I. To Establish and Maintain a Safe, Healthy Learning Environment

Functional Area 1

Safety of all children in the preschool environment is the preeminent responsibility of all caregivers. Safety must be measured by meeting the rules and regulations for the childcare facility by state, county and locality codes and statutes.

Injuries can be minimized and reduced significantly by paying attention to detail and by making sure that center staff, parents and children clearly understand the guidelines presented in the handbook and other communication that sets standards for personal behavior and facility cleanliness.

By conducting daily inspections of play equipment, toys, food preparation areas and restrooms, centers can box out risk that could damage health and potentially cause illness or litigation.

Functional Area 2

By modeling and teaching best practices of washing hands often, exercise, eating healthy foods and snacks, centers can enhance lifestyle wellness among children and families and provide broader education through influence among the families represented in the center.

Knowledge of the USDA Food Pyramid can help children and parents visualize the need for proper balance in food intake. It can also increase the awareness of children to foods that may not be part of the family's usual diet.

By providing snacks that promote health, a center can help children gain an understanding and appreciation of lifelong health which is the first step to prevention of childhood obesity.

Functional Area 3

Play is a child’s palette for learning. It forms the context for discovery in every developmental domain. Making an environment that is rich in play enables enjoyable relationships and promotes exploration. Materials, toys, activities, room space, centers and routines provide the context for children to both learn and develop a early love for school and learning.
2. To Advance Physical and Intellectual Competence

Functional Area 4

The physical development of early childhood age children cannot be separated from cognitive development as play and discovery are interconnected. Outdoor play such as running, hopping and throwing deploy large muscle groups that exercise a child’s gross motor skills. Fine motor skills can be challenged by using arts and crafts activities such as painting, coloring, gluing, threading and cutting. Stimulating physical development in early childhood age children requires a constant infusion of simple resources such as balls, balance beams, climbing apparatus, peddle tricycles, open areas for running and active engagement.

Functional Area 5

Science, music, art, media and math centers allow children to explore and investigate concepts that require skills that eventually lay the foundation of student critical thinking.

Project approach themed curriculum also encourages exploration opportunities and provides students with problem solving challenges that they can use across curricula. All of the fore-mentioned centers have cognitive connections. The numeracy skills of counting relate to geometric shapes in art and note counting in music. Science and media interrelate with visual stimulation and measurement skills in math and art and all open doors of exploration for curious early learners.

Functional Area 6

Clearly communicating thoughts and feelings that are age-appropriate, and that teach children how to deal with frustration and anger with words instead of acting out in a socially inappropriate way creates a meaningful interaction and an environment where students feel safe, understood and cared for. Art activities can also allow for creative expression and a release for students that may feel unable to verbalize their feelings. English speakers of other languages may also require an outlet that involves communicating in ways that are non-verbal as may disabled students.

Some limitations of pre-operational thought exist and restrict preschoolers to recognizing only one emotion at a time.
Competency Statement

Functional Area 7

A learning and play environment that supports sensori-motor exploration will include a variety of sound, language, adequate play space and opportunities for creative expression. Simple realistic props such as music and rhythm, push, pull and peddle toys should be accessible to children. Also classroom layout functions as a form of curricula and empowers students to move about and explore a wide variety of activities in the classroom. Classroom centers that are developmentally appropriate include social and emotional interaction that builds a positive learning environment and contributes to healthy relationships.
3. To Support Social and Emotional development and to Provide Positive Guidance

Functional Area 8

An emotionally healthy environment for students is pro-social, where children feel loved and accepted. It is also an environment that helps move preschoolers beyond egocentrism toward awareness of the needs, feelings of others.

Students develop a sense of independence when given opportunities to do for themselves. Montessori method is probably the most pronounced early childhood approach that actually builds student autonomy and independence into the curriculum system for early childhood age.

The sense of industry that preschoolers have also allows classroom facilitators/guides/teachers to promote independence as children have a desire to “I do it” or “Look what I can do.”

Functional Area 9

“Who will play with me?” and “Will you be my friend?” are key identity questions that preschoolers obsess over. Therefore, acceptance is key in helping preschoolers form a positive identity and relationship to others both inside and outside the classroom setting.

The process of self-control regulation and personal management becomes the issue for preschool children. Security, warm relationships, respect, acceptance and active listening form a nexus of successful emotional development in the classroom and social group. A child’s self-respect and respect for others and property is a social growth marker for preschool age children.

Functional Area 10

Healthy emotional environments recognize that children express and deal with feelings and stressful situations through play. Often play will help children blow off steam and prevent an emotional or behavioral meltdown.

Appropriate vocabulary will assist in helping children find a way to interact with other without being aggressive. Classroom guidelines can provide the social context for identifying behaviors that are not acceptable for the group and function as a frame of reference for children that are having difficulty self-guiding.
4. To Establish positive and productive relationships with families

Functional Area 11

Family is the basic building block of society. Students will know that regardless of their family composition, they are accepted and treated with equality. Students from diverse populations need to know that an extra effort will be made to include their parent/guardians in communication and center activities. Students that are English speakers of other languages will know that contact will be made to insure that appropriate services are provided to establish efficient and effective communication. Students that are in need of IDEA Part C services will be screened and referrals will be made to insure that disabilities are addressed and services are provided in a timely manner.

Bulletin boards and parent corners will be available with center information at either pick up or drop off. A newsletter complete with food service and menu listings by date will be provided. E-mail and web site updates will detail classroom activities, pictures and student work. U-tube video of classroom activity and student interaction will be available. Video surveillance will be standard in classrooms, hallways and exterior play areas, drop off and pick up areas.

Community outreach and advertising of the center will provide a awareness for parents that the center is available and open for business to serve a diverse population and prepare children for Kindergarten readiness.

Reciprocal relationships with families and teachers require mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility and achievement shared goals for the child. Therefore, collaborative working partnerships with families with open, two-way communication fosters positive, proaction in building an effective preschool center in the community.
5. To Insure a Well-run, Purposeful Program Responsive to Participant Needs

Functional Area 12

A well-managed early childhood program will be child-centric using effective means of method and models of curriculum such as Montessori, Bank Street, Reggio Emilia, High Scope, Creative Curriculum, or lesser known but effective models such as Waldorf or Project Approach.

A well-managed program will be organized. It will have a place for everything and put everything in its place. Files and records will be easily retrieved.

A well-managed program will be clean and safe. Dirt, germs, poorly kept resources will not be acceptable.

A well-managed program will have highly qualified staff. Education and continuing education will be valued. It will participate as a Quality Counts center and maintain high standards.

A well-managed program will be fun for the kids. Children will be attracted to the center, staff and enjoy the activities.

A well-managed program will be financially sound.

A well-managed program will be relevant to the community. It will be sensitive to the diverse make up of a local population.

A well-managed program will have a positive reputation. Advertising and community outreach will accurately reflect its goals and priorities for children.
6. To Maintain a Commitment to Professionalism

Functional Area 13

A well-run early childhood center will hire and retain professional staff, responsive to community needs and prove to provide Quality Counts standards as required by state statutes and county/municipal codes.

It will also associate with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and integrate the professionalism standards from that organization into the expectations for volunteer and employed staff.

Well written job descriptions that clearly describe employee roles and functions will be part of an employee file that is kept secure and up-to-date with background and screening records for each employee. Employee annual reviews will be executed to provide feedback, encouragement and improvement.

Familiarity with the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R) will be communicated to employees so that standards for the learning environment remain high and consistent with superlative standards.

Continued training and personal development will be part of life-long learning environment for employees with Continuing Education Units (CEU) through Palm Beach State, The Registry and Children’s Service of Palm Beach County as well as association with the Children’s Movement of Florida that communicates legislative updates on the early childhood education system in Florida.