

## a scientifically based framework for defining quality in early education settings

A large volume of scientific research serves to identify the fundamental characteristics of high-quality early education settings. SPROUT is a scientifically based framework for defining early education program quality, created by the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy. The goal of SPROUT is to provide common language to define quality.

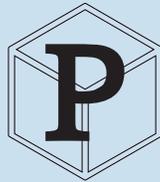


From the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy  
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## CHARACTERISTICS OF A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT



**Secure and sensitive** caregiving environments allow children to explore their surroundings and experientially learn. When teachers and caregivers are consistently warm, kind, and attentive, they create a sense of security within the classroom. These early experiences with adults in the classroom are the foundation upon which children construct future teacher relationships, impacting both academic and social success.



**Playful learning** fosters a child-centered approach where teachers support learning in ways that are developmentally appropriate. In play, children are mentally active and engaged, giving rise to optimal circumstances for learning. Play can involve interacting with peers, which provides a context for practicing important skills such as negotiation, decision-making, and rule following. Play can be used intentionally by caregivers and early childhood professionals to reinforce new skills in ways that further the love of learning.



**Responsive relationships** between teachers/caregivers and children are key to supporting a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Responsivity is a "dance" between the child and adult where the child signals his or her needs and the adult responds in a positive, consistent, and gentle manner. This can be most easily accomplished when the child-to-professional ratio is smaller rather than larger.



**Organized environments** are characterized by predictability and routines. An organized environment allows children to anticipate the future, eliminates feelings of instability, and makes transitions from one activity to the next more bearable. The world can be very overwhelming to a child with lots of changing variables. Organized, stable environments allow children to relax in the comfort of knowing what is coming next.



**Using evidence-based and engaging curriculum** is essential for helping children develop the basic skills necessary to tackle the learning demands ahead. If early childhood education is geared towards getting children ready to meet the rigors of kindergarten, the curriculum must be aligned to the skills necessary at kindergarten entry and include academic, behavioral, and socioemotional skills, all of which contribute uniquely and collectively to school readiness. The most effective curriculum is focused on specific rather than global domains.



**Training and professional development** are essential in both communicating to teachers and caregivers that they are valued and respected as well as ensuring they have the knowledge and know-how to create the most optimal environments, experiences, and relationships associated with positive developmental outcomes. Teachers and caregivers benefit from training in areas such as effective use of curricula, using assessment data to tailor instruction, and providing serve-and-return interactions.