

What is an Ideal Learning Approach?

An Ideal Learning approach is a holistic early childhood program, model, or tradition that supports young children's growth and development. Ideal Learning approaches share several core philosophical beliefs about high-quality early learning – the [Principles of Ideal Learning](#) – that paint a vision for what every child deserves. These approaches serve young children ages 0-8 in an equitable, relational, play-based, and interactive environment – supporting every child to thrive and reach their potential. While the format and delivery mechanisms of ideal Learning approaches may vary, all include several core components like a unifying curriculum, educator training, and/or professional development.

So far, Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, HighScope, Tools of the Mind, Bank Street, Friends Center for Children, All Our Kin, EL Education, AVANCE, and Educare have been identified as early childhood approaches aligned with the principles of Ideal Learning. While we hope that all early childhood programs embrace and aspire to the Ideal Learning principles, the Ideal Learning Roundtable (supported by Trust for Learning) uses the following criteria (abbreviated below) for consideration of new members.

Commitment to Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice - The approach is committed to providing experiences in which all students reach their full potential.

Strong Alignment with Ideal Learning Theory and Practice - There is deep alignment with Ideal Learning principles and practices. For example, instruction is supported by an intentional, personalized, and developmentally appropriate curriculum that ensures each child's needs are met.

Comprehensive View of Whole Child Development- The approach embraces a holistic view of children that addresses multiple domains of development (physical, social, emotional, cognitive, etc.) understanding that these domains are interconnected with the ultimate goal of developing well-rounded individuals.

Commitment to Meeting the Needs of Children - The approach is responsive to children's basic needs for love, nurture, and care. It recognizes that a warm, loving, and safe environment is important for children to be able to thrive.

Informed by Research - The approach is committed to ongoing reflection, evaluation, and improvements based on research and evidence regarding children's academic, social, and/or emotional development.

Values the Well-Being of the Workforce - The approach values the preparation, training, and compensation of its workforce and encourages ongoing professional learning and fair pay.

Commitment to Expanding Access through the Public Sector - The approach understands that expanding in the public sector will enable them to serve more children, particularly those in underserved communities.

Interest in Advocacy - The approach is interested in collective action to advocate on behalf of the children they serve and for the improvement of education for all children.