

## Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards: Early Literacy Skills

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### What are the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?

The *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards* (WMELS) is a resource for parents and professionals that provide common language for early learning. The standards were developed in 2008 by a variety of professionals working in the Birth to 6 system. The WMELS standards outline developmental milestones in sequential order so that parents and caregivers can track their child's development with appropriate expectations.

The WMELS standards are aligned with IDEA Early Childhood Outcomes and Wisconsin's K-12 Model Academic Standards; which are educational measures describing what children and youth must know and be able to do in order to become successful life long learners. The WMELS standards provide detailed information about child development from birth to first grade pertaining to the following five developmental domains:

- Health and Physical Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language Development and Communication
- Approaches to Learning
- Cognition and General Knowledge

### How is WMELS organized?

The WMELS book is organized by domains of development with the recognition that learning is multidimensional. The five domains are divided into sub-domains. See example below. The sub-domains include developmental expectations which are broad. The developmental expectations and specific skills described in the WMELS standards are not age-linked, to reinforce two of the guiding principles that children develop at individual rates and exhibit a range of skills and competencies within any domain of development. The specific information and skills that a child should know and be able to do are described in a developmental continuum. These developmental continuums are based on the order in which specific skills emerge in most children birth to first grade according to current research (WMELS, pages 4-9).

Example of how information is organized for the development of early literacy skills.

Domain: Language Development and Communication

Sub-domain: 1. Listening and Understanding

Sub-domain: 2. Speaking and Communicating

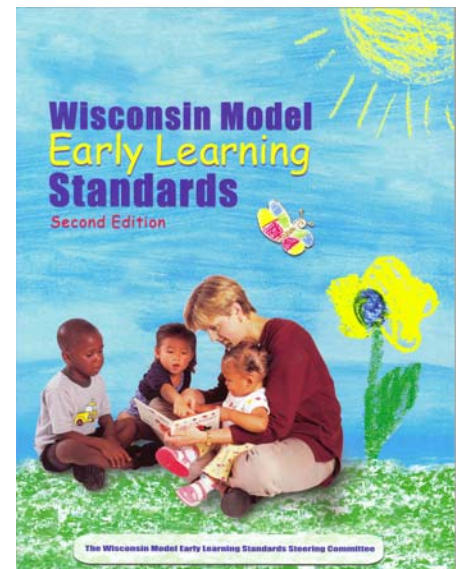
Sub-domain: 3. Early Literacy

Performance Standard 1: Shows an appreciation of books and understands how print works

Performance Standard 2: Develops alphabetic, phonological, and phonemic awareness

Performance Standard 3: Demonstrates use of strategies to read words

Performance Standard 4: Uses writing to represent thoughts or ideas



Early literacy is one sub-domain of Language Development and Communication. Early experiences with language and communication define children's assumptions and expectations about becoming literate as they learn that reading and writing are valuable tools. Long before they can exhibit reading and writing skills, children acquire basic understandings of concepts about literacy and its functions. Regular and active interactions with print, in books and in the environment are significant in early childhood. These experiences are part of a foundation that allows children to organize this information into patterns essential for later development in reading and writing. Children whose home language is not English may demonstrate literacy skills in their primary language before they do so in English (WMELS, pages 42).

## **What does the developmental continuum for early literacy look like according to WMELS standards?**

The developmental expectation, or overarching goal in our state for Early Literacy is "Children in Wisconsin will have the literacy skills and concepts needed to become successful readers and writers" (WMELS, page 43).

Early literacy skills first begin to emerge when a child explores and enjoys books. She will point to and name pictures in a book when asked. She will look at picture books and ask questions or make comments. She then develops an understanding that the print in the book carries the message. She views one page at a time from the front to the back of the book and learns that the book has a title, author, and illustrator. She understands that books have characters, sequence of events, and story plots. She handles books correctly showing increasing skills in print directionality. She chooses reading activities and responds with interest and enjoyment. She explores, repeats, and imitates alphabet related songs and games. She mixes letters with symbols. She recognizes the difference between letters and other symbols. She recognizes beginning letters in familiar words, especially in her own name. She recognizes and names most letters of the alphabet (upper & lower case) in familiar and unfamiliar words (WMELS, pages 54-57). Note: this is an example of the developmental continuum for performance standards 1 and 2 of early literacy.

## **How can WMELS standards be helpful for parents and professionals?**

It is critical that early childhood professionals have a solid knowledge base of the emergent literacy process in young children. This includes an understanding of alternative or augmentative communication processes and appropriate use of assistive technology devices. Of equal importance to a child's development of early literacy skills is parents' and caregivers' commitment to incorporating reading and writing skills into everyday family routines, such as reading bedtime stories and including children in writing family grocery lists (Elliott & Olliff, 2008). See AAC article on pages 4-5.

The WI Model Early Learning Standards can be a useful tool when writing goals for Individual Family Service Plans or Individual Education Plans. The sample strategies provided for caregivers are written in language that families can understand and incorporate into everyday activities.

In a recent WMELS training this past summer, professionals from Birth to 3 and Early Childhood Special Education were polled on the usefulness of WMELS standards in their professions. These professionals agreed that the standards can be used as a tool to guide curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions.

"I will use it to help with developing IFSP goals and strategies, using routines to assist with this for families."

"I can see myself sharing the whole book with some families and parts with others. I would love to steer a group of parents through this information."

"I will share copies of pages, discuss with co-workers and other agencies."

"I work with 2 families that have their child in daycare-so I see the child in home and at daycare. I plan to share this with them."

"WMELS will be helpful to use as an orientation tool for new staff."

## How can I obtain a copy of the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards?

The WMELS document Second Edition is available online in English, Spanish, and Hmong. To access and download the content please visit:

[http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/EarlyLS\\_docs.htm](http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/EarlyLS_docs.htm)

This publication can also be purchased for \$3.00 (minimum of 3 for \$9.00) from:

Wisconsin Child Care Information Center  
2109 South Stoughton Road  
Madison, WI 53716  
1-800-362-7353

## How can I receive WMELS Training?

The regional coaches for the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners facilitate WMELS trainings for a wide variety of audiences including Head Start, group and family child care, Birth to 3, and school district (regular and special education) staff and parents. For a list of upcoming WMELS trainings, please visit <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/training.htm>

## References:

Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Second Edition (2008)

Elliott, E.M. & Olliff, C.B. (2008). Developmentally appropriate emergent literacy activities for young children: adapting the early literacy and learning model. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35: 551-556. 

## "Bite" of Research

There is a strong relationship between children's learning and how often their parents play and involve them in everyday activities like going to the market.



(Hart & Risley 1995; Snow et al., 1998)