

**Indicator: All pre-K teachers have specialized education in early childhood education or child development. (5158)**

**Explanation:** For a pre-K through third grade classroom to be considered high-quality, it is important that the lead teacher have specialized education in early childhood education or child development (Barnett, W., Carolan, M., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, 2012). Currently only 44 of the existing 52 state-funded pre-K programs require specialized training in early childhood and state policies regarding specialized early childhood training for Kindergarten through grade three teachers vary considerably.

**Question:** Do all pre-K through grade three teachers have specialized education in early childhood education or child development? Do all pre-K through grade three teachers with specialized training spend the full school day teaching?

Jose Paradis is a teacher working in the Columbia School District Title 1 preschool classroom. Jose, who has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, began teaching fifth grade two years ago but was 'bumped' last year by a more senior teacher and was reassigned to the pre-K classroom.

All teachers in Columbia School District begin the academic year three days before school started for children so they have would time to set up their rooms, organize their curriculum, and meet with students and parents before the first day of class.

When Mr. Paradis entered his classroom, he is confused about the set-up. Instead of desks in rows, the classroom has small tables. Instead of text books, the room is filled with a range of books that do not seem to target just four-year olds as some are picture books and others are complex texts with few illustrations that appear geared for first or second graders. He sees that there are "stations" around the room that appear to include a library, a center for 'dress up,' a block corner, and a large space in the middle.

Mr. Paradis reorganizes the classroom so it looks more like a typical classroom. To prepare for the first day of school, he makes copies of worksheets for the students to complete. He makes copies of the 'parent information form' to give to students to take home to their parents. And, he develops a rigorous reading and mathematics curriculum.

After the first week of class Mr. Paradis has a new understanding of what it means to be a pre-K teacher. He feels completely overwhelmed and under-prepared to teach children of this age. The students don't sit at their desks. Many students have not yet learned how to hold a pencil so the reading and math worksheets are useless. He even realizes that giving students papers to take home to their parents is not a straight-forward task for some four-year-olds.

Mr. Paradis also realizes that he made a mistake in taking away the learning centers. The children want to move around and are eager to explore. He consults with a pre-K teacher in another district. She tells him about the importance of tailoring the pre-K curriculum to the developmental needs and learning styles of young children. She explains that it is best practice to set up the classroom environment and curriculum to encourage learning through play and exploration since this is how young

children learn. And, she gives him a number of books about young children's learning and development that she obtained when she studied early childhood development in graduate school.

Mr. Paradis realizes that he has never studied child development and that his teaching approach would benefit substantially by specialized early childhood coursework. He signs up for a graduate class at a local university. By the spring, he feels he is gaining important knowledge that will benefit his teaching and plans to take two other courses so that he can best support young children's early learning and development.

### Research

Specialized education in early childhood education or child development is an important component of quality early education (Barnett, W., Carolan, M., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, 2012).

- The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends that all early childhood teachers have specialized training in early childhood education or child development so that they are aware of the unique needs and learning trajectories of young children (Hyson, 2003).
- When teachers have specialized training in early childhood education, they are better able to support children's healthy development and school readiness (Bueno & Darling-Hammond, 2010).
- Young children's learning and development clearly depend on the educational qualifications of their teachers. Research by Barnett reveals that specialized training in early childhood development is linked with improved classroom quality and child outcomes (Barnett, 2003).
- Teacher behavior is one of the major influences on early childhood development (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000) and teachers with specialized training on early childhood are more likely to have positive relationships with young children to support development of social and academic skills (Pianta, 1997).

### References and resources

- Bueno, M. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *A matter of degrees: preparing teachers for the pre-k classroom*. Washington, DC: The PEW Center on the State, Education Reform Series.
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- Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development* (Executive Summary). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
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- Hyson, M. (2003). *Preparing early childhood professionals: NAEYC's standards for programs*. Washington, DC: National Associate for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from [http://www.naeyc.org/ncate/files/ncate/Std\\_1pager.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/ncate/files/ncate/Std_1pager.pdf)