



Standards for Accreditation of TEACH Rwanda *Project & Exemplary Schools*

International Best Practices, Learning Settings, &
Materials That Promote Integrated Learning
Through Guided Play & Projects

Project School Accreditation Standards

TEACH Rwanda partner schools are designated initially as Project Schools. The owner and/or administrator has read, understands, is committed to implement, and is expected to demonstrate continuous progress toward, meeting TEACH Rwanda Exemplary School standards. Project Schools develop a continuous improvement plan intended to achieve Exemplary School status and self-sufficiency within 3 years.

Exemplary School Accreditation Standards

I. Teaching Practices Requirements

A. Teacher Education

1. Teachers are fluent in the home languages spoken by children in their classrooms and functionally proficient in English (speaking, reading, and writing). Primary teachers are functionally proficient in French. Teachers agree to increase their language skills through self-study and group participation.
2. School owner/administrator, head teacher, and preschool/primary teachers observe children and teachers, supervised by a TEACH Rwanda representative, for at least one full day in a TEACH Rwanda Exemplary School (Module 1) BEFORE beginning Module 2.
3. Head teacher and others must engage in at least 35 hours of professional development sponsored by TEACH Rwanda (Module 2). A stamped certificate of completion is provided.
4. Teachers agree to continue their education in international best practices through formal college/university study, participation in educational organizations, and professional development opportunities offered through TEACH Rwanda including daily reflections, weekly mentoring (Module 3), and Continuing Professional Development workshops.

B. Enrollment

1. Enrollment is limited to 20 children per classroom with at least 2 well-prepared teachers for preprimary classrooms, 22 children with 1 well-prepared teacher for lower primary classrooms, and 24 children in upper primary with 1 well-prepared teacher.
2. Preprimary enrollment is limited to children ages 3 through 6. Primary enrollment begins at age 6 or 7.

3. Enrollment is open to all children in the community, including those with special needs and from vulnerable families. A scholarship program is available to ensure an equitable balance of children/families in the school.

C. Curriculum Planning

1. The school curriculum may be either the Rwandan Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) or an internationally recognized curriculum.
 2. Head teacher works with staff to prepare learning plans using TEACH Rwanda Weekly Learning Plan forms and other TEACH Rwanda curriculum resources. Learning plans are submitted for review to TEACH Rwanda experts by e-mail at least 2 weeks in advance. Suggestions for improvement are incorporated into learning plans and implemented.
 3. The curriculum focuses on a Rwanda-relevant, meaningful, integrated, engaging *theme* based on children's and teachers' interests that is explored in depth with children for at least one week. Learning plans address all required areas of the school's chosen curriculum. Analytical thinking, creativity, and language and numeracy literacy are featured.
 4. Daily learning plans reflect an enriched curriculum that addresses three key areas primarily through guided free play and in-depth projects
 - a. Construction & Creativity (math/science, social studies, free play, art/traditional crafts, music, Rwandan/world cultures, journals),
 - b. Investigation Outdoors (science, numeracy, Rwandan environment, active play/exploration, nature), and
 - c. Literacy & Imagination (beginning with children's names, storytelling, and expanding into books, poems, journals, writing, pretend play, experience stories, executive functioning skills, in Kinyarwanda, French, and English)
1. Key components of weekly *integrated* learning plans
 - a. DAILY: together, read one children's book/tell a story with props (in English, Kinyarwanda, and/or French)
 - b. DAILY: children explore Rwandan art/crafts/music/traditions
 - c. DAILY: children write and draw original work
 - d. DAILY: support children's social/emotional/brain development: increasing independence, analytical thinking, self-control, problem solving, and executive functioning skills
 - e. AT LEAST TWICE WEEKLY: children explore sand/water/mud/clay
 - f. AT LEAST TWICE WEEKLY: children engage in other outdoor investigations such as tending plants, caring for animals, observing weather, and exploring natural, open-ended materials
 - g. AT LEAST TWICE WEEKLY: children engage in large-motor, active outdoor play
 - h. WEEKLY: goals for children's development of knowledge and skills, key words/sentences/paragraphs, theme and resources for children's exploration
 2. Daily class schedules for *preschool* include about
 - a. 1 hour for large-group, teacher-directed activities and routines (planning time, snack, story time, group games, review)

- b. 2 hours for individual and small-group learning through child-initiated, integrated, and teacher-supported free play
- 3. Daily class schedules for *primary* include two flexible, 3-hour sessions of engaging, integrated learning, indoors and outdoors.
- 4. Weekly learning plans are available for families, community residents, TEACH Rwanda staff, and government officials to review.

D. Daily Routines

- 1. Teachers briefly plan with the group of children to start each day. At least two (2) learning experiences linked to the theme are featured each day in preschool, four (4) in primary.
- 2. At the end of each day, and each week, teachers ask *children* to review highlights of what they learned (KWL charts, journal entries, children's writing and art). Children use public speaking skills to discuss their achievements and challenges. Based on children's feedback and teacher observations of children's engagement and outcomes, teachers identify how well their learning objectives for children are being met and revise plans accordingly.
- 3. Healthy snacks (fruit, vegetables, enriched porridge, bread, eggs) are provided at times suitable for children.
- 4. Children use the bathroom as needed.
- 5. Hands are washed with soap and running water before entering the classroom, before eating, and after using the toilet.
- 6. Every day, teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, curriculum, and interactions. They share how they facilitated children's engaging learning experiences, describe children's feedback about the day, and analyze their classroom practices so they can continue to improve learning through free play and meaningful, engaging projects.

E. Teacher/Child Interactions That Support Integrated Learning and Analytical Thinking

- 1. International best practices (as outlined here) are implemented within a warm, loving Rwandan cultural context. Small group and individual explorations are encouraged. Rote learning/memorization is not an effective teaching method.
- 2. All teacher/child interactions
 - a. support positive social skills and feelings with kind, gentle, consistent, affectionate guidance;
 - b. encourage individualized, hands-on learning through children's play, enriching projects, curiosity, and creativity; and
 - c. nurture each child's development (mental, physical/sensory, social, emotional, cognitive/language/literacy, executive functioning).
 - d. expect children to think and reason for themselves, wonder and ask questions, make logical choices, be responsible for themselves (such as pouring their own porridge), and care for and about others. Encourage children to learn from their successes and mistakes, and to try tasks again or in another way until they succeed.
- 3. Teachers interact in calm, friendly ways with individuals and children in small groups as they learn independently. Teachers coach children to

peacefully agree on their own solutions to their disagreements and to become increasingly self-disciplined.

4. Teachers set up and facilitate learning experiences for children to explore materials using all five senses when possible. Teachers recognize that children learn in many different ways and have varied interests and skills.
5. Teachers support and encourage children's learning by observing their play, projects, and explorations, briefly describing children's efforts and the learning process ("You are looking at both sides of the leaf"), asking children to explain ("Tell me about...."), talking about the materials and tools ("What do you think would happen if...?"), and asking open-ended, thought-provoking questions.
6. For children with differing abilities, teachers and families agree on goals for their development, a plan to address those goals, and assessment strategies. All documentation is kept in children's confidential files.
7. Teachers choose a variety of increasingly difficult children's literature—fiction and nonfiction—to develop early and advanced literacy skills such as an understanding of story, plot, setting, and characters; empathy for others and appreciation of human and cultural diversity, and knowledge about the world around them.
8. Teachers focus on the PROCESS through which children learn. Children are encouraged to figure things out, solve problems, and do things for themselves. Children are urged to represent what they know with art materials, pretend play props, construction with blocks, and other original documentation.
9. Teacher performance evaluations are conducted annually using TEACH Rwanda's Teacher Self-Assessment & Performance Review or a similar knowledge/skill-based system.

II. Children's Progress Records

1. Teachers observe children daily. Teachers write objective notes at least twice a month to document how each child represents his/her learning and to record each child's strengths and areas that need additional support.
2. Teachers use tools such as preschool children's dictation of original stories, writing and drawing of original stories in primary, KWL charts, comparison charts, and graphs to record children's learning and understanding.
3. Individual, confidential records are kept (observation records, work samples, photos) to document each child's learning, including those who have differing abilities. Attendance records are kept for each classroom in accordance with Rwandan requirements.
4. Primary children take part in exams as required by the curriculum being implemented. Children may informally engage in practice exams to prepare for the required exams. Exam results are shared and explained to children's families as ONE way in which children's progress is measured.

5. At the end of each term, an explanatory progress report in Kinyarwanda/English is given to and discussed with each family. Instead of marks and class ranks, children's progress on developmentally appropriate skills and knowledge is identified.
6. Individual progress report results from each term are recorded on a spread sheet for research purposes. Results are reviewed, analyzed, and inform future directions at the end of each term.
7. Teachers analyze their observations of children to identify children with special developmental needs. For each child with special needs, teachers will work with families to develop a plan to set, address, and regularly review individual goals for their children.

III. Family Involvement Group

1. Families sign a contract at the time of their child's enrollment in which they agree to pay a nonrefundable enrollment fee, to pay school fees before each term starts, to see that their child arrives and leaves on time, to notify the school of any important medical conditions, to give the school contact information in case of emergency, and to allow photographs to be taken of their children. A Parent Handbook, outlining all school policies and procedures, including compliance with this document, is given to each family upon the child's enrollment.
2. Families of children enrolled in the school meet as a group at least once a term. Officers and committees are elected each year as required by Rwandan law. At each meeting teachers and families are sensitized about high-quality education, discuss school-related topics, how families can be involved in children's learning, and share practical ideas to promote children's development at home and school.
3. Through the General Assembly, families take leadership roles with regard to decisions such as school uniforms, budgets, and generation of income to support the school.

IV. Learning Environment Essentials

A. Building Requirements

1. Building meets and/or exceeds all Rwandan requirements.
2. Classrooms contain at least 3 square meters per child. Preferred size is 5 square meters per child.
3. Electricity is available in all rooms, with a ceiling light and wall sockets.
4. Building has a kitchen with running water at a sink and an energy-efficient method for cooking, such as gas burners. Kitchen includes secure storage shelves and containers for food.
5. Facility has 2 child-size toilets (separate for girls and boys) and 2 handwashing sinks for every group of children enrolled. Adult bathrooms have at least two seated flushable toilets (one each for men and women) and a sink with running water.
6. Fresh drinking water is readily available for children and staff. A convenient source of clean water is available for water play and handwashing.

7. Building layout includes a school office with wireless Internet service capability, library/meeting room, and sufficient storage for learning materials and children's records.
8. A large, safe, enclosed outdoor play area includes shaded areas, natural spaces with rocks and hillsides on which to climb, area suitable for a kitchen garden, water play basins and recycled learning materials, large containers such as recycled tires for sand play, grassy area for games, and running water.
9. Building has a gate, fence, or other security measures as needed to lock all access to the facility.
10. All features of the building are in good condition: unobstructed entrances and exits; plastered, painted, clean walls; and safe electrical wiring. Rooms are naturally well-lit with glass in lockable windows that can be opened for ventilation. Doors can be locked.
11. Structure is built to high standards of construction. Divisions between rooms are solid walls and ceilings to contain sound.

B. Classroom Furnishings

1. Classroom furniture made by local carpenters when possible:
 - a. Book display shelf placed in quiet area for reading, writing, dramatic play, puppets, and storytelling.
 - b. At least two low, open shelves to display learning materials.
 - c. At least two low, washable tables for children to write, draw, bead, do puzzles, and explore learning materials (preprimary) or child-size tables to accommodate all students in primary.
 - d. At least four benches and/or chairs for children and teachers to sit at tables.
2. Carpet/mat for children to sit on the floor.
3. Rwandan baskets and trays in which to organize and display learning materials.
4. Rwandan art and children's creations hung at children's eye level on walls.

C. Learning Materials Required

1. Rwandan drums, shakers, and other local musical instruments
2. Selection of natural, beautiful, native, and international materials: leaves, shells, rocks, plants, animals
3. Rwandan art used and displayed for inspiration: wood and clay sculpture, textiles, wood carvings, dung art, baskets, jewelry, mats, musical instruments, toys
4. Picture of Rwandan President, map of Rwanda, Rwandan flag, world map or globe
5. Variety of open-ended art media for writing and creative expression: washable markers, plain paper, scissors, beads, chalk, clay (no coloring books/sheets)
6. Collection of high-quality children's picture books in Kinyarwanda and English (preschool) and fiction and nonfiction books in Kinyarwanda/English/French for primary
7. Selection of Rwandan-made dolls (banana fiber, sisal, fabric) and other pretend play items such as recycled hats, scarves, purses, shoes/boots, stuffed animals, puppets, cooking tools
8. Assortment of blocks: wooden unit blocks, table blocks, and/or plastic interlocking blocks

9. Variety of toy vehicles, preferably wood and made by local crafters: cars, trucks, boats, trains, buses
10. Assortment of small, pretend animals and people, made by local crafters if possible
11. Selection of sturdy jigsaw puzzles and matching games, preferably made from recycled materials by local crafters or teachers
12. Several sturdy balls (banana fiber or recycled material), sidewalk chalk, other outdoor play equipment
13. Science and math exploration materials: magnifying glasses, measuring tools, wood scraps, plant materials, stones and soil, animals to care for/observe, recycled materials preferred
14. Soft sand and clean water play basins and tools: unbreakable containers, buckets, sieves, pipes, recycled items such as tires

D. Roles of Accredited Exemplary Schools as Centers of Excellence

Exemplary School

1. Host and guide ECE observers—including teachers, administrators, TTC, TVET, and college/university students—who engage in TEACH Rwanda Level 1 Modules for Introductory Classroom Observations
2. Host and guide visitors—government officials, families, international representatives, and others—to observe and begin to understand a high-quality learning environment and best practices

Professional Development

1. Orient all visitors to TEACH Rwanda's research and proven theory-based approach to the best education experiences for children and teachers
2. Facilitate a reflection at the end of each visit about the observers' experiences, as part of the Level 1 Module
3. Maintain a list of all visitors, including contact information and comments
4. Work with TEACH Rwanda to supervise and coach teachers to serve as role models and mentors to TTC and university-student interns placed in their classrooms
5. Provide space and materials for TEACH Rwanda to conduct Level 2 Modules to Implement Best Practices

Community Leadership

1. Work with TEACH Rwanda representatives to develop sensitivity and commitment within the community and country about the importance of high-quality early childhood/primary education and positive parenting skills
2. Advocate for higher quality early childhood and primary education, family services, provisions for children with varying abilities, and appropriate approaches to literacy in math/language in Rwanda
3. Offer holiday programs for the community, families, and children such as story times, support groups, and other enrichment opportunities

Adopted 2012. Latest revisions approved 23 February, 2020.

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