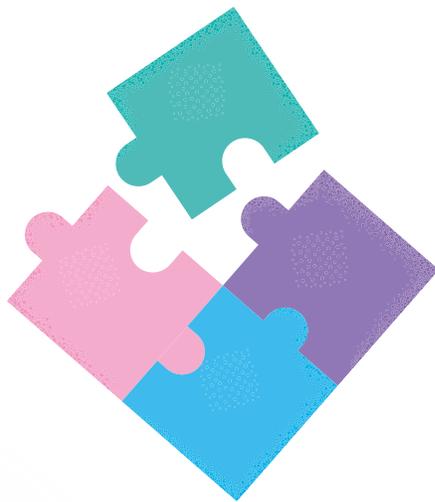


# LEARNING BEYOND PAPER

Research-Based Solutions to  
Address Challenges in the  
Early Childhood Field



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# LEARNING BEYOND PAPER

The challenges facing the early childhood field are numerous, to the extent that many refer to “the childcare crisis” across the nation. There is mounting pressure to find sustainable solutions to the systemic problems, yet much remains to be done to accomplish this goal. Furthermore, there is a great deal of debate about what is truly needed and how to best accomplish and fund it. Meanwhile, children and families are in urgent need of affordable, high-quality care and providers are struggling to find solutions daily. Learning Beyond Paper was created specifically to help address many common challenges across the industry.



- ✓ Cost of accessing high-quality, current, research-based curriculum
- ✓ Lack of planning time for early childhood educators
- ✓ Attracting and retaining high-quality early childhood staff
- ✓ Continuous need for training and professional development
- ✓ Improving equitable opportunities for ALL children and families
- ✓ Need for intentionality in teacher-child interactions
- ✓ Addressing development and learning across all domains
- ✓ Differentiating instruction and scaffolding to meet diverse needs
- ✓ Preparing 21st Century learners for future success

# COST OF ACCESSING HIGH-QUALITY, CURRENT, RESEARCH-BASED CURRICULUM

The cost of high-quality early childhood care has remained a major challenge for stakeholders across the field. Even prior to the worldwide pandemic, experts struggled to identify cost-effective ways to increase quality, while keeping care affordable for families. The childcare industry has relied upon accessing and blending a variety of funding sources, each with its own compliance requirements, to serve children. Research has continued to demonstrate the importance of quality, including implementation of research-based curriculum, to achieve child outcomes. Unfortunately, the cost of adopting a high-quality curriculum is often too high and competes with many other components, including teacher salary. Providers must continually incur the expense of replacing curriculum materials and resources to remain current.

Learning Beyond Paper (LBP) was designed to provide access to high-quality curriculum that is affordable to all types of programs, regardless of size. All curriculum materials are continually accessible upon demand to all staff members at one low cost. No need to store, transport, or share binders and bins of curriculum resources. The days of lugging materials home to complete lesson plans are gone. Digital native teachers will be thrilled to have everything accessible to them online from school and home. Moreover, the curriculum materials and resources will never become obsolete and need to be replaced. All updates can be continuously completed through the online platform, ensuring access to current resources, and eliminating the need to purchase a new curriculum as research, program requirements, and standards change over time.

Experienced early childhood educators and program leaders designed the curriculum, informed by decades of research across fields, to effectively meet the needs of their colleagues in the field. It is a standards-based curriculum, following a scope and sequence that spirals, addressing skills at increasing levels of depth and complexity as children build knowledge and competency across domains of learning. It is aligned to state and program standards, with alignment documents available to assist in planning and documenting.

# LACK OF PLANNING TIME FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Not having enough time to accomplish all the competing requirements throughout the day is an ongoing concern shared by educators.

Administrators struggle to provide planning time, but the reality is that many teachers end up planning, documenting progress, and completing necessary paperwork outside of the school day. LBP provides educators with 52 weeks of planned activities, addressing standards, progress monitoring skills and quarterly indicators through monthly curriculum themes for children from infancy through prekindergarten.

Daily activities are presented in a consistent format, providing teachers with a series of components to follow like a recipe. The curriculum provides developmentally appropriate activities that support teachers in being intentional about the experiences children engage in throughout each day. Strategies for developing predictable routines and schedules are included, as well as the value and importance of intentionally establishing consistent routines.

Teachers can focus their time and attention on interacting and engaging with the children, as they scaffold learning and differentiate instruction to meet their diverse needs. As the inevitable need for substitutes or changes in staffing assignments arises, administrators can rest assured that thorough plans are always available and readily accessible. Materials and resources for activities can be gathered and prepared in advance, since they are clearly listed and accessible through the LBP platform to all users. Additionally, documenting and communicating about classroom activities can easily occur for various purposes without interrupting classroom activities since everything is accessible on demand.



# ATTRACTING AND RETAINING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD STAFF

One of the greatest challenges faced throughout the childcare field continues to be staffing shortages. Attracting and retaining educators to provide high-quality care is a constant concern, especially as many leave the field for employment that provides better compensation and working conditions. Staffing the facilities remaining in operation following the pandemic is burdensome and time consuming for administrators. According to a survey conducted by NAEYC in 2021, an astounding four out of every five early childhood providers across the nation reported being understaffed.

Providing early childhood educators with the knowledge, tools, and resources they need to be effective in the classroom is one powerful way to encourage them to pursue and remain in the industry. LBP provides on demand access to all tools and resources your teachers need to successfully implement the curriculum and effectively manage their classrooms. In addition to providing detailed daily plans for classroom activities, the LBP platform also offers a wealth of information and resources across relevant topics to build the capacity of your staff. Less experienced educators will learn to use effective practices and strategies to set children up for success, while seasoned veterans will be reminded of best practices as they acquire some new tools and verbiage to add to their repertoire, strengthening their practice.



# CONTINUOUS NEED FOR TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Building the capacity of staff is critical to creating a high-quality program in which children and staff experience joy and success. Ongoing training and professional development opportunities are available to staff upon demand addressing a variety of topics to support educators in understanding how and why to utilize effective teaching strategies, informed by evidence to support children's development and learning. Additionally, the authors have embedded short snippets into daily activity plans, ensuring that teachers have examples of the language to use during interactions, as well as the purpose behind using it. The "teacher talk" used throughout the activities provides meaningful, regular opportunities for educators to empower students to think critically, build confidence, and respond to open-ended questions as they engage in intentionally planned hands-on experiences.

Resources are provided to facilitate setting up indoor and outdoor environments that support equity, agency, and meaningful exploration. Intentionally creating a welcoming environment with representation of children, staff, and families, as well as opportunities for meaningful inclusion is another powerful way to attract and retain staff and customers alike. People choose to stay in positive climates where they feel valued, respected, and supported. Improving job satisfaction for educators may become the reason educators choose to stay at a center, rather than move to another or leave the field completely.



# IMPROVING EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

All children and adults deserve the opportunity to thrive in an environment that encourages them to reach their full potential. Materials and experiences are intentionally included in LBP that advance equity and not only support tolerance of differences, but rather encourage appreciation and celebration of differences that make individuals unique. Awareness about the importance of environmental messages that create a sense of community is promoted in LBP.

Strategies for learning about the accessing the funds of knowledge children bring and ways to build meaningful relationships with them and their families are incorporated throughout the LBP curriculum and daily activities. Many standards, progress monitoring skills, and quarterly indicators across domains in the LBP scope and sequence support children's development and learning through an equity lens. Focus is placed upon creating a supportive learning environment through student agency, playful learning, fostering inclusion, and establishing relationships based upon mutual trust and respect.

LBP's platform also provides families with access to @Home Connections, which provide daily learning highlights for each learning activity. In addition to keeping families well informed and encouraging partnerships with schools, this also reduces the need for teachers to communicate this classroom-level information. As a result, teachers can focus daily communication with families on authentic conversations regarding the individual needs of children.



# NEED FOR INTENTIONALITY IN TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

Developing secure relationships is of paramount importance to the healthy development of young children. Furthermore, exposure to trauma and stressors can result in long-term, negative impacts for young children. Early childhood teachers must establish strong relationships with the children in their care, engaging in sensitive and responsive reciprocal (serve and return) interactions.



The LBP curriculum supports educators in creating a nurturing environment, where young children experience safety, belonging, and respect for their perspectives. Teacher talk is included in activities to provide caregivers with examples of rich language to engage young children in communication exchanges that facilitate understanding and promote language skills. As children engage in playful learning experiences and intentionally planned centers, educators engage in play with them, fostering inquiry, and strengthening children's knowledge and skills.

Each daily activity includes a social emotional component describing the social emotional development and skills addressed through the learning experience. Strategies for fostering self-regulation and building executive function skills in young children are also incorporated throughout the curriculum. Language and strategies to support all three Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) domains are interwoven within LBP learning experiences.

# ADDRESSING DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING ACROSS ALL DOMAINS

A concern about standards-based instruction in early childhood is that it can result in pushing down expectations, making the curriculum developmentally inappropriate for our youngest children and placing too much focus on academics. LBP's curriculum prioritizes authentic, playful learning and the use of developmentally appropriate practices grounded in evidence-informed research from across many fields. Children approach activities and learning through active play and exploration, while teachers support thinking and communication through meaningful interactions.

The LBP scope and sequence addresses standards from the following domains of development and learning: physical development, approaches to play and learning, social emotional development, cognitive development – mathematics, science, social studies, creative development, and cognitive processes. Although every activity has a primary objective, aligned to a standard from the scope and sequence, additional standards from other domains of development and learning are also identified and intentionally integrated into each learning experience.

Infants and young toddlers are engaged in daily experiences in STEAM, Language and Literacy, Physical Development, and Music and Movement. Older toddlers, preschool-3, and prekindergarten-4 children participate in daily activities in STEAM, Language and Literacy, Physical Development, Interactive Reading, and Cognitive Development. Teachers promote agency, allowing children's interests, choices, and experiences to guide them in constructing knowledge, building increasingly deeper understanding through social interactions.



# DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION AND SCAFFOLDING TO MEET DIVERSE NEEDS

To ensure that the diverse needs of learners are addressed effectively, the LBP curriculum promotes practices that are intentionally planned, inclusive, and individualized. Culturally responsive strategies are embedded in the experiences and interactions to promote belonging and foster the success of all children. The curriculum supports teachers in using a strengths-based approach, meeting children where they are, scaffolding learning, and providing opportunities to practice new skills.

Opportunities are intentionally provided for whole group, small group, and individual learning experiences. The value and purpose of flexible grouping and planning for smooth transitions is also included. Strategies for ongoing progress monitoring and reflection are incorporated to assist teachers in using children's current funds of knowledge to continually guide instructional decisions and next steps. Each activity includes a specific component for learning support, which offers strategies for differentiating and scaffolding learning to meet diverse needs in a specific learning experience. Ideas for supporting children with disabilities, dual language learners, challenging behaviors are addressed.

The concept of “zone of proximal development” is explained in detail in the teacher's manual to support educators in understanding that children learn best when they are provided with opportunities to be stretched just beyond the level at which they can perform independently. Evidence-informed strategies for modeling, questioning, providing feedback, and offering encouragement are recommended regularly to support development and learning.



# PREPARING 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

STEAM is a central focus of the LBP curriculum. The teacher's guide addresses the fact that the great majority of occupations children will be performing when they are adults do not yet exist. Educators must prepare children to be successful at performing tasks that have not yet even been invented. Focusing attention on developing collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity are universal tools recommended to support future success.

The characteristics of learners growing up in today's global world with rapidly changing technology are unique. Educators must find ways to assist our youngest citizens in navigating the use of technology as a tool to support learning. As a STEAM curriculum, LBP prioritizes hands-on exploration and authentic problem-solving throughout learning experiences. Teachers intentionally create rich learning experiences that allow children to engage in inquiry, trial, and error, as well as creatively designing through meaningful, playful learning opportunities.

Young children are naturally curious and find joy in learning and discovering through play. LBP capitalizes on this natural curiosity and assists educators in keeping children actively engaged through playful learning pedagogies. Choice is prioritized and children drive the learning, as teachers engage in interactions with children to help build connections to prior knowledge and extend thinking and learning.



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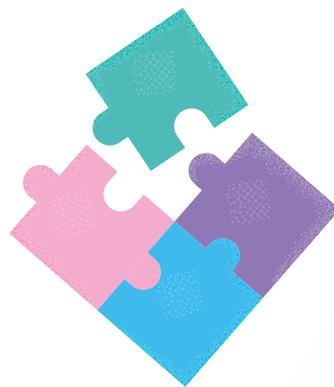
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