



## The Preschool Essential Skill Inventory

The Essential Skill Inventory: Preschool is a competency-based authentic assessment of the most crucial skills in the development of language, literacy, number sense, visual motor skill, gross motor skills, behavior, and self-care skills. The inventory serves as a formative assessment tool, updated weekly by the teacher, so educators can identify specifically what students know and what they are ready to learn. These skills are the core skills which cannot be merely “covered”. These are the skills we must ensure students learn to a level of deep understanding and application, and the inventory helps teachers have up to date information about each child to help design weekly or daily lesson plans. These are the foundation skills upon which a lifetime of learning will be built.

The Preschool Essential Skills Inventory guides a comprehensive understanding of the learning needs of the class, and of each child. In one place the teacher can see which children have already demonstrated proficiency for an essential skill, which children are typically developing, and which children need more intensive intervention to accelerate learning. Early childhood domains assessed include fine motor, visual motor, gross motor, adaptive, social communication, social relations, social-emotional, oral language, literacy, mathematics, and self-care.

Designed for use in preschool with children ages 3 to 5, the inventory uses a rubric which describes four stages of development toward proficiency and Kindergarten readiness. The rubric for each skill allows teachers to know precisely where each child performs within this scale, and to design instruction at the correct level of challenge to ensure engagement and instructional match.

**Emergent** skills are progressing and promising, but not yet at a level of development preferred for children at ages 3 or 4. If a skill is considered *emergent*, the teaching staff should be giving special attention to designing instructional opportunities for the child so that this skill will quickly grow and develop.

**Developing 3** skills are in the range of progress expected during the third year.

**Developing 4** skills are in the range of progress expected during the fourth year.

**Proficient** skills are at the level of development that predicts readiness for success in Kindergarten.

Essential preschool skills are identified as:

### **Oral Language**

Listens with interest to stories  
Retells stories using main ideas  
Expresses needs and wants verbally  
Uses words to solve problems  
Uses age-appropriate vocabulary  
Follows two-part oral directions

### **Literacy**

Shows an interest in books and print  
Understands basic concepts of print  
Identifies if sounds are the same or different  
Recognizes basic rhyming words  
Identifies basic shapes  
Recognizes and prints first name  
Identifies uppercase letters in first name  
Identifies some letters and the sounds they make

### **Number Sense**

Counts by rote to 20  
Recognizes numerals 0 to 10  
Counts using 1 to 1 correspondence for numbers (to 10)  
Models gross motor and fine motor patterns  
Understands concepts of add-on and take-away (to 10)

### **Visual Motor Skills**

Uses coloring and writing tools with skill

Can draw a picture to express an idea  
Demonstrates appropriate cutting skills  
Uses proper pencil grip  
Prints name in own style  
Gives sustained effort to visual-motor tasks

### **Gross Motor Skills**

Throws and catches a large ball  
Throws and catches a small ball  
Stands on one foot with eyes open  
Hops on two feet  
Hops on one foot  
Demonstrates ability to cross midline

### **Behavior**

Separates from parents/caregivers without excessive upset  
Plays/shares with others  
Waits his/her turn  
Perseveres to complete a task  
Respects classroom rules and procedures  
Demonstrates good listening skills

### **Self-Care**

Can use the bathroom independently and complete hygiene tasks  
Able to dress self (puts on coat and shoes; fastens snaps, buttons and zippers)  
States full name and age

The Preschool Essential Skill Inventory is not a normed or standardized testing instrument. It is not intended to give scores that rate children, or show percentiles for development or kindergarten readiness. It is instead an instrument for teachers to know each day what their students can do, and what they are ready to learn. As a formative assessment tool it gives educators the information needed to most effectively plan instruction to meet student needs. It is a tool for shaping educator plans for and delivery of instruction.

The skills represented in the inventory are universal, capturing the normal developmental progression in the domains of early childhood, and focusing on the skills that lead to readiness for kindergarten. Teachers are trained to be effective observers of childhood behavior. As such it is appropriate for use with children with variance from normal development, since it is not a tool to rank children. It is a tool to help educators know their students and design instruction that effectively matches student learning needs and readiness.

The ESI gives teachers a framework for assessment of the most crucial predictors of ongoing learning success. It is not intended to be a curriculum. It does not describe everything that should be taught during the school year. As a framework for assessment, it can be used with any high-quality early childhood learning materials or curriculum. Teachers using High Scope, Montessori, Steiner, Educare, Bright Horizons, Abbot, or International preschool curricula can effectively track progress using the Essential Skill Inventories.

Teachers must be trained and supervised to use the Preschool Essential Skill Inventories. This framework gives clear support for the need for teachers to differentiate instruction, since students are at varying levels of development in most of the skills. Teachers will need to clearly understand what proficient skills look like, and train their skills for embedding assessment into the design of instruction. When best used, teachers do not spend lots of time in assessment-only activities. Instead, they design instruction in such a way that they can update their understanding of student skills through observation and artifacts derived from the act of learning.

The ESI helps teachers clearly understand the different learning needs, and will over time develop a repertoire of instructional strategies to meet those needs. Supervisors and principals are expected to follow their part of the protocol for assessment, which includes monthly data meetings with staff to ensure compliance with the expected data updates and the development of reliable observation and data keeping. Training for teachers and principals in how to use the ESI are available, as are domain specific training for how to develop oral language, literacy, number sense, visual motor skill, gross motor skills, behavior, and self-care skills.

The instruments are available in paper format, and as a digital interactive pdf. In digital form the instruments can be updated, filed electronically, and shared with administrators on a

regular schedule. As per the protocol, teachers are expected to update two domains each week, which allows all domains to be updated within each month. Most teachers report that learning to use the inventory with skill allows them to know their students better, build better relationships, understand the whole child and how the domains of early childhood interact, and to differentiate instruction with greater skill.

The Preschool Essential Skill Inventory is designed for on-going authentic assessment of student skills and behaviors. It is not a standardized or norm-referenced instrument. As such, it is always advised that the ESI is used within a comprehensive plan for assessment which includes some standardized measure, to improve reliability and avoid the effect of staff indicating student proficiency based on wishful thinking rather than careful observation.

The data on the ESI gives teachers clear information over time regarding which students are struggling and in which areas. It also shows which students have made significant learning gains, even for those students who may have started the year behind normal or expected levels of development. As such it is a crucial tool for discussions of referral for special services, and gives support staff guidance on the specific areas of need and any patterns of delay which may impact learning success.

There is no cost for a license for use of the Preschool Essential Skill Inventory. Any school , school district or education agency or consortium is invited to obtain a license to use the inventory based on a commitment to a quality training plan, along with the expectation to submit a quarterly report showing that classroom data is being collected weekly per the protocol, and end of year student outcomes. Training plans and fees are negotiated based on individual school or consortium circumstances, with the aim to train staff as efficiently as possible. With this in place, schools or consortia receive:

- the Essential Skill Inventory in paper and electronic formats
- the ESI rubrics
- the ESI protocol for use, along with other supportive documents to help ensure fidelity and quality
- the expectation that the district/school will collect data to show that the ESI is used with fidelity, and data showing end of year student outcomes
- training as agreed in the plan

## Protocol for Use of the *Essential Skill Inventory* in Preschool

- Collect baseline data during the first four to six weeks of school
- Note proficiency by writing the date, after observing proficiency on several occasions
- Allow for exceptions during baseline data collection, letting teachers to use careful observational assessment to more quickly recognize proficiency
- Use data regarding student skills and needs to plan instruction
- Update two sections of the ESI each week
- Review data with director/principal monthly
- Individual student data can be used for communication with parents.
- Classroom data should not be used for individual discussions
- Our goal is to help at least 90% of our students reach proficiency in every skill before Kindergarten entry

### **License Agreement for Use of the Essential Skill Inventory: Preschool**

Any school district or education agency is invited to obtain a license to use the *Preschool Essential Skills Inventory*. Programs which commit to a staff training plan for proper use of the inventories are eligible for an on-going license with no additional fees.

#### **Use of the *Preschool Essential Skill Inventory* includes:**

- a training plan designed to the needs of your district, usually to include staff training, director/principal coaching, and data monitoring
- the Essential Skill Inventory in paper and electronic formats
- the ESI rubrics
- the ESI protocol for use, along with other supportive documents to help ensure fidelity and quality
- the expectation that the district will collect data to show that the ESI is used with fidelity, and data showing the quality of student end of year outcomes

For more information on training and a license agreement for use of the *Preschool Essential Skill Inventories*, contact Bob Sornson at the Early Learning Foundation, [Bob@earlylearningfoundation.com](mailto:Bob@earlylearningfoundation.com)

# Why Choose to Use the Essential Skill Inventories?

1. **Simplicity.** The ESI concisely describes the essential learning and behavior outcomes needed to predict high-quality early learning success at each level.
2. **Clear and concrete standards.** The essential skills and standards for proficiency provide a clear framework for what should be learned, which is a much different focus than what objectives were “covered”. Teachers have a clear focus for what students must learn and be able to do. The goal is competency for every essential skill.
3. **Teacher-driven assessment.** Using the Essential Skill Inventories, teachers are expected to find multiple ways to embed assessment into the design of instruction. This can be done with any high quality curriculum and materials, and creates a teacher-driven assessment process.
4. **Analytics.** By updating data weekly in at least two domains of the ESI, teachers have up-to-date information about the learning needs and readiness of each student. Districts can accurately track student success on a weekly basis.
5. **Data that matters.** The at-a-glance classroom inventory provides teachers with all the information they need for planning instruction, and encourages differentiated instruction.
6. **Improved teacher skills.** Use of the Essential Skill Inventories helps teachers significantly improve their skills for formative assessment, differentiate instruction, understand the whole child, and build connections with students.
7. **Improved outcomes.** Knowing the crucial learning needs of each student encourages teachers to design instruction at the instructional level of each student. This keeps students more engaged and motivated, improves time on task, behavior, and learning outcomes.
8. **Cost.** There is no on-going cost for the license to use the Inventories. Organizations with staff trained to use the inventories, and with a simple but powerful data collection plan, will be able to sustain use without incurring annual costs.

For additional information about use of the *Preschool Essential Skill Inventory*, contact Bob Sornson at the Early Learning Foundation, 5184 Milroy Lane, Brighton, MI 48116, 810 225 4991, [bob@earlylearningfoundation.com](mailto:bob@earlylearningfoundation.com).

## Essential Skill Inventory: Preschool

District: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School/Year: \_\_\_\_\_

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