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Resources for Early Learning

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Early Childhood Assessment

Early childhood assessment is a tool used to gather and provide educators, parents, and families with critical information about a child's development and growth. In Massachusetts, licensed early childhood programs are now required to include a child assessment component in their programs. Here we have included information and resources to inform educators on early childhood assessment programs.

What is childhood assessment?

Childhood assessment is a process of gathering information about a child, reviewing the information, and then using the information to plan educational activities that are at a level the child can understand and is able to learn from.

Assessment is a critical part of a high-quality, early childhood program. When educators do an assessment, they observe a child to get information about what he knows and what he can do.

Observing and documenting a child's work and performance over the course of a year allows an educator to accumulate a record of the child's growth and development. With this information, educators can begin to plan appropriate curriculum and effective individualized instruction for each child.

This assessment record is also a great tool to share with parents so they can follow their child's progress at school, understand their child's strengths and challenges, and plan how they can help extend the learning into their homes.

Why is assessment important?

Assessment provides educators, parents, and families with critical information about a child's development and growth. Assessment can:

- Provide a record of growth in all developmental areas: cognitive, physical/motor, language, social-emotional, and approaches to learning.
- Identify children who may need additional support and determine if there is a need for intervention or support services.
- Help educators plan individualized instruction for a child or for a group of children that are at the same stage of development.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses within a program and information on how well the program meets the goals and needs of the children.
- Provide a common ground between educators and parents or families to use in collaborating on a strategy to support their child.

What are different child assessment methods?

Methods of child assessment can be informal (conducting natural observations, collecting data and children's work for portfolios, using educator and teacher ratings) and formal (using assessment tools such as questionnaires and standardized testing). Both methods are effective and can help inform educators and parents about a child's progress.

- Observations can be made with minimal or no intrusion into children's activities. Educators can observe all facets of development, including intellectual, linguistic, social-emotional, and physical development, on a regular basis.
- Portfolios are a record of data that is collected through the work children have produced over a period of time. The collection clearly shows the progress of a child's development. Portfolios can be an important tool in helping facilitate a partnership between teachers and parents.
- Educator Ratings are useful in assessing children's cognitive and language abilities as well as their social-emotional development. These ratings can be linked to other methods of assessment, such as

standardized testing or other assessment tools. (See the next question below.)

- Parent Ratings integrate parents into the assessment process. Parents who are encouraged to observe and listen to their child can help detect and target important milestones and behaviors in their child's development.
- Standardized Tests are tests created to fit a set of testing standards. These tests are administered and scored in a standard manner and are often used to assess the performance of children in a program.

What are different types of child assessment systems?

There are two different types of assessment systems. Both are used to guide decisions about a child's development and program resources.

1. Program-developed child assessment tools are developed to align with a specific program's philosophy and curriculum.
2. Published child assessment tools have been researched and tested and are accepted as a credible source in assessing children's development.

The following assessment systems, used by early education and care programs across the state, are recommended by and available through the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care:

- **HighScope COR (Child Observation Record)**
Educators follow COR's three step process: 1) observe and record, 2) score, using the OnlineCOR, and 3) report findings to share.
<http://www.onlinecor.net>
- **Teaching Strategies GOLD**
This strategy bases its assessment around 38 objectives that are important to early childhood education.
<http://www.teachingstrategies.com>
- **The Work Sampling System**
The system is structured so that the combination of student portfolios and guidelines and checklists create the assessment for the educator.
<https://www.worksamplingonline.com>

How do you implement assessment into your program?

The process of choosing the right assessment tools varies for each early childhood program. Below are some general guidelines for implementing assessment into your program.

- **Assessment aligns with instructional goals and approaches.** Different types of assessments have different purposes. It is important to first determine what should be measured; then find the assessment program that best assesses those goals.

- **Assessor knows the child.** The adult conducting the assessment should have a pre-existing relationship with the child. Ideally the assessor is the educator.
- **Assessment is “authentic.”** Assessment should take place in a child’s normal setting. The assessment should reflect everyday relationships and experiences. It should be conducted in familiar contexts and settings (such as the classroom).
- **Observations are ongoing and diverse.** For a comprehensive assessment, observations should be made at a variety of children’s activities and be ongoing in order to fully see the progress of a child.
- **Assessment is a cycle.** Although specific methods for assessment tools vary, the process is cyclical. The cycle allows educators to make changes to their curriculum to better serve children in their program. The cycle is as follows:
 - Instruct.
 - Observe. Observe children in various situations.
 - Document, Reflect. Record while observing or as soon as possible.
 - Analyze, Evaluate. Study the data with assessment tools. The assessment comes from the combination of documentation and evaluation.
 - Summarize, Plan, and Communicate. This informs a child’s specific needs and future curriculum.
 - Instruct. (The cycle repeats.)

The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) support the use of child assessment systems in preschool settings to help educators individualize instruction and improve programs. To find more information on early childhood assessment, visit the EEC website (<http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/department-of-early-education-and-care>) and click on “Birth–Grade 12” at the top of the page.

Additional Assessment Resources

Organizations and Websites

- Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC)
<http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/department-of-early-education-and-care/>
 - EEC Professional Development search form:
www.eec.state.ma.us/ProfessionalDevelopment/WebFindTraining.aspx
 - Early childhood assessment presentations:
<http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education->

[and-care/curriculum-and-learning/early-childhood-assessment-presentations.html](#)

- Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children (MassAEYC)
www.massaeyc.com
- Early Childhood News
www.earlychildhoodnews.com
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
www.naeyc.org
- National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
www.nieer.org

Books

- *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How* by the [National Research Council](#). Catherine E. Snow and Susan B. Van Hemel, eds. The National Academies Press, 2008.
- *The Power of Observation: Birth through Eight* (2nd edition) by Judy R. Jablon, Amy Laura Dombro & Margo L. Dichtelmiller. Teaching Strategies Inc., 2007.
- *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education* (Early Childhood Education Series) by [Stacie G. Goffin](#) and Valora Washington. Teachers College Press, 2007.
- *Spotlight on Young Children and Assessment*. Derry Koralek, ed. NAEYC, 2004.

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