

## Portraits

### Pre-Kindergarten

#### Portrait of a Model Assessment System: PRE-KINDERGARTEN

#### AUGUST (BEFORE PRE-KINDERGARTEN BEGINS)



#### ***Meeting and Learning about Children and Families: Initial Picnic***

Three families, those of four-year-olds Emma, Ayesha, and Emmanuel, are looking forward to their children starting pre-kindergarten in a local school in the fall. The families are invited to a Sunday afternoon picnic in a neighborhood park at which they have the opportunity to meet their children's teachers, school staff, and other families. Teachers circulate during the picnic, meeting and beginning to learn about each child and their family. For example, Ms. MacDonald, who is Emma's, Ayesha's, and Emmanuel's teacher, learns that Emma's family owns a local diner and Emma loves to help there. Ms. MacDonald notices that Ayesha is playing with her dolls, which her mother noted is her favorite activity. Ms. MacDonald learns that Emmanuel's family is originally from Haiti and that, like his family, Emmanuel speaks Haitian Creole in

addition to speaking English. Even before the start of the school year, these conversations with and observations of the children and their families at the picnic serve as valuable data sources about the children's experiences and interests, to which Ms. MacDonald will connect in her instruction throughout the year.

Following the picnic, Ms. MacDonald takes some notes about what she learns about each family and child in a data binder she has created using her class list. The binder has a section for each child, as well as a section with many tables containing rows labeled for each child and specific standards (or components) to be observed heading each column. There are also blank pages for notetaking, which she will continue adding to throughout the year.

#### ***Learning about Families and Communities: Home Visits***

Emma's, Ayesha's, and Emmanuel's families alert them that one of their teachers is going to visit with them before school starts. Ms. MacDonald and her classroom's support teacher, Mr. Wilmac, conduct home visits (which can be at home or at a location of the family's choosing, such as a local park or community center) with each child during the month leading up to the start of school. To make these visits more manageable, they split the class list and take structured notes they share with one another following the visits. During the visit, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac have a protocol they follow, which was developed during a school-wide cultural proficiency training, although they are comfortable adjusting as needed. The protocol involves conversation

with the child and with the family. It involves the teachers sharing about themselves, as well as inviting the child and family to share about themselves. Activities include the child providing a tour of the home or neighborhood location, sharing favorite objects and activities, and talking about what the first day of school will be like. As soon as possible after the visit, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac take notes on what they learned. In the context of both the picnic and home visit, the teachers focus on learning what the child and family know and can do, rather than on what the child or family does not know or cannot do, and they begin to develop an inventory of the family's and child's interests and cultural assets.



## Portrait of a Model Assessment System: PRE-KINDERGARTEN

SEPTEMBER

***Initial Observations in a Classroom Setting***

Emma, Ayesha, and Emmanuel arrive for their first day of school with a mixture of nervousness and excitement. Wanting their first weeks at school to be as comfortable for the children as possible, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac do not administer any formal or informal assessments in the first weeks of school. However, they observe the children carefully throughout the day. These observations are guided by teachers' deep knowledge, gleaned through preservice teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, in four areas:

1. the State's Early Childhood Standards of Quality;
2. the Head Start Outcomes Framework 2015;
3. the observation forms (and other assessment tools/processes adopted by the district) that are part of their curriculum, which not only align to but also unpack and extend what is in the Head Start Outcomes Framework; and
4. their knowledge of criteria for requesting Tier 2 support services for children (e.g., speech and language intervention, intervention for emotional and behavioral needs).

Teachers record key observations in their data binder.

This year, as every year, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac spend some time early on explaining to their students the many different ways that children write (e.g., scribbling, making some lines). Having reassured children that many different ways of writing are just fine, they begin having children sign in each morning as part of their classroom entry routine. The teachers explain that this will help them quickly know who is here and who is absent, and they talk about jobs where grown-ups sign in, too. Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac put the first two days of sign-in sheets in the data binder and look forward to the yearly tradition of reviewing with children and families how the children signed in at the beginning of the year compared to how they do so at the end of the year. The teachers also record each child retelling a story read aloud to them, selected from the classroom library, which includes a variety of texts that reflect the cultural backgrounds and interests of students in the classroom. Children enjoy watching themselves on video, and the teachers appreciate having a record of each child's retelling skill to inform their planning, as well as to support a comparison to a retelling at the end of the year.

## Portrait of a Model Assessment System: PRE-KINDERGARTEN

OCTOBER – MAY

***Vision and Hearing Screening***

It is now early October and Emma, Ayesha, and Emmanuel are settling into the classroom well. Mr. Wilmac explained at circle time that the next day the children will have a chance to meet with a real nurse who will see how their eyes and ears are working. Mr. Wilmac introduces the terms *vision* and *hearing*, which he reinforces throughout the week, and shows a video so children can see what it will be like to have their

vision and hearing checked. All three children are very engaged during the vision and hearing screening process (none showed signs of vision or hearing problems). For the next two weeks, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac have part of the dramatic play area set up to be a nurse's office with (play) equipment for vision and hearing screening. Emma and Ayesha enjoy playing in that center.

***Continued Observation***

Throughout the year, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac continue to observe children regularly both during teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities. Some of these observations are recorded in prose in each child's section of the data binder. Other observations are translated into "check-offs" on the tables in the binder that list children's names as row headings and specific standards (or components) to be observed as column headings. The teachers also have a goal of talking with a family member of each child at least twice per month. This is not difficult to achieve for the family members who do classroom pick up and drop off, but for those children who ride the bus or go to curbside pickup, it is more difficult. Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac split responsibility for calling those families. They take notes on sticky pads during or shortly after these conversations and add to the data binder any sticky notes with particularly useful information (e.g., Emma has ear infection—her mother says she gets them "all the time"; Emmanuel has become very interested in insects) to ensure that the children's and families' voices are reflected.

In early November, during a series of meetings in which Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac go through the data binder section for each child (see **Planning** next page), they discuss Emma's continued challenge with unclear speech and note that recognizing and generating rhyming words remains difficult for her. Using the district guidelines for Tier 2 service referral, they decide to request an evaluation for speech and language pathology (SLP) support services. The SLP determines that Emma does in fact qualify for services. She begins seeing Emma twice per week and also provides the teachers with a bulleted list of recommendations for things they can do in the classroom to support Emma's development. They meet with Emma's family to share that information.



## Portrait of a Model Assessment System: PRE-KINDERGARTEN

OCTOBER – MAY *continued*

### **Assessments or “Games”**

Sometimes, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac need to have more systematic and psychometrically sound information to use in combination with observational data in order to use both sources of data to inform their instruction. For these situations, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac have a set of valid and reliable assessments that are designed for four-year-olds. For example, they have a phonological awareness assessment designed for four-year-olds that they administer only to children whom they are concerned may be making little progress in this area. Some weeks, one of the center experiences available to children is to sit with Ms.

MacDonald or Mr. Wilmac to play “games” that are these assessments. The teachers invite to this center children they are particularly interested in assessing. (There are games in math and science, and Social and Emotional Learning as well.) Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac explain that they check off different parts of the game on their clipboard as they play them. The clipboard holds tables from the data binder, which Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac return to the binder at the end of the session. Emma and Ayesha love the one-on-one time they get with their teachers during game time. (Emmanuel plays at other centers during this time.)

### **Planning**

Ms. MacDonald’s and Mr. Wilmac’s district ensures that they have one hour per day of collaborative planning time. The district encourages the use of some of these planning hours for what they call “data days,” on which teachers use the information in their data binders to inform their planning of whole-group, small-group, and individual lessons. For example, the curriculum with which they are working includes an opportunity to read aloud a book of their choice each afternoon. The teachers sometimes select books for that time that provide opportunities for instruction in an area that has arisen as a need across many children (they have other reasons for selecting, or encouraging

children to select, books for this time) and that reflect the interests and cultural backgrounds of students in their classrooms. The curriculum also provides an opportunity to do small-group review sessions each Friday, which the teachers plan based on who needs additional support to achieve particular standards. The teachers also make a “look-out list” that informs opportunities to teach, observe, or assess when they are circulating during center time and other parts of the day. For example, they note the need to “look out” for opportunities to develop Emma’s understanding of a letter versus a word and to “look out” for an opportunity to obtain another retelling from Emmanuel to see how that skill is coming along.

### **Conferences**

Twice during the year, the school holds family-teacher conferences, in which teachers meet one-on-one with each child’s family member(s) for an extended conversation about the child’s

progress and next steps for development. The central document for this meeting is the parent report from the ongoing comprehensive child assessment.

## Portrait of a Model Assessment System: PRE-KINDERGARTEN

JUNE



### ***Celebrating Growth***

Emma, Ayesha, and Emmanuel are looking forward to an end-of-year party to celebrate how much they have learned during the year. Each child prepares a booklet called “How I’ve Grown!” The booklet includes the child’s own drawings and dictated writing about what they have learned that year (e.g., Emmanuel learned that “It’s good to share with friends”). Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac also provide

recommended materials for children to include in their booklets, such as a copy of the child’s name-writing at check-in from the beginning and end of the year and photographs of children engaged in science learning. Each booklet ends with things the child hopes to learn in kindergarten. Each child practices sharing their booklets, so they will be ready to do so with their family members.

### ***Finalizing Data Binders***

Although there is no formal end-of-year assessment, teachers make sure that each child’s section of the data binder is up to date and reflects descriptive information about the child as well as information about where that child is in relation to specific standards or components

of standards. Teachers use this information for two purposes: one is sharing with kindergarten teachers (see below); the other is providing information for a meeting in which teachers reflect on things that went well this year and areas they’d like to improve in their teaching the following year.

### ***Data Sharing***

Not all children in pre-kindergarten in the district move on to kindergarten, but many do. For those who do move on, teachers pass along not only a child’s electronic reports from the ongoing assessment but also the section of the data binder and tables in which the child is included. The teachers take a few minutes to highlight some key information about each child that they think will be useful to next year’s teacher. Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Wilmac complete a

form that highlights key information about each child that they think will be useful to pass along to next year’s teacher. They also include their school contact information in case the children’s kindergarten teachers have any questions about the information on the form or data binder. Emma, Ayesha, and Emmanuel are each staying in the district and are looking forward to being “big kindergartners.”