



# Frequently Asked Questions and Terminology

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## **Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS)**

3 Years Old to Kindergarten Enrollment Age

*REVISED 2013*

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## References/Resources

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# Frequently Asked Questions about the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS)

## **1. Why were new standards developed and what are the differences between the 2002 version and the new ones?**

The Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS) are a revision of the Illinois Early Learning Standards (IELS) published in 2002. They have been updated by nationally and internationally recognized content experts to include recent developments in the field of education and to represent the most current knowledge about development across all domains for preschool children. They have been aligned with the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Children Birth to Age Three, with the Illinois Kindergarten Standards, and with the Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten. The Birth to Three Guidelines and the IELDS are a foundational part of the statewide effort to address children’s needs from birth through 12th grade.

### **a. What remains the same from the 2002 IELS?**

As before, the IELDS address the preschool age group (children ages 3 to kindergarten enrollment) and the overall design remains the same with goals, learning standards, and preschool benchmarks in multiple subjects/learning areas/domains.

### **b. What is different about the new Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS)?**

There are eight subjects/learning areas/domains in the IELDS that are consistent and aligned for all grade levels preschool through high school in the state of Illinois:

1. Language Arts
2. Mathematics
3. Science
4. Social Studies
5. Physical Development and Health
6. The Arts
7. English Language Learner Home Language Development
8. Social/Emotional Development

New to the IELDS is the domain of English Language Learner Home Language Development. This domain replaces the Foreign Language one in the 2002 IELS because research shows that the knowledge and skills children demonstrate in their home language can be applied to the learning of English academic content. Therefore, a child's understanding and ability to use his or her home language is the first step in acquiring English proficiency and English literacy skills.

In each domain, some of the goals and learning standards are correlated with the K–12 Illinois standards while others have been determined to be only appropriate for preschool children. At the core of the IELDS are preschool benchmarks that provide teachers with specific ways that children demonstrate learning standards. Example performance descriptors have been identified to help determine small steps of progress that children may demonstrate as they work toward preschool benchmarks. There are three levels of performance descriptors in the IELDS: Exploring, Developing, and Building. The child does not have to master or perform every descriptor to show mastery of the preschool benchmark. And the child may demonstrate his or her capabilities related to a specific preschool benchmark in a different way than is described in the performance descriptors.

In the subjects/learning areas/domains of Language Arts and Mathematics, the IELDS preschool benchmarks have been aligned with the end of kindergarten standards in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative for Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade. These standards were developed in a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in partnership with Achieve (NAEYC, 2012, p. 2). They are referred to as “the Common Core” and have been adopted by 45 states, including Illinois. This alignment will help preschool and kindergarten teachers coordinate their efforts on behalf of children, easing transition from preschool to kindergarten and providing a common language of development in these domains.

## **2. How are the new IELDS organized?**

The introductory sections of the IELDS include historical information, purposes and uses, guiding principles, and definitions of common terminology seen throughout the document. Each page of the actual standards contains six elements:

1. Subject/Learning Area/Domain
2. Goal
3. Learning Standard
4. Preschool Benchmarks
5. Example Performance Descriptors
6. Common Core Alignment (for Language Arts and Mathematics only)

When possible, the goals, standards, and preschool benchmarks are organized in the developmental sequence in which children tend to achieve them. A Summary Benchmark Index is included in the document for quick and easy reference. At times learning standards are identified as developmentally inappropriate for the preschool years and are labeled “not applicable.” Such learning standards do not have identified preschool benchmarks.

### **3. Who can make use of the IELDS?**

Anyone in the state of Illinois who works in a program serving children from age 3 to kindergarten enrollment can use the IELDS. This includes teachers and early childhood professionals in state-funded Preschool for All programs, Head Start, center-based child care, family child care, special education, faith-based preschools, and park district programs. Teachers of toddlers as well as kindergarten teachers may also make use of the IELDS. And administrators and program directors in early childhood programs will want to familiarize themselves with the document.

Preschool educators can refer to the IELDS when determining appropriate expectations for preschoolers, when planning for individual children’s needs, when implementing a play-based curriculum, and when using authentic, observational assessment procedures. Throughout the document, the term *teacher* is used to refer to any adult who works with preschool children in any early childhood setting.

### **4. What are the purposes of the IELDS?**

The IELDS were revised to create a foundational understanding for families and teachers of what children from age 3 to kindergarten enrollment are expected to know and do across multiple developmental domains. They provide reasonable expectations for children’s growth, development, and learning in the preschool years. When used as part of the curriculum, the IELDS provide guidance to teachers in early childhood programs to create and sustain developmentally appropriate experiences for young children that will strengthen their intellectual dispositions and support their continuing success as learners and students. The age-appropriate benchmarks in the IELDS enable educators to reflect upon and evaluate the experiences they provide for all preschool children.

Preschool children may not achieve or master every preschool benchmark. Children grow, develop, and learn at their own pace with strengths and weaknesses throughout their developmental profile. Teachers will refer to the preschool benchmarks to guide appropriate curricular planning and expectations for performance. The newly leveled performance descriptors will help teachers see the small steps of progress children are making as they work toward specific benchmarks. For children who may be identified as at risk or who have scattered skills or developmental delays, teachers can turn to the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Children Birth to Age Three to find a better match to the child’s performance. And for children who may go beyond mastery of the preschool expectations, teachers can turn to the Illinois Kindergarten

Standards and the Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten for these children to help them continue to grow, develop, and learn.

### **5. Are the IELDS an assessment?**

The IELDS are NOT an assessment tool. The IELDS preschool benchmarks are the criteria that can be used for authentic, observational assessment of preschool children’s learning, growth, and development. And the levels of performance descriptors (Exploring, Developing, and Building) have been included to help teachers see in benchmarks the small steps of progress that each child might take to work toward that benchmark. The performance descriptors are meant to provide examples for teachers of the steps of progress children demonstrate related to specific benchmarks, not to be used as a checklist for assessment purposes.

There are many commercially developed research-based checklists that teachers can use in observational assessment practices to determine the ways each child is learning and growing across multiple domains. It is important for teachers to make sure that the assessment tool they are using is aligned with the IELDS.

### **6. Are the IELDS a curriculum?**

The IELDS are NOT a curriculum. They provide research-based expectations for preschool children’s growth, development, and learning in multiple domains. Recognizing that curriculum is everything that happens in a child’s day at a preschool program, teachers are expected to incorporate these expectations into all parts of the preschool day including:

- a. In daily routines such as arrival and departure, snacks and meals, outdoor play time, hand washing and toileting, rest time, and in transitions between activities.
- b. In play that is engaging and purposeful in centers or interest areas that are well-organized and inviting. Teachers facilitate and coach children as they play to enhance learning opportunities.
- c. In teacher-led large- and small-group experiences.

Teachers plan for preschool benchmarks to be addressed in various routines, play activities, and large- and small-group experiences and write the benchmarks in their lesson plans. They provide materials and experiences that address those benchmarks for the children as needed. Teachers are also continually observing to see where children naturally demonstrate steps toward preschool benchmarks as they participate in different activities throughout the day. Teachers also are flexible and responsive in supporting children’s interests and integrating the benchmarks into activities that truly engage children’s attention and challenge their thinking.

Teachers who use a specific classroom curriculum make sure that the IELDS are integrated into the various aspects of the curriculum. There is no specific scope and sequence to the IELDS in general, although some of the benchmarks have been placed in the order of the developmental sequence in which preschool children tend to achieve them.

## **7. How is it best to share the IELDS with families?**

Preschool teachers communicate with families about the IELDS and how they use them in their program. Recognizing that families are the primary caregivers and educators of young children, teachers work collaboratively to ensure that children are provided optimal learning experiences. Teachers communicate in a variety of ongoing ways with families to inform them about the IELDS, including:

- a. Orientation Meetings
- b. Family Fun Events
- c. Family Seminars or Meetings
- d. Newsletters/Flyers
- e. Bulletin Boards
- f. Family Resource Library
- g. Photos and videos of the children in action at your program

## **8. In what specific ways are the needs of English language learners addressed in the IELDS?**

ELL stands for English Language Learner and identifies a child as being in the process of learning English as a second or new language. This term is used most frequently in the context of K-12 educational settings. DLL stands for Dual Language Learner and this term highlights the fact that young children are developing their language, both home language and English. DLL is the most appropriate term to use for young learners because it acknowledges the developmental nature of learning two languages at the same time whether simultaneously or sequentially.

Families can be a rich source of information when considering progress towards meeting IELDS benchmarks. Not all languages are alphabetic so it is important to investigate the writing system of the children's home language(s). For those languages that are alphabetic, it may not be culturally or pedagogically appropriate to ask children to recite the names of letters in that language. The focus may be more on learning the sounds of letters or blends. Reciting the names of letters in English may be appropriate for young DLLs when done through songs, chants, finger plays or other shared experiences.

It is crucial that children continue to develop their home language while learning English as a second or new language to build a strong foundation for future learning. Young dual language learners can show what they know and are thinking by using both their home language and English. Gathering information in both languages and across settings ensures a more accurate picture of children’s development.

Finally, promoting metalinguistic awareness for young dual language learners provides a foundation for future learning. Contrasting similarities and differences between children’s home languages and English is one way to do this. Highlighting cognates shared between children’s languages is a useful strategy. Practitioners can also contrast the languages at phonological, semantic, syntactic and discourse levels orally. Using color-coding for written language (i.e., Spanish in blue, and English in green) is also helpful to provide visual cues for the two languages. Practitioners need to keep in mind the socio-cultural context for communication in both the home language and English for these learners.

## **9. What do you mean when you say “with teacher assistance”?**

Throughout the IELDS, some of the preschool benchmarks include the phrase “with teacher assistance.” This phrase is included to recognize that preschool children can do many things with the scaffolding or support of a teacher (or a peer) that they cannot do independently. This help or support is given to a child as s/he engages in a challenging experience that is not quite in his or her range of competency. The teacher’s assistance may include any of the following:

- a. Asking questions that may guide the child’s thinking and reflecting and adding information to what the child may be sharing.
- b. Providing cues (i.e., verbal, visual, musical, physical gesture) to help them recall a specific answer.
- c. Talking a child through an activity.
- d. Modeling the skill the child is being asked to demonstrate.
- e. Providing hands-on help or guidance to the child.

For preschool benchmarks that include teacher assistance, the child is NOT expected to demonstrate the benchmark without such assistance.



# Terminology

## in the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards

The primary goal of the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS) is to provide a comprehensive resource of reasonable expectations for the development of children in the preschool years (age 3 to kindergarten enrollment) for all teachers across the state of Illinois. All domains or areas of development are included so the focus is on the whole child.

Throughout the IELDS, terms are used to name the various components of the standards and to describe the ways that preschool children show what they know and can do related to specific benchmarks in each domain. It is important that teachers using the IELDS become familiar with this terminology so they can understand the standards and use them in ways that are best for children. In this way, no matter in what community or part of the state a teacher is working with young children, s/he will be looking at the standards with the same understanding and application as teachers elsewhere. This consistency of understanding makes application of the standards much more reliable from teacher to teacher.

The following terms describe the major components or are used in the Introduction, Development, Purposes, and Guiding Principles sections of the IELDS. In addition, action words that are used throughout the preschool benchmarks (across all domains) are defined.

## Major Components of the IELDS

### **Common Core State Standards Alignment**

In the learning areas/domains of Language Arts and Mathematics, the IELDS preschool benchmarks have been aligned with the kindergarten standards in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative for Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade. These standards were developed in a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in partnership with Achieve (NAEYC, 2012, p. 2). They are referred to as “the Common Core” and have been adopted by 45 states, including Illinois.

## **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

These are recommended practices adopted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for the care and education of young children from birth through age 8 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Such practices address three key concerns:

1. What is known about child development and learning specific to different age groups from birth through age 8?
2. What is known about each child as an individual?
3. What is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live?

When a learning standard in the IELDS is determined to be “not applicable,” it is because it does not match what is known about what’s appropriate for preschool-age children.

## **Goal**

Provides an overview of or general statement about learning in the learning area/domain. Many of the goals in the IELDS are consistent with and aligned for all grade levels from preschool through high school in the state of Illinois, but some goals in the IELDS are only appropriate for the preschool level.

## **Learning Areas/Domains**

Reflect universal aspects of child development or subject areas for education from preschool through high school. There are eight learning areas/domains in the IELDS. Most are consistent with and aligned for all grade levels from preschool through high school. In the state of Illinois, these subject areas are Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Physical Development and Health, The Arts, English Language Learner Home Language Development, and Social/Emotional Development.

## **Learning Standard**

Defines what students/children should know and be able to do. Like the state goals, many learning standards in the IELDS are aligned for all grade levels, preschool through high school. However, not all learning standards are considered developmentally appropriate for the preschool years and are identified as “Not applicable.” In some instances, the learning standards have been revised so they are appropriate only for the preschool level.

### **Performance Descriptors**

Give examples that describe small steps of progress that children may demonstrate as they work toward preschool benchmarks. They are not intended to replace the IELDS nor are they all-inclusive. They are a resource for voluntary use at the local level to enable teachers to better recognize age-appropriate guidelines and expectations for preschool children. There are three levels of performance descriptors in the IELDS: Exploring (the first level where a child is just beginning to show some of the aspects of the benchmark), Developing (the second level where the child is beginning to show more understanding or related skills), and Building (the description of how a child demonstrates the benchmark as it is written). A child does not have to master or perform every descriptor to show mastery of the preschool benchmark. And a child may demonstrate his or her capabilities related to a specific preschool benchmark in a different way than described in the performance descriptors.

### **Preschool Benchmarks**

Provide teachers with specific ways that preschool children demonstrate learning standards. The benchmarks are unique to preschool children. Learning standards deemed “not applicable” do not have identified preschool benchmarks.

## Terms Used in the Introduction, Development, Purposes, and Guiding Principles Sections of the IELDS

### **Adaptation or Accommodation**

A change in the implementation of a curricular strategy that best meets the needs of a child.

### **Appropriate Curriculum**

Curricular practices that match the age group of the children as well as adapt to meet individual needs and respect cultural differences.

### **Assessment Tool**

The IELDS is not an assessment tool. There are many commercially developed research-based checklists and locally designed materials that teachers can use in observational assessment practices to determine how each child is learning and growing across multiple domains. It is important for teachers to make sure that the assessment tool they are using is aligned with the IELDS.

### **Authentic Observational Assessment Procedures**

Assessments based on teachers observing children in everyday activities including play, daily routines, and large- and small-group times. Teachers determine best ways to document their observations and relate them back to the developmental expectations or the IELDS.

### **Challenging Areas**

The capabilities or skills that are more difficult for a child or that s/he has to work hard on in order to accomplish them.

### **Challenging Experiences**

Experiences that are at the edge of a child’s capabilities but not overly frustrating or overwhelming.

### **Checklist for Children’s Development**

The IELDS is not a checklist for children’s development. It is a resource for preschool teachers in the state of Illinois to define reasonable, agreed-upon expectations for preschool children. Teachers may use research-based checklists that have been aligned to the IELDS for assessment purposes.

### **Child-initiated Activities**

Activities that a child independently chooses to do and determines how to proceed.

### **Child’s Individuality**

The unique characteristics about a child, such as personality, learning style, health issues, family and cultural background, interests, strengths, and challenges.

### **Construct Understanding**

As children play and explore, they figure out how things work and come to conclusions for themselves that they continue to test and refine.

**Curriculum**

“Curriculum is everything that goes on in a program from the moment a child arrives until she leaves. Teachers plan, implement, observe, reflect, and make adjustments based on individual children’s needs and the needs of the group. Curriculum is an ongoing process that requires teachers to think about child development, to observe how the children in their classroom are learning and growing, and to make hundreds of decisions about the best ways to help them reach their full potential.” (Gronlund, 2013, p. 31)

**Developmental Delay or Disability**

A significant lag in a child’s development identified by specialists through formal assessment procedures.

**Dynamic Interaction of Areas of Development**

Development in one domain influences development in other domains. As children demonstrate what they know and can do, they show their skills and capabilities in integrated ways rather than in isolation.

**Evidence-based**

Educational practices based on research that supports their effectiveness.

**Exhaustive Resource**

The IELDS is not an exhaustive resource. The document does not capture every single aspect of child development in the preschool years. Rather, it identifies the significant benchmarks in multiple domains that the state of Illinois has deemed appropriate for preschool teachers to incorporate into the curriculum for young children.

**Growth Patterns**

Identified trends in children’s development of skills and capabilities in various domains and in accomplishment of benchmarks.

**High Expectations**

Expectations that are appropriate for leading the development of young children and help teachers determine goals for planning.

### **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

A legal document that identifies the delay or disability that qualifies a child for special education services, the type of services to be provided, the goals for such services, and any accommodations needed to assist a child.

### **Intentional Practices**

Teaching with purpose, with goals in mind for the group of children as well as for each individual child, and being planful in implementing those goals in a variety of ways in a preschool program.

### **Parents or Family Members**

The primary caregivers of the child in his or her home setting.

### **Play**

Opportunities for children to explore, investigate, and discover things about their world and themselves. Play requires an interesting, well-organized environment and ample time for children to get deeply engaged. Teachers act as facilitators and coaches as children play.

### **Play-based Curriculum**

Curricular practices that incorporate a significant portion of the day for children to play with materials and with other children while teachers facilitate and guide the play so it is beneficial and full of learning opportunities for the children. A planned and organized environment is an important part of play-based curriculum with interesting and engaging materials and clear purposes for their use (e.g., dress-up clothes for dramatic play, blocks for building, art materials for creating).

### **Prekindergarten**

A program that serves children in the year before their kindergarten year.

### **Preschool**

A program that serves children from ages 3 to 5 or in the two years before their kindergarten year.

### **Proficiency or Mastery**

Being very good at or accomplishing the skills or application of skills identified in a benchmark.

### **Programmatic Goals**

The overall goals a preschool has for the children who attend (e.g., to love learning, to get along with others, to gain preschool skills in all domains).

### **Range of Skills and Competencies**

The levels or strengths and weaknesses of children's performance in various domains.

### **Reasonable Expectations**

Expectations that are appropriate for the age of the children. The IELDS standards and benchmarks were designed and reviewed by nationally recognized content experts.

### **Scaffolding or Assistance**

The help or support a teacher (or a peer) gives to a child as s/he engages in a challenging experience that is not quite in his or her range of competency.

### **Strengths**

The capabilities or skills that are easy for a child or that s/he does very well.

### **Teacher-initiated Activities**

Activities that the teacher has chosen, designed, or invited children's participation in and/or leads.

### **Teachers, Early Childhood Professionals**

Any adult who works with preschool children in any type of early childhood program or setting.

### **Work Collaboratively with Families**

To join in partnership with families determining mutual goals that are in the child's best interests.

## Action Words Used Throughout the Preschool Benchmarks

### **Begin to**

To take initial steps or actions or demonstrate something inconsistently.

### **Compare**

To examine or consider something (an object, a person, an idea, etc.) for similarities and differences.

### **Demonstrate**

To show through actions and/or words understanding of a concept or ability to perform a skill.

### **Describe**

To tell about something in words (an object, a person, an experience, etc.).

### **Develop**

To become more capable at a skill, to add more detail to a verbally expressed idea, to create something with a beginning point and add to it.

### **Differentiate**

To determine what is not the same through actions and/or words.

### **Discuss**

To talk with others.

### **Engage**

To become involved in or take part in an activity of some sort.



### **Exhibit**

To demonstrate understanding or capability to others through words and/or actions.

### **Explore or Experiment With**

To interact with a set of materials or items to discover their characteristics and possibilities, to try things out through trial and error, or to test a particular hypothesis.

### **Express**

To communicate with others through facial expressions, gestures, words, and/or actions.

### **Identify**

To verbally name, label, or, in some cases, to point to or act upon showing understanding of an expressed question to distinguish certain items.

### **Name**

To verbally identify or label.

### **Participate**

To join others in an activity, conversation, or discussion.

### **Recite**

To say something that has a set pattern, such as the alphabet or the counting order of numbers.

### **Recognize**

To show understanding of distinctive items, such as numerals, letters, or shapes by naming, identifying, grouping, touching, and/or pointing to them.

**Show**

To demonstrate understanding of a concept or ability to perform a skill through actions and/or words.

**Understand**

To comprehend the meaning of a concept or term and use words or actions accordingly to demonstrate such comprehension.



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