

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

Using the ECIPs as an Administrator, Director or Principal



Introduction

Those in leadership roles in early childhood programs – administrators, directors, and principals – are critically important to ensuring that high quality services are provided to young children and their families. The successful use of Minnesota’s Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) by teachers and providers is an essential part in achieving high quality.

“Administrators embrace the central commitment of the early care and education field...to ensure the well-being and support the healthy development of young children.” (NAEYC 2006, 1)

Administrators, directors, and principals have an important role in supporting educators to effectively implement the ECIPs. In order to do so, educational leaders need to:

- Familiarize themselves with the purposes and guiding principles of the ECIPs.
- Lead collaboration efforts with community-based child care in both centers and homes, prekindergarten, and kindergarten programs around the implementation of the ECIPs.
- Support teachers and providers in communicating with families about the ECIPs.
- Assure that assessment processes and tools align with the ECIPs.
- Identify effective ways to use the ECIPs to support children and families in the transition to kindergarten.
- Support ongoing staff development about the ECIPs for teachers and providers.
- Consider ways to integrate the ECIPs in supervision and evaluation processes.

“After teachers, principals are the most important in-school factor impacting student achievement. In fact, research shows that school leadership accounts for 25 percent of student learning...a principal’s role in supporting instruction by recruiting, hiring, evaluating, developing, and retaining excellent teachers is arguably the most important. To ensure that students are learning, principals must help foster high-quality teaching in their schools by providing teachers with valuable feedback on instruction, and offering worthwhile opportunities for professional learning.” (Bornfreund 2016, 2-3)

Getting to Know the ECIPs

Administrators, directors, and principals in early childhood programs need to know and understand the foundational principles and philosophical base for the 2016 revision and development of the ECIPs. It is recommended that all in leadership roles read the full Introduction. Here are some of the key points:

- 1. Development of the standards:** The previous versions (preschool from 2000 and infant/toddler from 2007) were revised, expanded, and joined together in the 2016 version of the Minnesota Early Indicators of Child Progress (ECIPs) to reflect the most current conclusions based on recent research about child development.
- 2. Purposes:** The ECIPs provide a framework that fulfills multiple purposes including providing a resource for early childhood professionals, supporting quality improvement initiatives, and aligning across the full educational spectrum from birth through secondary levels.
- 3. Guiding Principles:** The standards...
 - Support equity and excellence for all children in the state of Minnesota
 - Reflect the most recent research on brain development and how children learn
 - Are observable. They describe specific, observable behaviors.
 - Demonstrate the continuum of the domains of learning from birth to kindergarten entrance
 - Demonstrate the interrelatedness of the domains of learning
 - Enable teachers and providers to plan for the experiences young children need in order to build knowledge and skills and demonstrate learning
- 4. Organization and content of the standards:** The ECIPs provide a framework of generally accepted, developmentally appropriate expectations across six domains or areas of learning. These domains reflect the full range of child development.
 - Social and Emotional Development
 - Approaches to Learning
 - Language, Literacy and Communications
 - The Arts
 - Cognitive Development: Mathematics, Scientific Thinking and Social Systems
 - Physical and Movement Development

Components and subcomponents are identified for each domain. Specific indicators are listed across a continuum of five age ranges, one for each year of a child's life from birth up to kindergarten entry. The age ranges in the new ECIPs are:

- 0-1 year
 - 1-2 years
 - 2-3 years
 - 3-4 years
 - 4-5 years, K-readiness
- 5. Alignment with K-12 Academic Standards:** The ECIPs are aligned with the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards and with the Common Core State Standards Initiative for Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade (CCSS) for English Language Arts. The ECIPs identify the expectations that define what children should know and be able to do at kindergarten entrance.

Collaborating Around the Implementation of the ECIPs

Administrators, directors, and principals can serve as leaders in collaboration efforts with all early childhood professionals in the community around the implementation of the ECIPs. By joining with educators in community-based child care, family child care, prekindergarten, and kindergarten programs, administrators can ensure that the ECIPs are consistently used so that children's experiences are coherent, regardless of the program they attend.

“Connecting with external early childhood providers could help to facilitate the sharing of information and data, coordinate expectations across pre-K and kindergarten, and foster opportunities for shared learning...It should not just be child care centers and Head Start programs trying to help their families navigate the new world of kindergarten and elementary school. Principals should recognize the value in establishing relationships with center administrators and building connections between what happens before children enter kindergarten and after.” (Bornfreund 2016, 8)

Supporting Communication with Families about the ECIPs

Those in leadership roles in early childhood programs can help teachers and providers communicate effectively about the ECIPs by incorporating information about the standards in all of the ways that families receive information from the program. Explanations about the ECIPs and how they are used in curriculum and assessment practices can be included in:

- Marketing and informational materials about the program
- Philosophy and mission statements

- Enrollment documents
- Program-wide announcements and newsletters (both on paper and on websites)
- Program-wide family meetings and events

In addition, administrators, directors, and principals can support teachers and providers as they communicate with families about their implementation of the ECIPs in their classrooms. Teachers and providers can show the ways they are using the ECIPs through:

- Lesson plans, newsletters, bulletin boards, emails, blogs, websites, and social media
- Displays of children's work
- Individualized portfolios, summary progress reports, and conferences
- Planned opportunities for family participation in the program

“By consciously building standards into curriculum plans and assessment tasks and by explicitly gathering evidence of how standards are met, teachers, students, and their families gain a clear sense of what students know and can do. They get to see how students are progressing in relation to the standards, to other students, and more importantly, to themselves.” (Falk 2000, 124)

For more suggestions about communicating with families about the ECIPs, see Brief #7 Using the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress in Parent and Family Education and Engagement.

Assuring Alignment between Assessment Processes and the ECIPs

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment System provides some information so that assessments aligned with the ECIPs are used for all children including typically developing children, children with disabilities, children from diverse backgrounds, and dual language learners with any appropriate accommodations. Teachers and providers are to employ evidence-based, developmentally, and culturally appropriate assessment techniques so that

children ages birth to eight reach their full learning potential.

Educational leaders need to provide appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers and providers to learn more about authentic, observational assessment techniques with the ECIPs as the criteria for evaluation of children's progress. Ongoing support and opportunities for continued learning for educators will ensure that assessment information is informative and linked to curricular planning.

Using the ECIPs in Transition to Kindergarten

The transition from preschool and pre-K programs to kindergarten can be both an exciting time and a difficult one for children and their families. Often, the transition involves a change in location, a move to a larger program with older children, riding a school bus, and facing different expectations for both the child and the family. Administrators, directors, and principals are key players in supporting children and families so that the transition to kindergarten is as smooth as possible.

“Support from programs and schools can help families overcome their concerns about the upcoming transitions, and enjoy the excitement of the changes and opportunities ahead.” (Harvard Family Research Project and Boston Children's Hospital 2013, 5)

“Elementary school principals play a central role in making transition planning about more than welcome sessions and kindergarten readiness packets for families. Principals establish the school culture, ensure teachers from different grades have time to collaborate and plan together, and can build relationships with external pre-K providers that typically feed their school. This is important for coordination of curriculum, assessment, and environments; sharing data; and fostering opportunities for smooth transitions for children and families.” (Bornfreund 2016, 3)

Leaders in early childhood programs can ensure that the ECIPs are incorporated into the transition process.

They can help teachers and providers see that in the continuum of indicators, kindergarten readiness expectations are clearly identified across the domains and age ranges. They can guide preschool and preK teachers and providers as they plan for spring conferences with families prior to kindergarten entry and encourage them to show the ways that each child is demonstrating strengths related to kindergarten expectations. Teachers and providers can invite families to join in goal-setting and identify additional support strategies for those areas most challenging for their child. In addition, administrators, directors, and principals can arrange for preschool and preK teachers and providers to meet with kindergarten and first grade teachers to share cross-program experiences and information.

Here are additional ideas for ensuring smooth transitions into kindergarten:

- **Form a transition team.** Establish a collaborative team of parents, teachers, administrators, and community staff whose members are directly affected by the transition. Include team members that represent the different educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of your community to help develop forms and activities that are accessible to everyone...
- **Train staff to work with families through transitions.** Offer professional development programs for your staff and encourage your partner elementary schools to do the same. Try scheduling joint training or home visits that bring early childhood and elementary school staff together.
- **Assemble a kindergarten transition panel and host a panel discussion session with families.** Convene a panel of experts who can address the specific strengths and needs of your program and community, using the ECIPs as a foundation. Panelists can include parents of current or former kindergarten students, teachers from schools and administrators and representatives from programs that support the unique needs of families (e.g. early intervention for children with special needs).
- **Help families learn how to advocate for their children and access the appropriate resources.** Provide information to families about how

to access extra support for themselves and their children once they reach kindergarten. Offer opportunities for families to share their children's strengths and challenges with their new school.

- **Develop systems for sharing information.** Collaborate with your partner elementary schools and families to determine what types of information should be shared...
- **Develop community partnerships to address children's needs for transitions.** Work with partners in your community who can help ensure that children's physical, mental, and emotional health needs are met as they transition to kindergarten. (Harvard Family Research Project & Boston Children's Hospital 2013, 5)

Supporting Ongoing Staff Development

Administrators, directors, and principals need to ensure that the teachers and providers in their program have meaningful coursework and ongoing staff training and development about the ECIPs, regardless of the age span they care for and teach. The indicators in the ECIPs begins at birth and builds across the age span to kindergarten entrance. The early years are the foundation for children's abilities. It isn't sufficient for teachers and providers to only work on the skills and abilities of children at age four; intentional support prior to age four is important for many children to be fully prepared for kindergarten. Staff development can occur onsite as part of PLCs, coaching, staff or classroom team meetings or in focused training sessions. In addition, statewide training modules (for a total of 8 two-hour sessions) about the effective implementation of the ECIPs are offered. Check the Minnesota Department of Education website for more information. There may also be other regional and local training opportunities about the ECIPs available as well.

Staff development sessions about the ECIPs help further the knowledge of teachers and providers about child development and developmentally appropriate practices. Higher education coursework

and staff development sessions increase familiarity with the ECIPs as well as address the implications of the standards for curriculum and assessment. It is essential that early childhood leaders support and encourage their staffs to take full advantage of all that is offered and provide on-site opportunities to further understanding of the ECIPs.

Integrating the ECIPs in Supervision and Evaluation Processes

The ECIPs are the focus for high quality practices in early childhood programs in the state of Minnesota. Therefore, administrators, directors, and principals need to integrate the standards into supervision and evaluation processes. By doing so, they are making clear the accountability teachers and providers have to integrate the ECIPs into both the curricular and assessment approaches they are using. Such expectations should be made clear at the time of hiring, in job descriptions, and in initial administrative support for new teachers and providers.

Early childhood leaders can turn to Minnesota's Knowledge and Competency Frameworks to learn more about the skills and abilities that are required to work effectively in the field of early care and education. These frameworks support teacher preparation and ongoing professional development for teachers and providers. Three sets of competencies have been developed to date:

- For those working with infants and toddlers.
- For those working with preschool-aged children in centers and school programs.
- For those working in family child care.

The frameworks are the basis for Minnesota's professional development system. The ECIPs are an essential element incorporated into all professional development.

"The core knowledge element of the system emphasizes that early childhood educators need to be equipped with knowledge, competencies, tools and confidence to effectively work with children and families. People working with young

children must be well grounded in child services for young children and families.” (Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Education, and Minnesota Department of Human Services, 4)

As administrators, directors, and principals visit classrooms and observe teachers and providers in action with children, they can focus on how the teachers use the ECIPs in meaningful and appropriate ways. They may make use of a teacher evaluation tool such as the Danielson Framework that will help them identify specific components and elements of instruction and facilitation of learning appropriate for young children. As they conference with teachers and providers to review classroom observations, they can inquire about the implementation of the ECIPs, support effective strategies, and clarify any misunderstandings. As they set expectations and goals with teachers and providers for further professional development, they can relate those goals to effective implementation of the ECIPs.

Conclusion

Administrators, directors, and principals play important roles in early childhood programs. They are leaders in quality initiatives which include using the ECIPs to the fullest to support each child’s growth and development. There are many actions that educational leaders can take to ensure that the teachers and providers in their programs understand the standards, know how to use them in curriculum and assessment, communicate fully with families about them, and continue to grow in their knowledge and application of developmental expectations. Administrators, directors, and principals work together with teachers, providers, and families for the benefit of the children.

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