

Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

Use of the ECIPs with Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers and the Transitions Between



Introduction

The 2016 revision of the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs): Minnesota's Early Learning Standards made use of the latest research on children's learning from birth to kindergarten entry. The ECIPs are structured to support teachers and providers as they engage in the intentional processes of planning, teaching, observing, documenting and assessing (and beginning the process again!). The organization of the ECIPs is designed to be easy-to-understand and aid in planning for individuals and small groups of children so that children's daily experiences provide multiple opportunities for growth and development.

The revised ECIPs include the following changes:

- The Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to 3 and Minnesota's Early Learning Standards were combined to yield one set of standards for children birth to kindergarten entrance.
- The display of the standards was revised.
- The age ranges were increased so as to make the ECIPs more helpful in planning.
- The primary audience was clarified to be teachers and providers in early childhood programs.

The standards are meant to be used as one document with information that spans across the age range from birth to kindergarten entry. Two key assumptions underlie the new revisions:

1. There are developmental differences in children at different ages.
2. Early educators meet each child where s/he is in his/her development.



This brief will look at some of the specifics related to the use of the ECIPs with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and offer recommendations for practices when transitioning children between classrooms and programs in early childhood settings and into kindergarten.

Structure of the ECIPs

The Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) provide a framework of generally accepted, developmentally appropriate expectations for children from birth to kindergarten entry. They reflect the full range of child development for all of the designated ages across six domains or areas of learning:

1. Social and Emotional Development
2. Approaches to Learning
3. Language, Literacy and Communications
4. The Arts
5. Cognitive Development: Mathematics, Science and Social Systems
6. Physical & Movement Development

The identified age ranges in the ECIPs help teachers and providers see children's learning across a continuum. There are five age ranges identified in the ECIPs, one for each year of a child's life from birth up to kindergarten entry, with a few exceptions.

- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years
- 4-5, K-readiness

The ECIPs are formatted in a continuum so that teachers and providers can identify where each child is performing and easily see what the next expectation is in the continuum. Early educators can use the ECIPs to determine the forerunners to specific indicators and see the next opportunity for growth. As every teacher and provider knows, young children's growth and development doesn't progress in even, measured ways but rather in steps, stops, and leaps. The intent of expanding the age ranges in the revised ECIPs is to aid teachers and providers so that they can determine each child's progression through the indicators and adapt curricula accordingly. The indicators describe expectations for observable outcomes for child by age spans. This helps teachers and providers to plan more effectively, to support each child's continued learning, and identify ways to challenge children, building on what they already know.

Children's development is highly variable and they will not always demonstrate the knowledge and skills identified for their chronological age. They may show some behaviors identified for younger children or may demonstrate skills and knowledge beyond their present age. The ECIPs are intended to be a flexible guide in describing a child's individual progress and in planning for next curricular steps. In addition, it's always important to attend to the capabilities, personalities, interests, learning styles, background and experiences, culture and language, and special needs of each child.

Considerations for Infants and Toddlers When Using the ECIPs

When reading the ECIPs, teachers of infants will focus more on the first two columns of indicators (0-1 year and 1-2 years) while teachers of toddlers will focus more on the second and third columns (1-2 years and 2-3 years). As children are turning three and preparing to move into preschool settings, toddler teachers will need to pay attention to the expectations in the fourth column of indicators for 3-4 years, as well.

Considerations When Planning Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers

There are common factors in the development of infants and toddlers that cross all domains. It is important for teachers and providers to know that curriculum for this age group revolves around four major areas: Social and Emotional; Sensory and Motor; Language Learning; and Investigation and Problem-Solving. Here are more specific considerations when planning curriculum related to these four areas.

1. **Social and Emotional:** Since all healthy development and learning takes place within the context of trusting relationships for young children, building emotional

security with primary caregivers is critical at this age. Working closely with families, teachers and providers learn more about each child and work to gain each child's trust. As infants become mobile, they have a secure foundation from which to move away from and return to as they explore. In their growing independence and assertiveness, this also gives toddlers assurance and support. The social and emotional competence that develops during this period influences all later learning.

- 2. Sensory and Motor:** Children need sensory and experiences at this age. Teachers and providers plan for opportunities for children to touch, feel and explore objects as well as for opportunities to grasp, pick up and manipulate toys and materials. Children at this age need to explore real world items like water, sand and living things as well as be held and rocked and have chances to crawl, walk, climb and run. This requires a safe environment for exploration with close adult supervision.
- 3. Language Learning:** Throughout their interactions with children, teachers and providers talk. They describe what they are doing as they change a diaper or feed a child. They engage in conversations and ask questions, encouraging the growing vocalizations and emerging words. They introduce children to the joys of books and print materials. They plan for language to be an ongoing part of all of their interactions with children.
- 4. Investigation and Problem-Solving:** Infants and toddlers build cognitive knowledge by manipulating and exploring their world and sometimes facing simple challenges. For the youngest infant, the face of a caregiver may be the extent of his range. But quickly that world expands to include many things to stimulate the child's interest and invite action. Planning involves choosing intriguing materials and providing opportunities for investigation and problem-solving.

Considerations for Preschoolers When Using the ECIPs

There are common factors in the development of preschoolers that cross all domains. It's important for teachers and providers to know that curriculum for this age group revolves around five major areas: Social and Emotional; Language and Literacy; Cognitive (Mathematics, Science, Social Systems); Physical/Movement; and the Arts. Here are more specific considerations when planning curriculum related to these five areas:

- 1. Social and Emotional:** Preschool teachers and providers also plan ways to build warm, caring relationships with children and their families. Working closely with families, they learn more about each child's temperament and learning styles. They recognize the growing social skills and assist the preschoolers as they learn to separate from their loved ones and become a part of a group in which they share, work and play together and make friends. They plan for strategies to help children communicate their feelings appropriately, to develop self-regulation, and to learn negotiation and conflict resolution skills.
- 2. Language and Literacy:** Teachers and providers must provide for this age range interesting experiences that naturally expand word knowledge, including story creation and telling. They create opportunities for children to interact with print – in shared book-reading experiences, in a print-rich environment, and in meaningful writing opportunities. They connect literacy to interesting content in the cognitive domains as well.
- 3. Cognitive (Mathematics, Science and Social Systems):** Preschoolers acquire understanding of mathematics, science and social systems as they engage in meaningful, high-level play both indoors and outside. Teachers and providers plan for ways to bring about, support, and enhance such play. They add materials and develop projects that integrate mathematics and science understanding

and introduce new vocabulary. They create multiple opportunities for extensive dramatic play that helps children better understand the roles and responsibilities in families and society.

4. **Physical/Movement:** Preschoolers are active learners; they wiggle and move, run and jump more than they walk quietly. They often have energy that needs to be expended. Teachers and providers plan schedules that include active play both indoors and outside. They offer opportunities for dance, movement, and gross motor games and experiences. In addition, they choose materials that challenge children to refine the use of their small muscles and eye-hand coordination providing support as they move toward writing with purpose.
5. **The Arts:** Preschool teachers and providers recognize that children in this age group are extremely creative and that each child excels in different ways of expressing herself. Some children are drawn to painting and drawing. Others are gifted at construction or truly interested in music and dance. Some engage in dramatic play experiences as if they were on a Hollywood set. Effective teachers and providers plan for a variety of experiences for children to explore their own creativity and to learn more about the arts.

Considerations When Transitioning Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers Between Classrooms and Programs

Chronological age and licensing requirements are common reasons for transitioning young children between classrooms. Some programs also use developmental milestones (such as walking or being potty-trained) that determine when a child moves from one room to another. No matter the reason for the transition, it's important for the staff to

communicate closely with each other, the child and the child's family so that the child is always supported.

All transitions for young children should include these best practices:

- Visits to the new classroom.
- Getting acquainted with the staff and children in that room.
- Inviting the family members to spend time with their child in the new setting.
- Meeting with the family to discuss the curriculum and routines of the new classroom/program and to answer questions that may be raised.
- Communication with everyone throughout the transition.

The important role that the ECIPs play in transition for all children is to establish a set of common expectations for children, across classrooms, homes and program types. Children then experience coherence and consistency in expectations that increases the likelihood of transitions being smoother and making more sense to the child, and of learning and development being scaffolded.

For infants and toddlers, strong bonds with their caregivers are essential and some programs use a continuous care model where the teachers and providers transition with a group of children into the next classroom. The constancy of the care provider(s) lessens the stress for all. Whatever the model used, strong communication between families, the child, the new staff, the old staff and the administrators greatly improves the chances for an easier transition for the children.

When a preschool child moves from one early childhood program to another, the steps listed above take on an additional dimension. The child can ask questions, describe fears or anxiety and receive verbal reassurance. Communication is essential at this age because of the child's longer history and the need to fully share all of this information to. Directors, administrators and teachers from both classrooms/programs must communicate with each other and the parents about the needs of the child, the goals the parents have and the experiences of the child at the previous program.

Considerations When Transitioning Preschoolers into Kindergarten

As children finish their preschool years and transition into kindergarten, they continue to need the same kinds of supports. Preschool teachers and providers should communicate with the kindergarten teachers in their community. They can share the documentation, notes and assessments they have of the children. They can learn more about plans for classroom visits and family meetings. In addition, to improve the transition, teachers and providers can provide information about kindergarten registration and screening to the families of the children in their preschool program. Although the ECIPs end at kindergarten entry, they are linked to kindergarten expectations and standards so the child experiences a continuum of expectations. When preschool teachers and providers and kindergarten teachers work in partnership, all children benefit. By providing transition support from both programs, teachers ensure that children start kindergarten in the best possible way.

Conclusion

The revised ECIPs address children's development from birth to kindergarten entry. The specific indicators identify observable outcomes for children at different ages. The format and information in the ECIPs is designed to help teachers and providers know more about the age group with whom they work, as well as adapt curricular approaches for children's individual differences and needs. Such adaptations require attention to curriculum, assessment and transition support that are just right for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers so that each child is successful and thrives in his or her early childhood setting.