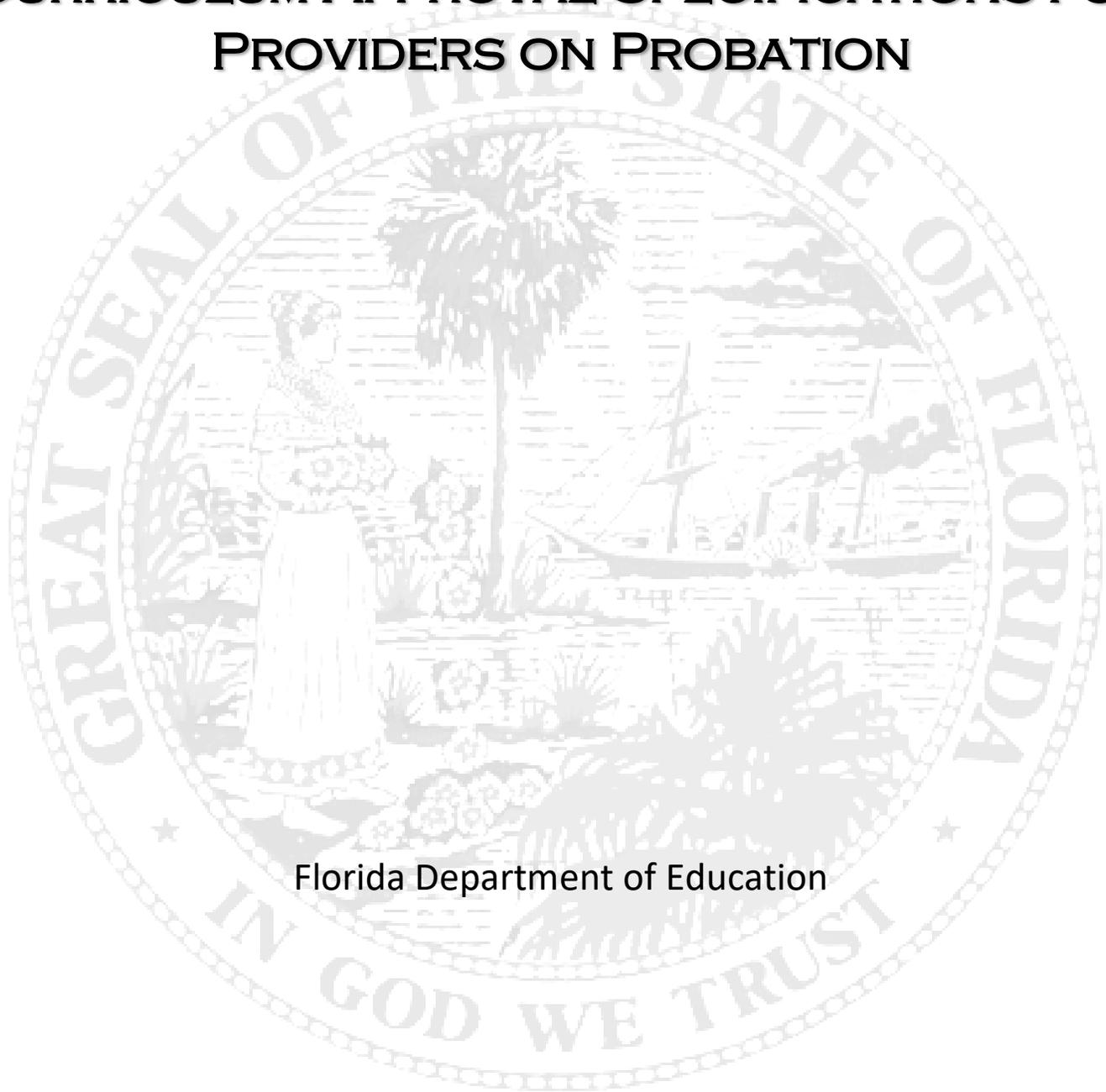


# FLORIDA VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN (VPK) EDUCATION PROGRAM: CURRICULUM APPROVAL SPECIFICATIONS FOR PROVIDERS ON PROBATION



Florida Department of Education

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# **I. Florida’s Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program Curriculum Review and Approval Process**

## **A. Background**

Section (s.) 1002.67(2)(c), Florida Statutes (F.S.), directs the Department to approve curricula for use by public and private Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) providers that fail to meet the minimum provider performance metric and designation as described in Rule 6M-8.622, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). The Department maintains a list of such approved curricula. The curriculum approval process described in this document has been developed in accordance with this statutory requirement.

Section 1008.25, F.S., describes the use of explicit, systematic, and multisensory reading interventions grounded in the science of reading, including intensive language, phonics, and vocabulary instruction. “Science of Reading” is the interdisciplinary body of research about reading that focuses on how individuals learn to read and other issues related to reading and writing, as described in Rule 6A-6.053, F.A.C. Additionally, s. 1001.42(8)(c)3., F.S., specifies classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in prekindergarten through grade 8, except when required by ss. 1003.42 and 1003.46, F.S.

## **B. Developmentally Appropriate Curricula**

Section 1002.67, F.S., requires that all curricula used in VPK programs be developmentally appropriate, be designed to foster early literacy skills and incorporate comprehensive instruction in foundational mathematics concepts in accordance with s. 1002.67(1)(a), F.S., enhance the age-appropriate progress of children in attaining the performance standards adopted by the Department, and support student learning gains through differentiated instruction that can be measured by the coordinated screening and progress monitoring program under s. 1008.25(9), F.S. Developmentally appropriate curriculum must be appropriate for prekindergartners and flexible enough to modify for individual four-year-olds who have skills at either end of a developmental continuum.

### **1. Defining Curriculum and Comprehensiveness**

For the purposes of this approval process, curricula are defined as a set of written materials that:

- Develop students’ background knowledge through a content-rich and sequential knowledge-building early literacy curriculum.
- Address the use of materials, scheduling, arranging the environment and interaction between children and adults separately and in combination.
- Include more than activity suggestions and more than theory and pedagogy.
- Are aligned with the performance standards adopted by the Department.
- Are aligned with evidence-based research.
- Are able to be replicated so that a provider may reuse the curriculum rather than needing to replace after each use.

To be considered comprehensive, the curriculum submitted must “stand-alone” and cover the performance standards in all domains. A comprehensive curriculum package is one that

contains a mix of instruction and practice activities sufficient to build strong skills in each of the domains of the performance standards.

A comprehensive curriculum package contains the following characteristics:

- Intentional teaching
- Comprehensive domains of learning
- Specific learning goals
- Well-designed learning activities
- Accurate representation of Florida’s population
- Individualized/differentiated instruction
- Ongoing assessment (check for knowledge)
- Family engagement
- Appropriateness for program staff, children and families

The comprehensive curriculum package also includes all required Department forms outlined in the VPK Education Program Policies and Procedures for Curriculum Approval document.

## **2. Integration**

The curriculum used in a VPK education program to teach skills in any domain must be authentic and support and reinforce the performance standards in other subject areas. Research emphasizes the importance of providing real-world applications and presenting information that is related to children’s lives. Use of such concept development strategies promotes cognition and comprehension by assisting children to make connections across subject areas and integrate new information with previous knowledge. This level of instructional support is accomplished most effectively when children are encouraged to move seamlessly from one activity to the next.

## **3. Alignment with the Performance Standards**

Section 1002.67, F.S., requires that the Department develop and adopt performance standards for children in the VPK program that address emergent literacy skills grounded in the science of reading, including oral communication, knowledge of print and letters, phonemic and phonological awareness, vocabulary and comprehension development, and mathematical thinking and early math skills designed to correlate with the content that students will encounter in K-12. The purpose of the performance standards is to describe the knowledge and skills that a child on a developmental trajectory (progression) should know and be able to do by the end of their age-related timeframe.

The performance standards are grouped around the following domains:

- I. Physical Development
- II. Approaches to Learning
- III. Social and Emotional Development
- IV. Language and Literacy
- V. Mathematical Thinking
- VI. Scientific Inquiry
- VII. Social Studies
- VIII. Creative Expression Through the Arts

The developmental **domains** are divided into **components, sub-components** (where applicable),

**performance standards**, and, where appropriate, **benchmarks**. All submitted curricula and associated instructional methods must align with and support these performance standards and benchmarks. The performance standards can be viewed at: <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/reference.asp?No=Ref-08828>.

#### **4. Use of Evidence-Based Research: Language and Literacy**

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP), funded by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) and the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), has worked to synthesize scientific research on emergent literacy skills in young children. Among empirical research studies reviewed, five emergent literacy skills have been found to consistently and uniquely predict children's later (conventional) reading skills. These skills include alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, writing, rapid automatic naming of letters and digits or naming of objects and colors, and phonological short-term memory. An additional five early literacy skills were also moderately correlated with at least one measure of later literacy achievement. These additionally potentially important variables include concepts about print: knowledge of print conventions, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing. Several of these skills relate directly to the performance standards and require specific attention by publishers and the Department in this approval process (Alphabet and Print Knowledge: IV.F.3., Phonological Awareness: IV.F.2., Writing/Writing Name: IV.G.1.c., Vocabulary: IV. C., Oral Language: IV.A., IV.B., IV.C., IV.D., IV.E. ). For further information on the final report, *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*, visit <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>.

#### **5. Use of Evidence-Based Research: Mathematical Thinking**

The *What Works Clearinghouse* sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), has worked in conjunction with a panel of experts to develop the *Teaching Math to Young Children* practice guide.

This guide provides five recommendations for teaching math to young children in preschool, prekindergarten, and kindergarten.

The first two recommendations identify early math content areas that should be included in preschool, prekindergarten, and kindergarten curricula.

Listed below are the five recommendations.

- Teach number and operations using a developmental progression.
- Teach geometry, patterns, measurement and data analysis using developmental progression.
- Use progress monitoring to ensure that math instruction builds on what each child knows.
- Teach children to view and describe the world mathematically.
- Dedicate time each day to teach math and integrate math instruction throughout the school day.

Curriculum utilized in the VPK program must align with the performance standards in the Domain of Mathematical Thinking, ensuring that children are introduced to mathematical skills and providing significant opportunity for practicing skills and discussing mathematics in developmentally appropriate ways. You may access the *Teaching Math to Young Children* practice guide at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/18>.

### **C. Access to the Curriculum**

Florida’s VPK Education Program ensures prekindergartners access to a high-quality prekindergarten learning opportunity. It is important to note the varying learning profiles of prekindergartners residing in Florida, including children with special developmental, behavioral or physical needs, who are English language learners (ELLs), or who may be at risk of future learning or school difficulties for a variety of reasons. Evaluating the extent to which a comprehensive curriculum package can accommodate a wide range of children’s needs and skill levels and be implemented across a variety of settings is part of the curriculum approval process.

Accommodations implemented to foster access to the program do not lessen achievement expectations. They must, however, provide a wide range of techniques and support systems to help children in areas of special need or challenges. Frequently, accommodations that may be required to ensure meaningful participation by a given child are found to benefit many other children in the class. Accommodations include changes in instructional methods and materials, learning activities and assessments, time demands and scheduling, the learning environment and the use of special communication systems, among others.

### **D. Digital Comprehensive Curriculum Packages or Components**

Submission of digital comprehensive curriculum packages or curricula that include digital components is encouraged.

## **II. Submissions for VPK Curriculum Approval: General Description**

### **A. Publishers’ Submissions**

The Department will review submissions of a comprehensive curriculum package for prekindergarten children which address the domains of the performance standards.

### **B. Core Curricula**

A VPK-approved curriculum must cover all domains of the performance standards.

Development of many skills requires explicit instruction in the particular skill area, strategies or steps to follow, and scaffolding of instruction by the teacher. The curriculum must provide explicit, systematic instruction, assessment, and intervention that leads to children’s growing proficiency at each stage of skill development. To support success in learning, a VPK curriculum must include clear presentation and explanations of the following:

- Purposes, goals, and expected outcomes.
- Concepts, processes, rules, information and terms.
- Models, examples, questions, and feedback.

The overall instructional design must include the following:

- A clear ‘road map’ or ‘blueprint’ for teachers to get an overall picture of the program (i.e., a scope and sequence).
- Clearly stated goals and objectives.
- A cohesive approach for the teacher to set a positive environment to ensure children’s development.
- Resources to help the teacher understand the rationale for the instructional approach and

strategies utilized in the curricula (e.g., articles, explanations in the teacher manuals, references, reliable websites).

- Explicit instructional techniques or strategies.
- Consistently systematic and intentional instruction – a logical organization of the materials so that it is clear how the curriculum proceeds over the course of the program (day, week, month, year).
- Consistent ‘teacher-friendly’ instructional routines.
- All materials aligned with the performance standards.
- Examples of constructive instructional support and feedback.
- Scaffolding with specific instructions to:
  - Differentiate instruction;
  - Include guidelines and materials for flexible grouping; and
  - Provide enrichment activities for advanced learners.
- Guidelines for use with varying populations such as ELLs and children with special needs.
- Components that foster intrinsic motivation in children (approaches to learning domain).
- Ample opportunities for practice.

Brief, frequent engaging activities must be included within the curriculum to attain mastery of each of the performance standards.

Activities must include options for children with varying abilities and backgrounds, providing teachers with alternatives to teach all children the required skills and content. Worksheets, drills or simply allowing children to play without teacher planning and reflection **will not** facilitate optimal progress for children. Research shows that young children learn best through hands-on, intentional learning experiences (e.g., “play with a purpose”) that have been planned by knowledgeable teachers. When young children explore things directly with their senses and practice new skills through play, they are learning in ways that are meaningful to them at their stage of development.

### **C. Learning Opportunities in the VPK Program**

Children need one-on-one interactions with teachers and peers each day. Through one-on-one interactions with children, teachers scaffold children’s activities and can provide feedback and support. Additionally, they build rapport and a trusting relationship. When children are given many daily experiences to interact with peers, they begin to develop skills in negotiating, turn-taking, and cooperative play.

The curriculum used in a VPK program must include active learning experiences that are child-initiated, as well as those planned and initiated by the teacher. As stated previously, the curriculum must be developmentally appropriate, meaning that it is appropriate for four-year-olds and can be modified for individual four-year-olds who have varying skills across the developmental continuum. Also, when planning and implementing the curriculum the teacher must take into account the children’s personal knowledge, and then use this information to build on their strengths and skills.

Throughout the course of the VPK schedule, the curriculum must include instruction in varying formats, such as large group, small group, and learning centers. Teachers have a very distinct role in facilitating and scaffolding the activities of the program, but it is not developmentally appropriate for four-year-olds to spend extended amounts of time in teacher-directed activities. Of course, children’s attention spans will grow over the year and will be longer when engaged by an enthusiastic, invigorating teacher.

Early literacy skills are critical to children’s success, and curricula used in the VPK program must be designed to prepare a student for the educational journey ahead. Research demonstrates that dedicating as little as twenty minutes daily to these fundamental skills can significantly enhance children's emergent literacy proficiencies.

#### **D. Assessment**

Publishers must include assessment(s) that teachers can use to guide student instruction. The assessments must measure progress in all the domains of the performance standards and identify children who are at-risk or are experiencing difficulty with learning and/or development.

The curriculum must then include strategies for the teacher to use to guide instruction, based on how each child, as well as the group, performed on the assessment(s) so that data from assessment(s) is used in meaningful ways to plan the next steps.

### **III. Major Priorities for a Comprehensive Curriculum Package**

Comprehensive curriculum packages must be effective in six major priority areas: content, presentation, learning, professional learning, parent/family materials, and research base. The Department assesses each major priority area to assign a score.

**To be considered for approval, the comprehensive curriculum package must meet one hundred percent (100%) of the performance standards and benchmarks within *both* the Language and Literacy and Mathematical Thinking domains and ninety percent (90%) of the other domains’ performance standards and benchmarks to earn a score of two (2) on a scale of zero to two (0-2) or eighty percent (80%) of the other domains’ performance standards and benchmarks to earn a score of one (1).**

Each comprehensive curriculum package **MUST** receive an average score of 1 (on a scale of 0-2) in the six major priority areas to be considered for approval.

#### **Essential Features in Priority Areas**

The following sections describe essential features for each of the major priority areas. These features generally apply to all formats of VPK curriculum, whether print or other media/multiple media formats.

#### **A. Content**

##### **A.1. Alignment with the Performance Standards**

Content must align with the performance standards, which can be accessed at <http://flbt5.floridaearlylearning.com/>. This document includes the performance standards and benchmarks where applicable, by domain as well as related skills; descriptions of child skills; environmental considerations; supportive instructional strategies; and other information pertinent to the curricular implementation of a VPK education program. **Each domain is scored separately.** The following requirements must be met with each of the domains of the performance standards.

- **Correlations** – Form VPKC3 submitted by publishers must provide information that identifies exactly where and to what extent (e.g., included in one or more activities, in-depth coverage across multiple activities and/or domains) the VPK curriculum addresses each of the performance standards and benchmarks. If a particular performance standard is not addressed, the Form VPKC3 must indicate this.

- **Scope** – The content must address the performance standards for each domain and associated learning outcomes, including thinking and learning skills.
- **Completeness** – The content of the curriculum must “stand on its own,” without additional curricular supports. To be useful for class instruction, the curriculum must be adaptable to the instructional goals of individual VPK instructors. The curriculum must include concepts and topics that enrich and extend children’s knowledge and learning and be free of unrelated facts and information that would detract from the achievement of the performance standards.
- **Curriculum Integration** – The curriculum must include integration across subject areas/domains, and over the course of the program year. Young children do not separate their activities and learning by subject area, and it is necessary that the curriculum used for four-year-olds not be separated. Integration allows children to be engaged and active learners while providing a positive learning environment that builds the foundational skills needed for kindergarten entry.

## **A.2. Level of Treatment of Content: Scope and Sequence**

The level of complexity or difficulty of content must be appropriate for the developmental levels of the children and the time periods allowed for teaching. Publishers must submit a separate Form VPKC4 detailing the scope and sequence of the curricula for VPK school year and summer programs. VPK school year programs comprise 540 hours and may be a 3-hour day for 180 days or a 6-hour day for 90 days. Summer programs comprise 300 hours with a typical 9-hour day.

The Department will review the following four elements to determine if the curriculum’s scope and sequence relate fully to the skills outlined when compared to the performance standards and recommendations by the *What Works Clearinghouse* of the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES). (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/18>).

- **Objectives** – Content must be sufficiently simple or complex, technical or non-technical, to match the objectives and developmental levels of a typical group of four-year-old children.
- **Children** – Content must be developmentally appropriate for four-year-old children. It must contain sufficient details for children to understand the significance of the information presented and to engage in reflection and discussion.
- **Time** – The level of complexity or difficulty of content also must allow for its coverage during the time periods available for teaching, given the daily schedule and the hour requirements of the VPK program year.
- **Coverage** – The comprehensive curriculum packages must adequately and comprehensively address the Language and Literacy and Mathematics performance standards and benchmarks throughout the curriculum. Skills must be introduced and practiced throughout the year, in varying group settings (whole group, small groups, and one-on-one) as well as throughout the program day (transitions, center time, routine times, planned small groups, whole group time, and outdoor play).

## **Curriculum Review Targets**

### ***A.2.a. Scope and Sequence: Alphabetic Knowledge***

A systematic way of ensuring that *all alphabet letter names and the most common sounds associated with each letter* are introduced and revisited throughout the year in meaningful, developmentally appropriate ways must be included.

### ***A.2.b. Scope and Sequence: Phonological Awareness***

A systematic way of ensuring that phonological awareness skills are introduced and revisited throughout the year, to include a minimum of ten to twenty minutes per day, and occur in meaningful, developmentally appropriate ways, must be included. These skills include blending and elision of compound words, syllables, and onset and rime to form a familiar one-syllable word.

#### ***A.2.c. Scope and Sequence: Vocabulary Development***

A systematic way to introduce new vocabulary words and provide opportunities for children to incorporate the use of vocabulary words must be included. This must occur during the program day and across the program year.

#### ***A.2.d. Scope and Sequence: Mathematical Thinking***

A systematic way of ensuring that mathematical thinking skills are introduced and revisited throughout the year, with particular attention to number sense and operations must be included. Skills in these areas must be integrated with geometry, patterns, seriation, measurement, and data collection.

### **A.3. Language-Rich Programs**

The curriculum must provide many opportunities to foster a language-rich class environment. This will be evident in teacher materials that encourage opportunities to:

- Engage children in extended conversations
- Encourage children to tell and retell stories and describe events
- Discuss a wide range of topics
- Model use of new and unusual words
- Discuss word meanings
- Ask open-ended questions
- Give explicit guidance on vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation
- Challenge children to explain their thinking
- Focus on the expression of ideas
- Encourage frequent conversations
- Utilize advanced language
- Repeat and extend children's responses
- Engage children in "read aloud" opportunities

### **A.4. Accuracy of Content**

Content must be accurate in historical context and contemporary facts and concepts.

- **Objectivity** – Content that is included in the curriculum must accurately represent the domain of knowledge and events. It must be factual and objective. It must be free of mistakes, errors, inconsistencies, contradictions within itself, and biases of interpretation. It must be free of the biased selection of information. Curriculum must distinguish between facts and possible interpretations or opinions expressed about factual information. Visuals or other elements of instruction must contribute to the accuracy of the text or narrative.
- **Representativeness** – The selection of content must not misrepresent the domains of the performance standards. It must include the generally accepted and prevalent theories, major concepts, laws, performance standards and models used within prekindergarten education.
- **Correctness** – Presentation of content must be free of typographical and visual errors and include correct grammar, spelling, linguistics, terminology, definitions, descriptions, visuals, graphs, sounds, videos, and all other components of the VPK curriculum.

### A.5. Relevance of Content

Content must be up-to-date for the academic discipline and the context in which the content is presented.

- **Dates or editions** – Copyright dates for photographs and other materials and editions must suggest sufficient portray currency of content. Copyright dates and editions serve as indicators of currency. However, neither the copyright date nor the edition guarantees currency. Subsequent editions must reflect more up-to-date information than earlier editions. Informed examination of the text, narrative, and visuals contained in the materials provides the most direct information about the currency of the materials.
- **Context** – Text or narrative, visuals, photographs, and other features must reflect the time periods appropriate for the objectives and the intended learners. Sometimes context must be current. For example, a photograph used to show various jobs that people do to earn money will be more relevant when the clothing, hairstyles, and activities reflect present-day styles. Sometimes context must be historical. For example, illustrations and photographs of historical events must reflect the historical time period. Sometimes context must be both current and historical. For example, historic images alongside modern ones would convey changes in styles over time. At all times the context must be relevant to the learner, to the performance standards and to the concept presented.

### A.6. Authenticity of Content

Content must include solution-centered connections to life in a context that is meaningful to children.

- **Life connections** – VPK curriculum must include connections to the child's life situations to make the content meaningful. Children might be expected to deal with time constraints, consider risks and trade-offs in decision-making, and work with teams. Connections may be made to children's situations in daily home life, family, their local community, community events and services.
- **Interdisciplinary treatment** – VPK curriculum also must include interdisciplinary connections to make content meaningful. Examples of situations that connect a variety of subject areas include building projects, playing sports or games, retrieving information or objects, creating products, and researching information. In addition to subject area connections, VPK curriculum must connect themes or lessons taught to other disciplines. Examples of approaches to interdisciplinary connections include:
  - Explanations and activities for using skills and knowledge from other domains
  - Projects and activities that require children to relate learning from other domains rather than to isolate knowledge or skills
  - The focus on common themes across several subject areas (infusion, parallel, transdisciplinary or multidisciplinary instruction)

### A.7. Representation

Portrayal of sex, color, age, work situations, and various social groups must include fairness and advocacy. Section 1001.42, F.S., specifies classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in prekindergarten through grade 8, except when required by ss. 1003.42 and 1003.46, F.S.

- **Fairness** – Through balanced representation of cultures and groups in multiple settings, occupations, careers, and lifestyles, the materials must support equal opportunity without regard for age, color, disability, national origin, or religion. It is not the number of pages devoted to fairness, but the substance of what is stated and portrayed that matters most. For this reason, it can be misleading to count the number of pages or illustrations. It is more important to focus on the integration of fairness throughout the curriculum. In addition to balanced representations, the portrayal of individuals and situations must exclude biases and stereotypes. These portrayals must promote an understanding and appreciation of the importance and contributions of cultures and heritage.
- **Advocacy** – The understanding and appreciation of multiple cultures extends beyond fair representation. It involves embracing a context, not just through pictures, but through information about ways to honor differences and deal with conflicts, promote a positive self-image for members of all groups, and provide for the development of healthy attitudes and values. Effective treatment of issues requires consideration of the age and ability levels of children and whether it is appropriate to include issues in the study of a particular topic. Overall, however, curriculum must reflect both fairness and advocacy.

## **A.8. Resiliency**

The curriculum must provide strategies to demonstrate resiliency through adversity and to develop healthy characteristics that reinforce positive core values and foster resiliency such as:

- Empathy, perseverance, grit, gratitude, and responsibility;
- Critical thinking, problem-solving, and responsible decision-making;
- Self-awareness and self-management;
- Mentorship and citizenship;
- Honesty; and
- The benefits of service to the community through volunteerism.

## **B. Presentation**

Features of presentation affect the practical usefulness of curriculum and the ease of finding and understanding content.

### **B.1. Comprehensiveness of Teacher and Student Resources**

Resources must be complete enough to address the targeted learning outcomes without requiring the teacher to prepare significant teaching materials for the class beyond those available in a typical preschool program.

Curriculum must contain support for children in completing instructional activities and assessments and for teachers in implementing all the instructional elements. A variety of components can accomplish this purpose. Typically, curriculum will include outlines and strategies for teaching, media supplements, learning activities, and projects.

All curricula will likely include activities that use additional materials that are not a part of the comprehensive curriculum package, such as play dough, blocks, or puppets, which are typically available in a preschool program. Activities of this sort should explain in detail, possibly with illustration, the material(s) needed to include alternate ways of making or substituting the material.

The major components generally expected for teacher and student resources are listed below.

### ***B.1.a. Comprehensiveness of Teacher Resources***

Teacher materials typically include a teacher's manual, so the teacher has to use only one guide or one guide per unit/theme. The materials for the teacher must support continued teacher learning. Support, guidelines, resources, or features such as the ones described below must be available to help teachers effectively implement materials in class and school settings.

- **Components and materials are easy to use:** Examples include clearance, license, or agreement for copying and use of materials; clear description and accurate directions for use of required equipment, facilities, resources, and environment; clearly labeled grade, lesson, content, and other information to identify components; correct specifications for making instructional media and electronic programs work effectively.
- **Teacher materials support lesson planning, teaching and learning:** Examples include an overview of components and objectives; background for group time and discussions; vocabulary, and reinforcement and review strategies; scope and sequence chart for activities and planning; sample lesson plans; suggestions for learning centers, individualized study, small-group and large-group presentations and discussions, opportunities for community-based experiences, safety procedures and other extension activities; suggestions for integrating themes across the subject area and forming connections to other disciplines; and suggestions for family and community involvement.
- **Suggestions are provided for adapting instruction for varying needs:** This section includes children with disabilities, ELLs, children who may benefit from additional supports, etc. Examples include alternative approaches to teaching, pacing, and options for varied delivery of instruction such as media, tools, equipment, and emerging technology; strategies for engaging all children, such as open-ended questions to stimulate thinking, pictorial journaling, hands-on investigations, explorations, and multisensory approaches; suggestions for addressing common student difficulties or adapting to multiple learning styles; and alternative reteaching, enrichment, and remediation strategies.
- **Guidelines and resources are provided on how to implement and evaluate learning:** Examples include suggestions for using learning tasks for class assessment and guidelines for alternative assessments, such as sample project guides and checklists, rubrics, and portfolios.
- **Resources are provided to use in class activities:** Examples include technology resources; lists of resources and references, reading strategies, materials to use for displays or photocopies, class management strategies, and documentation on how to manage the entire instructional program.

### ***B.1.b. Comprehensiveness of Student Resources***

Student resources must include a variety of materials, such as children's trade books, manipulatives, posters, games, puzzles, CDs or computer software, puppets, and other props. Formats may include print, audio, visual, computer, or other media, but *must not include worksheets and ditto-type activities, as they will not facilitate optimal progress for children*. The student resources must be complete, labeled correctly, and have directions that are easily followed.

Review and practice components might include participation activities such as role-playing and opportunities for hands-on practice. Review works best as a logical extension of content, goals, objectives, and lessons, with increased similarity to real-life situations. Review activities must require children to recall or apply previously taught knowledge and skills. Frequent short reviews over time or space improve learning more than a concentrated review after a longer period of time.

## **B.2. Alignment of Instructional Components**

All components of a comprehensive curriculum package must align with each other, as well as with the curriculum as a whole. All components of a comprehensive curriculum package—teacher’s edition and materials, any student materials, and supplementary materials—must be integrated and interdependent and must correspond with each other. For example, support materials in the teacher’s edition should align with student activities or projects. They must match in content and progression of instructional activities across the domains of the performance standards and over the course of the program year.

## **B.3. Organization of Curriculum**

The structure and format of the curriculum must have enough order and clarity to allow children and teachers to access content and explicitly identify ideas and sequences. Providing an explicit and teachable structure can double the amount of information remembered. Clear organization allows teachers to discriminate important pieces of information through skimming, reading, or browsing. Clear organization may be accomplished through a combination of features, but generally not through one feature alone.

### ***B.3.a. Access to Content***

Some features help in searching and locating information, such as a table of contents; menu or map of content; directions on how to locate information; an index for quick reference; goals and/or objectives, outlines, lists, or checklists for major sections; bibliographies and lists of resources; glossaries for quick access to major terms; introductions, key concepts and themes, visual cues, illustrations, labeled examples and labeled reviews or summaries.

### ***B.3.b. Visual Features***

Visual features that improve readability include print that is dark and clear, with good contrast, on paper with clean-cut edges and without glare; computer screens without glare; or margins wide enough on a page or screen to allow easy viewing of the text. Other features are more important in establishing the readability of the curriculum, such as:

- Chunking text (e.g., sentence ends on the same page as it begins);
- Visuals that are relevant, clear, vivid, and simple enough for children to understand;
- Quantity of visuals suitable for the intended children—both lower ability children and higher ability children tend to require more visuals;
- Left-justified text (ragged on the right) rather than full-justified (lined up on the left and right);
- Visuals that contain information in a form different from the text;
- Graphs, charts, maps, and other visual representations integrated at their point of use; and
- Colors, size of print, spacing, quantity, and type of visuals suitable for the abilities and needs of the intended children.

### ***B.3.c. Visible Structure and Format***

At-a-glance features should signal the organization of content. The following features are desirable:

- Theme or unit titles and/or frames; headings and subheadings;
- Typographic cues such as bold, italics, or changes in size or type;
- Divisions of content such as borders, boxes, circles, highlighting, visual signposts, icons, or color cues; and
- Diagrams, labels, and visuals placed near the related content, and numbering of pages and other components.

Objectives or a content outline may serve a similar purpose by introducing main ideas, providing guideposts to use in searching for key information or serving as a checklist for self-assessment.

Certain types of brief narrative sections also contribute to clear organization. For example, the statement of a clear purpose with content organized around main ideas, principles, concepts, and logical relationships supports the unity and flow of information. Introductions also play a major role when they include anchoring ideas, a list of key points, or conceptual schemes such as metaphors. Summaries also can assist children in understanding the logical order of topics presented.

#### ***B.3.d. Logical Organization***

The pattern of organization of the content must be consistent and logical for the type of domain or topic. Patterns of organization may include compare and contrast, time sequence, cause-effect or problem-solution-effect, concrete to abstract, introduction-review-extension (spiral structure), simple-to-complex, whole-part or part-whole, generalization-examples-review-practice, and conflict-inside view-structure.

#### **B.4. Readability of Curriculum/Language Style**

Curriculum narratives and visuals such as books, posters, puppets, sound, or letter cards, etc., must engage children in activities as well as help them understand the instructional content provided by the teacher. Curriculum must include a user-friendly language style and visual features which influence the readability of curriculum materials. Readability formulas may be helpful at times, but they often focus only on a few countable characteristics of language style such as the length of words, sentences, and/or paragraphs. Additional features are more important in establishing the readability of curriculum content and may include the following:

- Instructional materials are organized, coherent text;
- Use of language and concepts familiar to the teacher;
- Language that clarifies, simplifies, and explains information;
- Use of transitional words such as “yet,” “also,” “next,” “for example,” “moreover,” or “however;”
- Other phrases that create logical connections;
- Words with concrete and specific images;
- Active rather than passive voice;
- Varied sentence structures and avoiding both choppy sentences and unnecessary words; and
- Specific questions or directions to guide student attention to visuals or key information.

#### **B.5. Pacing of Content**

The amount of content presented at one time or the pace at which it is presented must be of a size or rate that allows children to perceive and understand it. It is important that materials contain “bite-size” chunks or blocks of information. The chunks must not be so large, nor the pacing so fast, as to overwhelm children. Neither must the chunks be so small, nor the pacing so slow, as to bore them. Information must be included to assist teachers in scaffolding – extending content up or down for learners who need additional opportunities for practicing and extending skills.

#### **B.6. Ease of Use of Materials**

Both print and other formats of the comprehensive curriculum package must be easy to use and replace and be durable enough for multiple uses over time.

### ***B.6.a. Use***

Curriculum must be designed for practical use in the class setting and school environments. It must be easy to identify and store. Teachers and children must be able to access and use the materials. Some of the factors influencing their ease of use include number of components, size of components, packaging, quality of materials, equipment requirements, and cost to purchase or replace components.

The best choice about weight, size, and number of volumes depends on several factors, such as the organization of the content, how well separate volumes may fit time periods for instruction, and the ages of children. Technical production requirements, such as page limits or different types of bindings, may lead to multiple volumes.

Examples of class use include repeated copying of consumable materials and repeated use of other materials by children over time. Technology-rich resources must work properly without the purchase of additional software and run without error. Electronic media for student use must be encoded to prevent accidental or intentional erasure or modification. As with textbooks, electronic media must allow teachers to easily access and interact with them without extensive supervision or special assistance.

The physical and technical qualities of materials must match the resources of VPK programs. Materials such as videos, software, internet sites, and other resources may serve an instructional purpose, but have little value unless they can be implemented with the program's equipment. Publishers must include training, in-service, and consultation to help in effective use of the materials.

### ***B.6.b. Durability***

Children and teachers must be able to have materials that will be durable under conditions of expected use. For example, boxes, books, or other materials must not fall apart after normal class use. The packaging and form of materials must be flexible and durable enough for multiple uses over time. Durability includes considerations such as:

- High-quality paper, ink, binding, and cover;
- Back, joints, body block, and individual pages;
- Worry-free technology that runs properly, with easy to hear, see, and control audio and visuals;
- Teaching materials that have been tested for use in real-world class environment; and
- The publisher's guarantee for replacement conditions and agreements for reproduction needed to effectively use the materials.

## **C. Learning**

Several features have been found to promote learning and apply to most types of learning outcomes. The following sections describe the learning features expected for each of these priority areas.

### **C.1. Motivational Strategies**

The curriculum must include features to create and maintain learner motivation.

#### ***C.1.a. Expectations***

Curriculum must positively influence the expectations of children. Examples include:

- Positive expectations for success;
- Novel tasks or other approaches to stimulate intellectual curiosity;

- Meaningful tasks related to the child’s interests, backgrounds, and developmental levels;
- Activities with relevance to the child’s life;
- Thought-provoking challenges such as paradoxes, dilemmas, problems, controversies and questioning of traditional ways of thinking;
- Challenges that are neither too difficult to achieve nor so easy that a child becomes bored;
- Hands-on tasks in a concrete context and images, sounds, analogies, metaphors, or humorous anecdotes; and
- Variety, including the opportunity for the child to ask his/her own questions, set their own goals and make other choices during learning.

### **C.1.b. Feedback**

Curriculum must include informative and positive feedback on progress. Examples include:

- Frequent checks on progress, including formal and/or informal assessments;
- Explanatory feedback with information about asking questions to further the completeness or accuracy of responses, how to avoid or correct common errors (problem-solving approach), and/or different approaches to use; and
- Varied forms of assessments (self-assessment, peer assessment, and some learning tasks without formal assessments).

### **C.2. Explicit Instruction**

Curriculum must contain clear statements of information and outcomes that effectively focus children’s attention on specific learning objectives. To support success in learning, the curriculum must include clear directions and explanations of:

- Purposes, goals, and expected outcomes;
- Concepts, rules, information, and terms; and
- Models, examples, questions, and feedback.

For example, the development of specific thinking skills requires an explicit statement of the particular *thinking skills* to be learned, along with the *strategies or steps to follow*. Explicit instruction for thinking skills might also involve showing *examples* of successful thinking contrasted with examples of poor thinking processes.

Similarly, the development of learning skills requires explicit directions, the teacher making thinking visible by verbal modeling, *when* and *how* to do activities such as problem-solving, analyzing, summarizing, self-coaching, memory strategies, persistence, preview and questioning, reading and listening, reflecting and reciting.

### **C.3. Scaffolding Guidance and Support**

Curriculum must include guidance and support to help children safely and successfully become more independent learners and thinkers.

#### **C.3.a. Scaffolding**

The type of guidance and support that helps children to become more independent learners and thinkers is sometimes referred to as *scaffolding*. Scaffolding is a solid structure of support that can be removed after a job has been completed. As children gain proficiency, support can diminish, and children can encounter more complex, life-centered problems. Information and activities must provide guidance and support at the level that is needed—no more and no less. Too much can squelch student

interest and too little can lead to failure. Presenting opportunities to practice existing abilities and scaffolding more complex tasks, facilitates young learners to develop an awareness and understanding of their own thinking processes (metacognition).

Scaffolding guidance and support can be accomplished by a combination of the following features:

- Organized routines;
- Advance organizers or models such as:
  - Simplified views of information;
  - Visual representations of new information during initial instruction;
  - Questions to focus on key ideas or important features;
  - Explanations of how the problems were solved;
  - Analogies, metaphors, or associations to compare one idea to another; and
  - Prompts or hints during initial practice.
- Step-by-step instructions;
- Feedback that fosters and supports the learning of skills;
- Simulations with features for realistic practice; and
- Opportunities for children to do research and to organize and communicate results.

### **C.3.b. Adaptability**

Guidance and support must be adaptable to developmental differences and various learning styles. For example, young children tend to understand concepts in concrete terms and over-generalize new concepts. Some children need more time, some tend to be more impulsive than reflective, some have trouble distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information and some have better written than spoken language skills. Teachers may maximize students' interest and engagement through effective facilitation and quality feedback such as prompting the thought process and providing encouragement and scaffolding.

Approaches for scaffolding based on developmental differences and learning styles of children include a variety of *activities* such as:

- Structured and unstructured activities;
- Independent and group work;
- Teacher-directed and discovery learning;
- Visual and narrative instruction;
- Hands-on activities;
- Open-ended activities;
- Simple, complex, concrete, and abstract examples;
- Practice without extrinsic rewards;
- Hints and assistance;
- Variable pacing or visual breaks;
- Allowing choice; and
- Reorientation statements.

## **C.4. Active Participation of Children**

### **C.4.a. Activities**

The curriculum must engage the physical and mental activity of children during the learning process. The curriculum must include organized activities of periodic, frequent, short projects that are logical

extensions of content, goals, and objectives. Activities must address a variety of modalities and encourage hands-on exploration and active engagement.

#### **C.4.b. Child Responses**

Projects and activities must include questions and application activities during learning that give children opportunities to respond. Active participation of children can be accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, information and activities might require children to:

- Respond orally or through drawing and emergent writing;
- Create visual representations (block structures, emergent writing, puppet shows, dramatic play scenarios, drawings, two- and three-dimensional artwork);
- Generate their own questions or examples;
- Make predictions and complete discovery activities;
- Think of new situations for applying or extending what they learn;
- Add details to concepts from prior knowledge;
- Form their own analogies and metaphors;
- Practice lesson-related tasks, procedures, behaviors, or skills;
- Choose from a variety of activities;
- Share ideas and perspectives; and
- Engage in classifying and comparing.

#### **C.5. Formal, Informal and Formative Assessment(s) and/or Progress Monitoring Tool(s)**

A submitted comprehensive curriculum package must include one or more of the curriculum-based formal, informal, formative assessment(s), and/or progress monitoring tools(s). The submitted assessment(s)/tool(s) must relate to the performance standards domains, which instructors could use to guide instruction to increase child success.

All assessment(s)/tool(s) must be purposeful, and results should directly link back to strategies and activities which will enhance instruction. Instructors must be able to easily identify the next steps for instruction for children struggling or excelling in any area or skill.

##### **C.5.a. Types of Assessments and Resources**

Formal (standardized) Assessment(s) must:

- Be curriculum-specific; and
- Supported by data, providing percentiles, or standardized scores.

Informal Assessment(s) may include:

- Instructor checklists for specific skill ability (e.g. letters, sounds, numbers, shapes, etc.); and
- Instructor observation tool(s) for specific skills or behaviors (e.g., communication skills, cooperative play, physical activity, etc.).

Formative Assessment(s):

- May include techniques or tools used to check for understanding through teacher observations, student participation, and/or student work to then determine if the student has mastered identified skills(s) or if additional and/or different instruction needs to occur.
- The instructor must use the collected information to determine the next steps for instruction.

Progress Monitoring assessments may consist of:

- Periodic assessments for the purpose of evaluating individual child progress as related to the performance standards.
- Direction and guidance for the instructor and program administrator in identifying children who are at-risk or are experiencing difficulty in one or more areas.

- Guidance directing instructors to resources which may be utilized to target specific areas of need.

#### **C.5.b. Additional Resources**

- Sample class record sheets for tracking individual child progress.
- Guidance for using and implementing results of any assessment products and collected data provided within the curriculum.
- Strategies for instructor use to assist in guiding additional instruction, based on how a particular child or group of children performed on the assessments. These strategies or “next steps” must be linked directly to the curriculum.

### **D. Professional Learning**

Publishers must submit a Form VPKC5 for use with the comprehensive curriculum package. In-service training, workshops, and consulting services must be made available and included as part of the comprehensive curriculum package pricing to support teachers with implementation. Publishers must clearly indicate the required amount and types of professional learning necessary for VPK instructors to implement and for VPK directors and/or instructional coaches to support the curriculum (initial and ongoing).

Professional learning may be provided in a variety of timed options as well as via webinar, face-to-face, or online tutorial. All trainings must be user-friendly and include a facilitator’s guide to assist instructional coaches in supporting current as well as new instructors entering the program mid-year. The facilitator’s guide must provide the instructional coach with tools and resources that will assist them in the delivery of training geared toward increasing participation and successfully implementing the curriculum. Tiered levels of professional learning support must also be available to assist instructors and instructional coaches with various experience levels. All professional learning opportunities must be adaptable for all types of learners including evidence-based instructional strategies.

#### **D.1. Initial Professional Learning for Instructional Staff**

Initial professional learning must provide adequate opportunities for instructors to learn new concepts and practice what they learn. Teachers must be instructed in the administration, interpretation, and instructional implications of assessments that accompany the program. *Instructional Staff* for the purpose of VPK Curriculum Approval are all VPK instructor(s) and assistant(s) in VPK classes, if applicable.

#### **D.2. Ongoing Professional Learning for Instructional Staff**

After initial professional learning, ongoing professional learning must be offered to provide support and a deeper level of knowledge of the curriculum, including how the curriculum enhances children’s development and skills in the domains of the performance standards. Ongoing professional learning must also target areas of instructional need based on student performance on program assessments and progress monitoring tools.

All instructional staff must take part in all ongoing professional learning based on the activities prescribed in the publisher’s submitted Form VPKC5.

### **D.3. Initial Professional Learning for Instructional Coaches**

*Instructional Coach* is defined for purposes of the VPK Curriculum Approval Process as leadership staff (e.g., director, owner, Pre-K supervisor), a lead teacher, or other staff person responsible for working alongside the VPK instructor(s) and assistants to ensure the curriculum is implemented with fidelity. The instructional coach must have the necessary content and instructional knowledge to observe and provide guided feedback on curriculum implementation and assist teachers with instructional decisions.

Initial professional learning must be available to instructional coaches on the instructional components of administration, interpretation of assessment data, and instructional implications based on assessment results. This training must also be available throughout the school year for new staff entering the program mid-year.

Additionally, fidelity checklists and targeted guidance on how to support instructors based on observations would be beneficial to directors and instructional coaches as they support staff with the implementation of a specific curriculum.

### **D.4. Ongoing Professional Learning for Instructional Coaches**

Ongoing professional learning must provide instruction on the administration, interpretation of assessment data, and instructional implications based on assessment results.

All instructional coaches must take part in all ongoing professional learning, based on the activities prescribed in the publisher's submitted Form VPKC5.

### **D.5. Supporting High-Quality, Consistent Teaching**

Professional learning must emphasize the implementation of high-quality, consistent teaching. Professional learning must meet the needs of both instructors and directors/instructional coaches. Form VPKC5 must outline how instructors will learn to differentiate their instruction based on assessment data, adjust instructional pace based on the group being taught, and individualize instruction as needed. The Form VPKC5 must also provide support (e.g., principal/director checklists, follow-up in-class modeling, a resource for teachers to view model lessons) to facilitate the application of content. Additional supports such as fidelity checks, class observation checklists, or other administrative/teacher resources are encouraged.

### **D.6. Access to Professional Learning Opportunities**

The publisher must provide a single web location where approved trainings can be accessed along with an up-to-date monthly schedule. The postings must include webinar opportunities, online tutorials, researcher chats, and any other supporting trainings available to educators.

### **D.7. Assessment/Progress Monitoring Professional Learning for Instructional Staff and Coaches**

The professional learning must provide resources and guidance on the following:

- How to administer the assessment(s)/tool(s);
- How to use the data;
- How to identify levels of student performance in specific learning areas (e.g., identification of students at specific age ranges scoring below expectation, at expectation, or above expectation); and

- Instructional implications based on assessment data.

## **E. Materials for Parents and Families**

The VPK Education Program is a parent choice program; as such, it is recognized that parents are a child's first teacher and an important component in the child's education.

### **E.1. Family Support Materials for the VPK Instructor**

A comprehensive curriculum package must provide information for VPK instructors and directors on the importance of family involvement, tips and ideas for involving family members, as well as materials that are sent home with parents and families. Designs for parent involvement are endless and could include, for example, materials to send home, family workshop materials, and/or access to online resources.

### **E.2. Parent/Family Materials Available in Multiple Languages**

In a state such as Florida, where there are varying learning profiles of children, it is recognized that there is as much or more variety among children's families. Parent/Family materials must be available in multiple languages, including Spanish at a minimum, to ensure that the child's family can participate as actively as possible in their child's learning.

## **F. Research Base**

Each publisher must submit a resume or curriculum vitae for each author of the curriculum.

### **F.1. Expertise for Content Development**

Expertise in the content area and education of the intended children must be reflected in the authors, reviewers, and sources that contributed to the development of the materials. The authors, consultants, and reviewers must have contributed to the development of the VPK curriculum and must have credentials that reflect expertise in the subject area, course, course category, grade level, pedagogy, education, teaching, or class instruction. Qualifications may include expertise in educational psychology or instructional design.

## **IV. Criteria for Evaluation**

The VPK Curriculum Approval Process for Providers on Probation must be fair to all publishers. Applying evaluation criteria consistently to each submission assures that the materials will be judged fairly.

Regardless of format or technology, effective materials have certain characteristics in common, and the basic criteria important for the evaluation of a comprehensive curriculum package apply to all subject areas and all formats.



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