

Introducing the Preschool Curriculum Consumer Report

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Narrator: In Head Start classrooms, we see children learning new skills, making friends, sharing, and growing. The structure behind all that busy activity is your program's curriculum. We all know that no one curriculum is the best fit for all Head Start programs. Every program has different resources, unique strengths, and specific needs.

You may be choosing a curriculum for the first time for a new program; or perhaps a concern about child outcomes data makes you want to review whether your current curriculum is adequate; or maybe you've been using several curricula piecemeal and would like to choose a single core curriculum. So, how do you decide which one is the best fit for your program?

The Curriculum Consumer Report was written to help Head Start center-based programs choose high-quality, research-based comprehensive preschool curricula. From research, we know which components make a curriculum effective. Using those key components, we analyzed a selection of preschool curricula. We chose to review a curriculum if it aligned with more than two of these Head Start Child Development and Early Learning domains: Language Development; Literacy Knowledge and Skills; Mathematics Knowledge and Skills; and Social and Emotional Development.

For this report, we reviewed 14 curricula. The report describes in detail how well each one addressed these 13 components of an effective, comprehensive curriculum: grounded in child development principles, evidence-based, shows effects on child outcomes, comprehensive across learning domains, shows depth in each covered learning domain, specific learning goals, well-designed learning activities, responsive teaching, supports for individualized instruction, culturally and linguistically responsive, ongoing assessment, professional development opportunities, and family involvement materials.

We found that every curriculum has strengths and weaknesses across these components, so it's important to know which components are the most essential to your program. You can evaluate your program's needs and resources with the help of a self-assessment team that includes staff, families, and members of the governing board, Policy Council, and community. Then you can look for curricula with solid, high-quality evidence ratings in the components that are the most important to your program.

This table summarizes information about all the curricula across the 13 components. To learn more about a specific curriculum, go to the individual curriculum tables, where you will find a general description and rating for each one. Remember, the best curriculum is the one that is the best fit for your program. When you're looking for a comprehensive curriculum, the Curriculum Consumer Report can help you find it. You can then work with your staff to implement it with fidelity, since each curriculum is only as good as how well it's used.

Over time, monitor how it continues to meet your program's changing needs. Curriculum developers revise, update, and incorporate the latest research into their materials. Stay informed to make sure your program's curriculum also reflects current research and best practices. A carefully chosen curriculum and a staff that embraces it with enthusiasm will help the children in your program grow and thrive in the knowledge and skills they need for kindergarten and beyond.

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