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Virginia's Alignment Project

Introduction

Without a doubt, the early years – from birth to kindergarten – comprise the most extraordinary period of development in a child's lifetime.

Learning begins in infancy when a child's development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward learning serves as the basis for healthy development and lifelong achievement. Infants and young children are by nature avid learners – enthusiastic, creative scientists who observe, explore, experiment, and practice skills until they are mastered, and then continue to the next challenge.

Although they learn much through independent exploration, infants and young children need competent adult guides to provide the critical elements of high quality learning environments at optimal times. Skillful adults – whether parents, grandparents, child care providers or teachers - provide the safety and security, both physical and emotional, that support young learners through adventures of discovery and mastery. Skillful adults provide more than affectionate relationships that support and foster confidence; they structure the environment to provide challenges, coach the learning process by providing feedback, and offer interpretation to confirm and to inspire. These skillful adults become learning partners who mentor young children as they explore the world in which they live.

It is vital that we support Virginia's young children as they prepare for school and life success. The Alignment Project documents serve as guides to assist adults in their important roles with young children.

Guiding Principles

The Alignment Project documents reflect a set of guiding principles that have served as a valuable compass in developing these resources:

1. Families are the first and most influential teachers of young children.
2. Every child develops at an individual rate, possesses unique characteristics, and exhibits an array of talents and interests regardless of family background, culture, special need, experience, or ability.
3. Optimal learning occurs when we recognize that all aspects of a child's development (i.e., social and emotional, approaches to learning, language and literacy, cognitive, and physical) are inextricably interrelated and nurtured through a combination of active exploration, play, social interaction, and thoughtfully planned activities that capitalize on children's natural tendency to seek ever higher levels of challenge to master.
4. Early learning experiences draw upon and enhance the connections between families, early childhood programs and services, schools, and the community.
5. Quality early learning experiences for children are guided by research-based knowledge and practice.
6. All children are capable and competent learners, and they learn best when they are included with their peers.

Developing the Alignment Project Documents

These frameworks were developed through a comprehensive and collaborative process involving many sources of information, expertise, and guidance.

The process began in February, 2006, through an intensive initiative known as the Alignment Project. Though spearheaded by the Virginia Department of Social Services, the Alignment Project team is comprised of dedicated professionals from many agencies and organizations, both public and private. Each of the team members brought insight and wisdom reflecting years of experience, expertise, and commitment.

Following the development of the original documents, numerous professionals in the field reviewed critically the documents and provided suggestions for improvement. In addition, six focus groups were held in six different regions across the Commonwealth to gather broad feedback on the Alignment work, as well as specific feedback concerning draft documents. The participating individuals represented various relevant constituent groups, selected to offer a full range of perspectives, thereby ensuring inclusion and integration of varied needs, programs, and cultures to the greatest extent possible. Working within a tight timeframe, the reviewers provided valuable edits and additions, contributing substantively to the final products.

Finally, the Alignment Project benefited in significant ways by reviewing and incorporating guidelines and competencies gleaned from early childhood initiatives from numerous states and local coalitions. Thanks to the graciousness and generosity of key representatives from each state and locality in granting permission for the team to learn from their respective processes and products, the Alignment Team feels assured that Virginia's frameworks reflect best practices across the nation.

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More than one hundred parents, teachers, directors, child care resource and referral agency staff, and other interested partners attended the focus groups in Abingdon, Fairfax, Harrisonburg, Richmond, Roanoke, and South Hampton Roads.

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Milestones of Child Development

Welcome to Virginia's Milestones of Child Development!

This document is a comprehensive resource for those who work with and care about young children. We hope you will find this document valuable and that you will share it with others.

Purpose and Goals

In recognition of the important learning that takes place in a child's earliest years, the Alignment Project addresses the opportunity to articulate a set of *Milestones* for parents, grandparents, child care providers, educators and other involved adults that focus on children's observable behaviors and interactions during the period from birth to kindergarten, as well as a set of recommended strategies for adults to provide optimal learning environments and experiences for young children.

Broadly defined, the *Milestones* are a set of child develpment indicators and strategies for adults designed to support the growth and development of young children from birth to kindergarten entry. Specifically, the *Milestones* are organized by domain area (e.g., Social and Emotional Development); within each domain are related strands (e.g., Relationship with Others) and indicators, examples, and strategies arranged in a gradual progression by approximate age range (i.e., birth to 18 months; 18 months to 36 months; 36 months to 48 months; and 48 months to kindergarten entry). These age ranges are intentionally broad because young children's development is highly episodic; such flexibility, therefore, permits variation within developmental ranges.

Adults of varying roles in the lives of young children may use the *Milestones* as a resource for better understanding and supporting the continuum of young children's growth and development across various domain areas. The *Milestones* may also be of particular value to:

- **Parents and families** as they support their children's growth and development in the home and community;
- **Early childhood professionals** for the selection and planning of appropriate curricular materials, quality learning experiences and family support services;
- **Child care directors** and other **school and early childhood administrators** to assess their programs and to inform the professional development of staff; and to
- **Providers working in the field of early intervention** who seek new strategies to provide individualized support for infants and toddlers of varying abilities and for their families.

By specifying the knowledge, skills, and dispositions often acquired or exhibited in young children, the *Milestones* offer a comprehensive reference to consolidate our understanding of young children and their needs, and to help reduce inequities in achievement as children mature. Further, the *Milestones* highlight the essential need for partnerships among families, early childhood programs and services, schools, and the community. Together, we can make a positive difference in the lives of young children.

The Milestones of Child Development were developed for young children, ages birth to kindergarten. To inform one's use of the *Milestones*, it is essential to understand their intended purpose and features.

Virginia's *Milestones of Child Development* are:

- Research-based, with emphasis on requirements to use adult-child relationships as the key ingredient for creating a learning environment for young children;
- Built upon, but not duplicating, licensing standards;
- Aligned with Virginia's Pre-K-12 system, Virginia's *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*, and the Head Start *Child Outcomes Framework*;
- Written to be readily understandable for users;
- Focused on providing age- and stage-appropriate, multi-dimensional opportunities for promoting and enhancing child development;
- Developed with consideration to children's individual rates at which they progress through common developmental milestones, as well as the different patterns exhibited in children's strengths across the learning domains. The goal must be to fit learning opportunities to the child rather than to fit the child into preconceived, "one-size-fits-all" paths.

As important as it is to understand what the *Milestones* are, it is equally important to state what they are not.

Virginia's *Milestones of Child Development* are not:

- A developmental checklist or an exact sequence of developmental indicators;
- A curriculum, although they can be adapted by caregivers and educators to supplement many different curricula;
- An assessment tool to determine children's eligibility for various programs or services; to gauge children's functioning or skills for an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP); or to collect statewide information on the overall status of children in the Commonwealth of Virginia;
- A resource meant to stifle the creativity of families, child care providers, or teachers.

Structure and Content of the *Milestones:*

Because children learn and develop by experiencing the world as a whole, the Virginia *Milestones of Child Development* cover six major domains – or areas – of development. These six domains represent a commonly held, and research-based, organization of the dimensions of children's overall development.

Though presented separately, the six domains of children's development are inextricably interrelated. Children develop holistically; growth and development in one area often influences and/or depends upon development in other areas. It is, therefore, imperative to recognize the interconnectedness of children's early development in other areas. For that reason, no single domain is more important than another.

The domains used to organize Virginia's *Milestones of Child Development* are:

- Social and Emotional Development;
- Approaches to Learning;
- Language and Literacy;
- Cognition and General Knowledge;
- Fine Arts; and
- Physical Development and Health.

Each of the six domains begins with an introduction that defines the rationale and definitions for each domain. Within each domain are strands or components of a domain area that, when combined, represent the comprehensive elements of the domain.

Each individual strand is broken down by **indicator**, **example**, and **strategy**:

Indicator – A general statement that indicates the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes toward learning that a child may exhibit during a given developmental stage.

Example – Defines what a child is doing to demonstrate he is acquiring the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes toward learning addressed in the specific indicator.

Strategy – A suggested learning activity or interactive approach for adults to help children develop toward desired indicators and goals.

Importantly, the *Milestones of Child Development* are arranged along a continuum of development, a predictable but not rigid progression of accomplishments that are sequenced in the order in which they emerge in most children according to current research. We know, however, that children are unique individuals who develop at different rates—and, therefore, the age ranges are intentionally broad and overlap. The suggested developmental continuum serves as a general guide to help adults identify a progressive set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are likely to occur as a child matures. Color shading is used along each strand to denote the *approximate* age range during which a child may exhibit a given indicator. Additionally, caregivers and early childhood professionals should be aware that the development of skills in one area is related to and influences development in other areas—consequently, daily routines and planned learning experiences should integrate skill-building across domains and related strands.

To help acquaint you with the *Milestones of Child Development*, an overview section is included beginning on Page 1—detailing the comprehensive list of indicators for each domain plus related "Strands-at-a-Glance," one-page guides for each strand that offer a sample of the indicators, examples, and strategies included within the comprehensive set of *Milestones*.

The Milestones of Child Development project was supported by the Virginia Department of Social Services with the federal Child Care Development Fund provided through the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Points of view contained in this document do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

An electronic version of this document is available at http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cc/index.html .

For more information on the *Milestones of Child Development*, contact the Division of Child Care and Development, Virginia Department of Social Services, 7 North Eighth Street, Richmond, VA 23219.

These overview pages are structured as follows:

Overview of Indicators

Overview of Indicators
Approaches to Learning

Birth to Kindergarten Developmental Continuum

Strand 1: Persistence

A1. Observe objects and people for a brief period of time.
A2. Hold attention of adult.
A3. Pay attention briefly and try to reproduce interesting and pleasurable effects and events.
A4. Increase the amount of time they can persist in repetitive tasks or preferred activities.
A5. Increase persistence in trying to complete a task after previous attempts have failed, sometimes seeking the help of others.
A6. Grow in ability to persist in and complete tasks, activities, projects, and experiences.
A7. Increase persistence in activities despite frustration or disappointment.
A8. Recognize and solve problems independently through trial and error and by interacting with peers and adults.
A9. Set goals, develop plans, and complete tasks.
A10. Show growing capacity to maintain concentration over time on a task, question, set of directions or interactions, despite distractions and interruptions.

Strand 2: Curiosity and Initiative

B1. Show awareness of and interest in the environment.
B2. Engage in and actively explore self, objects, and surroundings.
B3. Show eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
B4. Demonstrate ability to initiate activities.
B5. Participate in an increasing variety of tasks and activities.
B6. Develop increased ability to make independent choices.
B7. Find and use materials to follow through on an idea.
B8. Initiate play with others.
B9. Offer to help with chores.
B10. Invent projects and work on them with little assistance.
B11. Grow in eagerness to learn about and discuss a growing range of topics, ideas and tasks.

Strand 3: Creativity & Inventiveness

C1. Notice and show interest in and excitement with familiar objects, people, and events.
C2. Approach and explore new experiences in familiar settings.
C3. Delight in finding new properties and uses for familiar objects and experiences.
C4. Pretend and use imagination during play.
C5. Imitate action observed in another situation.
C6. Approach tasks experimentally, adapting as the activity evolves.
C7. Use imagination to create original thoughts, ideas, or products.
C8. Approach tasks and activities with increased flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness.
C9. Use creativity and inventiveness to complete projects or tasks.
C10. Make changes to a familiar story by adding actions or characters.
C11. Represent reality in a variety of ways (e.g., pretend play, drawing, making up stories).

Strand 4: Reasoning & Problem Solving

D1. Explore object characteristics (e.g., size, shape, texture) in many different ways.
D2. Behave in consistent ways to elicit desired response.
D3. Use sounds, gestures, and movements to impact the environment and interactions.
D4. Realize that people or things even when out of view (object permanence).
D5. Use objects as intended.
D6. Demonstrate beginning understanding of cause and effect, especially of own actions.
D7. Seek assistance from an adult or another child to solve problems.
D8. Explain reasons why simple events occur.
D9. Develop increasing abilities to classify, compare and contrast objects, events and experiences.
D10. Recognize and solve problems through active exploration, and interactions and discussions with others.
D11. Create a strategy based on one learning event and extend it to a new learning opportunity.
D12. Demonstrate understanding of what others are thinking, their intentions, or motivations.
D13. Demonstrate long-term memory of meaningful events and interesting ideas.
D14. Work with others to find a solution, using problem solving strategies.

Here, the comprehensive set of indicators is included for each strand.

Note: While the indicators are placed in sequence along the vertical column, children may accomplish them in any order. The indicators are numbered *only* for the convenience of instructional planning and not for formal assessment purposes.

"Strands-At-A-Glance"

Approaches to Learning—the inclinations, dispositions, attitudes, habits, and styles that reflect the many ways that children involve themselves in learning.

Strand 1: Persistence—Continued attentiveness that indicates the ability to retain meaningful information and ideas and to use best practices in future activities and situations.

For the purposes of this overview guide, each indicator is paired with *one* example and *one* related strategy.

Birth to 18 months

Indicators
Children Are Learning To...

- Observe objects and people for a brief period of time. (A1)
- Hold attention of adult. (A2)
- Pay attention briefly and try to reproduce interesting and pleasurable effects and events. (A3)

Examples
You May Observe The Child...

- Examine a toy, rattle, or face for a brief period of time.
- Smile, babble, and sustain eye-contact with adult.
- Use certain behaviors to get adults' attention.
- Grasp, release, re-grasp, and re-release an object.
- Lift arms up while crying to be picked up and comforted.

Strategies
You Can Help/Support By...

- Providing child with opportunities to explore characteristics of safe objects.
- Providing child with consistent responses, environments, and routines.
- Providing child with a safe environment in which to explore a variety of age-appropriate materials.
- Observing child to understand and support temperament, learning styles, and interests.

18 months to 36 months

Indicators
Children Are Learning To...

- Increase the amount of time they can persist in repetitive tasks or preferred activities. (A4)
- Increase persistence in trying to complete a task after previous attempts have failed. (A5)

Examples
You May Observe The Child...

- Work at building a block structure for a short period of time.
- Fill a container with small objects and dump them out repeatedly.
- Try various shapes in a shape-sorting toy until the shape finally fits.
- Try to start the zipper on coat repeatedly until able to do the task without help.

Strategies
You Can Help/Support By...

- Providing several stacking type toys that encourage a child to use a variety of motions.
- Demonstrating confidence in child by not interrupting or redirecting when child is focused on an activity.
- Noticing and making specific comments about a child's efforts and accomplishments.
- Being available and responding when child encounters problems, without being intrusive.

36 months to 48 months

Indicators
Children Are Learning To...

- Grow in ability to persist in and complete tasks, activities, projects, and experiences. (A6)
- Increase persistence in activities despite frustration or disappointment. (A7)

Examples
You May Observe The Child...

- Use materials to create a collage, working on it in a focused manner.
- Persist in attempt to find missing pieces of a toy or to try something new with the playdough.
- Successfully complete a challenging puzzle.
- Spill a cup of juice on the floor, clean it up, and ask for more juice.

Strategies
You Can Help/Support By...

- Designing projects that take more than one day to complete.
- Offering suggestions for overcoming challenges only after he asks for assistance.
- Providing adequate time and support for child to complete increasingly complex games or tasks.
- Commending child for handling frustration or disappointment in socially appropriate ways.

48 months and older

Indicators
Children Are Learning To...

- Recognize and solve problems independently. (A8)
- Set goals, develop plans, and complete tasks. (A9)
- Show growing capacity to maintain concentration over time. (A10)

Examples
You May Observe The Child...

- Focus on an activity.
- Alter approach to tasks when initial approach does not work.
- Work on building a specific item, though the design may change during the process.
- Disregard activities nearby while maintaining focus and concentration on the task at hand.
- Remember on a day-to-day basis to maintain long-term projects.

Strategies
You Can Help/Support By...

- Facilitating play and activities between child and others.
- Encouraging child to try new approaches without intervening.
- Talking with child about her activities and plans.
- Creating projects for child to work on over time.
- Providing adequate time and support for child to complete increasingly complex activities, games, or tasks.

Here, the definitions of the domain and strand serve as a quick reference.

Sample **Indicators**, **Examples**, and **Strategies** are organized along a developmental continuum by age ranges: birth to 18 months; 18 to 36 months; 36 months to 48 months; and 48 months and older.

Note: Because young children develop at unique rates, a child may exhibit a particular indicator in a different sequence, or at a later date. These intend to serve as guides, and are not for formal assessment purposes.

Following this overview section begins the comprehensive set of *Milestones*. Each domain includes an introductory page, providing a rationale and definition for each strand. The domain sections are color-coded to promote user-friendliness. Here is an example:

The Comprehensive Set of Virginia's *Milestones of Child Development*

Indicators:

A general statement that defines the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes that a child may exhibit during a developmental stage from birth to kindergarten.

Strand 1: Persistence

Indicators Children Are Learning To…..	Examples You May Observe the Child….	Strategies You Can Help/Support By…..
A1. Observe objects and people for a brief period of time.	Examine a toy, rattle, or face for a brief period of time.	Providing child with opportunities to explore different characteristics of safe objects by looking, mouthing, grasping, etc.
A2. Hold attention of adult	Smile, babble, and sustain eye-contact with adult. Use certain behaviors (e.g., crying) to get adults' attention.	Responding appropriately to interactions with child through facial expressions and language, using exaggeration. Providing child with consistent responses, environments, and routines.
A3. Pay attention briefly and try to reproduce interesting and pleasurable effects and events.	Grasp, release, re-grasp, and re-release an object. Lift arms up while crying to be picked up and comforted.	Providing child with a safe environment in which to explore a variety of age-appropriate materials. Observing child to understand and support temperament, learning styles, and interests.
A4. Increase the amount of time they can persist in repetitive tasks or preferred activities.	Work at building a block structure for a short period of time. Fill a container with small objects and dump them out repeatedly.	Providing several stacking type toys that encourage a child to use a variety of motions such as dumping and stacking. Demonstrating confidence in child by not interrupting or redirecting when child is focused on an activity.
A5. Increase persistence in trying to complete a task after previous attempts have failed, sometimes seeking the help of others.	Try various shapes in a shape-sorting toy until the shape finally fits. Try to start the zipper on coat repeatedly until able to do the task without help.	Noticing and making specific comments about a child's efforts and accomplishments. Being available and responding when child encounters problems, without being intrusive.

Strategies:

Suggested activities or behaviors for adults to support a child's acquisition of a specific indicator, or desired outcome.

(Note: Not all strategies will be effective with all children; therefore, it is recommended that adults incorporate many and varied strategies to support young children's healthy growth and development.)

Examples in the Context of Daily Routines, Activities, and Play:

Here are samples of a child's behaviors, skills, or dispositions that you may observe in the context of daily routines, activities, and play that demonstrate his learning of a particular skill or knowledge and his understanding of a particular concept.

Note: While the indicators are placed in sequence (as signified by color shading along the vertical column), children may accomplish them in any order. The indicators are numbered only for the convenience of instructional planning and not for formal assessment purposes.