

# Guide to the Curriculum Approval Process

This guide is designed for child care/early education programs going through the Parent Aware process who are planning to submit their curriculum to be reviewed for approval.

The guide provides background on the Parent Aware curriculum approval process, a definition of curriculum, and the criteria that are used for approving curriculum for the Parent Aware program. It also defines the terms used in the review process.

## Background

The Minnesota Parent Aware definition of “curriculum” and criteria for approval were developed by a committee of early childhood experts, including national and state consultants, higher education faculty, and early care and education professionals. The committee reviewed many resources, including definitions and criteria used in other state curriculum approval processes, as well as national research on best practices related to curriculum. After substantial discussion, the process, definition and criteria outlined in this guide were developed. The Minnesota Departments of Education and Human Services both reviewed the recommendations of the committee and approved them for use in the Parent Aware program.

## Approval process

Early learning programs in the Parent Aware pilot areas are invited to submit curriculum for review. (See the Parent Aware Curriculum Review Process Summary and Form or Submitting Curriculum for Review for more details. These forms can be found on the Parent Aware Rating Tool website.)

When a curriculum is received, it is sent to the Curriculum Review Committee to review it and make recommendations to the Minnesota Department of Human Services regarding whether or not it should be approved. The committee members use the definition of curriculum and criteria for approval outlined in this guide in the approval process. This guide gives programs an opportunity to “walk through the process” themselves before they submit their curricula for review.

## Definition of curriculum

Curriculum is a set of written materials that describe a particular approach to providing learning experiences for children, including all of the following:

- the theoretical, philosophical and/or research basis of the approach to nurturing and educating young children
- the goals and objectives for children’s learning and development, including the skills and knowledge the curriculum seeks to foster
- the experiences that children will have to facilitate their progress toward the goals and objectives, including specification of features of the environment, scheduling, specific learning activities, and adult-child interactions
- the process through which adults will plan and carry out learning experiences to facilitate children’s progress toward the goals and objectives

Primary sources used in developing the curriculum definition:

- Reaching potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and assessment for young children (NAEYC, 1992)
- Head Start Definition of curriculum

Secondary sources used in developing the curriculum definition:

- Smith, M. K. (2000). Curriculum theory and practice. The encyclopedia of information education. ([www.infed.org/biblio/b-curruci.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-curruci.htm))
- NAEYC Accreditation Criteria for Curriculum. [www.naeyc.org/academy/standards/standard2/](http://www.naeyc.org/academy/standards/standard2/)

## Submitting curriculum for review

If you are nominating a published, commercially available curriculum for review, simply complete the *Form for Submitting Curriculum for Review*, including the name of the curriculum and publisher. If you are submitting a curriculum you developed yourself, or documentation of the way you are implementing an approach, you will need to submit all written materials related to your program's curriculum. For example, be sure to include any manuals, training manuals, teacher guides, sample lesson plans, descriptions of the classroom layout, or any other guidance for teachers related to instruction for each age group served (infant-toddler, preschool).

Locally-developed curricula should clearly communicate your approach, instructional strategies and learning activities. It should be clear that the teachers or caregivers in your program are the audience for the curriculum. You may also include examples. Feel free to label the examples in order to share with the committee members which criteria each example helps to demonstrate. If you work in a center-based setting and have a team of teachers who work together to develop your curriculum, consider working as a team to put together your curriculum documentation.

If you are developing a curriculum for the first time, a good first step is to go to a resource library, such as the Debra S. Fish Library at Resources for Child Caring, and review the curriculum on the list of Parent Aware approved curriculum. Go through the manuals and any related training materials to see how each curriculum meets the approval criteria.

## Questions

Call or email for information regarding the Parent Aware curriculum review process:

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## Required criteria

The following criteria are things curricula **must** include to be approved. The review committee assesses whether or not the written documents provide for these items fully, partially or not at all. If the materials do not provide for these required criteria at all, the curriculum will not be approved. Note that the following items can be embedded in the lesson design (home follow-up ideas, items to discuss) and/or suggestions about group family activities and/or resources/guidance for teachers.

Criteria	Questions to consider as you submit (Note: A curriculum does not have to answer <i>all</i> of these questions; these are simply examples of the kinds of things the reviewers look for in the submitted materials.)
<p><b>Provide a theoretical, philosophical and/or research basis</b></p> <p>Definition/clarification: This is the underlying foundation that guides all other components of the curriculum. This foundation needs to be described clearly by identifying the theory, philosophy, and/or research. Reviewers will look for how this foundation is consistent with current understanding of how young children develop and learn.</p>	<p><b>Theoretical base:</b> How does your curriculum reflect your theory of child development and/or the early childhood teaching and learning process? Using your curriculum, what process would enable children to learn? If you base your curriculum on a particular child development theorist (i.e., Piaget, Vygotsky), what are examples of particular statements or beliefs from that theorist that form the base for your curriculum?</p> <p><b>Philosophical:</b> What is your philosophy of the early childhood teaching and learning process? How does your philosophy help you structure your curriculum? Do you have examples of your philosophy and how it is revealed in or structures how and what you do with children? How does your philosophy guide the way you organize the information that is presented to the children. Are there examples provided for each age group included in the curriculum?</p> <p><b>Research:</b> What research supports your understanding of how children learn? What research supports the activities and methods of your curriculum?</p>
<p><b>Stated goals and objectives for children’s learning and development, including the skills and knowledge the curriculum seeks to foster</b></p> <p>Clarification: This may be in the form of a developmental chart that ties skills and knowledge to learning and development.</p>	<p>This can be the “content” of the curriculum—what do children learn? What are they able to do?</p> <p>Are the goals and objectives clearly identified goals and objectives that support children’s developing skills? Are the goals and objectives consistent with the curriculum’s theoretical, philosophical and/or research basis?</p> <p>Are the activities linked to specific goals and objectives? For example, if the reader looks at an activity plan (put zoo animals in the block area), is the developmental goal or learning objective clear (sorting &amp; classification)?</p>
<p><b>The process through which adults plan and carry out learning experiences to facilitate children’s progress toward the goals and objectives</b></p>	<p>Did you include samples of lesson plans? The reviewers will use the samples of the lesson plans to determine if the lessons reflect sound principles of child development.</p> <p>How do adults plan experiences that support children’s progress? Is there a plan for the day? How do adults know how to adapt plans? Are there choices?</p> <p>How do goals and objectives connect to the lesson plan format?</p>

<p><b>Experiences that children will have to facilitate their progress toward the goals and objectives (including specification of features of the environment, scheduling, specific learning activities, and adult-child interactions)</b></p>	<p>Did you include the following?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples (whether activities, environment, interactions) are based on sound principles of child development</li> <li>• Examples of specific activities and experiences</li> <li>• Examples of daily schedules</li> <li>• Description of the environmental arrangement (for example, are there activity areas, routines, etc.)</li> <li>• Description of types of interactions (small group, large group, free play where adult can interact 1:1 to scaffold children's learning)</li> </ul> <p>Are the activities and experiences clearly written?</p> <p>Is the way the environment is arranged support children's development, and is the arrangement of the environment clearly described?</p> <p>Is there guidance included for teachers on how to support child-adult interaction?</p> <p>Did you include a chart or drawing showing the room's layout? (This is recommended.)</p> <p>You may include photos; however, they cannot be used <b>in place of a written description</b> of the classroom layout.</p>
<p><b>Information about the ages it is designed for</b></p>	<p>Did you include a summary of the ages the curriculum is designed for?</p> <p>Will readers be able to distinguish the goals, activities, and/or planning expected for each age group (i.e., infant-toddler; preschool)?</p>
<p><b>Reasonably provide for/allow for and/or is flexible enough to be used with an assessment tool to individualize instruction based on children's individual differences and varying developmental levels</b></p>	<p>Does the curriculum include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance for teachers about how to incorporate information from assessments into instructional planning for individual children</li> <li>• Guidance on how to use observations of children's abilities, developmental levels, and interests to plan activities</li> </ul> <p>Some curricula include an assessment tool specifically designed to be used with them. However, it is not required that the curriculum have an assessment developed to be used with it.</p> <p>Is the curriculum flexible enough to allow for use of the results of an assessment tool to individualize instruction for children? Are the materials/activities presented in a way that is so rigid that they can not be easily individualized for children?</p> <p>Are adults able to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of individual children as needs are identified through assessment?</p> <p>Are adults able to use the assessments to plan for individual needs while also using this curriculum?</p> <p>Is the schedule flexible enough to allow teachers to react in the moment to the needs of individual children?</p>

<p><b>Scope/Reasonably aligned with the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPS) by covering all domains or being supplemented through a bundle</b></p> <p>Definition: Scope refers to the breadth of content that is covered within a curriculum.</p>	<p>The reviewers look for reasonable alignment between the curriculum and the domains and indicators included in <i>Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress</i> (ECIP).</p> <p><i>Are all the developmental areas identified and supported?</i> For example, if a curriculum has a primary focus (i.e., literacy or math), is the curriculum broad enough to also address physical, social-emotional, and cognitive areas? Or, do the materials identify additional goals and activities that support children across other developmental domains? If you are bundling multiple curricula, is there a description of how components of either self-developed or purchased curricula meet all domains?</p> <p>Will children in the program that use this curriculum have experiences that line up well with those identified in the ECIP?</p> <p>All programs submitting curriculum are encouraged to submit a chart that indicates how their curriculum aligns with the ECIP. In some cases, the chart may describe the alignment with all of the ECIP by lining them up one to one. However <b>it is not required</b> that every indicator is provided for in the curriculum. Rather, it is important that the curriculum covers all of the domains so that it addresses the whole child, rather than just one domain. As mentioned above, curricula that address one primary domain may be submitted as part of a bundle, but will not be approved as a stand alone curriculum.</p> <p>Note that the domains may be called something slightly different, or be combined with other domains; however, all domains must be included.</p> <p>If you are submitting a bundle, you must include a chart demonstrating alignment with the ECIP.</p> <p>For infants and toddlers, the <i>Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress</i> domains include: Social and Emotional Development, Language Development and Communication, Cognitive Development, and Physical and Motor Development.</p> <p>For preschool-age children, the <i>Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress</i> domains include: Social and Emotional Development, Approaches to Learning, Language and Literacy Development, Creativity and the Arts, Cognitive Development, and Physical and Motor Development.</p>
<p><b>Features suggest sensitivity to cultural diversity</b></p>	<p>Do the materials respond to and are respectful of the cultural differences of individual children and avoid stereotyping?</p> <p>Do "cultural" activities reflect the individual children in the program, or are they only about particular holidays or rituals? Are children and families' backgrounds represented and respected in materials, routines, learning opportunities? If not, is there guidance for helping teachers weave activities into their delivery of the instruction in a way that this can be achieved?</p> <p>If a curriculum includes activities that are culturally insensitive, it will <b>not</b> be approved.</p>

## Additional review criteria

The following criteria are things approved curriculum **should** include. The review committee assesses whether or not the written documents provide for these items fully, partially or not at all. Based on this information, the Minnesota Department of Human Services decides whether or not the curriculum provides for enough of these items to be approved.

<p><b>Curriculum <i>should include</i></b></p>	<p><b>Questions to consider as you submit</b> (Note: A curriculum does not have to answer <i>all</i> of these questions. These are simply examples of the kinds of things the reviewers look for in the submitted materials.)</p>
<p><b>Provisions for including families</b></p>	<p>Note that the following items can be embedded in the lesson design (home follow-up ideas; items to discuss) and/or suggestions about at home or family activities, on site family activities (i.e., activity nights) and/or resources/guidance for teachers.</p> <p>What connections are made between lessons and children’s family experiences? Are there explicit home follow-up ideas?</p> <p>How are parents’ interests, concerns or resources included or represented?</p>
<p><b>Sequence</b></p> <p>Definition: Sequence is the order in which various activities/topics are presented to children within a curriculum. A curriculum’s sequence should provide a continuum of skills from beginner to emerging to mastery/proficiency.</p>	<p>Do skills build on or “scaffold” on each other? Do the materials include guidance for teachers on how adults should plan for similar skills across ages?</p> <p>Does the curriculum articulate a sequence and, if so, is the sequence logical?</p> <p>Is there a clear way to gauge children’s progress and a description of the skills and knowledge that should be expected to come next?</p> <p>Does the curriculum clearly explain how teachers would use data from their observations of individual children to plan activities?</p>
<p><b>Developmentally appropriate materials</b></p> <p>Definition: Developmentally appropriate activities and teaching practices vary with and adapt to the age, experience, interests, and abilities of individual children.</p>	<p>Do the materials fit the age range of the children? Are they adaptable?</p> <p>Does the curriculum include guidance for using open-ended materials that children can use for play-based learning?</p> <p>The majority of activities can not include worksheets and teacher-modeled activities in which children have little or no ability to be creative.</p>
<p><b>General approach (appropriate balance of teacher-directed and child-directed activities)</b></p>	<p>Is there a balance of both teacher-directed and child-directed or “child-initiated” learning indicated in the written materials?</p> <p>Do the examples of activities provided demonstrate a good mix of both?</p> <p>Curricula that are too heavily teacher-directed and do not provide for opportunities for child-directed learning will not be found to meet this item.</p>

<p><b>Provision for different types of learning experiences (individual, small group, and large group, learning centers, “hands-on” learning experiences and learning during routines and transitions)</b></p>	<p>Are different types of experiences listed in the written materials? Are particular activities matched with different types of learning? Is there a good mix?</p> <p>Are there examples of how routines and transitions are used as learning experiences?</p> <p>Are there examples of different types of experiences provided?</p>
<p><b>Guidance on adult-child interaction, including behavior management</b></p> <p>Definition: Materials that provide guidance related to behavior management that reference positive approaches and provide specific suggestions such as using transitions, adaptations, and group management.</p>	<p>Are there suggested follow-up questions to group/small group activities?</p> <p>Is there guidance about how teachers follow/adapt to children's interests (either as a group or individual children)? Is there guidance on interactions/conversations with individual children?</p> <p>Is there guidance on arranging the environment to reduce stresses that could lead to behavior management issues/problems?</p> <p>Detailed information about behavior management policies is <b>not</b> required.</p>
<p><b>Guidance on adapting/refining to serve children of differing developmental levels or abilities</b></p> <p>Definition: Materials that describe how to adapt or refine instruction for children with differing developmental levels or abilities.</p>	<p>Often, written materials claim to be “for a wide range of abilities.” How is this actually demonstrated in the materials?</p> <p>Are there specific suggestions about how to adapt materials to serve children at different levels? For example, is there guidance for how to adapt activities for children who are ahead of the other children in the class, or children who are struggling with the materials or who have developmental delays?</p> <p>If you are creating a locally-developed curriculum, consider including a plan for how you will approach the need for adaptations.</p>
<p><b>Guidance on adapting/refining to serve children who are English language learners</b></p> <p>Definition: Materials that describe how to adapt or refine instruction for children who speak another language at home and are learning English.</p>	<p>Are there specific suggestions about how to adapt materials to serve children learning English as a second language?</p> <p>Does guidance show respect for children's home languages when they are different from the primary language in the classroom? Does the curriculum include resources or suggestions for incorporating children's home languages into the classroom?</p> <p>Does the curriculum provide materials in other languages? (Not required, but is preferred.)</p>
<p><b>Guidance for using instructional assessment information in curriculum planning process</b></p> <p>Definition: Materials that describe how to use assessment results to plan meaningful instruction.</p>	<p>Some curricula come with an assessment and written guidance on using the assessment provided. All approved curriculum <b>MUST</b> be flexible enough to be used with an assessment tool, but ideally the curriculum should also have guidance about how to use the assessment process in planning.</p> <p>Is there guidance about how teachers follow/adapt to children's interests and ability levels using observations of children?</p>

## References

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