, Level Three and Level Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
<p><b>2F) <u>Administrative Policies</u></b> – Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Policies and Procedures</b> – No requirements for this level.</li> <li>2. <b>Operational Evaluation</b>—No requirements for this level.</li> </ol>	<p><b>3F) <u>Administrative Policies</u></b> – Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Policies and Procedures</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Evidence that program has a business plan;</li> <li>b) Evidence that program has a one-year budget showing all income and expenditures;</li> <li>c) Policies and procedures for the handling of financial transactions.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <b>Operational Evaluation</b> – No requirements for this level.</li> </ol>	<p><b>4F) <u>Administrative Policies</u></b> – Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Policies and Procedures</b> – Continue meeting Level Two requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</li> <li>2. <b>Operational Evaluation</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A written plan for a process that is comprehensive and includes all aspects of the program’s operations, is ongoing and occurs on a regular basis;</li> <li>b) A plan for using evaluation results for program improvement;</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Exit interviews all staff that terminate, feedback incorporated into program planning/evaluation.</li> </ol>	<p><b>5F) <u>Administrative Policies</u></b> – Financial Policies and Procedures and Operational Evaluation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Financial Policies and Procedures</b> – Continue meeting Level Two requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</li> <li>2. <b>Operational Evaluation</b> – Continue meeting Level Four requirements. No additional requirements for this level</li> </ol>

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<p><b>2G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u></b> 1. Development of a compensation philosophy statement that is incorporated into the personnel handbook. A compensation philosophy statement for family childcare homes is required only in the case of a second caregiver who is non-related.</p>	<p><b>3G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u></b> 1. Develop and implement an incremental compensation plan that includes tangible recognition and salaries. 2. Provide at least <b>three</b> employee benefits including but not limited to: a) Payment of individual professional membership or association fee b) Insurance supplement c) Paid Leave (sick, vacation, personal, maternal, parental or bereavement d) Monetary bonuses e) Insurance (health, life, accident, disabilities, dental or vision) 3. Director is knowledgeable of resources regarding the Fair Labor Standards Act</p>	<p><b>4G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u> –</b> Continue meeting Level Two and Level Three requirements plus: 1. Continue to implement an incremental compensation plan that includes tangible recognition and salaries. 2. Program must provide at least <b>four</b> employee benefits (review list on Element 3G).</p>	<p><b>5G) <u>Employee Compensation and Benefits</u> –</b> Continue meeting requirements for Level Three and Level Four. No additional requirements for this level.</p>
<p><b>2H) <u>Ratios and Group Size</u> –</b> No requirements for this level.</p>	<p><b>3H) <u>Ratios and Group Size</u> –</b> No requirements for this level.</p>	<p><b>4H) <u>Ratios and Group Size</u> –</b> Implement ratios and group size: 1. <b>Licensed Child Care Centers</b> Child Care Centers in which children are grouped by age: 6 weeks through 24 months ..... 1:5 2 years..... 1:8 3 years..... 1:10 4 years..... 1:10 5 years..... 1:12 6 years..... 1:12 2. <b>Child Care Centers</b> in which age groups are combined: 6 weeks through 24 months ..... 1:5 2, 3 and 4 years..... 1:10 3, 4 and 5 years..... 1:12 6 years ..... 1:12</p>	<p><b>5H) <u>Ratios and Group Size</u> –</b> Continue to meet Level Four requirements. No additional requirements for this level.</p>

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		<p><b>Maximum group size:</b>  6 weeks through 24 months ..... 10  2 years..... 16  3, 4, and 5 years..... 24  6 years and up..... 24</p> <p>3. <b>Licensed Family Child Care Homes:</b>  a) 1:6 for programs licensed for 6 children  b) 2:12 for programs licensed for 12 children</p> <p>4. <b>Licensed Out-of-School Time Programs:</b>  Group size does not exceed 30.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ratio is between 1:8 and 1:12 for groups that include children 6 years of age or younger.</li> <li>• The ratio is between 1:10 and 1:15 for groups of children 6 years of age and older.</li> </ul> <p>5. <b>Registered Family Child Care Homes:</b> A caregiver will have no more than four (4) non-resident children at any one time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A caregiver will have no more than two (2) children under the age of two years old at any one time, including the providers own children.</li> <li>• A caregiver will have no more than six (6) children under the age of six at any one time, including providers own children.</li> <li>• Shifts are allowed provided there are never more than 4 non-resident children present at any one time.</li> </ul>	

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<p>1) <b>Accreditation</b> – No requirements for this level.</p> <p><i>*Programs serving children on Child Care Assistance will be required to achieve 2-STAR status at the time of their annual visit effective 7/1/2006.</i></p>	<p>3) <b>Accreditation</b> – No requirements for this level.</p>	<p>4) <b>Accreditation</b> – No requirements for this level.</p>	<p>5) <b>Accreditation</b> through a nationally recognized accrediting body approved by the Office of Child Development Board through demonstration that their accreditation significantly matches standards set by the NAEYC Academy of Early Childhood Program Accreditation. Refer to the AH Essential Elements document for a complete list of accepted accrediting organizations.</p>

# **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY**

## **LEVEL TWO**

**Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Two.**

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2A**

### **STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS, EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS**

RATIONALE — One of the most important determinants of program quality is hiring qualified staff/caregiver in order to ensure the provision of quality services to children and families. Minimum educational qualifications ensure that staff/caregiver have basic awareness of what is required to perform their assigned functions responsibly.

DEFINITION — Minimal requirements for professional development/qualifications of the teaching staff/caregiver

#### **STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS**

No requirement for this level.

#### **STAFF/CAREGIVER EVALUATION**

No requirement for this level.

#### **STAFF/CAREGIVER COMMUNICATION**

No requirement for this level.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2B

### ENVIRONMENT

**RATIONALE** —The environment affects the way children behave, develop, and learn. It also affects the quantity and quality of interactions between adults and children. It includes tangible aspects, such as appropriate materials and equipment, and intangible aspects, such as the physical and human qualities that together create an atmosphere that promotes self-esteem, social interaction, rich language, and joy of learning.

**DEFINITION** —The environment meets all required local, state, and federal regulations. It includes space (both indoors and outdoors) with appropriate equipment and materials that encourage children to engage in hands-on learning. The environment represents New Mexico's diverse languages and cultures.

### CRITICAL ELEMENTS

#### 1. Physical Environment

- a) The environment is organized into functional, identifiable learning centers in child care centers, out of school time programs and identifiable spaces for family child care programs, including any modifications required to meet children's special needs. Learning materials should be available on a daily basis. Positive examples of racial and cultural diversity should be represented in the environment through materials, equipment and displays:
- Dramatic Play: Examples include child-size kitchen furniture, mops and brooms, play telephone, large cradle or crib with blankets; tables, chairs, pots and pans, dishes, plastic or rubber food items; unbreakable mirrors, dress up clothes reflecting both genders and different types of work such as firefighting, post office, doctor, farm, construction, etc., dolls and doll clothes, doll buggies and shopping carts, stuffed toys, puppets.
  - Creative Art: Examples include a variety of sizes and colors of paper, collage material, markers, finger paint and other paints for children over age two, play dough or clay with accessories, smocks or cover-ups, easel, large crayons, blunt scissors, paint brushes, sponges, glue for children over age two.
  - Blocks and Accessories: Examples include cardboard blocks, unit blocks, trucks, cars, trains, planes, boats, figures of people and animals made of wood or plastic with no small parts, fences, hats and construction tools for children over age two.
  - Books: Examples include board books or picture cards, storybooks, including large books suitable for reading to a group, book display shelf, flannel boards and stories for children over age two. Books are rotated.

- Manipulatives: Examples include bristle blocks, connectible beads, interlocking blocks, snap beads, peg boards and large pegs, waffle toys, simple wooden puzzles with peg handles, shape sorters, stringing beads, matching games, small table blocks, stacking and sorting objects and collectibles.
- Music: Examples include a radio or tape – or record player in working order, children’s tapes or records, rhythm instruments and other music-making toys, rhythm movement accessories such as ribbons, bean bags or streamers.
- Science: Examples include a magnifying glass and color paddle. For children over age two: caged animals, fish, plants, microscope, prisms, bug collection, magnets, and balance scales.
- Math/Number: Examples include balance scales, number puzzles, number lotto games, dominoes, parquetry blocks, magnetic or flannel board numbers, rulers, or items to count such as animal figures, buttons, etc.
- Sand and/or Water: Examples include a water table or large container, buckets, shovels, water/sand wheels, cars, trucks, boats, fences, and figures of people and animals made of wood or plastic with no small parts.

For Family Child Care Homes:

- A place for messy play so children can enjoy activities like: play dough, painting, cutting and gluing.
- A place for loud, active play where children can jump or dance to music.
- A space for playing quietly so children can read, relax or be alone.
- A place to pretend where children can dress up, act out different characters and use their imagination.
- A place to eat where furniture is child size and if spill occurs clean up is not a problem.
- A place to rest or sleep where children will not be disturbed.

For Family Child Care homes that have dedicated space, verify by observation that a minimum of four learning areas are available. Homes that do not have dedicated space should be a minimum of three learning spaces.

- b) Noisy and quiet areas are arranged so that children’s activities can be sustained without interruption.
- c) Materials are clean and well-cared for, organized by type and, where appropriate, are labeled with words and/or pictures. Adaptations to materials are made when needed to accommodate various abilities of all children. Unused materials are stored in inaccessible storage.
- d) Interest areas are functional with adequate space and are logically placed. The environment is set up so children are not continually interrupting one another.
- e) Examples of children’s individually expressed artwork are displayed in the environment or in the home.
- f) Floor surface is suitable for activities that will occur in each interest area or in the family child care home.
- g) File and storage space is available for teacher/caregiver materials.

## 2. Social-Emotional Responsive Environment

- a) The environment reflects an atmosphere where all children feel accepted and able to be successful. The classroom/school-age space/home environment has a positive social atmosphere where staff/caregiver/caregiver and children spend time talking and interacting with one another in general conversation during the day as well as during mealtimes and other scheduled activities. Various methods are used to communicate with nonverbal or language delayed children.
- b) Staff/caregivers endeavor to establish a positive, caring relationship with every child in their care. Physical contact is used to comfort and/or positively support children in daily routines and interactions.
- c) Staff/caregivers encourage children to interact with one another in a positive manner. Staff/caregivers intentionally prepare (coach) children to interact positively with children of various abilities.
- d) Staff/caregivers are attuned to and respond promptly and consistently to children's needs and interests during regular routines and activities.
- e) Staff/caregivers facilitate children's growing independence and initiative by giving them many opportunities to make decisions, choose their own activities, and take charge of their own learning.
- f) Relationships among staff/caregivers are professional and respectful, and do not interfere with their responsibilities in caring for and interacting with children both indoors and outdoors.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2C**

**OBSERVATION & DOCUMENTATION OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS & CURRICULUM PLANNING\***

\*No requirements for Level Two.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2D**

### **STAFF/CAREGIVER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**RATIONALE**—The quality of the staff/caregiver is the most important determinant of the quality of programs. Research shows that the level of professional preparation and formal education directly impact developmental outcomes for children. Teachers make decisions about the environment and the curriculum based on knowledge of early childhood theories and best practices. Well-prepared teachers advocate for quality in early childhood programs and take advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of New Mexico’s culturally diverse children and families.

**DEFINITION:** A staff/caregiver professional development plan is a written plan (see samples on the following pages) for the training of all staff/caregivers, the director, and any other person employed in the family child care home and working with the children in order to meet the overall goals of the organization as set forth in the mission statement.

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENT**

1. Development of a written plan for on-going professional development for each staff/caregiver, including the director or for each person working with children in the family child care home.

#### **RECOMMENDED ELEMENT**

1. Staff/caregivers participate in the development of their own professional development plans.

**Staff/caregiver Development Goals Blueprint<sup>1</sup>**

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Teacher's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Strengths as a teacher

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Areas in need of improvement/growth

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Goal(s)

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Objectives

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director's signature

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Blueprint for Action: Achieving Center-Based Change Through Staff/caregiver Development, Bloom, P. J., Sheerer, M., and Britz, J., New Horizons, 1991.

Staff/caregiver Development Action Plan

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Objective #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Activities	Time Needed	Resources Needed
1.		
2.		

Evaluation (how/when) \_\_\_\_\_

Objective #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Activities	Time Needed	Resources Needed
1.		
2.		

Evaluation (how/when) \_\_\_\_\_

Objective #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Activities	Time Needed	Resources Needed
1.		
2.		

Evaluation (how/when) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director's signature

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2E**

### **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PLAN**

RATIONALE—Family participation is valuable in assisting families to increase their knowledge about child development and education which enhances their ability to serve as their child’s primary teacher and to help staff/caregiver make learning meaningful for children. Acknowledging families is an important beginning step towards building a relationship that encourages a team approach in supporting both the family and the child care program.

DEFINITION: The program has developed a written plan on how it will involve families.

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENT**

1. A statement supportive of family involvement is incorporated into the Family Handbook that includes an unrestricted open door policy to a child’s classroom/school-age program/family child care home.
2. Children and family members are acknowledged upon arrival and departure.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2F**

**ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES—FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL EVALUATION\***

\*No requirements for Level 2

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2G

### EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

RATIONALE—Incremental compensation and benefits act as incentives for the staff/caregiver to participate in professional development activities and remain in the program. Retaining an increasingly qualified teaching staff/caregiver reduces costly turnover and increases program quality.

DEFINITION: There is evidence that the program has developed a written statement regarding compensation and benefits for staff/caregivers.

#### CRITICAL ELEMENT

- a) Development of a compensation philosophy statement that is incorporated into the personnel handbook. A compensation philosophy statement for family child care homes is required only in the case of a second caregiver who is non-related.

#### EXAMPLE:

The objective of our total compensation package is to pay above the average rate for early childhood staff/caregiver employed in our community when individual performance, team and overall agency performance goals are achieved. The agency will compensate its entire staff/caregiver based on the following factors: an individual's job performance level, type of position, and internal equity. Additional compensation, depending on program budget, will be variable based on team or individual performance.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: 2H**

**RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE\***

\*No requirements for Level Two

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 2I**

**ACCREDITATION\***

\*No requirements for Level Two.

# **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY**

## **LEVEL THREE**

**Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, Level Two requirements  
PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Three.**

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3A

### STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS, EVALUATION AND COMMUNICATION\*

#### STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and Level Two requirements plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Effective July 1, 2010, all **NEW** staff/caregivers working directly with children must have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED)

Group Child Care Home:

1. Second caregivers have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in New Mexico's Early Care, Education and Family Support Career Lattice\*.

Out of School Time Care:

1. All school-age staff/caregiver have completed at least the 45-Hour Entry Level Course or equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development or have or are currently working toward a higher level of certificate or degree as defined in the career lattice.

#### STAFF/CAREGIVER EVALUATION

No requirement for this level.

#### STAFF/CAREGIVER COMMUNICATION

No requirement for this level.

\*For more information on the New Mexico's Early Care, Education and Family Support Career Lattice, go to [www.newmexicokids.org](http://www.newmexicokids.org)

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3B

### ENVIRONMENT

#### EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM'S ENVIRONMENT

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Materials and equipment are rotated and adapted on a regular basis to conform to curriculum goals and to meet the needs of children with various abilities. Evidence of rotation of portable outdoor equipment is included in this requirement. Evidence can be written lesson plans documenting rotation.
2. Staff/caregiver of the program are very familiar with the environment rating instruments and feel confident that they will score an average score of four on the appropriate environment rating scale.
3. Each classroom in the program must earn an average score of four (4) on the appropriate environmental rating scale (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ITERS), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition (ECERS), Family Child Care Rating Scale – Revised Edition (FCCRS), or School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)\*. The post rating scale is administered by a professional who have been trained in the use of the scale (ITERS, ECERS, FCCRS, OR SACERS). The Program Development Specialist (PDS) assigned to the program may not administer the post rating scale.

\*Environment Rating Scales, *All About the ECERS-R* and *All About the ITERS-R* are available through:  
Your local Training and Technical Assistance Program  
Publisher: Teachers College Press at [www.tcpres.com](http://www.tcpres.com)  
Various early childhood catalogs

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3C**

### **OBSERVATION & DOCUMENTATION OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS & CURRICULUM PLANNING**

**RATIONALE** — One of the major aspects of high quality programs for young children is the curriculum, which stems from sound principles of child development and reflects that each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth and development. The curriculum consists of developmentally appropriate practices that are based on a holistic view of children, meeting their needs in all six developmental areas: physical, motor, social, emotional, language, and cognitive. Some programs might also include the spiritual domain as a seventh developmental area. Curriculum is carefully planned to meet both short-term and long-term goals for the program and for children.

Children's progress is documented informally on a continuous basis using a series of brief anecdotal records (descriptions of the child's behavior or skills in given situations). Children's progress also can be documented formally at least twice/year using a developmental checklist (checklist of behaviors that indicate physical, motor, language, cognitive, social, and emotional development/progress).

**DEFINITION:** Curriculum is what happens every day in the classroom and on the playground. It includes every aspect of the daily program. Curriculum derives from the program's mission statement, philosophy (which, in turn, is based on assumptions about young children's development and learning), and program goals and objectives. It includes how materials and equipment are used, activities that children and adults participate in, and interactions among children and between children and adults.

Information gained through objective observation is used to inform the development of curriculum. Objective observation of children is the primary method of gathering information for assessment. In the case of children with special needs, other forms of formal assessment and evaluation may be needed and should be conducted by trained personnel. Information on each child is collected, summarized and analyzed to document progress, and this information is shared with families.

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Develop a system teachers will use for observing & documenting children's development, in all developmental domains, and used as a means to individualize curriculum planning in support of the whole child.
2. Develop a basic understanding of key components of an early childhood curriculum and begin implementation by using an observation, documentation, and evaluation process- a continuous process of observing children, documenting, planning, implementing activities and routines, observing the activities and assessing outcomes<sup>2</sup>. Demonstrate evidence that the director and/or curriculum coordinator have the knowledge to provide support to classroom teachers resulting in teachers using the information gained from the use of an assessment instrument to plan curriculum based on individual children's needs for 75 percent of the classrooms. For preschoolers, anecdotal observations should be completed at least two times a year for each child enrolled in the program or a development checklist completed at least twice a year accompanied with written observations that are conducted during the interim time period. For infants and toddlers, anecdotal observations should be completed three times a year or a developmental checklist completed three times a year accompanied with written observations conducted during the interim time period.
3. Describe how the program will communicate information with families regarding their child's growth and development.
4. Post weekly lessons plans organized around an appropriate curriculum (see information on infant and toddler curriculum listed below) that incorporate a posted daily schedule (one for the families and one for the children) and a written description of the role of the teacher(s) and teaching/learning strategies used. Together with the children, teacher/caregivers develop classroom/program rules. Classroom/program rules are posted and reviewed regularly with the children.
5. Develop a written curriculum. Staff/caregivers begin to implement the beginning stages of the items listed below:
  - Review and update mission and philosophy statements. Curriculum planning and implementation should be consistency with the mission statement, philosophy statement, short-range and long-range goals;
  - Knowledge of child development. Staff/caregivers are familiar with ages and stages of development. Evidence is demonstrated by having appropriate expectations for children including those with special needs;

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of resources for understanding key components of an early childhood curriculum are the *curriculum development spiral* available through the Early Childhood TTAP program, Focused Early Learning: A Planning Framework for Teaching Young Children by Gaye Gronlund, and Reflecting Children's Lives A Handbook for Planning Child-Centered Curriculum by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter.

- Activities are meaningful, developmentally appropriate, adapted/modified according to the needs and abilities of children;
- Facilitation of all areas of development: Social, Emotional (including self-help), Physical (including health), Fine and Gross Motor, Language (including communication, literacy and numeracy), and Cognitive (including problem solving, thinking and reasoning, and creativity). Some programs may also include a spiritual domain.
- Integrates foundations for the following content areas: Math, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts/Literacy, Health and Fine Arts;
- Variety of learning experiences (i.e., water/sand play, science activities, block play, use of creative media, literacy activities, etc.). This includes having materials and equipment available and adjusted to support activities for children with various abilities;
- Variety of materials that range from simple to complex (i.e., classroom contains puzzles that range from 4 to 14 pieces depending on the age and ability of children served in the classroom);
- Active engagement of children;
- Opportunities to make choices;
- Ensures smooth transitions from one activity to another;
- Opportunities to experiment and explore;
- Large blocks of time for discovery and child-initiated learning activities;
- A balance of active/quiet, individual/small group/large group activities and indoor/outdoor time;
- Emphasis on the value of social interaction through peer learning;
- A positive social/emotional foundation is valued as essential for the development of lifelong positive interpersonal relationships and the growth in all other developmental domains;
- Social skills are intentionally taught.

### **Curriculum for Infants**

- Curriculum for infants is unlike that for preschool children. It is based on **their** daily routines.
- Each infant determines his/her own daily schedule, by being fed when he is hungry, put down for a nap when he is tired and sleepy, changed when he is wet or soiled, consoled when he is distressed, and played with when he is awake and alert.
- Routines are used as a “teaching” experience with the caregiver talking, smiling, singing, and naming objects.
- Awake time should be balanced between child-initiated exploration of the environment (toys and other materials) and one-on-one play/interaction with his caregiver.

- Appropriate toys are introduced at each stage of development, and toys and other materials are rotated on a regular basis, maintaining a mix of the familiar and novel.

### **Curriculum for Toddlers**

- Curriculum for toddlers is similar to that for preschool children with a few exceptions: There is more flexibility in the daily schedule to accommodate each toddler's needs (for eating, sleeping, toileting, etc.).
- Duplicate toys and other items are recommended because of toddlers' inability to share.
- Fewer and different learning areas are appropriate;
- Little emphasis is placed on group activities.

## Recommended Element

1. Research and choose an assessment instrument<sup>3</sup> based on the following guiding principles excerpted from Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments, National Education Goals Panel, 1998. Staff/caregiver receives training on how to observe children, and on the use of the assessment instrument.
  - **Bring about benefits for children.** To justify conducting assessments, there must be a clear benefit—using the assessment results in planning curriculum for the children in the classroom or to improve the overall quality of the educational program.
  - **Be tailored to a specific purpose and should be reliable, valid, and fair for that purpose.**
  - **Recognize that reliability and validity of assessments increase with children’s age.** The younger the child, the more difficult it is to obtain reliable and valid assessment data. It is particularly difficult to assess children’s cognitive abilities accurately before age 6.
  - **Be age-appropriate in both content and the method of data collection.** /Assessments of young children should address the full range of early learning and development.
  - **Be linguistically appropriate, recognizing that to some extent all assessments are measures of language.** Assessment results are easily confounded by language proficiency, especially for children who come from home backgrounds with limited exposure to English. Each child’s first- and second-language development should be taken into account when determining appropriate assessment models and in interpreting the meaning of assessment results.
  - **Be a valued source of assessment information, as well as an audience for assessment results.** Assessments should include multiple sources of evidence, especially reports from parents and teachers. Assessment results should be shared with parents as part of an ongoing process that involves parents in their child’s education.

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of excellent assessment tools are Focused Portfolios: A Complete Assessment for the Young Child, Gronlund, G., & Engel, B., Redleaf Press, 2001, Web address: [www.redleafpress.org](http://www.redleafpress.org). & The Ages and Stages Questionnaire, <http://asq.uoregon.edu>, New Mexico Early Learning Outcomes, [www.newmexicokids.org](http://www.newmexicokids.org) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website under Beyond the Journal at [www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/](http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/). Click on the January 2004 article “Choosing an Appropriate Assessment System.”

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3D

### STAFF/CAREGIVER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RATIONALE –The quality of the staff/caregiver is the most important determinant of the quality of programs. Research shows that the level of professional preparation and formal education directly impact developmental outcomes for children. Teachers make decisions about the environment and the curriculum based on knowledge of early childhood theories and best practices. Well-prepared teachers advocate for quality in early childhood programs and take advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of New Mexico’s culturally diverse children and families.

DEFINITION: An on-going plan for continued professional development for each staff member, including the director or for each person working with children in family child care homes.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Evidence of progression of the professional development plan from Essential Element 2D. The progress should show evidence that the program is beginning to meet the professional development criteria in AIM HIGH Level 4 (if the program is planning on attaining AIM HIGH Level 4).
2. Beginning **July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010** at the time of annual visits, all classroom staff, administrative staff and family caregivers have completed the 6-hour **Quality Early Childhood Programs for All** course developed by the Office of Child Development and offered at all Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance Programs *OR* an equivalent approved by the Office of Child Development (e.g. Young Children with Diverse Abilities). Employees hired after 2010 must complete the course with six (6) months of hire date.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3E

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

RATIONALE — Family participation is valuable in assisting families to increase their knowledge about child development and education which enhances their ability to serve as their child's primary teacher and to help staff/caregivers make learning meaningful for children.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Provide at least **TWO (2)** family involvement activities including but not limited to:
  - Suggestion box, family bulletin board, newsletter;
  - Family meetings, socials, informational workshops, minimum of one activity that encourages male participation;
  - Child developmental milestone information, Family/Staff conferences;
  - Classroom and/or field trip volunteer, support of program operation;
  - Daily (written) communication system between families and teachers.
2. Information on family involvement activities is cross-referenced in the program's family handbook.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3F

### **ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES—FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL EVALUATION**

RATIONALE— Sound financial management is one of the best ways for businesses to remain solvent. How well a program manages the finances of the business is the cornerstone of every successful business venture. Each year thousands of potentially successful businesses fail because of poor financial management. Business owners will need to identify and implement polices that will lead to and ensure that financial obligations are met. (U. S. Small Business Administration)

#### **FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

DEFINITION: A business plan that details strategies for obtaining adequate funding, the handling of money, accompanied by a budget, which balances income and expenses, in compliance with all local, state, and federal laws regarding the reporting of income and management of money.

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

1. Evidence that program has a business plan.
2. Evidence of a one-year budget.
3. Policies and procedures for the handling of financial transactions.

For example, a business plan could include:

1. Executive Summary
  - In one page, capture the strengths of the business and the particular place it holds in the industry.
2. Business Description
  - Describes the services offered by the business. Provides a brief history of the business and its philosophy for doing business.

3. Market Information
  - Describe and quantify the target market for the services. Identify and describe the competition. Identify and describe the company's "competitive advantage" – characteristics which make it better than or different from the competition in your market.
4. Marketing Plan
  - Identify specific tactics for informing your target market that the service exists, i.e., public relations, advertising, promotions, pricing discounts, etc.
5. Financial Plan
  - Copy of the last year's financial statements.
  - Prepare a detailed operating budget, providing monthly detail and yearly summaries.
6. Management Plan
  - Identify the key personnel in the business, including job descriptions and relevant background experience. Include plans for other personnel. Discuss any expansion opportunities and plans.
7. Contingency Plan
  - Identify areas of risk to the successful operation of the business and describe your plans to lessen each area of risk. Also explain how debt would be repaid in the event of business failure.

#### Recommended Elements

1. Sources of funding for the long-term (5 years).
2. A five-year projected budget, showing all income and expenditures.

#### OPERATIONAL EVALUATION

No requirements for Level 3.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3G

### EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

RATIONALE — Programs that are able to offer employee incremental compensation and benefits reinforce the professionalism of the staff/caregiver employed by the program and provide incentive for the staff/caregiver. Research shows that programs that provide incremental compensation and benefits are more likely to retain staff/caregiver.

DEFINITION: Provide a brief written description of benefits available to staff/caregiver.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Implement an incremental compensation plan that includes tangible recognition and salaries.
2. Programs must provide at least **THREE (3)** employee benefits\* including but not limited to:
  - Payment of individual professional membership or association fee;
  - Insurance supplement;
  - Paid Leave (sick, vacation, personal, maternal, parental or bereavement);
  - Monetary bonuses;
  - Insurance (health, life, accident, disabilities, dental or vision);
3. Director is knowledgeable of resources regarding the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) - U.S. Department of Labor.

\*Benefits other than those listed must be approved by the Office of Child Development prior to implementation.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: 3H**

**RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE\***

\*No requirements for Levels Two or Level Three.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 3I**

**ACCREDITATION\***

\*No requirements for Levels Two or Three.

# **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY**

## **LEVEL FOUR**

**Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, Level Two and Level Three requirements  
PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Four.**

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4A**

### **STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS, EVALUATION, AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **STAFF/CAREGIVER QUALIFICATIONS**

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Levels Two and Three. No additional requirements for this level.

#### **STAFF/CAREGIVER EVALUATION**

DEFINITION: Each staff member or non-relative caregiver in a family child care home is evaluated, using criteria from the individual's job description. The evaluation criteria and procedures (which may include self-evaluation) are known to each individual being evaluated as described in the programs personnel handbook. The director/caregiver discusses evaluation results with each staff member or caregiver working with children in the family child care home, and results are considered when determining salary increments and are incorporated into the individual's professional development plan.

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

1. A tool, which includes criteria for evaluation and the process of evaluation for staff/non-relative caregivers in family child care homes at least on an annual basis.
2. A plan for improvement for each staff member/non-relative caregiver(s) in family child care homes, if appropriate, based on evaluation results.

#### **RECOMMENDED ELEMENT**

1. Staff/caregiver participates in the development of any corrective action plan, if necessary.

## **STAFF/CAREGIVER COMMUNICATION**

DEFINITION: Meetings are held on a regular basis with all staff for program planning and problem solving. Caregivers set time aside on a regular basis to plan and discuss relevant program issues.

### **CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

1. Evidence that meetings are held at least on a quarterly basis;
2. Staff/caregiver participation in developing agendas and setting meeting dates;
3. Evidence that meetings provide a safe environment where staff/caregiver members can ask questions, present alternative ideas, and share feelings.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4B

### ENVIRONMENT

DEFINITION: The environment meets all required local, state, and federal regulations. It includes space (both indoors and outdoors) with appropriate equipment and materials that encourage children to engage in active learning. Adaptations and modifications are made to encourage active involvement of all children. The environment represents New Mexico's diverse languages and cultures.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two and Level Three plus:

### CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Outdoor space has some protection from the elements.
2. Outdoor space has some play interest centers/spaces such as the following\*. Outdoor space should include as many centers/spaces as possible and be offered as often as possible:
  - Active Play area that includes climber, swings, slides, space for active games, play with a parachute, hoops, balls and other equipment.
  - Sand box for digging area and various sand toys made available to children. Sandbox /sand is kept clean.
  - Water table or dish tubs and water toys located near a faucet.
  - Riding toys with trails or paths that link various spaces on the playground, a large patio area for riding, and a storage area.
  - Dramatic play area that includes a playhouse or other play structure. Dramatic play also occurs on climbers in conjunction with riding toys. Wide variety needed.
  - Quiet play area for relaxing, enjoying books, listening to stories, and alone space.
  - Science/Nature area such as a small garden, animal area or bird feeders.
  - Art/Woodworking area for children to engage in creative and constructive play with equipment such as a table, an easel, and tree stumps, etc.
3. Opportunities to develop motor skills.

\*Excerpted from the 45-Hour Entry Level Course, State of New Mexico, 1994

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4C

### **OBSERVATION & DOCUMENTATION OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS & CURRICULUM PLANNING**

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Three plus:

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

1. A written curriculum that is carefully planned to meet both short-term and long-term goals for the program and for individual children that includes:
  - Knowledge of children's needs and interests based on observation and documentation completed in the classroom or in the family child care home program;
  - Continued use of the curriculum development process of gathering information through observations for individual curriculum and program planning in every classroom or in family child care homes (evidence that the program ties assessment of children to curriculum);
  - Reflection of on-going implementation demonstrated in the classroom environment;
  - Social and Emotional teaching strategies;
  - Variety of instructional strategies such as small/large group activities, puppets, role play, visual supports, peer buddies, scripted stories and/or picture prompts;
  - Sequencing of activities from simple to complex.
  - Support for children's thinking, reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. Teachers/caregivers facilitate discussions to challenge (scaffold) children's thinking;
  - Support for the development of children's self-regulation using methods such as logical and natural consequences. Teacher/caregivers facilitate discussions to problem-solve conflict;
  - Evidence that each child's language and culture are integral components of the daily program;
  - Evidence of child participation in planning activities and developing program rules and routines;
  - Evidence that teachers/caregivers challenge children just beyond their current level of development (scaffold their learning).
  - Documentation verifying at least a three (3) months history of curriculum planning and preferably a year's history of planning.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4D**

### **STAFF/CAREGIVER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**RATIONALE**—The quality of the staff/caregiver is the most important determinant of the quality of programs. Research shows that the level of professional preparation and formal education directly impact developmental outcomes for children. Teachers make decisions about the environment and the curriculum based on knowledge of early childhood theories and best practices. Well-prepared teachers advocate for quality in early childhood programs and take advantage of opportunities to improve competence, both for personal and professional growth and for the benefit of New Mexico's culturally diverse children and families.

**DEFINITION:** An on-going plan for continued professional development for each staff/caregiver member, including the director. Evidence should show that staff/caregiver professional development plans are progressing in order to meet national accreditation standards, if the program plans on attaining national accreditation.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two and Level Three plus:

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

1. Evidence that individual professional development plans established at Level Two and Level Three are progressing for each staff/caregiver member, including the director or for each person working in the family child care home.
2. Evidence of career guidance to ensure that all training contributes to program and individual goals.

#### **RECOMMENDED ELEMENT**

1. Staff/caregivers participate in the development of their own professional development plans.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4E

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PLAN

RATIONALE—Family participation is valuable in assisting families to increase their knowledge about child development and education which enhances their ability to serve as their child’s primary teacher and to help staff/caregivers make learning meaningful for children

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two and Level Three plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENT

1. Provide at least **THREE (3)** family involvement activities including but not limited to:

- Suggestion box, family bulletin board, newsletter, written monthly communication
- Family meetings, socials, informational workshops, minimum of one activity that encourages male participation;
- Child developmental milestone information, Family/Staff conferences;
- Classroom and/or field trip volunteer, support of program operation;
- Daily (written) communication system between family and teacher.

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4F**

### **ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES—FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONAL EVALUATION**

**RATIONALE**— Sound financial management is one of the best ways for your business to remain profitable and solvent. How well you manage the finances of your business is the cornerstone of every successful business venture. Each year thousands of potentially successful businesses fail because of poor financial management. As a business owner, you will need to identify and implement policies that will lead to and ensure that you will meet your financial obligations. (U. S. Small Business Administration)

#### **FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two. No additional requirements for Level Three or Level Four.

#### **OPERATIONAL EVALUATION**

**DEFINITION:** The operational evaluation is a process to determine if the goals and objectives of the program are being met. The evaluation process includes collecting, summarizing, analyzing and using data to document outcomes.

#### **CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

1. A written plan for a process that is comprehensive and includes all aspects of the program's operation, is ongoing and occurs on a regular basis;
2. A plan for using evaluation results for program improvement;
3. Exit interviews with all staff/caregivers that terminate, with feedback incorporated into program planning/evaluation.

RECOMMENDED ELEMENT

1. Evidence that the plan for the evaluation process includes the director, the staff/caregiver, family members, and external early childhood professionals.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4G

### EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

RATIONALE—Programs that are able to offer employee benefits reinforce the professionalism of the staff employed by the program and provide incentives for staff/caregiver. Research shows that programs that provide benefits are more likely to retain staff/caregiver.

DEFINITION: Provide a brief written description of the benefits available to staff/non-relative caregivers in family child care homes.

Continue meeting minimal licensing regulations and requirements for Level Two and Level Three plus:

#### CRITICAL ELEMENTS

1. Continue to implement an incremental compensation scale to include tangible recognition and salaries.
2. Programs must provide at least **FOUR (4)** employee benefits\* including but not limited to:
  - Payment of individual professional membership or association fee;
  - Insurance supplement;
  - Paid Leave (sick, vacation, personal, maternal, parental or bereavement);
  - Monetary bonuses;
  - Insurance (health, life accident, disabilities, dental or vision);

\*Benefits other than those listed must be approved by the Office of Child Development prior to implementation.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: 4H

### RATIOS AND GROUP SIZE

RATIONALE—Research has consistently documented that fewer children per adult and smaller group size result in a higher quality program and more positive developmental outcomes for children. When teachers have smaller numbers of children and smaller groups, they can supervise and monitor children more carefully, provide more individualized attention, implement activities that are developmentally appropriate for each child, and engage in more one-on-one language. Basic health and safety are compromised when adults have responsibility for too many children and/or when group size is large.

DEFINITION: Ratios are stated as the number of children allowed per one adult in each classroom or home at all times. The number of children per adult increases as the age of children increase. Group size refers to the total number of children in any one classroom or home.

Programs preparing for national accreditation should check with the chosen accrediting body for specific information related to ratios and group size. It is recommended that programs meet the ratios and group size identified by national accrediting bodies.

### CRITICAL CONTENTS

#### **Licensed Child Care Centers:**

Child Care Centers in which children are grouped by age:

6 weeks through 24 months ...	1:5
2 years.....	1:8
3 years.....	1:10
4 years.....	1:10
5 years.....	1:12
6 years.....	1:12

**Child Care Centers in which age groups are combined:**

6 weeks through 24 months ...	1:5
2, 3 and 4 years.....	1:10
3, 4 and 5 years.....	1:12
6 years.....	1:12

**Maximum group size:**

6 weeks through 24 months ....	10
2 years.....	16
3, 4, and 5 years.....	24
6 years and up.....	24

**Licensed Family Child Care Homes:**

- 1:6 for programs licensed for 6 children
- 2:12 for programs licensed for 12 children

**Licensed School-age Programs**

Group size does not exceed 30

- The ratio is between 1:8 and 1:12 for groups that include children 6 years of age or younger.
- The ratio is between 1:10 and 1:15 for groups of children 6 years of age and older.

**Registered Family Child Care Homes**

A caregiver will have no more than four (4) non-resident children at any one time.

- A caregiver will have no more than two (2) children under the age of two years old at any one time, including the providers own children.
- A caregiver will have no more than six (6) children under the age of six at any one time, including providers own children.
- Shifts are allowed provided there are never more than 4 non-resident children present at any one time.

**ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 4I**

**ACCREDITATION\***

\*No requirement at this level.

# **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY**

## **LEVEL FIVE**

**Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, Levels Two, Three and Four requirements PLUS the following criteria to complete Level Five.**

## **ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: 5**

### **ACCREDITATION**

Programs must meet minimal licensing requirements, all Levels Two, Three and Four requirements plus:

**RATIONALE**–The purpose of voluntary national accreditation is to improve the quality of care and education provided to young children. The accreditation process provides an opportunity for administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, and parents to work collaboratively to evaluate and improve program quality. It also involves external validation by an early childhood expert. Accreditation enhances the credibility of the program and communicates to parents, funders, and policy-makers that the program is of high quality.

**DEFINITION:** The program has participated in the accreditation process, has been validated by a nationally recognized accrediting body approved by the Child Development Board through demonstration that their accreditation significantly matches standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Academy of Early Childhood Program Accreditation.

### **CRITICAL ELEMENT**

1. Evidence of current accredited status by one of the bodies listed below. National accrediting entities must be approved by the Child Development Board. If an accreditation entity makes changes to the accreditation process, the accreditation must be re-reviewed and re-approved.

#### **CHILD CARE CENTERS:**

- a) NAEYC (National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, National Association for the Education of Young Children)
- b) NECPA (National Early Childhood Program Association)
- c) ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International)
- d) COA (Council on Accreditation)
- e) NAC (National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education Programs)
- f) ICAA (International Christian Accrediting Association)

#### **FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES:**

- a) NAFCC (National Association of Family Child Care)

#### **SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS:**

- a) COA (Council on Accreditation)