



Washington
Kindergarten Inventory
of Developing Skills



PRINCIPAL SERIES 2 Family Connection

At the beginning of the school year, kindergarten teachers meet individually with the families of their new students. This “family connection” helps to:

- Welcome families to school.
- Establish a relationship between families and teachers.
- Create a safe environment for families to share sensitive information about their children.

During the Family Connection

Teachers and families meet in a comfortable setting for 20–40 minutes. Teachers get to know the family, learn about the child, and address any concerns or questions about the transition into kindergarten. Families get to know the teacher; share their child’s interests and characteristics, and describe the child’s home environment and languages spoken.

OSPI provides a booklet called *Introducing Me!* to help guide the conversation. Teachers may choose to use additional — or even altogether different — resources. Teachers will receive hard copies in English/Spanish for every student in their class when they attend training. ESDs will distribute English/Spanish copies to districts

and schools. The booklet can also be printed from www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/Family in 18 additional languages, if needed. If you would like hard copies in these additional languages, please contact wakids@k12.wa.us or 360-725-6161.

Preparing for the Family Connection

- **Establish the meeting days.** 2013 legislation (HB 1723) allows WaKIDS schools to use up to three school days for the family connection at the beginning of the school year. A waiver from the 180-day requirement is not needed. If schools need more than three full days, they have two choices. They can apply for a 180-day parent-teacher conference waiver from the State Board of Education to use full school days for the family connection (1.usa.gov/13tuGvJ). Or they can schedule early-release days, or meet before the school year starts or during after-school hours (no waiver required).
- **Create a meeting invitation process.** The meetings should take place with the teacher the child will have for the school year. Assign someone to set up

the appointments. Consider requesting the same interpreter to set up appointments and interpret for the family in their home language.

- **Work with your ESD to ensure teachers have enough copies of *Introducing Me!* for all students in their classes.** The booklet was revised in 2016 based on feedback from teachers and families. The new, shorter format focuses on information that teachers and families thought was most useful to share.
- **Decide where the meetings will occur.** They usually take place in the school building, but teachers can also visit families at home or in community centers.
- **Create a welcoming environment for families.** Arrange to provide interpreters, if your families need them. And when possible, introduce yourself to the families as they enter your school.
- **Discuss with your teachers when and how to share the “Entering Kindergarten” brochure with families.** Hard copies are available from your ESD. The brochure can also be printed from www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/Family.

After the Family Connection

There are no reporting responsibilities associated with the family connection. Principals and teachers are encouraged to build on the relationships established during these meetings to develop ongoing family engagement opportunities throughout the year.

Resources

- *Introducing Me!* booklet (www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/Family)
- Entering Kindergarten brochure for families (www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/Family)
- Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines Birth Through Third Grade, which includes open-ended questions to get to know new families (www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/guidelines.aspx)

Practical Advice From Principals

- “Parents received a letter from school introducing their teacher and inviting them to call and schedule their family connection meeting. The school secretary scheduled the appointments.”
- “We scheduled individual family meetings in groups reflecting languages spoken at home to provide efficient use of interpreters and to bring ethnic language community members together.”
- “Parents were contacted to set up family connection meetings in three ways: they were called by Alert Now, called by teachers, or spoken with in the school office as they registered their children for kindergarten.”
- “We took the first two days of the school year for teachers to interview families. On the third day, the families brought their children to school for a half-day program. It was wonderful.”
- “We met for ‘Kindergarten Academy’ in the morning the week prior to school and met with the parents in the afternoon.”
- “Conferences with families were scheduled as families enrolled their children for kindergarten. This way we also knew who needed interpreters and what languages were required.”

We look forward to hearing your challenges and success stories, and hope you will share them with your colleagues!

Note: This document is one of several support materials available to deepen principals’ understanding of WaKIDS and support best practices. Additional materials are available at www.k12.wa.us/wakids.

Contact Information

www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS

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Educational Service District WaKIDS Coordinators
www.k12.wa.us/wakids/ESD-Coordinators.aspx

- *I think the parents really appreciated*
- *having the opportunity to talk*
- *to the classroom teacher, get*
- *their questions answered about*
- *kindergarten procedures and*
- *the whole intent of kindergarten*
- *before we had data on the kids,*
- *because it became a non-evaluative*
- *conference. The parents really*
- *connected with the classrooms, and*
- *feeling they were part of the same*
- *team with the classroom teacher*
- *— all focused on the students being*
- *successful.*

— Cynthia Evans, Principal,
Stafford Elementary
Tacoma School District