



Supporting Family
Engagement To
Promote Literacy

Prekindergarten

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Interactions Around Writing for Prekindergarten

A Resource for Educators



Introduction

This resource is intended to support educators in building family partnerships to enhance children’s literacy development at preschool and at home. The goal is for schools, child care providers, and families to effectively partner to engage children in literacy-based activities. By providing practical ideas and resources for families, schools and child care programs are better able to bridge literacy instruction from classrooms into homes, giving children more literacy opportunities in multiple contexts.

The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Michigan Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) created *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten* to improve children’s literacy.¹ The Michigan Department of Education endorses the use of the Essentials as quality, research-informed literacy practices. The evidence supporting the family literacy practices is informed by research that meets rigorous standards established by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) in classroom settings. These evidence-based classroom practices were adapted for home-use; however, research has not investigated the efficacy of all of these practices in home contexts.

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten includes guidance on the provision of writing interactions for children. The writing Essential supports literacy development of children across the other instructional practices. The opportunity to engage in deliberate interactions with children around writing that is personally meaningful promotes literacy development. Teachers and families who write model the importance of writing for children. Research shows that children learn by doing; therefore, children’s learning is influenced by their active participation and construction of knowledge.² Interactive writing involves the child contributing to a piece of writing led by the adult, who demonstrates directionality of writing, purposes for writing, and letter-sound relationships.³ To help families understand that interactive writing helps children develop literacy skills, educators can share this strategy with them.



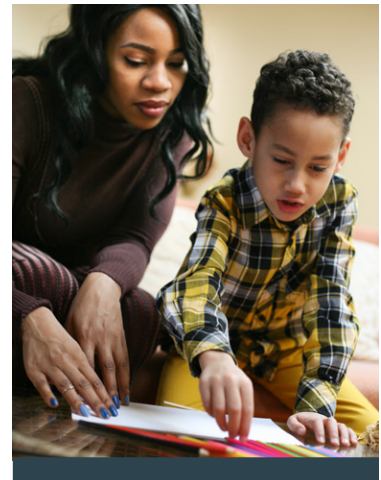
Sharing Why Writing Is an Essential Practice With Families

The goal of writing in prekindergarten should include helping children to integrate their understanding of print so they can apply language and literacy skills in personally meaningful writing. In prekindergarten, writing should aim to:

- Improve children’s attitudes toward and engagement in writing;
- Hone children’s oral language skills; and
- Improve their knowledge of letter-sound relationships and concepts of print.⁴

A task as simple as name writing supports children’s construction of knowledge of how they identify sounds within words, how letters represent those sounds, and how to write letters to convey their message. Evidence suggests that name writing skills are correlated with later reading skills such as decoding, reading comprehension, and spelling.⁵

Young children should be given many opportunities to write, as writing benefits both emergent reading and writing skills. It is important to understand that writing in prekindergarten should focus on more than fine motor skills and letter formation. While those procedural skills are important, the meaning-making processes of writing are vital for language and literacy development. The meaning-making processes of writing in prekindergarten include recording thoughts and ideas to communicate with others. This typically starts as indiscernible scribbles or marks and progresses to individual symbols or letters to letter strings and words.⁶ Learning to write involves simultaneously learning to transcribe (i.e., write letters) and compose (i.e., graphically represent thoughts and ideas).⁷



Supporting Families in the Essential Practice of Writing

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten also includes collaboration with families in promoting literacy. Schools can partner with families to learn more about supporting writing at home in several ways. For example, schools can share with families the "Writing" infographic that accompanies this brief. The MiFamily Engagement Framework⁸ outlines several high-impact strategies that help support child outcomes and family engagement. These strategies can be adapted to help families work with their young child on emergent writing skills. For example:

- During classroom observations, teachers can model shared writing,ⁱ interactive writing,ⁱⁱ journaling,ⁱⁱⁱ and bookmaking for families.^{iv}
- Schools or teachers can host a family bookmaking night during which teachers guide families to make a book with their child and send home materials for families to make additional books at home.
- Teachers can share videos on how to incorporate writing into everyday activities at home.
- Teachers can conduct home visits during which they share the importance of emergent writing.

Family engagement involves educators regularly partnering with the family to support children's emergent language and literacy skills, including writing in personally meaningful ways at home.



ⁱ Shared writing involves a joint collaboration between adult and child to construct text. While the adult is the scribe, the child can concentrate on meaning-making.

ⁱⁱ Interactive writing provides an opportunity for the adult and child to share the pen and write together. This allows the child to focus on copying the writing of the adult.

ⁱⁱⁱ The purpose of journaling in prekindergarten is for children to record their thoughts and ideas. It is important for adults to remember that journaling is not handwriting practice or writing to a prompt.

^{iv} Bookmaking is a child-centered activity in which the children focus on composing a story through illustrations and writing at their level and ability.

Resources

The following resources provide more information about and examples of how to support writing at home:

Writing at Home Activities:

[Emergent Writing: Background Information](#)

Tips for Families:

[Shared and Interactive Writing: Literacy Beginnings](#)

[Supporting Very Young Writers](#)

Writing Development:

[Promoting Preschoolers' Emergent Writing](#)

[Pre-K Essential Bullet 6: Interactive Writing Experience](#)



Endnotes

- ¹ Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, General Education Leadership Network, Early Literacy Task Force. (2016). *Essential instructional practices in early literacy: Prekindergarten*. https://literacyessentials.org/downloads/gelndocs/pre-k_literacy_essentials.pdf
- ² Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- ³ Hall, A. H., Simpson, A., Guo, Y., & Wang, S. (2015). Examining the effects of preschool writing instruction on emergent literacy skills: A systematic review of the literature. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 54*(2), 115–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2014.991883>
- ⁴ Tolchinsky, L. (2014). From text to language and back: The emergence of written language. In C. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research (2nd ed., pp. 144–159)*. Guilford.
- ⁵ National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). *Developing early literacy: A scientific synthesis of early literacy development and implications for intervention*. National Institute for Literacy.
- ⁶ Molfese, V. J., Beswick, J. L., Jacobi-Vessels, J. L. Armstrong, N. E., Culver, B. L., White, J. M., Ferguson, M. C., Rudasill, K. M., & Molfese, D. L. (2011). Evidence of alphabetic knowledge in writing: Connections to letter and word identification skills in preschool and kindergarten. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 24*, 133–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-010-9265-8>
- ⁷ Tolchinsky, L. (2014). From text to language and back: The emergence of written language. In C. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of writing research (2nd ed.)*. Guilford.
- ⁸ Michigan Department of Education. (2020). *MiFamily: Michigan's family engagement framework*. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MIFamily_Family_Engagement_Framework_683447_7.pdf

Acknowledgments

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