



Department of Early Education and Care

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EEC Child Care Licensing

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Progress Reports

Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) regulations require licensed programs to prepare a written report periodically documenting the progress of each child in the program. The program must provide a copy of each report to the child's parent(s), offer parents an opportunity to discuss the report, and maintain a copy of the report in the child's record.

Progress reports serve a number of important purposes. They are an important tool in developing a partnership between educators and parents to promote the child's growth and development; they can help the educator learn about each child; they can be useful in planning activities to meet the needs of individual children; and they form a useful record that can help the child and family transition more smoothly to another program, to another classroom or to kindergarten.

Educators and parents are interested in learning about a child's development. Educators and parents first share information about the child at the time of enrollment, which helps set a baseline for measuring the child's later progress. Once the child is enrolled in the program, it is important to gather information to document his/her growth. This can be done by observing the child in an ongoing way and recording the child's activities and skills. Families can help in this process by talking with educators about how they see their child at home or in other social settings outside the program.

Observation

There are several methods for recording children's progress.¹ Each method depends on documentation *over time*. Because child development is not smooth or even and because a child's performance may not reflect his/her true abilities on a day when s/he is tired or not feeling well, it is important not to rely on observations made on a single day or in a single week. In addition, child development varies across the developmental domains. Educators must observe children as they are involved in a variety of activities that draw upon different skills, including cognitive, social/emotional, language, fine motor, gross motor, and life skills. It helps to keep a list or a chart of which children have been observed, the types of skills that have been observed (cognitive, social/emotional, fine or gross motor, language, life skills), and the dates of observation. This list or chart helps to ensure that no child and no developmental domain is overlooked.

¹ Programs using standardized assessment / progress reporting tools (such as Ages & Stages Questionnaire, High Scope / Child Observations System, Work Sampling System, Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum) should continue to use those tools to satisfy progress reporting requirements.

Documentation

Anecdotal Notes. One method of recording children's progress is to take "anecdotal notes" of the child's activities from day to day or week to week. These notes simply and briefly describe what the child is doing; for example, is the child interacting with other children or playing alone? Is the child reading, drawing, writing, building a block tower, dressing up in play clothes, riding a bike? Did the child choose her own activity, or respond to a suggestion from an educator or an invitation from another child? Is the child playing silently, or talking or singing to herself or others nearby? Documentation should be specific; for instance, how high is the block tower (how many blocks?); what book is the child reading; how many different colors is the child using in her drawing, how steadily is the child able to ride the bike, and is it a tricycle or a bicycle, with or without training wheels? Observations should be made weekly or every other week and documented immediately (including the day and time of the observation and the name of the person documenting the information) so that the information will be reliable and will illustrate progress over time.

Portfolios. Another way to document children's progress is by developing portfolios of their work. Each child should have a folder or a large envelope in which you can put samples of their writing and drawing, as well as photographs of the child engaged in other activities. A picture of a child next to a block tower she built that is as tall as she is says a lot about fine motor control, and a picture of a group of children happily engaged in a game of "Go Fish" is a nice way to document their cognitive development, as well as their social skills. Periodic tape recording of a child's speech is another valuable (and fun!) way to record a child's (spoken) language development. Writing (for a child too young to write) the "story" a child tells you is another way to record his imagination and language skills. Depending on the ages of the children, they may be able to take part in deciding which samples of their work (or which pictures) go into their portfolios.

Checklists. A third way to document children's progress is to use a developmental checklist. This is a document that lists many of the skills that children in a particular age group usually learn. It can be completed both by parents and by educators, based on what they have seen a child do recently at home or in the early education and care program. The checklist gives an idea of how a child is doing in comparison to an "average" child of his or her age. Because all children grow and develop at different rates, checklists cannot be used to "diagnose" developmental problems. However, they can be used to identify skills that a parent may want to watch for or talk to a pediatrician about if they do not develop within the usual time frame. More importantly, a developmental checklist repeated at various intervals can highlight the child's growth and development over time.

Research-Based Tools. There are a number of well-designed tools available for purchase that can be used to assess children's skills, developmental levels and/or progress over time. These tools have been tested and proven to be reliable and valid when used as intended by their authors. They utilize a variety of methods, including those described above, and are often accompanied by training to promote their appropriate use and interpretation. One advantage of using research-based tools is that the information gathered from their use can be accurately used to measure progress of a child over time in the developmental domains if properly administered. Among the available research-based tools are four that have been approved by EEC for use in the Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Program: the Ages & Stages Questionnaire; the High Scope /

Child Observations System; the Work Sampling System; and the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum. All of these publishers have variations of their tools for all ages and for most types of care. To see an example of a research based tool, see <http://www.brookespublishing.com/tools/index.htm>

Reporting to Parents

Whatever method of observing and documenting behavior is used, the educator will need to take time to review the information gathered, and to consider how best to share that information with parents. Some research-based tools provide their own formats for sharing information with parents. No matter what tool is used, it is important to be sure that the information that is shared relates only to the individual child, and does not include confidential information about other children in the group. It is also important to be sure that the progress report is dated and signed by the person making the report. It is generally not helpful to share the original anecdotal notes with parents, since they may contain shorthand and jargon. The information from the anecdotal reports should be summarized in words the parents can understand. The report should be concrete and positive and focus on what the child can do, rather than what the child can't do, without any explanation or suggestion of why the child does or doesn't do certain things. Since children grow and change quickly, it may be helpful to say that a child "is beginning to develop" a certain skill, rather than saying that the child "is having difficulty" or "can't do it yet."

Checklists also require some explanation when being shared with parents. They represent a child's development at a particular point in time, and the child's skills may change within weeks or even days. It is important to be sure that parents understand that a child is not considered "delayed" if s/he has not mastered every skill on the checklist for his/her age group. Many checklists cannot be considered screening tools, and are useful only to show parents some of the skills that the child has mastered, what new skills have been mastered since last report, or what skills the child can look forward to learning in upcoming months.

Portfolios should be accompanied by an explanation of the skill or developmental domain that is being illustrated by the work sample, and why it was included. If samples have been collected over a period of time within the same domain, it is useful to make a direct comparison of the work so that parents can see the change. Older children may wish to write (or tape record) their own explanation of the materials in their portfolio to be shared with parents.

Summary

Whatever method is used, observing and documenting behavior regularly focuses the educator's attention on each individual child. Reviewing the information gathered and reflecting on it will help the educator to know the child better and to draw appropriate conclusions about the child and the program curriculum. This supports a positive relationship between educator and child and between educator and parent. In addition, it gives the educator the information she needs to tailor program activities to meet and extend the skills and the interests of each child.