

EELS

EARLY LEARNING SCALE



Family Guide

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EARLY EDUCATION RESEARCH

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Children learn best while playing...

When I play with blocks, I am making discoveries about sizes and shapes.



When I explore nature, I am learning how to use tools to gather information.

When I play with dinosaurs, I am developing my imagination and creative thinking abilities.



When I play with table toys, I am strengthening my fine motor skills.

...and we learn best about children by observing, documenting, and evaluating their learning through play.



When I play dress-up, I am developing role-playing skills and learning how to express myself.

Dear Family,

Preschool marks the beginning of a thrilling time in your child's life. It is a period of extraordinary growth and development, packed with new experiences that your child will be eager to share with you. You can look forward to hearing from your child—and from us, your child's preschool teachers—about all the exciting activities that happen each day at school.

Your child will spend lots of time playing, because that is how preschool children learn best. She'll be encouraged to explore blocks, dolls, art materials, musical instruments, and much more. As she plays, we will observe her and guide her. We'll help her strengthen her current abilities and learn new skills.

Children enter preschool with a wide range of experience and knowledge, and they each develop at their own pace. To plan activities that are appropriate for each child, we teachers constantly observe and record our children's changing abilities. We need to know what individual children can already do and what they are ready to learn. To help us monitor each child's development and share that information with their families, we use a tool called the Early Learning Scale, or ELS. Our children's families can use the ELS to share specific, detailed information with us. This creates a partnership between families and teachers that maximizes each child's learning experience.

You are your child's first and most important teacher, and you will continue to play an essential role in your child's education. This guide explains how the ELS can help us form an effective partnership. We hope you will take the time to review it, and feel free to ask us any questions you may have. We welcome you as our partner in preparing your child for success!

Sincerely,



Sharing information lets families and teachers work together to give children the best learning experiences.

What is the Early Learning Scale?

The Early Learning Scale (ELS) is a system for assessing the development of preschool children. It helps us evaluate the progress your child is making in three key educational areas, or domains: Math/Science, Social-Emotional/Social Studies, and Language and Literacy. Educators have determined that competence in these domains is critical to your child's future success in elementary school. (You'll find more information about these domains beginning on page 6 of this guide.)

Preschool children are highly individual in their development. Each child masters important skills at a different pace, and their abilities change on a daily basis. So, rather than comparing your child to other children, we use the ELS to assess your child's progress over time. We compare what your child can do now with the abilities he showed a few weeks or months ago. Because the ELS tracks individual progress, we can use it for all children, including children who do not speak English at home and children who have disabilities.

We use the ELS as a guide to help us observe our preschool children in their daily play. We document our observations by making specific notes about what each child knows and can do. We also collect samples of our children's work. The notes and samples are stored and organized in a separate portfolio for each child.

We combine this information with information that you provide to plan appropriate activities for your child. And we share what we observe with you. This keeps you aware of your child's development so you can provide more learning opportunities at home.



How does the ELS help my child?

We use the ELS as a guide while we observe your child at play. We pay close attention to what your child is doing and note what skills she is demonstrating. We may ask her questions or suggest new activities to find out more about her current abilities in the domains of Math/Science, Social-Emotional/Social Studies, and Language and Literacy. And we collect samples of your child's work in these learning areas.

Next, we evaluate the information and samples. We compare it to previous assessments of your child and also to general preschool learning expectations. This allows us to set new learning goals, prepare an appropriate learning environment, and suggest activities that will help your child progress. We use the assessment to help your child celebrate what he has learned and encourage him to focus on more challenging tasks.



Sign-in time provides an opportunity to observe whether your child can recognize his or her own printed name, or which letters your child can identify.

Counting skills may be evaluated as children play with small objects like these teddy bear counters.



How can families and teachers create a successful partnership?

Families have a key role in their children's development. You were your child's first teacher, and he will continue to learn from you. Now that your child is in preschool, we teachers will be your partners in helping your child learn and grow.

To make our partnership a success, it's important to share information with each other. As we observe and assess your child over time, we'll tell you what we learn. We'll schedule formal conferences to explain how your child is growing and what he is learning. At these conferences, we'll review your child's portfolio and discuss the Child Accomplishments Summary form. We'll also share information more informally when you drop off your child or pick him up at the end of the day.



During conferences, we'll review and discuss your child's portfolio. It includes our observations and notes along with samples of your child's drawings, writing, and artwork. You can ask to see your child's portfolio at any time.

The Child Accomplishments Summary covers Math/Science, Social-Emotional/Social Studies, and Language and Literacy. It tells you what your child has learned during the past few months and what he will be learning next.

During both formal and informal conferences, we hope you will also share your observations with us. Children often demonstrate different skills and interests at home than at school, so you have knowledge about your child that we may not have. When you see your child trying something new or demonstrating a skill you haven't seen before, make a note so you can tell us about it later. By sharing information, we can work together to help your child succeed.

What will my child learn in preschool?

At school, your child will enjoy many activities that support three domains, or subject areas: Math/Science, Social-Emotional/Social Studies, and Language and Literacy. We focus on these domains because research has shown that each one is critical to future success in elementary school.

Math/Science

Preschool experiences in Math/Science strengthen your child's problem-solving and logical-thinking skills. Your child will practice counting and will discover how numbers can be used to solve problems. She will explore shapes and patterns and learn how and why we measure things. These early math experiences will give her a foundation for future success in geometry and algebra.

Preschool science activities use children's natural curiosity to build their investigative skills. Your child will learn how to make observations and use scientific tools. He'll be encouraged to ask questions, develop plans to find answers, and read and write about concepts that interest him.

Language and Literacy

Language and literacy skills develop dramatically during preschool. Your child will progress from listening to stories and recognizing some letters to forming letters and even reading some words. Her reading and writing skills will continue to grow, providing a foundation for pleasure and learning that will extend through elementary school and beyond. As your child reads new stories and explores books about topics that interest him, he will discover how exciting reading can be. At the same time, his vocabulary will expand rapidly, and he will enjoy sharing ideas, experiences, and desires with other children and adults.



Copying and extending patterns prepares your child to understand more complex math concepts.



Scribbling and drawing build a foundation for future writing skills.

Social-Emotional/Social Studies

One of the most important areas of development for preschool children is social-emotional skills. Learning to work with others, control impulses, and understand other people's feelings will help your child succeed in all areas of life. Social-emotional skills develop as your child plays and works with other children to create, act out, and tell stories; pretend to be favorite characters or animals; and find creative new uses for materials and objects in the classroom.

How can you help your child grow and learn at home?

To support your child's development, it's important to provide home activities that reinforce the skills your child is learning in school. You'll find it's easy—and fun!—to include learning opportunities in everyday routines. Following are some suggestions to get you started. If you or your child think of more ways to practice new skills at home, please be sure to share them with us!

Overall Development

Let your child know that you value education by showing enthusiasm and interest in her preschool experiences. Take time to talk to her about her day. Asking "What did you do in school today?" is a good start, but you'll learn more by prompting for specific details such as:

- What learning center did you go to today?
- What book did you read today? Tell me what happened in the story.
- Who did you play with today? What did you do?
- Where did you play today?
- What was in the sand table today? Tell me about it.
- What song did you sing today? Will you teach it to me?



Pretending and role-playing help your child develop empathy for others.

When your child brings work home, be generous with your praise. Focus on your child's efforts rather than the results, and encourage him to express pride in his work. For example, say:

- Tell me about what you made.
- It looks like you worked hard on this! How did you do it?
- I can see that you're proud of this. What do you like about it?
- It sounds like you enjoyed doing this project. Why was it fun?

Try some of the following activities to reinforce your child's skills in specific domains.



Math/Science

- Invite your child to help you measure ingredients when you prepare food.
- While cleaning up, provide boxes or bins and encourage your child to sort the toys into categories.
- When simple math problems come up, ask your child for ideas about solving them. For example, "How could you and I share these strawberries evenly?"
- Have your child help you sort laundry and put socks into pairs.
- Choose a number, shape, or color and hunt for examples around the house.
- While grocery shopping, ask your child to put a certain number of objects into the cart.
- Count silverware, dishes, and napkins as you set the table together.
- Ask, "How many sinks (windows, doors, etc.) are in our house? How could we find out?"
- While running errands, look for and identify numbers on traffic signs, houses, and billboards.
- Count stairs as you walk up them. Count backward as you walk back down.
- Count the people waiting at the doctor's office. Then count their feet by twos.
- Look for patterns around the house and describe them to each other. Ask, "What would come next in this pattern?"
- Use comparison words to talk about objects. For example, "Which of these towels is the biggest?" or "Is the cereal box taller or shorter than the juice box?"
- Practice measuring things with rulers, measuring cups, and scales.
- Take a walk around your neighborhood and discover things that interest your child. Collect leaves, pebbles, or other small objects. At home, sort the objects into groups or arrange them by size.
- Model how to use books, the Internet, nonfiction magazines, and other resources to find the answers to science questions that your child asks.

Language and Literacy

- Visit the library and pick out books. Examine the covers, read the titles, and look at some of the pictures. Then ask your child what she thinks each book is about. Which ones would she like to take home and read with you?
- Read to your child and discuss the story afterward. How was it similar to things your child has experienced or other stories he has read? How was it different?
- Encourage your child to describe things by asking open-ended questions such as, “How did you build this block tower?”
- Use and explain words your child may not know and then listen for your child to use them.
- When reading stories with lines that rhyme, pause before the rhyming word to let your child complete the couplet.
- Play with sounds during everyday activities. For example, say, “Wish, fish, dish! I need a dish for this salad.”
- Use your child’s name to model language play. You might say, “Good morning, Jazzy Jonathan!” or “Would you like a banana, Anna Fo-Fanna?”
- When reading a familiar book, encourage your child to use the pictures to “read” parts of the story to you. Afterward, ask him to tell you what happened at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the story.
- At a restaurant, point to words as you read parts of the menu aloud. Invite your child to find letters or words that she knows.
- Model how writing is used. Explain what you are doing as you write a greeting card, copy a recipe, take a phone message, or make a shopping list.
- Provide magnetic letters for your child to play with.
- Set out paper and pencils, markers, or crayons for your child to use. Encourage him to draw pictures, write his name, send a letter to Grandma, make up a shopping list, and so on. Don’t worry if your child’s scribbles don’t resemble letters yet.
- Give your child a notebook or journal and prompt her to draw pictures or write about her day. Ask her to describe what she drew or wrote.
- Invite your child to tell you a story or describe an experience. Write down his words and then read them back to him. Suggest that he draw a picture to illustrate his story.
- Promote fine motor skills by prompting your child to practice buttoning her clothes, fastening snaps, doing zippers, tying shoelaces, putting together puzzles, and so on.



Social-Emotional/Social Studies

- Provide choices and encourage your child to make decisions. For example, “Would you like to wear your blue shirt or your white shirt today?”
- Invite your child to take responsibility for some tasks, such as putting empty cans into the recycling bin.
- After reading a story, discuss the characters’ feelings and motives. Why did they do what they did?
- Read books about friends cooperating and working together to achieve a goal.
- Help your child identify and talk about his feelings. For example, “I can tell you feel angry by the way you’re standing. Let’s take some deep breaths, and then we’ll talk about why you’re angry and what we can do about it.”
- Tell your child about your own feelings. You might say, “I’m upset because it’s raining and we can’t go to the park like we wanted to. You probably feel upset, too. But I think we can have a good time drawing pictures instead.”
- Watch your child as she plays with other children. Note how she handles problems that arise. Talk about it later.
- Spend time pretending with your child. Prompt him to give you a role, such as the baby or mother. Ask questions or make suggestions to help him continue the story.



Notes
