

Toothbrushing, Evaluations & Educators
New Child Care Regulations Hit January 2010
By Mary E. Hart

Starting in January of 2010, daycare centers both big and small across Massachusetts will need to follow new child care licensing regulations from the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) Board. These new regulations will include the following mandates:

- Child-care workers are now called “educators.”
- Written progress reports must be issued every three to six months that track the cognitive, social, emotional, language, motor and life skill developments of infants and preschoolers.
- Day-care providers must “assist” with toothbrushing after all meals, or for any children on site for four hours or more.
- Nannies must devise a “curriculum” that provides “evidence that programs provide specific, planned learning experiences” and that supports “school-readiness.”

For accredited daycares that are licensed by the EEC, these regulations won’t cause much in the way of change, as they already provide parents with progress reports. Junie Hinckley of Middle St. Learn and Play in Attleboro (508-761-7475) states, “We have rules all the time, just like hairdressers do and real estate agents do. It’s just part of the job.”

Parents of children at accredited centers are already accustomed to what these regulations will require at all centers. Patti Allan of Medfield says, “.We go to a pretty progressive center (Next Generation Children's Center/Walpole branch) and truly believe that our son's daycare providers are ‘educators.’ They are his teachers 3 days a week. We do receive written activity reports daily (includes a list of naps/feeding/diaper changing times as well as a personal note from the teacher outlining our son's day), which we really enjoy reading and it also helps us to keep tabs on his nap schedule while he is not in our care. We receive written "accident reports" in the case of a fall or bump to the head. We also receive progress reports outlining the developmental and social milestones for his age range and which of these our son has achieved, which he is starting to exhibit and which still need work.”

Rosalind Mann, Assistant Director of Metro North Children’s Learning Center in Malden (781-324-2028, www.metronorthchildren.com) says, “We do everything that is going to be mandated by the EEC because we are accredited. Our center implemented tooth brushing back in September utilizing a Head Start practice, so that regulation won’t be an imposition at all. As we all know, budgets are tight and obtaining everything needed to help the children with brushing their teeth does have a cost. The initial cost of the toothbrush holders was reasonable. After that, a dentist donated some instruments to help out, and parents donated some toothpaste.”

Ally Pike of Norwood, who has two daughters in daycare, has some concerns about the requirement for toothbrushing after all meals, stating, “I can't see teachers properly brushing my kids’ teeth and all the other kids at the same time. If it’s required after all meals, they will basically be brushing a child’s teeth three to four times during the day, since they sometimes have breakfast there in addition to AM Snack, Lunch and PM Snack. That seems a bit excessive since our dentist says only twice a day. I'm hoping I

have some say to the number of times, and wonder if there are any studies on too much brushing since that is so much more than most kids and even most adults do.”

Ms. Hinckley also has concerns about the toothbrushing regulation. “By helping children brush their teeth, we’d have to clean up after every child; wear gloves; and the kids will be spitting on the sink instead of in the sink, so we’d have to clean that up as well. We already have a lot of sanitation to deal with as it is, so this will add to that amount.”

Kelly Doherty, Director of Marketing at Little Sprouts, which has 11 locations across Massachusetts (978-291-0256 x42, www.littlesprouts.com), says, “Toothbrushing will be the biggest change for Little Sprouts and we are working on the most effective way to implement this in all of our schools. Once we have a system in place, the toothbrushing will enhance the day by supporting children's self help skills and teach them to take care of their bodies. With the increasingly large amounts of sugar added in to so many foods, the toothbrushing will be a preventive measure for tooth decay, so we support the regulation. Some of our classrooms have already implemented toothbrushing and are serving as demonstrations for the rest of our schools.

“We have been working with local dentist offices to demonstrate the importance of oral hygiene. The November learning unit in Little Sprouts is ‘Life in our Community’ and classrooms will include dentist offices in their dramatic play areas and read books about overall health, including oral health. We are also looking at systems to sanitarily store all toothbrushes. For families, while toothbrushing will become a regulation and therefore not something that families can opt out of, we want to impress that it is the habit of using a toothbrush that we are focusing on, and toothpaste is still a family decision.”