

**Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about
the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines
March 2012**

Q1: What is the expectation for the appropriate use of *the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines*?

Ans:

- *The NM Early Learning Guidelines* were developed to be used by early childhood practitioners in their everyday work with children and families. They are meant to be used in ways that support children's growth and development and provide support for collaboration and communication with families. Use of *the NM Early Learning Guidelines* are to respect and celebrate the uniqueness and strengths of each child in early care and education programs across the state.
- *The NM Early Learning Guidelines* have been developed to be used as a common foundation for the observation/documentation/curriculum planning - individualization process.
- Each early childhood system (child care, early intervention, home visiting, early childhood special education, NM PreK, Head Start and Early Head Start – and individual programs within these systems – will determine how the *NM Early Learning Guidelines* are most appropriately used.

**Q2: What are the do's and don'ts of Early Learning Guidelines?
can we be wrong?**

Ans:

- *The NM Early Learning Guidelines* were developed to support the work of early childhood practitioners within the natural context of everyday activities of an early childhood program. They were not developed, for example, to "test" children outside the context of his or her normal everyday activities.
- They were not developed to be used as a diagnostic tool. As a result, they should not be used to deny services or to place children in specialized programs.

Q3: Can programs use the *NM Early Learning Guidelines* as a checklist for individual children?

Ans:

- The *NM Early Learning Guidelines* were not designed to be used as a “checklist” but rather as a guide for observation and planning - the source of information regarding reasonable, age appropriate expectations to be used as the basis for authentic observational assessment and curriculum planning.
- Some indicators can easily be observed and “checked off” quickly but most must be observed over time to determine a child’s capabilities, strengths in different domains.

Q4: For accountability purposes how would an outsider know the *NM Early Learning Guidelines* are being used?

Ans:

- *The NM Early Learning Guidelines* may be used as part of a criterion-based approach for the authentic assessment of children and appropriate curriculum planning. They provide reasonable expectations that early childhood professionals can refer to when determining the capabilities and needs of each child when assessing children’s developmental progress and when planning individualized curricular strategies. Therefore, *the NM Early Learning Guidelines* should be an on-going reference and reflected in anecdotal observation notes, lesson or activity plans, in children’s portfolios and in family summary reports.

Q5: Will this be part of the STAR or Quality Rating system?

Ans:

- Yes. Learning to conduct criterion-based observations of children, document observations and plan individualized curriculum based on those observations is certainly an indicator of quality.

Q6: Are the *NM Early Learning Guidelines* being recognized as a research-based tool?

Ans:

- Yes, they are research-based. The infant and toddler guidelines have been reviewed by Zero to Three and West Ed to ensure that they reflect current research. The preschool guidelines have been reviewed by the National Institute

for Early Education Research (NIEER). And, the guidelines for the end of kindergarten tie directly to the NM State Kindergarten Standards.

- NIEER has documented research that supports the importance of the preschool essential indicators in relationship to school success. This research can be accessed at the www.newmexicoprek.org.

Q6: How can we insure that ELG’s do not turn into the “standardized assessments” that have burdened education in grades K-12?

Ans:

- The focus is on an authentic, observational assessment processes, not a standardized, out-of-context, on-demand assessment or test.

Q7: Why don’t ALL of the NM Early Learning Guidelines have a rubric to follow?

Ans:

- For infants and toddlers, the guidelines are not designed to be tracking small behavioral changes. The development of infants and toddlers is seen as more fluid and dynamic than that of preschoolers and kindergartners.

Q7: How do we determine appropriate guidelines for children that may have lower or higher development than their actual age?

Ans:

- A guiding principle of *the NM Early Learning Guidelines* is that every child develops at his or her own pace, developing and learning differently at different times across domains and indicators. It is not reasonable to expect a child to be perfectly at their age level in all domains and indicators at any given time. An individualized picture of each child’s capabilities is possible by using the continuum of the Guidelines, paying attention to what precedes the child’s age as well as what follows for their development. In this way, the Guidelines can be used to observe and to plan for activities and experiences that will be reinforcing

as well as stimulating and challenging for that child (rather than for his chronological age only).

Q8: How will it be incorporated into inclusion specialists' roles?

Ans:

- *The NM Early Learning Guidelines* were designed to be used by anyone working with young children and their families in early childhood programs - including early intervention and special education preschool programs.
- It is our assumption that the Guidelines may be used differently based on each individual's role and responsibilities.

Q9: How are the agencies going to ensure this information is dispersed so that those working with young children are able to implement these principles?

Ans:

- Continued staff development, state-wide sessions and production of additional materials such as family materials, training materials, video materials, etc. is planned for over the next years.

Q10: How do we help teachers understand and implement *the NM Early Learning Guidelines*? How much support is going to be provided to make sure that the Guidelines are being implemented appropriately?

Ans:

- Through on-going staff development, practice implementation, review of documents, attendance at state-wide training sessions, and on-site support in the classroom or program.