



Department of Early Education and Care

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EEC Child Care Licensing

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Documenting Progress with Portfolios: Getting Started

Portfolios are collections of children's work that show their abilities in a number of areas, or developmental domains. These include cognitive, social/emotional, language, fine and gross motor and life skills. When done well portfolios reflect the day-to-day growth and learning activities of the children, and show progress and achievement over time. They provide a rich, authentic, realistic portrait of a child's abilities, and are a powerful way to communicate a child's performance to parents and educators.

For very young children the work of completing the portfolio falls mainly to the educator. The educator will collect samples of the child's work (for example drawing or writing) and include them in a folder, binder or large envelope. Each sample of the child's work should be labeled with the child's name and the date it was done. Photos or videos of the child building a block tower, taking early steps or playing chutes and ladders with friends may be used to illustrate the child's activities in other areas. An audio tape recording of the child babbling, asking questions or singing songs or can be used as evidence of the child's language development.¹

School-age children can help create their own portfolios by choosing what samples of work they would like to include. They can explain why they have chosen a particular piece of work, and if they are able they can write down their reasons. If they are not yet able to write, the educator can write down their explanation for them. Older children may be able to see for themselves how their work has changed over time, and it is a good idea to write down their observations as well as your own and keep them in the child's portfolio.

Portfolios are most useful when they include multiple examples of the child's work in each area of development. Educators may want to use a checklist for each child that includes all of the developmental domains and provides room to mark the date that the work was collected/photographed/recorded. This checklist should be reviewed periodically to make sure that every area has been sampled more than once. Educators may want to plan to observe and collect evidence for a particular child or children on an assigned day of the week, or may want to observe all of the children in a particular activity center on a certain day, and move on to another activity center the next day.

¹ Educators must obtain written parental consent for video or audio recording or photographing children, and may not use such recordings for any purpose other than that to which the parent has consented.

Because child development happens across developmental domains, children's work will often reflect a child's skills in more than one area. In general, something should be added to each child's portfolio every two weeks. Educators should observe children when they are playing alone and with others, and at various times of the day. Educators should pay particular attention to children who are learning new skills, and try to document those, so that the portfolio is a record of children's growth and success.

In addition to documenting a child's skills across developmental domains, it is also useful to collect work that reflects the required curriculum areas of English language arts, mathematics, science and technology/engineering, history and social science, comprehensive health and the arts. For very young children English language arts may be represented by an audio recording of the child babbling or repeating words, while for an older child a story written by the child may be saved for the portfolio. Photographs of children engaged in science projects, or counting out raisins for a snack can illustrate science and mathematics, depending on the child's age and interests. Once educators are familiar with the developmental domains and the curriculum areas it will be easy to see examples in each child's every day activities.

Portfolios can take a number of forms. Colored pocket folders, large manila envelopes or expandable file protectors can all be used to store children's work. Binders with page protectors, plastic storage boxes, or new (unused) pizza boxes (donated by a local pizza shop) can all be used, depending on available storage space. Children may be asked to decorate the cover of their portfolio, which may be the first work sample in the area of the arts!

Once the educator has collected children's work (or photos, video or audio recordings of their skills) over several months, the educator should review the work and make some notes about the differences between the early samples and the most recent ones. These notes, together with the work samples themselves, form the basis of the child's periodic progress report. As always, progress reports should only include factual information stated in a positive way about the skills and abilities demonstrated, and should never include assumptions or opinions about why a particular skill or ability has or hasn't developed. In addition, it is necessary to be sure that the work samples collected include information only about the child whose report is being written, and does not breach the confidentiality of other children in the group.