

**Research Foundation  
Paper**

# Scholastic Early Childhood Program

Aligned to Early Reading First





# **Scholastic Early Childhood Program**

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## PREFACE

### **Scholastic Early Childhood Program (SECP) Overview**

The Scholastic Early Childhood Program (SECP) is a cohesive, comprehensive PreKindergarten program that is structured around the pedagogy of systematic, developmentally-appropriate curriculum, effective instructional methodology, and attention to cognitive and affective skill development. The program is based upon the conjuncture of best practices in early childhood education and key research findings about the relationship between what is determined by genetic factors and what is shaped by a child's environment and interactions. This research-based foundation addresses the critical elements of a successful high-quality curriculum and environment for young learners. These include effective curriculum, assessment and evaluations, relevant professional development, and strong school/home connections and family support.

### **SECP Curriculum Model**

The Scholastic Early Childhood Program is designed to support children's development of knowledge, skills, and processes that will help them make sense of themselves and the world around them. The SECP curriculum is thematic, integrated, and replete with culturally-relevant materials in both English and Spanish. An integrated curriculum approach puts the development of language and early literacy first within the integration of the following domains: mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, physical development, and personal and social development. SECP provides planning flexibility with themes and lessons that adapt easily to classroom needs, including grouping flexibility through suggestions and activities for different collaborative settings.

### **SECP Curriculum Goals**

The curriculum goals of the Scholastic Early Childhood Program are implemented through organization around real-world themes. The themes include Friends and School, Home and Family, Inside and Outside Me, Staying Well/Staying Safe, Our Community, Working and Playing Together, Make It/Build It, Let's Explore, Animals and Where They Live, and Everything Changes. These relevant themes build on children's current understanding of the world in which they live, enabling them to develop new knowledge, thus increasing their possibilities of success. In addition to engaging children within the reach of their conceptual knowledge, the program is constructed to address developmental differences in children. SECP helps teachers organize their classroom and make modifications for children with special needs. Teacher materials are provided for working with and modifying the curriculum for all children, including children with visual challenges, children with hearing challenges, children with physical challenges, children with cognitive challenges, and children with social/emotional challenges.

### **SECP Instructional Design**

The instructional design of SECP is based upon a model of socio-cultural theory that promotes the importance of educators and caregivers providing young children with informed instruction, supporting children as they actively investigate novel concepts, skills, and processes and reexamine known ones. This instructional design allows for both teacher-initiated direct instruction and child-initiated explorations. SECP addresses children within their zone of proximal development, as well as providing instruction that scaffolds children to acquire new knowledge or refine their current understandings. The central goal of the program is to help guarantee that young children will develop the critical skills, knowledge, and life habits to become successful learners, especially in their language and literacy development. Thus the Scholastic Early Childhood Program is designed to ensure that children's language and early reading skills will develop in accordance with the four crucial areas outlined by the *Early Reading First* legislation: oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabetic knowledge.

This paper presents critical guidance from *Early Reading First* regarding PreKindergarten language and literacy programs and provides evidence of how the Scholastic Early Childhood Program responds to and aligns with this important legislation.

## EARLY READING FIRST OVERVIEW

The overall purpose of the *Early Reading First* legislation is to prepare PreKindergarten children to enter kindergarten with the language, cognitive, and early reading skills necessary for reading success, thereby preventing reading difficulties.

The specific purposes of the *Early Reading First* program are as follows:

- To support local efforts to enhance the early language, literacy, and reading development of PreKindergarten children, particularly those from low-income families, through strategies and professional development that are based on scientific reading research.
  
- To provide PreKindergarten children with learning opportunities in quality language-rich and literature-rich environments so that they can attain the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development in kindergarten and beyond.
  
- To provide language and literacy activities based on scientific reading research that supports age-appropriate development in the following areas:
  - Oral language (vocabulary development, expressive language, and listening comprehension)
  - Phonological awareness (rhyming, blending, and segmenting)
  - Print awareness
  - Alphabet knowledge (letter recognition)
  
- To use screening assessments to effectively identify preschool-age children who may be at risk for reading failure.

The following table displays the Scholastic Early Childhood Program (SECP) alignment to the primary goal of *Early Reading First*: to provide language and literacy activities based on scientific research that support the development of oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge.

### EARLY READING FIRST LANGUAGE & LITERACY FRAMEWORK

#### PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

- Identifying and making oral rhymes
- Identifying and working with syllables in spoken words through segmentation and blending
- Identifying and working with “onsets and “rimes”
- Identifying and working with individual sounds in words

#### ORAL LANGUAGE

- Development of expressive and receptive spoken language including vocabulary, the contextual use of speech and syntax, and oral comprehension abilities

### SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

- Teacher-directed instruction is provided daily in one of the key areas of phonological awareness.
- In addition to being given direct instruction during each day’s Circle Time experiences, children also engage in additional teacher-led and child-initiated activities to build phonological awareness, including rereading books, singing songs and rhymes, listening to poems, and working with the sounds and patterns of language.

- Language and vocabulary are developed within the context of the theme and associated theme literature.
- In accordance with research confirming the critical importance of reading aloud, Story Time lessons are built around multiple read-aloud sessions. Children have the opportunity to listen to each fiction and nonfiction book, then work with the concepts and vocabulary derived from the books. In addition, each Circle Time experience begins with explicit oral language development lessons.

## EARLY READING FIRST LANGUAGE & LITERACY FRAMEWORK

### PRINT AWARENESS

- Knowledge of the purposes and conventions of print

### ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

- Letter recognition

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

- Throughout the program, children are exposed to a variety of print, such as fiction and nonfiction books, poems and song charts, posters, and word lists.
- Print awareness activities include having teachers and children construct print in a variety of forms and for many different purposes. These activities are designed to help children understand that print carries a message. Through multiple encounters with the provided materials, and exposure to the recommended teacher-modeling strategies, children develop critical concepts of print that aid the reading and writing process.

- The program provides multiple vehicles to teach children letter sounds, letter forms, and letter/sound correspondence.
- Instruction is drawn from the literature and/or from the additional teacher's resource, *Teaching Letters and Sounds*. Children are provided opportunities to engage in activities that help them make letter-sound discoveries in meaningful ways.

The following table displays details of the *Early Reading First* guidance for high-quality and research-based PreKindergarten programs with the Scholastic Early Childhood Program response and alignment.

## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

### INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

A high-quality oral language environment includes the following:

- Adults read books out loud to children while asking them predictive and analytic questions that help them better understand the story.
- Adults use rich and varied vocabulary.
- Adults provide children frequent opportunities to ask and answer questions during all activities.
- Teachers engage children in conversation.
- Teachers use linguistic awareness games, such as songs and nursery rhymes, and rhythmic activities that are focused on phonological awareness to help develop children's oral language skills.

A high-quality print-rich environment includes the following:

- Access to print is provided in a variety of forms.
- The alphabet is posted at an eye level appropriate for young children.
- Items in the classroom are labeled.
- Classrooms contain a variety of attractive and age-appropriate books that are easily accessible to young children, including storybooks and nonfiction books.

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

### SECP PUTS LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FIRST WITHIN AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

The *Scholastic Early Childhood Program* is a Pre-Kindergarten curriculum that provides a rich environment of print and non-print experiences related to language and literacy development. SECP contains the following components, most of which are bilingual and/or English and Spanish sets:

- Teacher Materials: Program Guide, 10 Teacher's Guides, *Welcome to PreKindergarten: A Guide to Setting Up and Managing Your Classroom*, Informal and Formal Assessment book, *Creating Family Partnerships* book, and *Teaching Letters and Sounds Teaching Guide*
- Theme Literature: Big Books, Little Books, Audiocassettes, Content Area Big Books, Read Alouds, and Mini-Books
- Posters and Charts: Phonics Poem Posters, Math Concept Cards, Science Posters, Clifford's Big Idea Poster, and Alphabet Frieze
- Music: *Songs and Fingerplays* books and audio CDs

Throughout the program, children engage in activities that help them build awareness of the sounds of language.

Through oral language activities, songs, fingerplays and poems children are exposed to the sounds and patterns of language.

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## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

- Children are given opportunities to express themselves on paper without being limited to using correct spelling and proper handwriting, thus helping them to understand that writing has purpose.
- Teachers post children’s work around the classroom, as well as posting “environmental print” (print from familiar objects children may see at home and in the community).
- The classroom contains objects that children can manipulate into letters and words as an engaging way to provide children with the opportunity to explore letters and print.

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

Story Time lessons are constructed as multiple read-aloud sessions. Children have many opportunities to listen to each book being read aloud, then to work with the book by retelling the story or rereading it themselves, by participating in related discussions, and by collaborating in meaningful, language-based activities related to the story.

Throughout SECP, children are exposed to a variety of print—fiction and nonfiction trade books, poems, printed words of songs, signs, lists, recipes and so on. By participating in read-alouds and related activities, children develop an understanding that print carries a message and recognize that stories have sequence and flow. Through multiple encounters with these materials and exposure to the provided modeling strategies, children develop critical concepts of print that aid the reading process.

## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

### RESEARCH FOUNDATION

*Early Reading First* requires that teachers identify and provide activities and instructional materials based on scientific reading research for use in developing children's language, cognitive, and early reading skills.

Research has revealed that language and literacy development in the preschool years is critical to children's future success in learning to read and in overall academic achievement throughout the elementary and secondary school years. Children who do not receive a wealth of early experiences that build vocabulary and early reading skills, as well as motivation for learning, are at risk for reading failure in the kindergarten and first grade years. Such failure can spiral into repeated cycles of struggle and underperformance in subsequent years.

Early reading research on oral language development reveals that the quality and amount of adult/child discourse is critical.

Reading research on phonological awareness reveals that repetition and interactions with new and familiar songs and poems help children become aware of sounds and their combinations.

Early reading research on letter and sound knowledge reveals that children must learn letter names as well as their sounds to develop the alphabetic principle.

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

### SECP WAS DEVELOPED ACCORDING TO LEADING ACADEMIC AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

The *Scholastic Early Childhood Program* provides a curriculum designed to help children acquire school-readiness skills in these four critical framework areas of language and early reading:

- Oral language
- Phonological awareness
- Letter and sound knowledge
- Print awareness

The language and early literacy curriculum of SECP is based upon the 1998 National Research Council report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. This report presents scientific evidence that children's performance in all of the above areas is significantly stronger when access to books and other literacy materials is combined with professional development and training for preschool teachers.

SECP directly introduces cognitively challenging conversational opportunities through its Circle Time, Story Time, Learning Centers, and Transition Time activities centered on thematic investigations. Vocabulary is developed through being explicitly introduced and highlighted.

SECP provides multiple opportunities to help children develop rhyming, blending, and segmenting skills through speaking, chanting, and singing activities.

SECP features multiple exposures to all letters throughout the program, and provides activities for writing explorations. Letters and sounds are taught in the context of the reading and then extended and reinforced in multiple ways. Teachers have the flexibility to use an alternative sequence provided in the *Teaching Letters and Sounds Teacher's Guide*.

## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

### CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

*Early Reading First* identifies that teachers should organize and present their research-based materials in a systematic, coherent manner. Teachers should prepare monthly, weekly, and daily lesson plans by referring to a scope and sequence that outlines the academic goals for the year.

Curricula should be intellectually engaging, have meaningful content, and provide multiple opportunities for developing language and cognitive skills, including the use of explicit instruction. Teaching should be intentional, meaning that the teacher is focused upon the skills that a child is developing while engaged in any activity.

Preschool teachers should integrate the instructional materials, activities, tools, and measures described above into the overall early childhood education program offered. The process is not complete, however, until teachers begin to demonstrate their new competencies in working with children and they incorporate those materials, activities, and assessments into the everyday operation of the preschool program.

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

### SECP PROVIDES CONSISTENT AND SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION

The *Scholastic Early Childhood Program* is organized around routines based upon best practices in early childhood education. Lessons are presented in both English and Spanish, and give intensive support for ESL students. Each daily lesson is structured in the following manner and can be tailored for half-day or full day preschool programs:

- **Circle Time:** Teacher-directed, explicit instruction in oral language, phonological awareness, mathematics, and additional skills from the content areas
- **Learning Centers and Teacher's Table:** Child-directed explorations across the curriculum that focus on the targeted skills and concepts for the week, as well as provide extra practice and reinforcement in previously-taught skills and concepts
- **Story Time:** Teacher-directed, explicit instruction in language and early literacy skills, especially in oral language, phonological awareness, letter and sound knowledge, print awareness, and writing
- **Transitions:** Teacher-led opportunities that use oral language and thinking skills to help develop additional literacy-area concepts

Each theme is also supported with instruction for preparing and managing the classroom, launching the activities, and wrapping up the topic.

## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

### ASSESSMENT

Teachers should use screening assessments and progress monitoring measurements that are developed according to scientific reading research.

These assessments should continually evaluate student progress, and determine whether preschool age children are developing the language, early literacy, and cognitive skills necessary for continued reading and school success.

Teachers should receive training in how to appropriately use these screening and progress-monitoring assessments.

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

### SECP INCLUDES FORMAL AND INFORMAL ASSESSMENTS

Assessments in the *Scholastic Early Childhood Program* are administered on a regular basis and embedded in instruction as appropriate. They are designed to determine student progress and identify possible cognitive development problems.

Teachers use these assessments to tailor their plan of instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Therefore, instruction is scaffolded through employing learning strategies and activities that build on the existing skills of students.

**Formal Assessment:** SECP contains an assessment handbook that provides both individual and group assessment instruments. The handbook contains the following assessments:

- Book and Print Awareness
- Phonological Awareness
- Letter Knowledge
- Writing Skills
- Checklists for monitoring the PreKindergarten Curriculum Goals: Language & Early Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Personal & Social Development, Fine Arts, and Physical Development

**Informal Assessment:** SECP also provides informal assessment techniques and suggestions within the context of learning and instruction. These include:

- Daily Work and Observation
- Portfolio Review
- Learning Over Time Assessment Recommendations

## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development should be based on scientific reading research, knowledge of early language development, and understanding of early literacy should be provided to teachers.

Professional development should be provided on a continuous and ongoing basis, as well as being sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused.

Effective professional development includes strategies such as mentoring and coaching (e.g., demonstration by the coach of effective teaching strategies, the coach's observation of teacher's instruction, followed by discussion and reflection on the effectiveness of instructional strategies and how they support student progress).

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

### SECP PROVIDES INTEGRATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development for the *Scholastic Early Childhood Program* is integrated into the curriculum through the *My Guide for Ongoing Assessment and Professional Development*. This binder includes a library of professional readings on the following critical early childhood education topics:

- Observation and Assessment
- Child Development
- Language Acquisition
- Early Literacy
- Technology
- Cross-Curriculum Content Areas
- Embracing Diversity
- Inclusion in the Classroom

In addition, SECP has developed 12 cooperative Teacher Workshops based upon articles written by noted experts, such as Dr. Susan Neuman, Dr. Stanley Greenspan, and Lillian Katz. Each workshop includes a selected expert article, workshop goals, and plans for structuring the workshop. Below are the 12 SECP Workshop topics:

- Phonological Awareness
- Language and Cultural Heritage
- Print Knowledge
- Literacy and Play
- Nonfiction Books
- Fostering Responsibility
- Discovery Science
- The Math in Music
- Building Language Through Songs
- Children With Special Needs
- The Project Approach
- Geometry and Young Children

## EARLY READING FIRST GUIDANCE

### PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

The quality of family environments and parent-child interactions has been shown to be central to a child's literacy development and education. Parents strengthen their child's literacy development and school-related competencies when they engage in language-rich parent-child interaction, provide support for literacy in the family, and hold appropriate expectations of their child's learning and development.

The U.S. Department of Education strongly encourages Early Reading First programs to provide parents with educational training in those parenting skills most closely associated with children's language and cognitive development. In addition, program staff is encouraged to meet with parents to talk about any areas in which their child is experiencing difficulty, as well as to offer early language and cognitive activities that families can do at home to help prepare their child for formal school instruction.

Program staff should work with parents to develop a plan to consistently reinforce crucial oral language and cognitive skills during the summer months or other extended vacation periods between preschool and kindergarten, which will help prevent the loss of previously-acquired skills.

## SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESPONSE

### SECP FOSTERS STRONG SCHOOL-TO-HOME AND HOME-TO-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

A vital component of the *Scholastic Early Childhood Program* is *Creating Family Partnerships: A Bilingual Guide to Family Involvement*. This product contains relevant information and resources in Spanish and English. Informational resources for connecting to families include:

- Meeting and Greeting Families
- Teacher-Family Conferences
- Family Meetings
- Family Home Projects
- Family Learning Night

In addition, theme content resources include the following:

- Letters to Families: introducing the themes being studied
- Mini-Books: theme-related emergent text to bring home and reinforce early reading
- Door Hangers: activity ideas for parents to do at home with their children

## REFERENCES SUPPORTING THE SCHOLASTIC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

SECP is based on the educational research reported in the following publications, as well as guidance from our academic authorship team and pilot research.

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