

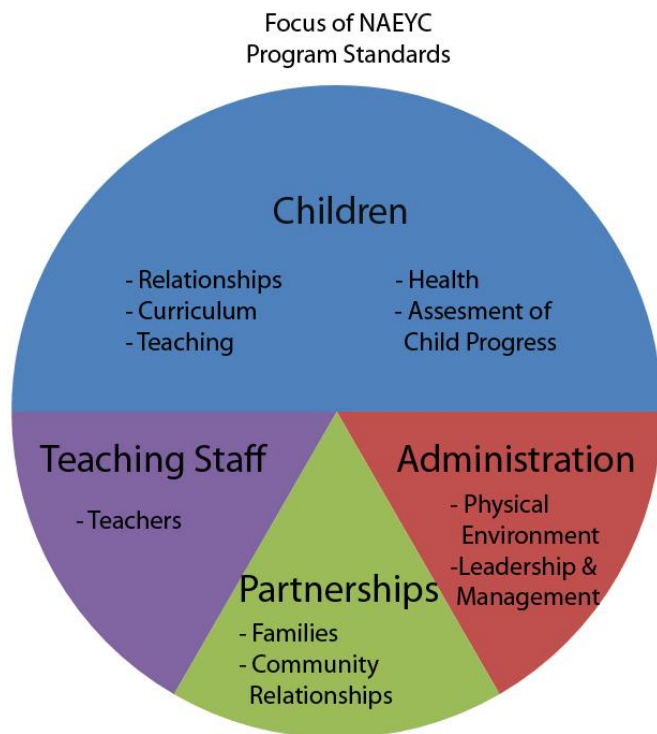
Putting Kids on the Right Track- from the Beginning

The University of Texas Elementary School has committed to developing and maintaining a high-quality early childhood education program. As a demonstration school using best-practices research, we specifically address the diverse needs of urban students and ensure they have the best start to a good education by delicately balancing rigor with a nurturing environment.

Early childhood instruction has an enormous impact on children’s lifelong learning and positively contributes to their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Amazingly, 90% of the brain’s growth occurs by age five. Studies done at Georgetown University show that by age five, children in high-risk environments can already be two years behind developmentally. The gap tends to persist over time, adversely impacting school readiness and lifelong success.



Children who experience high quality early childhood education programs are more likely to stay in school, get and maintain good jobs, and earn higher wages during their adult years. Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman said it best: “The real question is how to use the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports this policy prescription: invest in the very young.” According to the central Texas United Way project “Success by Six,” research shows that every \$1 invested in quality early childhood development saves society up to \$17 in remedial education, welfare costs, court expenses and prison expenses.



High Standards for Young Children

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes in using research on early childhood development and education to work towards building the academic foundation for success later in life. They promote advanced criteria for a high-quality early education programs and specialist training and development for professionals in the early childhood education field.

NAEYC Accreditation represents the mark of quality in early childhood education. UT Elementary is one of only 330 NAEYC Accredited programs in the entire state of Texas. To achieve accreditation, early childhood education programs volunteer to be measured against the most robust and rigorous national standards on education, health and safety.



Fulfilling the Role

UT Elementary opened its doors in 2003 with only pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grades, and added a new grade each year. Over the past six years, we have demonstrated commitment to the education of the whole child.

As a demonstration school, we balance high expectations, rigor, and strategic planning as well as developmentally appropriate practices. Through our research-based curriculum, we implement NAEYC national standards as well as the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) developed by The University of Texas Health Science Center.



The state of Texas and the nation as a whole are looking to nationwide best practices and research to develop programs that provide effective, high quality educational services to our youngest children. UT Elementary follows the best practices outlined by NAEYC - including stressing the importance of free play, and choices for young students. Nap time and extended playground time are part of the daily schedule for pre-kindergarten. According to NAEYC, the importance of naps and play experiences are crucial to children forming early understandings about the natural world, mathematical and early literacy ideas, and social competence.

The national organization Pre-K Now stresses that engaging parents and other family members in the classroom is a key element of a high-quality early education program. NAEYC also stresses the necessity of building family and community relationships. UT Elementary teachers visit their students at their homes, and invite students' family members to participate in

classroom activities as well as workshops where our early childhood educators and school social worker provide training in understanding the school culture of Social and Emotional Learning, effectively communicating with their children, and raising expectations for academic achievement. This type of activity is meant to strengthen the connection between parents and school educators, which will bring positive outcomes for the children for years to come. UT Elementary also works with The Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, to train teachers in the area of early child development, including pre-literacy, social/behavioral competence, and parent involvement.

In order to ensure school-readiness in elementary grades, UT Elementary School's early childhood education program combines the use of NAEYC standards with that of the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM). The TEEM model approach stresses the "3 P's": well-Planned, Purposeful, and Playful. TEEM encourages the use of various "learning centers" in the classroom, where young students are exposed to the alphabet, math, science and other activities in a playful environment. The combination of these two research-based approaches raises the standards of early childhood education and school-readiness.

At UT Elementary, programming and curriculum are aligned pre-k through fifth grade. This includes Response to Intervention (RTI) methods, which demonstrate that rigor, high expectations, and assessment are an important part of early childhood instruction. However, the emphasis on social skills such as respect, empathy, communication, and problem-solving through the Social and Emotional Learning program is also a high priority campus-wide.

In most cases early childhood education methods fade after kindergarten; however, UT Elementary embraces early childhood education best-practices through the second grade with great success. Faculty and staff balance developmentally appropriate practices in all elementary grades - social, emotional, physical, and intellectual.

Focus Ahead

The 'Lil Longhorns who start in the quality UT Elementary early education program have a greater probability of being successful later in life, through middle school, high school, college, and beyond. The economy and society as a whole will benefit from their achievement. Because early childhood education is currently a policy priority in the state of Texas and across the nation, UT Elementary has an important opportunity to share what it has learned with the larger community. In addition to helping the students that attend UT Elementary, the school extends its knowledge of best practices in the education of young children to others. The school will continue to demonstrate best-practices in this area of instruction and broaden its reach in setting the example.

