INTRODUCTION

The USAID Pre-Primary Framework: All Children Learning details an ideal pre-primary education system that focuses on three key levels for consideration for pre-primary learners: Schools and Learning Spaces, Families and Communities, and Delivery Systems. Each level includes critical components and sub-factors that can allow all pre-primary learners to build foundations for early learning, taking the needs of a specific context into account. The framework is intended for use in both non-formal and formal education systems and by stakeholders including national, regional, and local governments; donor agencies and their partners; and others interested in thinking holistically about the planning, implementation, and evaluation of pre-primary systems.

Guided by the foundational principles of equity, inclusion, adaptability, and accessibility, and a commitment to cross-sectoral linkages, the USAID Pre-Primary Framework aims to foster resilience in young learners as they build foundations for learning. The framework is intended to help identify the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in any education ecosystem, so the provision of pre-primary is contextually aligned and responsive. Framework users can also conduct targeted analyses and develop equitable, inclusive, and context-appropriate pre-primary interventions that advance USAID’s education priorities in all types of learning environments. If the framework cannot be used as a starting point for system design, it can still identify gaps in analysis and

BOX 1: KEY TERMS

Pre-Primary: Any group-based, organized instruction serving children, generally between ages 3 to 6, prior to their entry into primary school. A program may be school-based, center-based, or community-based, and include between one and three years of instruction.

Early Learning: Skills, behaviors, and attitudes that young children develop across a range of domains including, but not limited to: social and emotional learning, language and literacy, emergent numeracy and cognition, physical development, and approaches to learning.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): UDL is a guiding framework used to design accessible, empowering, and quality learning environments and opportunities for all learners.

Early Childhood Development (ECD): ECD is used to refer to a holistic set of services for children between ages 0 to 8 including nutrition, health, education, and child protection that ensure children have the best start in life.
pre-primary systems, especially when pre-primary interventions are not achieving their desired impact in terms of educational and learning outcomes.1

This framework should be used to expand access to high-quality pre-primary education for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, with a particular focus on children with disabilities and those living in crisis and conflict contexts. Although the ultimate goal of any pre-primary system should be providing free and compulsory education for all children, most contexts will require a phased approach to programming due to limited resources.

**Relationship to USG Basic Education Strategy and USAID Education Policy**

Investments in pre-primary education support the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education's objective of providing “strong beginnings” for young children through early learning opportunities. Pre-primary is recognized as part of Basic Education in the USAID Education Policy and is a key means of addressing the learning crisis. Pre-primary investments can complement and support USAID investments in early grade and foundational skills programs by providing young children with the opportunity to develop skills, behaviors, and attitudes that will better prepare them for primary school.

**Considerations for Investing in Pre-Primary Education**

Pre-primary education is one of several potential investment areas within the USAID Basic Education portfolio. While high-quality, inclusive pre-primary education can have a significant impact on children’s learning outcomes, a variety of factors merit consideration when determining whether and how USAID will invest in pre-primary education. Framework users should understand the policy landscape, funding envelope, regulatory structures, demand, and levels of pre-primary access as well as the context-specific opportunities, barriers, and resources involved in ensuring high-quality pre-primary access for all children.

Pre-primary education systems vary widely, and no single approach will be appropriate for all contexts. While the framework is intended to provide an overview of the components necessary to providing high-quality pre-primary education, the [USAID How-To Note on Developing High-Quality Pre-Primary Programs](#) can be used to analyze particular contexts and understand which and how elements of a given pre-primary system may need to be addressed in program design, implementation, and assessment. Additional resources for program planning are also listed at the end of this document.

**INTRODUCTION TO COMPONENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY PRE-PRIMARY SYSTEMS**

USAID’s *How-To Note on Developing High-Quality Pre-Primary Programs* highlights quality elements at three levels of pre-primary systems: Schools and Learning Spaces, Families and Communities, and Delivery Systems. Framework users should ensure the integration of the following principles:

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1 The USAID Pre-Primary Framework is closely aligned with UNICEF’s Build to Last framework and the three levels (Schools and Learning Spaces, Families and Communities, and Delivery Systems) are aligned with and include the core functions of the UNICEF framework: Quality Assurance, Family and Community Engagement, Workforce Development, Curriculum Implementation, and Planning and Budgeting. The USAID framework provides an overview of key components and can be used in combination with UNICEF’s document to support pre-primary programming.
- **Equity and inclusion**: Pre-primary systems should first address access for the most marginalized groups and those in vulnerable situations, and ensure that programs are equitable to and inclusive of all children and their families. For the purpose of this document, groups referred to as the “most marginalized” and “in vulnerable situations” include persons with disabilities; those living in and affected by crisis and conflict; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people; rural populations; linguistic minorities; those with a low socioeconomic status; those of a minority race, religion, gender, or ethnicity; Indigenous populations; and other groups marginalized due to specific contextual factors. Programs should initially focus on groups who are traditionally the most marginalized and vulnerable, specifically children with disabilities and those living in situations of crisis and conflict.

- **Adaptation to local context**: Every situation will present different needs, different opportunities, and a variety of stakeholders. While the framework presents an ideal system, users will need to understand the local system and adapt activities to fit the context based on the opportunities and challenges identified using the framework. Overall, the adaptation should also include localization efforts and is not simply about adjusting procurement procedures and providing support services, but rather is dependent on supporting local stakeholders to become change leaders in developing inclusive programs.

- **Cross-sectoral linkages**: Pre-primary education fits within the larger Early Childhood Development system, and will need to build strong linkages with other sectors, including health, social services, rehabilitation services, WASH, nutrition, and child protection, to achieve its goals.

### Exhibit 1: Features of high-quality pre-primary systems

**Features of high-quality pre-primary systems**

The following list of features includes key processes, resources, and behaviors that must be present at each level to ensure a high-quality pre-primary system. While highlighting critical factors, the list is not intended to be exhaustive.
Level 1. Schools and Learning Spaces

Feature 1. Materials and Resources

- Children interact with a range of developmentally appropriate materials that foster language, literacy, numeracy, and a socially and emotionally nurturing environment in the classroom. Materials are designed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to be accessible to all children and provide multiple means of engagement and representation of content.
- Play and instructional materials are available and support children’s development across a broad spectrum of domains.
- Age-appropriate books, including high-interest picture books, are available in a language that children use and understand. These books are available in multiple formats, such as text, braille, audiobooks, and sign language storybooks. Materials should be developed for the local context and culture, and use locally available and locally sourced materials to the extent possible.
- Assistive devices are made available as needed.

Feature 2. Teachers/Facilitators

- Teachers/facilitators are trained on and consistently implement inclusive play-based pedagogical practices.
- Teachers/facilitators foster positive adult-child and child-child interactions and cultivate a safe environment in the classroom.
- Teachers/facilitators, including specialist teachers, are trained on and consistently use inclusive education pedagogies, such as the UDL Framework, that can be applied to reduce barriers, foster participation, and maximize learning opportunities for all learners.
- Teacher/facilitator’s well-being is prioritized, with adequate resources for making contextually relevant support available (e.g., mentoring scheme, learning circles, access to MHPSS services).
- Teacher/facilitator’s mentors/coaches are experienced practitioners with training in developmentally appropriate, play-based pedagogies.
- Teachers/facilitators are trained in and use developmentally appropriate assessment tools.
- Teacher/facilitator’s mentors/coaches provide ongoing support in the classroom using a classroom observation form or similar tool.
- Teachers are trained in community engagement and conflict resolution to inform their work with parents, caregivers, guardians, and communities.

Feature 3. Developmentally Appropriate Formative Assessment

- Assessments are holistic, developmentally appropriate and formative in nature, contextualized, and used to inform instruction that supports children in acquiring the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that will prepare them for primary education. Assessments should not be used as a means of determining whether children are “ready” for the primary grades.
- Assessments should be designed to be responsive to varying contexts (e.g., crisis and conflict) and identities (e.g., disability, gender, language minority, culture, and others).
Feature 4. School Leaders

- School leaders ensure that systems meet the minimum standards of quality as determined by the national regulatory framework.
- School leaders actively reach out to parents, caregivers, families, and community members to engage them in young children’s education.
- School leaders actively seek opportunities to foster cross-sectoral linkages with health, nutrition, and other essential service providers that work with young children and families.
- School leaders actively ensure teachers are highly skilled, support teachers’ motivation and retention by developing a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, and support teachers’ well-being.

Feature 5. Schools and Learning Spaces

- Schools and learning spaces are at an appropriate and safe distance and location for young children, and children have a safe route and passage to school.
- Schools and learning spaces support the transition from pre-primary to primary.
- Quality standards ensure learning environments are safe, accessible to all, violence-free, and secure. Applying both conflict-sensitive and resilience lenses when establishing learning environments will help ensure schools and learning spaces are prepared to continue operating despite natural disasters and extreme weather in areas where those are common threats, and when facing risks and insecurity.
- Learning environments must ensure schools and learning spaces follow the highest accessibility standards and are culturally and linguistically responsive to all students, particularly learners with disabilities. Evaluations are regularly implemented to ensure the environment meets minimum quality, inclusion, and safety standards.
- Trained professionals are able to connect children with early detection, referral, and intervention pathways to receive targeted or specialized support in language, disability, psychosocial well-being and development, and other areas as needed.

Level 2. Families and Communities

Feature 1. Engaging Families and Communities

- Families are actively engaged and full partners in their children’s education, in developmentally appropriate ways both at home and in the classroom.
- Families are kept up-to-date on their children’s learning, and communication with families is in a language and method they use and understand.
- Systems/schools have established a feedback mechanism so that parents’ and caregivers’ voices are heard and inform system adaptation.
- Systems/schools have mechanisms for collaboration and coordination among existing and new community services and resources to ensure families can access comprehensive services for their children across ages and stages.
- Systems consider the importance of offering services during times that align with families’ schedules and needs.
- Systems promote school-family activities that characterize shared values, trust, ongoing communication, respect, and mindfulness of a child’s well-being.
Feature 2. Family and Community Education

- Systems generate a public understanding of pre-primary education as a vital element of children’s development, increasing demand and support for early learning services and improving the accountability of leaders for the delivery and quality of these services.
- Systems support families and communities in understanding that pre-primary education includes familiarity with how to positively engage and interact with children across ages and stages, and offers strategies for families to build their own knowledge and skills to support their child’s education.
- The community is included in various child-focused (e.g., communication, parenting classes) and community-oriented (e.g., volunteering, decision-making) activities to promote local pre-primary engagement.

Level 3. Delivery Systems

Feature 1. Standards, Policies, and Quality Safeguards

- Education systems should set the goal of ensuring free and compulsory access to at least one year of inclusive pre-primary. If available funding cannot provide universal access to quality pre-primary programs, then education systems should prioritize the needs of the most marginalized groups, with a focus on children with disabilities and those affected by crisis and conflict.
- Provision of pre-primary education is anchored within a lead ministry that is empowered and funded to ensure coordination and collaboration among agencies and ministries whose programming affects young children (e.g., health, nutrition), and has dedicated staff with early childhood expertise at all levels of the system.
- The public education system has policies and practices that strive to maintain continuity of learning in crisis situations, including natural and weather-related disasters, pandemics, and armed conflict.
- A pre-primary curriculum is holistic, developmentally appropriate, comprehensive, evidence-based, and offers smooth transitions to primary school.
- Quality standards address staff qualifications, ongoing training requirements, familial roles, the language of instruction, group size and staff-child ratios, positive child and classroom management, and health and safety, with attention to ensuring equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities.
- Initial qualification requirements for pre-primary teachers/facilitators are defined and a core set of professional competencies and standards are established for ECE professionals that respond to the developmental characteristics and needs of young children. Policy provides multiple avenues to licensure, including for currently unlicensed teachers, to ensure the workforce of trained pre-primary teachers/facilitators can meet demand.

Feature 2. Funding or Financing

- Pre-primary is included in Education Sector Plans, humanitarian response and education cluster plans, and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Multi-Year Resilience Plans.
- The individual national budget for education includes a specific line item for pre-primary education that is sufficient to meet national policy goals and commitments for the subsector. Country governments are working toward the goal of allocating sufficient funding to provide high-quality, universal pre-primary education, but the education system may require additional funding from the private sector and other non-state actors to meet national policy goals and commitments for pre-primary education.
• Teachers are compensated equitably when compared to primary and secondary teachers, and regular professional development opportunities are accessible to minimize teacher turnover and maintain high quality.

**Feature 3. Regulation and Oversight**

• A regulatory framework that includes monitoring and inspection for compliance with pre-primary standards is used for all service providers including public, private, for-profit, nonprofit, community, faith-based, and other nongovernmental organizations.

• Data on service provision, quality, effectiveness, and financial expenditure are regularly collected, made available to stakeholders, and used to assess progress and inform adaptations in planning.

• Actors across government agencies and across national, subnational, and municipal levels of government are accountable to the lead ministry for clear roles in pre-primary education. The lead ministry is held accountable for progress toward agreed-upon targets.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Links to additional resources, guidance, and research.

USAID Pre-Primary Guidance

Developing High-Quality Pre-Primary Programs: USAID Education How-To-Note

Evidence Summary: What Works in Pre-Primary Pedagogical Practices

What Works in Pre-Primary: A Review of the Evidence

Existing Frameworks

Build to Last: A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-Primary Education

Nurturing Care Framework

Research

The Case of Brain Science and Guided Play: A Developing Story

COVID-19: A Reason to Double Down on Investments in Pre-Primary Education

Leave No Child Behind: Invest in the Early Years

Tools

ECE Accelerator: Analysis and Planning Toolkit

Learnings for Global Play

Examples of Assessments

International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA)

Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3)