

Using the ECIPs with the Greater Community



Introduction

The primary purpose of Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs): Minnesota's Early Learning Standards is to support teachers and providers in offering the highest quality care and education services for young children and their families. The ECIPs outline generally accepted expectations for children from birth to kindergarten entry in all areas of learning. This includes language, cognitive, physical/motor and social/emotional development. The standards provide a consistent foundation to the variety of early childhood programs in Minnesota. They are the basis for pedagogy, curriculum, child assessment, teacher preparation curricula, evaluation, and monitoring.

Community members should become familiar with the ECIPs for two reasons:

1. To know more about the ways that early childhood professionals are working to meet the needs of all young children.
2. To determine how they can make use of the ECIPs in their community settings.

It is in the greater community's interest to support high quality care and education for young children. Improved outcomes for children and families build potential to benefit all citizens.

Community members include the families and the extended families of children in early childhood programs. Families care deeply that their child's potential be developed to its fullest. In addition to their parental role, family members are also workers, business owners, members of religious organizations, voters and taxpayers. Families are not the only group that has a stake in the successful care and education of young children; the greater community benefits when each child thrives.

Therefore, community members such as civic and business leaders, employees, volunteers, the medical community, religious leaders and groups, and those that serve in community organizations such as libraries, museums, youth organizations and cultural and recreational centers are all stakeholders in high quality early care and education. As children accomplish developmental milestones, learn, and grow, they move forward:

1. First, toward readiness for kindergarten success
2. Then, on to academic success as they move through their schooling
3. And finally, to become successful, contributing members of the greater community

Every citizen should recognize the benefits of high quality services for children and families – benefits that improve the quality of life in every neighborhood, town, city, and state.

Communities in Minnesota are connected by culture, ethnicity, language, geography and neighborhood. High quality early childhood education supports the optimal development of each and every child regardless of income, ability, race, culture, or special needs. As recommended in best practices, valuing family culture and heritage is essential.

Ways the ECIPs Can Be Used in Communities

Families, teachers and providers, community members, and policy makers can join together in partnership to advocate on behalf of programs for young children and to assure that measures are taken to support high quality services. The Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) are designed to support quality initiatives and improved outcomes for children. Community members and organizations can look to the standards to better understand expectations for what children should be able to know and do and the defining characteristics of quality early care and education that are needed to scaffold learning.

- Local governing bodies use the ECIPs as they make decisions regarding zoning and business regulations that impact child care centers or faith-based programs.
- School boards use the ECIPs as they make decisions about educational issues and services.
- Chambers of commerce and business leaders publicize the quality of life in a community that has excellent education and care for children and plentiful opportunities to support comfortable lifestyles for families.
- Community libraries, local museums, and cultural and recreational centers use the ECIPs to develop programming for young children and families and coordinate with early childhood professionals to connect their services with early care and education programs.
- Youth organizations (such as the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts, or religious youth groups) use the information in the ECIPs about young learners to expand their understanding and approaches for young children.

In addition, community members can refer to the ECIPs when communicating with representatives of government agencies when advocating the issues and/or services with which they are involved. For example:

1. The information in the ECIPs about children's development in the social/emotional domain can be used to inform efforts to advocate for mental health services for young children.
2. Advocates for community library services can turn to the ECIPs for support for the development of children's language, literacy, mathematics and science skills.
3. Professionals planning for community parks and recreational programs can consider the physical development information in the ECIPs.

In this way, the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) become a resource to share with policymakers as decisions are made about development, funding, and support of various community services and organizations that impact the lives of young children and their families.

Conclusion

While teachers and providers are the primary audience for the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (ECIPs), the standards can also be used in the greater community. Community members benefit by becoming familiar with the ECIPs, learning more about this set of shared expectations of what young children know and can do. They learn what it takes to build successful early childhood programs and work in partnership with early childhood professionals to support high quality services for young children. In addition, community organizations make use of the standards themselves to support the quality of services they provide.