

# Communicating with Parents about Children's Learning



A Guide for  
Kindergarten  
Educators



**DRAFT**

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## Introduction

*Communication with parents about a child's learning should be ongoing throughout the school year and should include a variety of formal and informal means, ranging from formal written reports to informal notes, conversations, and discussions.*

*(Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting In Ontario Schools, 2016, p. 12)*

Effective educator-parent<sup>1</sup>-child communication is fundamental to growth in learning. Educators are encouraged to develop a range of practices and strategies for effective communication with parents and children. As the title suggests, *Communicating with Parents about Children's Learning* focuses on communicating with parents. It is offered as a resource to support educators in reviewing and reflecting on their practices with respect to writing comments on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates, providing feedback, and engaging parents in ongoing dialogue, all with the aim of supporting growth in children's learning.

The information educators provide on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates is an important element in the ongoing communication that educators establish with parents and children. Personalized, clear, precise, and meaningful comments are essential for informing parents about what their children have learned, their growth as learners, and next steps for learning.

To engage parents in their child's learning, written comments on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning templates should:

- use personalized, clear, precise, and meaningful language that parents can understand;
- provide essential information that enables parents to be partners in their child's learning;
- focus on key learning; growth in learning; and possible next steps in learning.

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1. The word *parents* is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

## Part 1: Effective Assessment and Evaluation in Kindergarten

Assessment and evaluation of children’s learning in Kindergarten are focused on the individual child and are not based on standard levels of achievement. As noted in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016, p. 43):

As educators assess children’s learning, they must bear in mind that children enter the Kindergarten program at different stages of development and with diverse backgrounds and experiences – and that they will leave it at different stages and at different points in their growth in relation to the program expectations.

### Assessment *for* and *as* Learning

Educators and children engage in a variety of assessment practices to help children grow in their learning. These practices support “assessment *for* learning” and “assessment *as* learning”.<sup>2</sup>

Educators use pedagogical documentation to “make thinking and learning visible” – to develop a shared understanding with the children of what they are learning, where they are in their learning, and where they are going next. As educators interact with children in play and inquiry, for example, they determine when, where, why, and how to apply the strategy of “noticing and naming the learning”, which enables the children to understand what they are learning and to build on what they have learned. Picturing their learning in this way supports children in moving forward, no matter what their developmental level. As the children participate in and reflect on a variety of learning experiences, they develop and deepen their understanding of what their learning looks like and what their next steps in learning might be. (This strategy establishes the foundation for the more formal use of *learning goals* and *success criteria* in later grades.)

Providing descriptive feedback and reflecting on the documentation of children’s learning with the children creates opportunities for them to develop the skills of self- and peer-assessment.

### Evaluation

As stated in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum* (2016, p. 11), evaluation in Kindergarten is the summarizing of evidence of a child’s learning in relation to the overall expectations outlined in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016) at a given point in

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2. Detailed discussions of assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning in Kindergarten are included in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum* (2016), pp. 6–9, and *The Kindergarten Program* (2016), pp. 36–44.

time – that is, at the end of a reporting period – in order to specify the child’s key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning. Using professional knowledge and judgement, educators interpret and judge the evidence of learning, to determine growth in relation to the overall expectations.

## Part 2: The Kindergarten Communication of Learning Templates

### Versions of the Templates

The **Kindergarten Communication of Learning: Initial Observations** report<sup>3</sup> is intended to provide parents with an *overview* of their child's learning and early evidence of growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations in *The Kindergarten Program*, as well as with information about appropriate next steps to further the child's learning. The Initial Observations report is issued in October or November.

The **Initial Observations** report also provides an opportunity to:

1. establish a positive relationship between educators and parents;
2. involve parents as partners in a conversation about their child's learning, about the educators' assessment, and about how parents can support their child's learning;
3. develop strategies for next steps in the child's learning.

The **Kindergarten Communication of Learning** reports are intended to provide parents with descriptions, written in plain language and including anecdotal comments, about their child's strengths and growth in relation to the overall expectations *within each of the four frames* of *The Kindergarten Program*. Next steps in the child's learning are also indicated, to inform parents of the educators' plans for supporting the child's new learning at school and to assist them in supporting their child's learning at home.

The Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports are issued at the end of the second and third reporting periods.<sup>4</sup> The report issued at the end of the second reporting period reflects the child's growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations introduced and developed from September to January/February of the school year. The report issued at the end of the third reporting period reflects the child's growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations introduced or further developed from January/February to June of the school year.

The Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports include tear-off sections for parents' acknowledgement of receipt of the report and for their comments and/or request to discuss with the educators the information provided. Parents are asked to return these sections to the school.

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3. In the context of Kindergarten, the term *report* is used, in the sense of "an account", as opposed to *report card*, which is associated with the reporting of student achievement in terms of standard measures of performance.

4. For more information about the dates of issue of the reports, and for specific instructions about completing the templates (e.g., when to use the boxes indicating Individual Education Plan [IEP] and English as a second language [ESL]), see *Growing Success --The Kindergarten Addendum* (2016), pp. 12 and 15–16.

### ***English Language Learners***

All of the templates have a box labelled “ESL”. For many children in Kindergarten who have English language learning needs, accommodations to support their learning in relation to the overall expectations may be all that is required to meet their language learning needs. For these children, the English as a Second Language (ESL) box need *not* be checked on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning.

When a child’s learning and growth in learning are based on expectations modified from the expectations in *The Kindergarten Program* to support English language learning needs, educators will check the “ESL” box for the frame.

Educators will *not* check the “ESL” box to indicate only:

- that the child is an English language learner; or
- that accommodations have been provided to support learning.

When program expectations are modified, assessment and evaluation will be based on the documented modified expectations, and the modifications will be explained to the parents. Because the parents of children in ESL programs may have difficulty understanding the information in the Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports, it might be necessary to meet with them in person and to use an interpreter.

When an English language learner requires modifications to program expectations to address *both* language-learning needs and special education needs, both the “ESL” box and the “IEP” box are checked.

### ***Children with Special Education Needs***

All of the templates have a box labelled “IEP”.

- If the child’s IEP requires only accommodations to support learning, educators will *not* check the “IEP” box. Key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning are based on the expectations in *The Kindergarten Program*.
- When the expectations in a child’s IEP are based on learning expectations in a given frame but have modifications, educators will select the “IEP” box for that frame and include the following statement:  
*“Program expectations have been modified to meet the needs of the child.”*
- Where the expectations in a child’s IEP are alternative learning expectations, the educator must check the “IEP” box for the frame and must include the following statement:  
*“Key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in learning are based on alternative learning expectations in the IEP.”*



## Part 3: Communicating Information about Learning Using the Templates

As noted in *Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum* (2016, p. 13), the templates are designed to provide parents with “clear, detailed, and straightforward information” about their child’s learning. The following sections offer guidance in communicating information in this way using the Communication of Learning templates.

### The Focus of the Communication of Learning

At the end of each reporting period, educators will use the appropriate template to communicate information, through written comments, about three aspects of the child’s learning: *Key Learning*, *Growth in Learning*, and *Next Steps in Learning*. These terms are defined as follows:

**Key Learning:** The most important or significant skills and/or understandings (knowledge) that the child has demonstrated during the reporting period, in relation to the overall expectations. It is appropriate for educators to include their perceptions about the child’s interests and learning preferences in their descriptions of *key learning*.

**Growth in Learning:** Positive developments in learning that the child has demonstrated over the reporting period, in relation to the overall expectations. Developmental stage, learning trajectory, and/or other individual processes of learning should be taken into account when evaluating and describing *growth in learning*.

**Next Steps in Learning:** Ways in which the child can move forward in developing knowledge and skills, in relation to the overall expectations, both at school and at home. Developmental stage, learning trajectory, and/or other individual processes of learning should be taken into account when determining *next steps in learning*.

### The Role of Professional Judgement

Educators will use their professional judgement, informed by the evidence gathered through pedagogical documentation and their knowledge of child development and of the expectations outlined in *The Kindergarten Program*, to decide which aspects of the child’s key learning and growth in learning, and which next steps, are the most important to comment on for the reporting period.



#### Questions for Reflection

*In composing comments, educators consider the following:*

- What is the most significant learning demonstrated by this child at this time? How does it link to the overall expectations? What does it tell us about the growth in this child’s learning?
- How were we able to tell that the learning occurred?
- What made the progression in learning evident?

Ongoing reciprocal communication with parents throughout the year will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the child’s growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations in and across the four frames of *The Kindergarten Program*. The comments in the Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports are a distillation of the evidence of learning accumulated over time, with special consideration given to more recent evidence of the child’s learning.

Educators need to be selective in the evidence of learning that they cite in their comments, focusing on the most significant learning and growth and knowing that they can elaborate and draw attention to a wider range of evidence, if appropriate, in later conversations with parents.

### **Equitable and Inclusive Communication**

As in all aspects of teaching and learning in Ontario’s classrooms, it is important to take into account the diversity of the children in the Kindergarten program when completing the Communication of Learning templates. According to *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (2014, p. 86), “the dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status”.

Kindergarten children and their families possess a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, both connected with and independent of their individual identities. In view of this diversity, educators strive to communicate information about a child’s learning in ways that best support understanding and the development of a positive relationship. How these relationships are established and maintained may differ, depending on the particular child and family. In all cases, sensitivity to individual differences in both approach and use of language supports understanding and contributes to relationships that enhance the child’s growth and school experience.

For some families, it may be helpful, or necessary, to involve members of the extended family and/or community support personnel such as interpreters, Indigenous community members (e.g., Elders, Métis Senators, Indigenous counsellors), settlement workers, members of faith communities, community service providers, and/or others to assist in communicating information about children’s learning.

### **Composing Written Comments**

Comments are a distillation of the educators’ observations and assessment of the child’s learning, based on evidence gathered through pedagogical documentation over time.



#### **Questions for Reflection**

*In composing comments, educators consider the following:*

- Are we taking the backgrounds and experiences of our learners and their families into account?
- Do our comments – in both content and language – take into account and positively reflect each learner’s unique identity?

Like all communication about learning, the written comments should be designed to provide detailed information that will support children in their learning, assist educators in establishing plans for further learning, and help parents support their child’s learning at home (*Growing Success –The Kindergarten Addendum*, 2016, p. 13).

Comments that are based on the “collaborative, complementary, and reciprocal relationship” that educators have developed with each child and their family in the Kindergarten classroom (*Growing Success – The Kindergarten Addendum*, 2016, p. 5) will be both meaningful and personalized.

Comments should provide parents with *clear, precise, focused, personalized, and meaningful* feedback.

### **Clarity and Precision**

Written comments are most helpful when they use clear, precise, concrete, and concise language, and everyday vocabulary that is easy to understand. Educational terminology taken directly from *The Kindergarten Program*, while it may be clear to educators, is less helpful for communicating information to parents. Precise information and concrete examples communicate clearly and vividly, and help make the comments readily understandable.

The readability of the comments is also very important, so they should also be typed in a clear and readable font.

### **Focus**

As noted above, the comments should focus on the most significant aspects of the child’s learning in relation to the overall expectations in *The Kindergarten Program* – those that are most relevant to the child’s learning and development in the reporting period. (It is not necessary to address all of the overall expectations individually or to use the exact language of the expectations, but it is important to anchor the comments to the learning outlined in the expectations.) Descriptions of the growth in the child’s understanding and skills that has been observed since the last reporting period should be included. It is always important to focus on the child’s strengths – in other words, to use an “asset focus”.

The comments also identify next steps in learning. The descriptions of next steps focus on the most significant areas in which the child can move forward in learning and development, and provide concrete information and specific suggestions about the learning that the child can engage in next, with the support of the educators and families.



### **Questions for Reflection**

*In composing comments, educators consider the following:*

- Will our comments be clear to, and understood by, the child’s family members?
- Are we focusing on the child’s strengths in our descriptions of the learning?

**Personalization**

Comments are tailored to the individual child, and should include information about the child’s particular interests and learning preferences. It is important to include specific examples of learning based on evidence gathered during the reporting period. When composing comments, educators bear in mind the child’s developmental stage, learning trajectory, and/or other individual processes of learning.

**The Educator’s Voice**

In the following section, sample comments are provided to help guide educators in composing comments and to support professional dialogue. However, individual educators naturally use their own voice and their own forms of expression to convey details relevant to each child’s learning and development. Parents respond to the authenticity of the educator’s voice as it is conveyed through the written comments, which communicate both information and shared investment in the child’s learning and well-being.

**Sample Comments**

**Comments on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning: Initial Observations Report**

As noted above, the Initial Observations report gives parents an overview of the child’s key learning and growth in learning during the early fall of the school year, along with information about next steps in learning. In providing an overview, the Initial Observations comments are not given by frame. Sample comments for an Initial Observations report are provided below.

Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning	<input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP
<p>Ryan uses social skills when playing with his friends (e.g., at the spinners and blocks and when playing soccer). He acts as a leader by inviting others in, cheering classmates on, using strategies to pick teams, and making sure that everyone gets a turn. For example, he says, “Let’s do Rock, Paper, Scissors to decide.”</p>	
<p>Ryan demonstrates his interest in writing and in collecting and organizing data when he uses a clipboard to keep score. He makes sure that scores are recorded accurately so that a champion can be determined in a fair way, which is an example of his understanding of numbers and quantity. Ryan also shows problem-solving skills and empathy when he calmly supports his friends as they settle disputes about the winner of the game.</p>	
<p>Ryan has recently expanded his design skills – he has been seeking out different kinds of tools and materials. He had ideas about constructing the soccer playing area with his friends, “We need something to make the goal posts stronger so they don’t fall down.”</p>	
<p>We will support Ryan as a writer in areas of interest to him, to develop his understanding of how writing works and how it can be used for different purposes, such as writing rules for games he invents, creating signs, making lists, and sending notes to others.</p>	

**Comments on the Kindergarten Communication of Learning Reports**

The Kindergarten Communication of Learning reports provide clear descriptions, including anecdotal comments, about the child’s learning and growth in relation to the overall expectations *specific to each of the four frames of the Kindergarten program*: Belonging and Contributing, Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and Problem Solving and Innovating.

The four frames are designed to reflect the integrated way in which learning occurs in children’s play and inquiry in the Kindergarten classroom, but each focuses on distinct aspects of learning. As part of their program planning, educators familiarize themselves with the descriptions of the frames in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016), and they draw on that knowledge to describe key learning, growth in learning, and next steps in relation to the overall expectations identified for each frame.

Sample comments for the Kindergarten Communication of Learning report are provided below. The sample for each of the four frames refers to a different child, in order to illustrate the personalization of written comments.

<b>Belonging and Contributing</b> <span style="float: right;"><input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP</span>
<b>Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning</b>
Omar interacts with the rest of the children in creative ways -- by observing their play and passing them new materials, then showing them new ways to put the materials together. He shows a growing interest in creating and designing with various materials as he draws and constructs many works of art. In this way, he communicates what he is thinking and feeling quite clearly. He also uses clearly organized and precise drawings to show how he solves mathematical challenges. He has contributed books for the classroom library with very detailed illustrations. We will give Omar the camera and encourage him to capture and share his thinking and creations, adding to the examples of how he contributes to our class learning.

<b>Self-Regulation and Well-Being</b> <span style="float: right;"><input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> IEP</span>
<b>Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning</b>
Alasie uses strategies to self-regulate. When she looks away while listening to a story, she is able to bring her attention back and still understand what is happening. She has learned to use the visual schedule on her own now, so she can tell what is coming next. We have observed growth in Alasie’s ability to identify and take responsibility for a broader range of her emotions (e.g., “My stomach feels nervous, I’m going to do my yoga breathing.”).  As she continues to try new things and expand her friendships with others, we encourage Alasie to name and describe her emotions in new and unfamiliar situations.

**Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours** ESL  IEP**Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning**

When Mei-Xing first came to Kindergarten she spent a lot of time exploring materials (e.g., pattern blocks, magnet letters). She would pour the materials onto the carpet and then put them back into the bin. Now, she is selecting materials and following her plan for them (e.g., sorting and selecting blocks to stack into towers; comparing the size of the towers). When asked, she responds with words and gestures (e.g., “This tower is bigger” as she uses her hand to show the size difference).

We will work with Mei-Xing to share more details of her thinking by asking questions such as, “How do you know? What makes you think that?” We will encourage her to describe her understanding as she sorts, compares, and builds with a variety of materials (e.g., by drawing out what she knows about shapes and quantity, we can help her describe what she measures: “taller”, “heavier”, or “wider” will begin to replace “bigger”).

**Problem Solving and Innovating** ESL  IEP**Key Learning / Growth in Learning / Next Steps in Learning**

Alex questions the way things work, and creates theories and tests them out, particularly during outdoor play.

Alex is trying to expand their\* thinking by including theories that other children have talked about or ones that Alex has found in books (e.g., Alex applied what they saw in a book about how tunnels are made to improve the structure of the tunnels they were making in the sand).

Alex takes photos and makes videos to document the design process as well as the end product (e.g., the cushion they designed to make landing at the bottom of the slide safer). We will encourage Alex to use these photos and videos to show others how Alex tests theories and solves problems.

As a reader, Alex also solves problems -- for example, when they read a word that doesn't make sense or that they don't recognize, they check the picture and the starting sound to figure out the word.

*\*Alex is a gender-fluid child, whose preferred pronouns are “they” and “their”.*

## Conclusion

### **The Importance of Educator Collaboration and Planning**

The comments that educators write in a child's Communication of Learning report are supported by the processes of planning, assessment, and evaluation. In order to write clear, precise, personalized, and meaningful comments, educators work as a team to carefully plan for assessment and regularly notice and name the learning so that children know where they are in the learning and where they need to go next. All the educators involved in the child's learning contribute to the collection of information that the Kindergarten teacher considers in order to determine and describe key learning, growth in learning, and next steps.

For additional resources about assessment and evaluation in Kindergarten, educators may wish to review the print and video illustrations on the EduGAINS website, at <http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/aer/index.html>.