

The 10 Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs

During Phase I of the Minnesota Governor's Summit on School Readiness, two early childhood research experts, Arthur Reynolds of the University of Minnesota and Susan Neuman of the University of Michigan, presented 10 essential elements of effective early childhood programs as defined by research. The researchers concurred that a significant body of evidence exists to support these findings.

The 10 Essential Elements: Definitions

1. **Target children at risk.** The effects of early education on school performance and social adjustment are greater for children that are at risk of school failure than for children at low risk.
2. **Begin early.** The earlier that education intervention begins, the larger the impact and the more likely those effects will be sustained.
3. **The number of years of preschool and the length of program services** is positively associated with children's learning and development.
4. **Intensity of instruction.** The instructional content and activities should be of sufficient length and intensity to address learning needs adequately. A teacher's organization and use of time does matter.
5. **Small class sizes and low child-to-staff ratios.** Class sizes of fewer than 20 and child-to-staff ratios less than 10-to-1 are associated with greater learning gains. These should be lower for 3-year-olds (i.e., class sizes of less than 19 and ratios less than 9-to-1).
6. **Highly trained professionals and ongoing professional development.** Children taught by teachers who are well trained are more likely to experience high-quality programs. Teachers and staff should have regular opportunities with sufficient time allocated to participate in professional development activities to keep current on best practices in the field.
7. **Comprehensive services.** Programs that provide a full range of education and family services are more responsive to children's needs and will be more likely to impact child development outcomes. Attention to children's education and social development, family needs, health, and social services are important. Opportunities for parent involvement are especially important.
8. **Compensatory services.** Instruction that accelerates literacy and language development in an appropriate manner is a major need for many children at risk.

9. **Coordination of transitions to kindergarten and the early grades.** The extent to which the preschool program is integrated with kindergarten and the elementary grades leads to smoother transitions to school. Attention to coordination and the provision of services across ages can help sustain the positive effects of preschool.

10. **Strong accountability system.** Programs should have well-documented learning standards. There should be formative assessments of children's progress on well-validated indicators. Careful monitoring of program quality also is important.