

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards

Introduction to Approaches to Learning Domain



“My friends and I decided to build a house on the floor at our preschool. We had some small wooden blocks, some magnetic blocks, and some Legos that we stacked up to make walls. Lydia said, “We need a roof.” I said, “Good idea, Lydia! We could make it out of magnet blocks.” She agreed and together with our friend, Kylee, we started laying the magnet blocks across the walls we had built. But the roof kept falling down. Kylee said, “I think our walls are too far apart.” We all helped to move them closer and rebuild the roof for our house. It worked! We continued to build more rooms and put roofs on them for the next twenty minutes.”

In the early years, children are learning so many things. Their brains are rapidly developing and multitudes of cognitive connections are being created. They're learning to use their bodies. They're learning the ins and outs of relationships and to express their feelings. Communicating with others and processing language is a big step. Skills and concepts are acquired rapidly during early childhood if children are given the opportunity to explore.

But most importantly, young children are learning how to learn and manage their learning. The domain of Approaches to Learning focuses on the very traits that children must develop so that they can be successful as learners in later schooling and throughout their lives:

- Curiosity
- Engagement
- Persistence
- Inventiveness
- Organizing information

There is research to support the importance of children's approaches to learning and success in school. One study found that children with higher levels of attentiveness, task persistence, eagerness to learn, learning independence, flexibility, and organization, generally did better in literacy and math at the end of the kindergarten school year and the beginning of their first-grade year. In addition, children who approach learning tasks or novel situations with these positive approaches to learning are better able to regulate their learning experiences, and more quickly acquire general knowledge and cognitive skills. (Conn-Power 2006, 2)



The expectations that are set out in the Approaches to Learning domain of the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) show the ways that children demonstrate these approaches at different ages. There is no alignment with the indicators in this domain with the Minnesota Academic Standards for Kindergarten because there is no similar domain in K-12 Standards. Instead, early childhood professionals can turn to other resources for kindergarten expectations.

The Approaches to Learning Domain includes four components:

- AL 1-2 Initiative and Curiosity - Showing an active interest in surroundings, people, and objects. Demonstrating an eagerness to learn.
- AL 3-6 Attentiveness, Engagement and Persistence - Focusing and maintaining attention, makes constructive choices, plans to achieve a goal.
- AL 7-9 Creativity - Demonstrating originality and inventiveness in a variety of ways. Appropriately expressing one's unique ideas.
- AL 10-13 Processing and Utilizing Information – Gathering, storing, and organizing information that is perceived through the senses in order to use or apply in new situations. Constructing and using knowledge.

The sub-components and indicators identified for the ages of birth through kindergarten entry address the specific expectations across the developmental spectrum.

- For infants, indicators focus on the ways that infants show interest in their environment, interact with others and objects for short periods of time, begin to manage frustration, begin to generalize experiences, and recognize cause and effect relationships.
- The indicators for toddlers include how they are beginning to examine the characteristics of objects, make some independent choices, handle transitions, seek out others to play and carry out play plans, pretend, and identify and communicate about problems.
- The indicators for preschoolers focus on how children show their eagerness to investigate new things, engage in play with peers for extended periods of time, persist, experiment with new ways to combine materials, and contribute relevant information to discussions.

The skills and concepts in the Approaches to Learning Domain are highly interrelated to children's development in other domains. Teachers and providers of young children must remain attentive to this important area so they build practice in these skills throughout the curriculum and children develop this important foundation.

Children's ability to stay focused, interested, and engaged in activities supports a range of positive outcomes, including cognitive, language, and social and emotional development. It allows children to acquire new knowledge, learn new skills, and set and achieve goals for themselves. Many early learning experts view approaches to learning as one of the most important domains of early childhood development. (Head Start 2015)

Resources:

Conn-Powers, Michael. 2006. All Children Ready for School: Approaches to Learning. Early Childhood Briefing Paper Series. Bloomington: Indiana Institute on Disability and Community.

Head Start. 2015. Approaches to Learning. https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/sr/approach/elof/a2_learning.html

Domain: Approaches to Learning

Component AL1-2: Initiative and Curiosity

Subcomponent	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years, K Readiness
AL1 Inquisitiveness Child explores the environment and seeks interaction with people and objects; willingly tries new things	AL1.1 Shows interest in the environment primarily through looking and listening AL1.2 Responds to people by looking kicking legs, vocalizing, reaching AL1.3 Demonstrates readiness for new experiences	AL1.4 Uses senses to explore their environment AL1.5 Seeks and taking pleasure in new skills	AL1.6 Approaches new materials in the environment with interest	AL1.7 Investigates and experiments with materials with enthusiasm AL1.8 Tries different ways of combining materials AL 1.9 Asks questions	AL1.10 Scans environment and notices new objects, materials and activities right away. Asks about them AL1.11 Eager to investigate new things and have new experiences
AL2 Wonderment Child expresses interest in novelty	AL2.1 Vocalizes in response to a new person, toy or experience	AL2.2 Bangs, moves, throws and dumps materials with pleasure	AL2.3 Turns objects around, upside down and inside out to examine characteristics	AL2.4 Verbally expresses interest when encountering novel objects or events	AL2.5 Independently seeks out new experiences, objects, or materials for own enjoyment

Component AL3-6: Attentiveness, Engagement and Persistence

Subcomponent	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years, K Readiness
<p>AL3 Attending Child focuses visual and auditory attention on relevant aspects of the environment</p>	<p>AL3.1 Recognizes primary caregiver and familiar objects by touch, sight, sound, smell</p>	<p>AL3.2 Stays focused on activities for a short period of time</p>	<p>AL3.3 Maintains attention for longer periods of time</p>	<p>AL3.4 Returns to an activity after an interruption</p> <p>AL3.5 Engages in play with peers for extended period of time</p> <p>AL3.6 Attends in a large group for short periods</p>	<p>AL3.7 Attends in large group activities led by teacher for sustained periods</p> <p>AL3.8 Participates in large group activities and discussions</p> <p>AL3.9 Listens to others</p>
<p>AL4 Self-direction Child makes choices based upon own interests</p>	<p>AL4.1 Shows preference for people, objects, and food</p>	<p>AL4.2 Makes choices seeking occasional assistance from adult</p>	<p>AL4.3 Makes choices independently</p>	<p>AL4.4 Engages in self-initiated activities for sustained periods of time</p>	<p>AL4.5 Creates a plan to achieve a goal and follows through to completion</p>
<p>AL5 Diligence Child is focused and productive</p>	<p>AL5.1 Repeats actions intentionally to achieve goals</p>	<p>AL5.2 Interacts with others, objects or activities for short periods of time</p>	<p>AL5.3 Seeks assistance then persists to complete task</p>	<p>AL5.4 Works at a task despite distractions</p>	<p>AL5.6 Conscientiously attempts to complete assigned tasks</p>
<p>AL6 Resilience Child responds to challenge by adapting</p>	<p>AL6.1 Calms self when frustrated</p>	<p>AL6.2 When upset, can recover in a reasonable amount of time</p>	<p>AL6.3 Handles transitions comfortably</p>	<p>AL6.4 Copes with change, persists and moves ahead</p> <p>AL6.5 Approaches new tasks with confidence</p>	<p>AL6.6 Maintains a positive outlook in spite of challenges</p> <p>AL6.7 Demonstrates ability to adjust to changes</p>

Component AL7-9: Creativity

Subcomponent	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years, K Readiness
AL7 Immersion Child becomes absorbed in the process of exploration	AL7.1 Looks and listens with intensity	AL7.2 Explores environment with purpose	AL7.3 Shows preference for certain activities, objects and materials through sustained involvement	AL7.4 Repeatedly becomes engrossed in activities of own choosing. AL7.5 Rarely shows boredom when engaged in preferred activities	AL7.6 When interested in a topic seeks opportunities to learn more and satisfy own curiosity
AL8 Playfulness Child demonstrates a sense of humor and imagination in their play	AL8.1 Smile, coos and laughs AL8.2 Begins to be playful with familiar people and objects	AL8.3 Explores and uses materials in new and unconventional ways AL8.4 Observes others when they are laughing and smiles or laughs too	AL8.5 Shows interest in other's play and seeks out others to play AL8.6 Uses a variety of voice inflections and facial expressions in play; laughs	AL8.7 Tries out various pretend roles AL8.8 Experiments with new ways to combine materials when playing	AL8.9 Approaches tasks with imagination and inventiveness
AL9 Production Child expresses ideas, thoughts and opinions and creates products that are unexpected, original and relevant	AL9.1 Shows excitement and pleasure at making something happen (activates mobile by kicking foot, drops toy and hears a "bang")	AL9.2 Wants to do things by self and has own way of doing thing AL9.3 Begins to play with toys, objects and materials in new, ways.	AL9.4 Begins to organize play and carry out own plans	AL9.5 Engages in inventive social play AL9.6 Engages in inventive play with materials AL9.7 Tries out different ways to accomplish a task	AL9.8 Becomes absorbed in the process of creating AL9.9 Purposefully works to create unique products of own choosing

Component AL10-13: Processing and Utilizing Information

Subcomponent	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years, K Readiness
AL10 Working Memory Child stores and retrieves information in order to use it purposefully	AL10.1 Demonstrates understanding of object permanence	AL10.2 Uses some prior experiences to build new knowledge and solve problems AL10.3 Anticipates familiar, daily events	AL10.4 Able to remember and pretend a sequence of events AL10.5 Recites simple songs, rhymes, a short sequence of letters, numbers, etc.	AL10.6 Recalls and follows multi step directions of increasing complexity AL10.7 Recites complete songs or rhymes	AL10.8 Independently carries out all of the steps in daily routines such as putting toys away, preparing for lunch, etc AL10.9 Participates in discussions about familiar topics and contributes relevant information
AL11 Symbolic Representation Child uses sounds, actions, objects and materials (paint, clay, blocks, etc.) to express their ideas and understanding as well as to make new connections	AL11.1 Imitates actions or makes a sound to represent or stand for an object or event ("Arf" for dog)	AL11.2 Acts out a sequence of related actions to recreate personal experiences (feeding teddy bear with a spoon, etc)	AL11.3 Begins to use one object to stand for another in play. (block as a telephone) AL11.4 After exploring and experimenting with materials, labels their creation	AL11.5 Begins to intentionally plan how to use materials to express an idea(may have a story in mind when pretending) AL11.6 Notices written words represent objects, people or events and begins to use in play	AL11.7 Plans and creates elaborate play plots, stories, block structures and art projects AL11.8 Begins to use print as a tool to express thoughts, ideas and to intentionally communicate
AL12 Cognitive Flexibility/ Reasoning Child considers more than one possible outcome	AL12.1 Recognizes their actions can cause a specific response	AL12.2 Notices similarities and differences	AL12.4 Makes inferences based on what is seen, heard, smelled, etc.	AL12.6 Predicts and hypothesizes what will happen next	AL12.8 Draws conclusions and can explain their thinking AL12.9 Considers another point of view

Subcomponent	0-1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years, K Readiness
to a problem or situation; begins to create theories for why things happen; can recognize how one thing relates to or affects another thing		AL12.3 Anticipates what will happen next	AL12.5 Considers possibilities for why something happened	AL12.7 Forms theories about why things happen	and will change opinion or idea when faced with new information AL12.10 Collaborates with others to investigate a situation or problem
AL13 Problem Solving Child seeks and finds solutions to problems	AL13.1 Notices and pays attention to things that seem amiss	AL13.2 Examines objects that don't respond as usual; attempts to make object work as expected	AL13.3 Communicates to others that there is a problem and request that they solve it	AL13.4 Makes guesses about how a problem might be solved and with support is willing to follow through to a solution	AL13.5 Independently attempts to solve problems AL13.6 Explains the possible solution and the outcome AL13.7 Evaluates the outcome of attempted solutions and makes revisions if necessary