



Characteristics of High Quality Teachers of Young Children: The Unified Voice of California Early Childhood Mentors

All Mentors qualify as Master Teachers in California and are selected using rigorous, standardized criteria by the California Early Childhood Mentor Program in their community. Over an 18-month period, using a format designed to encourage reflection and debate, Mentor Teachers throughout the state tapped into the wisdom of their collective thousands of years of education and experience. This document is an approved synthesis of their decisions and recommendations.

We believe . . . that regardless of the path that brought them to excellence, high quality teachers are in the field today. Whether teaching in center-based, family child care, or school-based programs, these teachers skillfully support the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and creative development of young children. In order to pave a clearer path to excellence for future teachers, we have come to consensus on the characteristics of a high quality teacher of young children, regardless of age group, auspice, or program type.

A High Quality Teacher of young children is someone with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to develop and maintain trusting relationships with young children. A child's relationships determine brain development, willingness and desire to explore the unknown, knowledge retention, and long-term success. The high quality teacher of young children develops and maintains trusting relationships as the bedrock on which all other teaching opportunities build.

A High Quality Teacher of young children is someone with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to develop and implement an integrated curriculum that incorporates:

- **Unstructured play** to develop executive function—the ability to regulate their emotions, make independent decisions, and collaborate with others.
- **Teacher-directed learning** to provide children with information, insights, and support in their acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- **Discovery-based/child-directed learning** to encourage further development of innate curiosity and lifelong learning by allowing young children to identify their own learning goals.
- **Sensory-based learning** to develop children's awareness of themselves and their natural and constructed environment. Touch, movement, sight, sound, taste, and smell each provide unique learning experiences.
- **Individualized developmental support.** Every child has a unique path and pace of development, a unique combination of physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and creative development. Critical developmental leaps taken in the first years of life require balancing group time with individualized support of each child, utilizing a repeating pattern of observation, documentation, evaluation and support.

A High Quality Teacher of young children is someone with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to [create a safe, healthy, inviting environment](#). The high quality teacher of young children creates a physical and emotional environment for all children, including children with special needs, that promotes safe exploration, protects children's health, and provides opportunities for motor development.

A High Quality Teacher of young children is someone with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to [celebrate diversity](#). The high quality teacher of young children is sensitive to cultural, linguistic, physical ability, and lifestyle differences of young children, families, and colleagues as well as self-reflection regarding her or his own hidden biases.

A High Quality Teacher of young children is someone with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to [facilitate partnerships with families](#). The high quality teacher of young children creates an environment that welcomes families as well as children, includes them in decisions that impact their young children, keeps families informed about their child's progress and activities, and provides them with information on community resources.

A High Quality Teacher of young children is someone with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to [continually learn](#). New research findings on brain development, new teaching methodologies, and new guidelines or requirements for health and safety provide rich sources for professional and personal growth. The high quality teacher of young children seeks out knowledge and then incorporates it into her or his teaching.



The Mentor Teachers of the California Early Childhood Mentor Program do hereby recommend . . . that the characteristics of the highest quality teachers of young children identified here be used as benchmarks to guide policies developed to educate and assess professionals in the field of Early Care and Education. College curriculum, mentoring programs, and professional development efforts should strive to encourage the development of these characteristics in the teachers of tomorrow.

The California Early Childhood Mentor Program is funded by the California Department of Education, Child Development Division, with Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds.