

**Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**  
**July 2004**

Many of the questions below have been identified from feedback received through May 31, 2004. This document will be updated as necessary to assure the most current information is available.

- 1. How were the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards developed?** Beginning in 2002, the federal government directed states to submit early learning standards currently available in the state as a requirement to receive the Child Care and Development Fund. Since Wisconsin did not have early learning standards at that time, a decision was made to begin drafting model standards through a collaborative approach. These voluntary Standards serve as a framework for early learning experiences for children. A steering committee made up of representatives from the State Departments of Workforce Development, Public Instruction and Health and Family Services, along with the Wisconsin Head Start Collaboration Project, Cooperative Educational Services Agencies (CESA) and Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP) was established to guide the development of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. The Steering Committee met many times to discuss the ongoing process in development of the Standards. A consultant was hired to complete the actual drafting of the Standards after a thorough review of current literature, best practices and research on child development. A review of other state standards, and Wisconsin community standards was completed also. Input was requested from content experts through focus groups, workshops and other stakeholder events. Guiding Principles were included to inform the development and application of the Standards into practice.
- 2. What age group are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards for?**  
These Standards reflect expectations for children beginning at age three through the completion of kindergarten.
- 3. Are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards appropriate for all children?** The Standards reflect expectations for a typically-developing child; adapting and individualizing learning experiences accommodates optimal development for all children. The Standards recognize that children are individuals who develop at individual rates. While children generally develop in similar stages and sequences, greatly diverse patterns of behavior and learning emerge as a result of the interaction of several factors, including genetic predisposition and physical characteristics, socio-economic status, and the values, beliefs, and cultural and political practices of their families and communities.

**3a. How can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be used for children with disabilities?** The Standards are designed to address individual difference and will serve as the foundation for individualized programming decisions for children with disabilities. While the vast majority of students with disabilities should be expected to work toward and achieve these standards, accommodations and modifications to help these students reach the achievement goals will need to be individually identified and implemented. For children with disabilities, these decisions are made as part of their individualized education program (IEP) plans developed by the school district's IEP team. This team could include school personnel as well as child care and Head Start personnel and the child's parent. Persons working with children with disabilities will need to pay special attention to the IEP and how curriculum adaptations and special education services can be provided to meet each child's individually identified developmental needs. Some accommodations and/or modifications may be necessary as young children with disabilities

master the skills and competencies related to the Standards. Adapting and individualizing learning experiences can help assure that each child is exposed to activities that can help him or her reach his/her optimal development.

**3b. How can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be used in programs with children who speak English as a Second Language?** The Standards will also serve as the foundation for individualized programming decisions for children who speak other languages and/or who have cultural differences. Persons working with children who speak other languages or are from other cultures will need to pay special attention to how they design culturally relevant environments and curriculum activities. Linguistically and culturally appropriate programming will ensure that each child's individual needs are addressed. See questions 28 and 29 for more information on Spanish and Hmong versions of the Standards.

- 4. Are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards research based?** Yes. Results of a comprehensive review of the current literature and research on child development and learning served as the foundation for the development of the Standards. Additional sources consulted include the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start Child Outcomes, National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) and standards developed by Wisconsin communities. A review of Standards from other states was also completed.
- 5. How do the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards relate to the Wisconsin School Readiness Indicators Initiative?** The Wisconsin School Readiness Indicators Initiative (WSRII) suggests that conditions necessary for school readiness include family and community supports, quality early learning environments, and receptive schools. Children's development is enhanced, or compromised, by the quality of these conditions. The Standards describe expected child developmental outcomes and provide general program standards statements that, when expanded and applied, can ensure that early learning environments are responsive to children's developmental needs. The Standards and the WSRII are tools intended to expand the concept of "school readiness", support developmentally appropriate expectations and practices for young children, and guide state agencies and communities in using resources to support children. For more information on the WSRII go to [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org) or [www.collaboratingpartners.com](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com).
- 6. Do all early childhood education and care settings have to integrate the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards into their programs?** No. Implementation of the Standards is voluntary. However the Standards can be used as a tool to guide parents and programs as they plan activities that will provide a developmentally appropriate environment for children.
- **Licensed and Certified Child Care Programs:** Regulated programs are required to include certain components within the daily activities planned for children and in the program education policy. The Standards can provide a framework for providing these high quality experiences for all children in these settings.
  - **Head Start Programs:** Head Start programs are legally required to meet the Head Start Performance Standards, including the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. While the Early Learning Standards are voluntary, they align closely with Head Start requirements. Implementation of the Head Start Outcomes Framework is consistent with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards.
  - **Schools:** The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards reflect expectations for a typically developing child at kindergarten completion or through age five. Wisconsin school districts may elect to use the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards of the K-12 Model Academic Standards for four or five year old kindergarten programs. As the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards are designed to align with K-12 Model Academic Standards they can be integrated into the school districts overall standards (see question 7 for more information).

- **Private/Parochial Programs:** The Standards are applicable to a variety of early care and education settings. The Standards do not prescribe a particular educational philosophy. The Standards provide a framework that honors a variety of educational philosophies including private schools, faith-based settings, Montessori programs and other varied settings. These Standards reflect attention to the domains of a child's early learning and development and recognize that these domains are interrelated and interdependent. The Standards provide an expectation for experiences that can be integrated into a variety of curricular philosophies and approaches to communicate expectations for young children's development.
7. **How are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards aligned with the Wisconsin Model K-12 Academic Standards?** To support a smooth transition for children and families across early learning environments, kindergartens, and elementary school settings, the framework for the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards was developed to align with Wisconsin Model Academic Standards. The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards were developed to align with Wisconsin Model Academic Standards in their comprehensive focus on developmentally appropriate learning expectations. Therefore:
    - 1.) The Model Early Learning Standards refer to specific developmental areas while the Model Academic Standards refer to academic content.
    - 2.) Both sets of standards offer specific developmental expectations; the Model Early Learning Standards specify developmental expectations and the K-12 Model Academic Standards specify content standards.
    - 3.) Both sets of standards offer performance standards that tell how the child/student is meeting the expectation.
    - 4.) To address what happens in the classroom, the Model Early Learning Standards identify general program standards while the K-12 Model Academic Standards address curriculum. Children who meet the developmental expectations outlined in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards will be prepared to master Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards. As such, the Early Learning Standards provide a foundation for the Model Academic Standards.
  8. **Why are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards numbered in the Performance Standards section like they are?** The numbering system used in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards reflects the numbering system used in the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards, where the first letter refers to the developmental expectation and the EL refers to Early Learning.
  9. **Can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards also be used as curriculum?** No. The Standards are neither a curriculum nor an assessment tool. By setting appropriate expectations for young children in the five domains of early learning and development, the Standards are intended as a guide for developing or selecting appropriate curriculum and assessment that support and promote children's learning and development.
  10. **What specific curriculum should I be using in my program?** There is not a specific state-recommended curriculum or assessment for young children. Selection or development of appropriate curriculum and assessment should be a local decision. There are however, several published curriculum guides and assessment tools that are research-based and compatible with the Standards. See page 20 of the Standards for a listing of assessment and curriculum resources.
  11. **How can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be incorporated into a natural learning environment?** The Standards embrace the opportunity to take advantage of the teachable moment. With a solid understanding of developmentally appropriate practice, learning

takes place in daily, natural occurrences.

**12. Should the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be used as an assessment tool?**

No. The Standards are neither a curriculum nor an assessment tool. By setting appropriate expectations for young children in the five domains of early learning and development, the Standards are intended as a guide for developing or selecting appropriate curriculum and assessment that support and promote children's learning and development.

**13. How can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be used for program assessment?**

The Standards were not designed to be a tool for program assessment. However, parents may find that quality programs are knowledgeable about the Standards and plan their curriculum in relationship to the Standards.

**14. Should the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be used as a screening tool when making program entry or exit decisions about individual children?**

No. The Standards identify a range of appropriate expectations for children three through the completion of kindergarten but recognize that wide variability in development between children that is typical during the early childhood years. Decisions regarding individual children should take into account the multiple factors influencing the child's development and be based upon information collected through multiple tools and methodologies.

**15. Is there a specific assessment tool that is recommended by the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?**

No. There is not a specific state-recommended assessment tool. It is recommended that assessment practices reflect principles established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which suggest that assessment and curriculum are an integrated process, with teachers using the information they collect on an ongoing basis to guide their teaching. This collected information should include evidence of progress towards identified learning and developmental goals, and be gathered in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, observational data, examples of children's work over time, performance during authentic experiences, and input from parents on their child's progress. Some published curricula also have companion assessment kits.

**16. Will the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards include specific benchmarks for each age group?**

No. The Standards identify a range of appropriate expectations for children three through the completion of kindergarten. Establishing benchmarks based on specific ages imposes a narrow view of acceptable developmental expectations and is contrary to current research suggesting that wide variability in development between children is typical during the early childhood years.

**17. What does show evidence of really mean within the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?**

Through observation of a child over time, a child has the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of a specific performance standard. The child may provide evidence of growth and learning experience over multiple observations.

**18. Will early care and education settings be assessed on their implementation of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?**

No. Implementation of the Standards is voluntary. Best practice recommends regular program assessment to insure quality. There are published tools intended to assess program quality and effectiveness. See page 20 of the Standards for a listing of assessment and curriculum resources.

- 19. How can child care programs be expected to provide opportunities for each of the Performance Standards listed with limited financial resources?** The key to implementation of the Standards is in providing a learning environment that facilitates hands-on exploration and language development. Expensive toys and packaged curriculum materials are not necessary. Developmentally appropriate practices are essential.
- 20. What Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards training will be available to the early care and education workforce?** Training workshops will be available at the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA)/ Wisconsin Division for Early Childhood (WDEC) conference and the Wisconsin Educators Association Council (WEAC) conference this October. Additional more in-depth training is planned for November. Training will provide greater understanding of the developmental domains, developmental expectations, program standards and performance standards for young children. Connections will be made between the Standards and curriculum determination and ongoing assessment. Refer to the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners ([www.collaboratingpartners.com](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com)) website for training dates and locations.
- 21. Can specific activities be identified within the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards for each domain?** *Helping Your Preschool Child* has been published by the United States Department of Education. This document provides suggestions for activities for children infancy through age five. These activities support the framework established within the Standards. A printable copy can be located online at: <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/preschool/index.html> or to request a free copy be sent to you, call 1-800-872-5327. Upcoming training opportunities will provide additional examples of activities that are appropriate for a variety of settings and developmental levels.
- 22. Can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be used by parents?** Yes. The Standards can be used by parents to plan activities and/or to select early childhood education and care settings that will enhance their child's development. Since parents are their children's earliest teachers, the Standards are expected to be a useful resource in supporting parents' understanding of child development.
- 23. Can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be revised to include parent resources?** Yes. Parent-friendly documents will be added to the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners website ([www.collaboratingpartners.com](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com)), and *Ready to Learn* materials will be added as an appendix to the Standards during the next revision.
- 24. How can the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards honor the cultural identity and background of children and families?** The guiding principles established to inform the development and implementation of the Standards specifically recognize the fact that children's development reflects the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of their families and communities. The Standards were designed to support adaptation and individualization of learning experiences in order to provide every child with a responsive learning environment. Such an environment demonstrates respect for children's home languages and cultural/ethnic backgrounds.
- 25. Will Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be developed for birth to age three?** The vision in Wisconsin is to develop birth to three year-old standards to align with the current Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards within the next five years. Researching national and regional guidelines, current literature and practice-based evidence and other resources available will be one step in the development of birth to three year-old standards. Work groups including professionals from across the state will be identified, a focus group of content experts will be

selected and continued collaboration across State Departments will continue to assure that the birth to three year-old standards are developmentally appropriate and inclusive and provide a continuum into the current Standards beginning at age three through the completion of kindergarten.

**26. Will a separate document be created for parents to accompany the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?** No. At this time it is not envisioned that a separate document will be created. Instead, specific training materials are being created to provide a broad understanding of the Standards. Additional parent resources, including *Ready to Learn* materials are also being identified and will be included on the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners ([www.collaboratingpartners.com](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com)) website.

**27. What is the concept of “Play” as included in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?** The major defining characteristics of play are positive affect (children’s enjoyment), active engagement (deep involvement without distraction), intrinsic/internal motivation, teacher’s active support, attention to process rather than product and nonliterality. Adults establish and guide the play environment. Adults ask exploratory questions that help extend the child’s play. Adults offer new and varied materials. Adults validate children’s feelings.

**28. Are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards available in Spanish?** Yes, the Standards have been translated into Spanish. The Spanish translation of the Standards has been added to the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners Website ([www.collaboratingpartners.com](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com)), and printed copies of the Standards are available through the Child Care Information Center (CCIC).

**29. Will the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards be translated into Hmong?** The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards have been translated into Hmong. The Hmong translated Standards have been added to the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners Website. ([www.collaboratingpartners.com](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com)).