

Communication and Literacy Standards in Action

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Communication among humans primarily takes place through speaking and listening and through the written word. Early learning standards in the area of language arts include children’s expressive and receptive language—how do they speak to others and how are their listening

skills developing? In addition, the standards address their growing interest in listening to books and reading them on their own, recognizing that the actual process of decoding and reading will come at a later age than preschool. However, beginning to recognize alphabet letters and names of themselves and their friends will be evident and can be expected. In addition, growing awareness of the sounds of language is an important foundation for later acquisition of reading skills. Finally, learning to write in order to communicate with others is another part of the language arts standards.

In this chapter, we have chosen eight standards from different states that cover the range of communication and literacy early learning standards around the country. We recognize that there are many more ways to address these standards than the ideas we have put forth here. We invite you to think about your classroom and curriculum. How will you address these standards in your program?

Early Learning Standards

“Communicate needs, ideas and thoughts.”

—*Illinois Early Learning Standards*

“Child produces speech sounds with increasing ease and accuracy.”

—*Texas Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines*

Other states with similar standards:

CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, IA, LA, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, NJ, NY, OK, RI, UT

Common Practices in an Early Childhood Classroom Where This Standard May Be Addressed

Engaging children in conversations and discussions throughout the day: in daily routines of arrival and departure, settling in, joining in play, toileting, meals and snack time, outdoors, and in small and large groups

You know how important good communication skills are to function in the world. Young children are just beginning to develop the capability to tell others about their needs and share their thoughts. You can make sure that the day is full of opportunities to incorporate these learning standards and to witness how children are doing with their communication skills by talking with them frequently, modeling language usage, being patient and helpful with their use of words, and being ready to listen! You can ask open-ended questions and encourage their verbalization of their responses.

What the Children Might Show You:

A range of communication skills

First Steps Toward the Standard:

Primarily uses single words and words in short combinations (phrases or one- to three-word sentences or commands) to express needs and communicate with others. Children's speech is not always understandable.

Making Progress Toward the Standard:

Primarily uses phrases and sentences of three or four words, expressing needs and communicating with others. Children's speech is more understandable.

Accomplishing the Standard:

Primarily uses phrases and sentences of more than four words, expressing needs and communicating with others with ever-increasing description and detail. Children's speech is more understandable.

Curriculum and Activities that You Can Plan and Implement for Each Child's Progress Level

- Talk calmly and gently with the child in engaging and friendly ways throughout the day, explaining things, modeling language usage, and giving vocabulary for expressing feelings as well as identifying objects.
 - Listen and look at the child as she attempts to communicate with you.
 - Expand on children's language—if they use one word, respond with a short phrase using that word. If they use a short phrase, expand to a full sentence, and so on.
 - Do not worry about correcting children's mispronunciations. Instead, model the correct pronunciation in a conversational tone in your response. Make a referral to specialists in speech when necessary.
- Continue to talk calmly and gently with the child in friendly ways throughout the day, explaining things, modeling language usage, and giving vocabulary for expressing feelings as well as identifying objects.
 - Listen and look at the child as she attempts to communicate.
 - Expand on children's language yourself and ask them to do so as well, asking open-ended questions that encourage them to explain their thinking more fully.
 - Do not worry about correcting children's mispronunciations. Instead, model the correct pronunciation in your response. Make a referral to specialists in speech when necessary.
- Continue to talk calmly and gently with the child in friendly ways throughout the day.
 - Listen and look at the child as she attempts to communicate.
 - Provide many opportunities for children to explain what they are doing, to tell others about their experiences and feelings, and to share their thoughts and ideas.
 - Ask open-ended questions that encourage longer, more complex responses rather than one right answer.
 - Do not worry about correcting children's mispronunciations. Instead, model the correct pronunciation in your response. Make a referral to specialists in speech when necessary.

Early Learning Standards

“Children show progress in listening when they follow directions that involve a two or three-step sequence of actions.”

—Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress

Other states with similar standards:

CA, CO, DC, GA, IL, IA, LA, MA, MI, MN, MO, NY, OK, RI, TX, UT

Common Practices in an Early Childhood Classroom Where This Standard May Be Addressed

Giving children clear and simple directions in the course of everyday activities and routines, starting with one step and moving on to two or more steps as their understanding increases

Young children are not good listeners. They are easily distracted because they are so interested in the world around them. Listening closely enough to follow two- and three-step sequenced directions takes focus and opportunities for practice. As adults, we need to be patient and consistent in our recognition of this developing skill.

Begin with one-step directions such as “Please sit here” or “Get your backpack.” As you see consistent follow-through, you can add another step. For example, “Please wash your hands and sit down for snack.” If you see a child having difficulty following through, break the task down into one step until you see consistent success. Always build on success rather than continue with failure!

What the Children Might Show You:

Response to one direction increasing to the capability to follow through with multiple steps

First Steps Toward the Standard:

Follows through with one clear, simple direction

Making Progress Toward the Standard:

Follows through with two clear, simple directions

Accomplishing the Standard:

Follows through with more than two directions that become increasingly complex and may be accomplished over longer periods of time

Curriculum and Activities that You Can Plan and Implement for Each Child's Progress Level

- Make sure that you have the child's attention by using his name, making eye contact, and stating the direction clearly.
- Give the child time to follow through, or repeat the request a second time. If still no response, walk the child through the action: "Now, we'll put your hands in the water to get them all clean."
- Encourage the child's follow-through by describing what she's doing, "Look, you're drinking your milk just like I asked you to!"
- As a child consistently follows one direction, start adding a second simple, logical step. "Come to the sink and wash your hands."
- If the child is unsuccessful, break the task down into one step at a time.
- Give the child time to follow through, or repeat the request a second time. If still no response, walk the child through the action: "Now, we'll walk you over to the sink and put your hands in the water to get them all clean."
- Encourage the child's follow-through by describing what she's doing in both steps.
- Start adding a third simple, logical step. "Come to the sink, wash your hands, and go sit down for snack."
- If the child is unsuccessful, break the task down into one or two steps at a time.
- Give the child time to follow through, or repeat the request a second time.
- Encourage the child's follow-through by describing what she's doing in all of the steps.
- Increase your expectations for the child's capability of following multiple directions over longer periods of time. Always be ready to back up if necessary!