

## Preparing for the First Days of School

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The beginning of the year can feel overwhelming for children and also for you. A good deal of responsibility falls on you to ensure that you and your physical environment are ready to welcome children and families into your program. The time that you invest in planning and preparing for the first days of school will help make these early moments as successful as possible for both you and the children in your class.

To help you plan and prepare for the first days of school, review the following checklist of reminders and important items to consider. While this is a rather comprehensive checklist, every program is unique. Be sure to take advantage of the additional space provided below to add items that reflect your program's specific needs.

## Welcoming Children and Families to the Program

From the very first moments of the new school year, you will begin building relationships with children and their families. Children need to know that their classroom is a safe place where they can have fun and try out new ideas. Families need to know that the person responsible for their children—the person teaching them new things, helping them when they get frustrated, comforting them when they get sad or angry, and celebrating with them when they accomplish a skill for the first time—genuinely cares about their children.

As you welcome children and families into the program at the beginning of the year, your first priority is to ensure that they recognize themselves as important and valued members of the classroom community.

- Review family and child records. Note any information that will help you make meaningful connections during initial meetings and interactions during the first week (Vol. 1, pp. 198–199).
- Send a welcome letter to each child and his or her family. Familiarize yourself with additional strategies for communicating with families (Vol. 1, pp. 204–205).
- Create laminated pictorial name tags. Try to get photos of the children before the first day of school or photograph children on the first day.
- Ask each family to share a family photo that you can display in the classroom (Vol. 1, p. 74).
- Post a picture of yourself, co-teachers, and any other individuals who will be responsible for caring for the children on a visible wall of the classroom. Include a short summary about yourself (Vol. 1, p. 74).
- Plan a system for ongoing communication with families, such as a daily message board, regular phone calls, or weekly emails (Vol. 1, p. 204–205).
- Confirm that there are positive and welcoming messages throughout the classroom (Vol. 1, pp. 69–70).

## Conveying positive messages

Conveying positive messages through the arrangement of your classroom helps you communicate to children and families that they belong there. Take some time to ask yourself if these messages are clearly being communicated by the choices you have made in setting up your physical environment.

### **“This is a good place to be.”**

- The classroom has warm and homey decorative touches throughout, such as framed artwork, plants, fabric-covered pillows in the Library area, baskets for storage, and tablecloths (Vol. 1, pp. 75–76).
- The furniture, books, art supplies, and other learning materials in the classroom are well-maintained (i.e., not broken or missing any pieces) (Vol. 1, p. 78–79).
- The entranceway is attractive, neat, and inviting, with places to display children’s future work (Vol. 1, p. 201).

### **“You belong here.”**

- The learning materials and pictures on the walls reflect the diversity and cultures of the children in the program and the community and emphasize the diversity of the world (Vol. 1, p. 69).
- Every child in the program has a cubby marked with his or her name and picture in which to keep personal items (Vol. 1, p. 69).
- Family members have a designated place to hang their coats and store any other belongings during their visits (Vol. 1, p. 69).

### **“This is a place you can trust.”**

- Bookshelves, storage shelves, and boxes or baskets of materials are labeled with words and pictures and are neat and uncluttered (Vol. 1, pp. 72–73).
- An illustrated daily schedule is prominently displayed so that children and their families can see and learn the order of the program day (Vol. 1, pp. 90–91).
- Photographs of the children and their families are displayed throughout the classroom at both child and adult eye level (Vol. 1, p. 74).

### **“There are places where you can be by yourself when you want to be alone.”**

- Small, quiet areas of the room accommodate one or two children only (Vol. 1, p. 75).
- A large pillow or stuffed chair in a quiet corner with minimal displays invites children to enjoy being quiet and alone (Vol. 1, p. 75).
- Headphones are available for audio players and other devices so children can listen to recordings individually (Vol. 1, p. 75).

### **“You can do many things on your own here.”**

- Materials for children’s use are stored on low, open shelves where children can reach them easily (Vol. 1, p. 75).
- Shelves are labeled with pictures and words that show children where toys and materials belong (Vol. 1, pp. 72–73).
- Labels and printed materials are in the children’s first languages as well as in English (Vol. 1, pp. 72–23).

### **“This is a safe place to explore and try your ideas.”**

- Materials are displayed attractively, inviting and encouraging children to use them (Vol. 1, p. 75).
- There are various well-defined areas to encourage independent discovery, small-group investigations, and large-group activities (Vol. 1, pp. 79–80).
- Each interest area in the classroom is labeled with signs explaining what children will learn in that area and ways that families can support their children as they make discoveries (Vol. 1, p. 201).

## Arranging the Physical Environment

The physical environment—the way your classroom is set up and the materials included in it—not only encourages children to explore and discover new things, it also strengthens the quality of the learning experiences and activities that children participate in during the day. A well-organized classroom helps facilitate children’s learning and development as they make choices, use materials, and take ownership of caring for the classroom.

- Evaluate the classroom materials that are currently available.
  - Remove any unusable materials, such as broken toys or games that are missing pieces.
  - Organize materials by interest area (Vol. 1, pp. 78–79).
- At the beginning of the school year, it may be appropriate to limit the number of materials available at each interest area to avoid overwhelming children. Select a few materials for each interest area that children can use easily and independently (i.e., open-ended and familiar materials) (Vol. 1, pp. 71–72).
- Consider the children’s family backgrounds as you select materials and plan learning experiences. Ensure that the materials do not depict stereotypes (Vol. 1, pp. 49, 54, 69).
- Strategically arrange the basic furnishings of the classroom (Vol. 1, p. 70).
- Label classroom materials (Vol. 1, pp. 72–73).
- Keep an eye open for items that might make the environment more comfortable and attractive, such as flowers from your garden or a framed picture of yourself and your family (Vol. 1, p. 75–76).
- Store extra materials in a way that does not create unnecessary visual clutter (Vol. 1, pp. 70, 75).
- Keep a prioritized list of the materials you want to request or order.

### Best practices for labeling classroom materials

- Include labels with pictures and words in lowercase letters.
- If possible, consider including a sample of the object on the label (e.g., a bead, a toy car, etc.) for children who may have visual impairments.
- Use one color for English and a different color for the second language that is predominant in your classroom. If other languages are spoken by children in your classroom, include words from those languages in the classroom so all children see their first languages.
- If there are labels in multiple languages in the classroom, make sure to limit the number of labels to avoid overwhelming children and creating visual distractions.

### Considerations for setting up the defined areas in your classroom

- Where are electrical outlets in the room? Place your Technology, Music and Movement, and Library areas near outlets so you can easily plug in music players or computers.
- Where are the sinks? Place the Sand and Water and Art areas close to a sink for easy cleanup and water access.
- Where are your larger, more defined spaces? Reserve a defined space for your large-group time where children can spread out and be comfortable having group discussions.
- How much shelving space do you have? Place the Toys and Games and Block areas near accessible shelves that can store materials for these areas.
- Where should quiet spaces be set up? Place quieter areas (such as the Library area) away from noisier, more active areas (such as the Block area).

### Tips for setting up interest areas

- Make sure messier activities like sand and water play take place on a washable floor, away from carpeting.
- Consider using shower curtains or drop cloths as additional protection from messes.
- Keep writing materials in every interest area.
- Be flexible when children want to bring materials from one interest area to another (e.g., bringing play food items from the Dramatic Play area into the Block area for the restaurant that children built).
- Carpets, tables, and shelves can help define your classroom interest areas. If you have limited furniture, use masking tape or small area rugs to define spaces.

If space limitations prevent you from giving each interest area a designated space, you can make the materials available in other areas of the classroom. For example, you might place tablets or a computer (which would ordinarily be in the Technology area) in the Library area and store musical instruments (generally included in the Music and Movement area) in the Dramatic Play area.

## Planning Your Daily Schedule

Your classroom structure, daily routines, and schedule are just as important as the materials within the physical learning environment. The structure of each classroom day creates a predictable sequence of daily events. A consistent, developmentally appropriate daily schedule that is designed to meet all children's needs facilitates a variety of learning experiences, caters to different learning styles, and nurtures children's sense of comfort and security in the classroom.

When activities are planned in an orderly, consistent, and thoughtful way, children feel empowered as active, independent learners. A consistent classroom schedule also helps children learn about, understand, and subsequently predict the sequence of daily events.

- Begin drafting a daily schedule, starting with fixed times of day such as arrivals and departures, mealtimes, rest time, playground/outdoor time, and other events that are outside of your scheduling control (Vol. 1, pp. 90–91).
- Include time for morning large group, choice time, small group, read-aloud, and large-group roundup at the end of the day (Vol. 1, pp. 80–90).
- Plan for at least 60 minutes of uninterrupted, child-initiated choice time (Vol. 1, p. 91).
- Strive for 40–60 minutes of outdoor play (Vol. 1, p.91).
- Create your daily schedule using pictures and words. If possible, use photos of the children in the classroom. Post the schedule near the large-group area for quick reference and use it with the children (Vol. 1, p. 90).

For a variety of daily schedules, see pages 91–96 in *Volume 1: The Foundation*. While the order of events in your schedule will ideally remain consistent, the time allotted for experiences on the schedule needs to be flexible and responsive to the needs, interests, and abilities of the children in your program. In the first weeks of school, some routines and learning experiences (such as cleanup time) may take longer, while experiences such as read-alouds and large-group activities will need to be shorter to reflect the children's developmental levels. As the weeks progress and children's independence and capacity to engage for longer periods of time increases, cleanup time will become shorter and large-group time will become longer.

## Planning for Each Time of Your Day

### Arrivals and Departures

At the beginning of the year, arrivals and departures are important moments of transition for the children and families in your classroom as they move from home to school and then from school to home. On the first day, remember to keep in mind that children, regardless of whether or not they have been in a classroom or group setting before, will be wondering what lies ahead and processing a lot of new information at once. By dedicating plenty of time for hellos and good-byes during arrivals and departures, you are anticipating the needs of children and their families and you are also easing children into these transitions and helping them feel secure in this new environment.

- Plan meaningful ways to interact with individual children as they enter and leave the classroom (Vol. 1, pp. 150–152).
- Create a daily sign-in sheet that children can write or scribble their names on when they arrive (Vol. 1, pp. 81–82).
- Create a sheet that families can use to sign their children in and place it next to the children's sign-in sheet (Vol. 1, p. 201).
- Use *Intentional Teaching Experience* SE02, "Look Who's Here!" and *Intentional Teaching Experience* SE07, "Good-Byes," as you develop your opening routine.
- Create an age-appropriate, interactive attendance chart that can be referenced at large-group time (Vol. 1, pp. 81–82).
- Consider inviting family members to actively participate in arrival routines by supporting their child as he or she answers the question of the day.
- Display "What We Did Today" items on an erasable board or chart outside of the classroom so family members can discuss the day's events with their child (Vol. 1, p. 201).

Having a sign-in sheet enables children to practice emergent writing skills as they learn to write and read their own names. Accept any attempt that a child makes to write her name on the sign-in sheet during arrival time. The transition from writing a simple mark on the page to clearly writing their name will demonstrate children's emerging skills and development over the year.

## Planning for Each Time of Your Day, *continued*

### Large Group

In large group, children become members of a learning community. For many children, this may be their first experience being a part of a group. The first meeting of the morning sets the tone for the day and establishes children's understanding of what will happen in the classroom that day. Gathering again as a group at the end of the day can encourage children to reflect on and share (often with much excitement and enthusiasm) what they learned and discovered that day.

Large group is most successful when the duration of the meeting is tailored to the needs and abilities of children. As you work up to a 15–20-minute large-group experience, be sure to remember that 5–10 minutes of large-group time may best meet the needs of the children at the beginning of the year. Large-group discussions and shared writing experiences help children develop language and literacy skills. By asking children questions during shared writing experiences and recording their reflections and ideas, you foster children's oral language, written language, and comprehension skills while demonstrating that their ideas matter. When children see that you are giving their interests and questions thoughtful consideration during shared writing experiences, they are encouraged to engage as active learners as they build on what they already know and consider what they want to learn more about. See *Intentional Teaching Experience* LL01, "Shared Writing," for guidance related to discussion and shared-writing experiences.

- Decide what to include in your morning routine. For example, you might sing a welcome song and then review the attendance chart with the children before having a group discussion about your focus for the day.
- Refer to the materials listed in your daily plans and collect them prior to your large group.
- Find a convenient place to store children's name cards so that you can use and refer to them during group activities.

#### Elements of an engaging and meaningful large-group experience include

- opening with the same routine each day (e.g., a good morning song, a welcome chant, a morning stretch, or a yoga pose);
- reviewing the question of the day; and
- creating a sense of a caring classroom community (e.g., using a job or attendance chart or posting a weekly or monthly calendar to document and call attention to meaningful events or special days that will take place in the classroom).



## Transitions

There are many transitions in a preschool day. If children do not know what is expected of them and have to wait with nothing to do, these transitions can become overwhelming and even chaotic. Transitions can be fun and enjoyable, however, when you turn them into engaging opportunities for learning and use them to reinforce children's developing skills.

Transition times provide a fun way to reinforce your program's best practices and strengthen the children's connections within the classroom community. When you give children clear and consistent directions, ensure that your expectations are developmentally appropriate, and strive to meet children's individual needs, you strengthen their understanding of transitions and help them to grow as caring partners in the program.

- Talk with other teachers, your coach, or a mentor about strategies they use to make the most of transition times, e.g., cleanup, walking in the hallway from place to place, or preparing for rest.
- Use children's name cards as a way to transition to interest areas.
- Locate the *Mighty Minutes*® cards in *The Creative Curriculum*® materials. Review several songs, chants, or simple games to use during transition times.
- Introduce songs, rhymes, chants, or fingerplays to children to signal the beginning of a transition (Vol. 1, pp. 87–88).

### Planning for transitions (Vol. 1, pp. 87–88)

As you plan for transitions, consider the following strategies and examples.

- Give clear instructions, e.g., "In 10 minutes we will be going outside. You can finish that puzzle before it's time to clean up and go out to the playground."
- Give children a 10-, 5-, or 3-minute notice before an upcoming transition, e.g., "Five more minutes until cleanup. I see that there are only a few puzzle pieces remaining. I'll make sure to take a picture of the puzzle when you are finished putting it together."
- Allow plenty of time for each transition to ensure that children do not feel rushed or anxious, e.g., "It is cleanup time. Reese, could you start taking the puzzle apart and putting it into the box? Charlie, could you please make sure to pick up any puzzle pieces on the floor and give them to Reese?"
- Be flexible, e.g., "I see that you are still working on your block structure; I will give you five more minutes to finish while the others begin cleaning up."

## Planning for Each Time of Your Day, *continued*

### Outdoors

Outdoor play is crucial to children's health and well-being. The time children spend outdoors each day is just as important to their development and learning as the time they spend in the classroom. The outdoor environment in your program will offer endless opportunities to interact with children and guide their learning as they explore and play.

- Create outdoor spaces for sand and water play, wheeled toys, indoor materials that can be brought outdoors, playing games, building, and pretend play (Vol. 2, pp. 250–251).
- Add equipment to your outdoor play area such as tunnels, cones, balls, and boxes.
- Collect measuring tools to use in outdoor sand and water play, such as measuring cups and spoons (Vol. 2, p. 251)
- Provide materials for labeling plants outdoors.
- Incorporate signs that the children might see elsewhere in the community, e.g., road signs, exit signs, and warning signs (Vol. 2, p. 252).
- Plan opportunities to sing and recite rhymes or chants while children are outdoors.
- Inspect the outdoor area daily to ensure that it is safe and free of hazards (Vol. 2, p. 251).

Outdoor areas in early childhood programs often vary widely. No matter what kind of outdoor space you have, you can create a setting where children can enjoy the outdoors. To make the most out of your program's outdoor areas, refer to the suggestions in chapter 11 of *Volume 2: Interest Areas*.

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## Choice Time

Choice time nurtures children's growing independence and helps them become engaged and active learners as they decide for themselves where they will work or play, what they will do in those interest areas, and the materials they will explore. The discoveries children make during child-initiated learning experiences provide a great starting point for group discussions as children share what they worked on during choice time.

- Familiarize yourself with the different ways you can help children decide which interest area to visit during choice time (e.g., displaying a chart with pictures, offering a sign-up sheet for favorite activities, or using timers to manage children's time) (Vol. 1, pp. 85–86)
- Add writing, drawing, and construction materials to all areas so children can represent their discoveries and learning (Vol. 4, p. 125).
- Include a variety of fiction and nonfiction books in each interest area (Vol. 2, p. 110).
- Write and post rules or directions for using particular tools, materials, and equipment (e.g., screwdrivers, nails, staplers). Note, however, that posted rules and instructions do not take the place of direct supervision. Plan to closely supervise children who are using items that could be misused or pose a hazard to children (Vol. 1, pp. 167).
- Display intriguing pictures in interest areas to encourage conversation and writing (Vol. 4, p. 54).
- Organize interest area materials in ways that encourage children to interact with them in meaningful ways, such as by sorting and classifying them (Vol. 5, p. 55).

Choice time provides some of the richest opportunities for you to build relationships with children through observation. By actively engaging with children and following their lead, you can note what interest areas they typically visit, the materials they select, how they manipulate and explore materials, and how they interact with other children. Making comments and asking open-ended questions allows you to extend their learning as you observe how they predict, experiment, explore, and play in the interest areas (Vol. 1, pp. 85–86). Making choices is an important skill that young children may need your help with, especially at the beginning of the year. To help children decide what they want to explore, consider using large-group time to discuss the interest areas and activities using visual cues, such as a chart displaying pictures of the available interest areas. Talking through the different activities children can do in each interest area helps children consider their options and decide what they want to explore.

## Planning for Each Time of Your Day, *continued*

### Read-Alouds

The teacher–child interactions that take place before, during, and after read-alouds refine children’s comprehension skills and their understanding of language. When children hear books read aloud to them, they

- learn how to listen to and comprehend stories and other informational texts,
- begin to understand what a story is (e.g., stories have characters, a plot, a setting, and a problem to be resolved), and
- develop the knowledge that books have various purposes (e.g., to describe ideas, feelings, and emotions; provide information; or tell a story).

The repeated read-alouds you will find throughout the *Teaching Guides* reflect a research-based approach that supports children’s literacy, language, and comprehension skills. High-quality children’s books are often more complex in their plots, problems, and ideas and should be read at least three times to allow children to fully engage with the text.

Elements of a repeated read-aloud include

- reading a book at least three times;
- asking children questions about characters and story events;
- defining words while reading the story; and
- building on children’s reconstruction of the text by asking them how the characters feel, why characters do what they do, and what the children think will happen next.

- Plan for two or three read-alouds each day (Vol. 1, p. 91).
- Establish regular read-aloud times during the classroom day. Plan reading experiences for your whole group, small groups, and individual children (Vol. 4, pp. 86–88).
- When selecting potential books for read-alouds, estimate the length of time each book might take to read aloud and consider children’s capacity for sustaining attention, especially at the beginning of the year (Vol. 4, p. 87).
- Try to minimize potential distractions (Vol. 4, p. 87).
- Introduce complex books in small-group experiences (Vol. 4, p. 87).
- Refer to the explanation of the repeated read-aloud that details what to do in the first, second, and third read-aloud (Vol. 4, pp. 95–97).

While *Teaching Guides* provide specific guidance for one or two read-alouds per day, we strongly encourage you to plan for additional read-alouds if your schedule permits. When selecting titles for these, make sure that they reflect children's interests, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and life experiences. At the beginning of the year, dynamic read-aloud discussions provide a wonderful way to introduce vocabulary and scaffold children's understanding of different emotions. Stories that focus on topics such as building community, meeting new people, feeling nervous, welcoming others, and becoming a good friend set the stage for additional informal discussions as you help children make connections to their everyday experiences.

**Remember to keep the following in mind as you plan read-alouds for the beginning of the year:**

- A book does not need to be read all at once; you can spread a story over two or three read-alouds.
- Invite children to sit or even lounge comfortably while you read.
- Make sure that children are near enough to see the book and can hear you as you read.
- Provide children with different seating options, such as a chair, pillow, or carpet square.
- Remember, active engagement does not mean children are sitting cross-legged, completely still and silent.

## Planning for Each Time of Your Day, *continued*

### Small Group

Small-group activities are ideal for introducing new concepts and materials and for reinforcing skills that children are already developing. These small-group learning experiences encourage children to have conversations and share materials, while giving teachers opportunities to extend children's thinking by posing new challenges for them to solve.

- Familiarize yourself with the guidelines for leading small-group experiences (Vol. 1, pp. 84–85; 167–169).
- Review the detailed example of how to guide learning during a small-group activity (Vol 1, pp. 168).
- Become familiar with a few of the *Intentional Teaching Experiences*.
- Decide the length of time necessary to complete a small-group learning experience. Remember that some activities like cooking may take longer than other activities (Vol. 1, p. 84–85).
- Ensure you have materials such as chart paper and markers easily accessible when leading small group so you can record children's ideas.
- Consider inviting children who are not participating in the small-group activity to engage in a modified, independent choice time activity (e.g., a quieter experience in the Library, Art, or Discovery area) (Vol. 1, p. 84–85).
- After the first week, consider what you know about each child's interests, strengths, and needs as you plan activities and decide which children will participate in each small group (Vol. 1, p. 84–85).

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## Meals and Snacks

Meals and snacks present another opportunity for you to lovingly interact with children, engage them in learning, and support their social–emotional development. Make it a priority to sit with children as they eat, and take part in their discussions.

- Find out whether any children in your class have food allergies or other dietary restrictions and take the appropriate steps outlined by your program’s guidelines and practices (Vol. 1, p. 88).
- Take time to talk with families in person, over the phone, or through email to learn about their children’s eating habits and food preferences (Vol. 1, p. 88).
- Create a calm and pleasant atmosphere to encourage socialization during meal and snack times. A read-aloud right before lunch can help set a relaxed tone for mealtimes (Vol. 1, p. 88).
- Write, review, and post any breakfast, lunch, and snack menus.
- Include snack and/or lunch helpers’ jobs on the job chart (e.g., setting the table and passing out supplies).
- Post written procedures for washing hands and cleaning dishes. Use numerals to indicate what to do *first*, *second*, *third*, etc.
- Post a picture and word recipe if children are going to make their own snacks.

Encourage and support children to serve themselves independently. Help them read the self-serve snack charts and recipes beforehand. As children serve themselves, help them count, measure, and follow the appropriate steps in the preparation process.

- Try to reduce the need to get up and down from the table when sitting with the children so that you can actively participate in group discussions. You might need to keep extra food, napkins, paper cups, sponges, and paper towels near enough for you to reach from the table (Vol. 1, p. 89).
- Be tolerant of spills and accidents as children take on more active roles, such as pouring their own milk or water and serving food (Vol. 1, p. 89).
- If meals are served in the classroom, be sure to store the child- and adult-sized cleanup supplies where they will be readily available (Vol. 1, p. 89).

You can support children’s content learning during meals and snack time by guiding and taking part in their conversations. You might say, “Yes, Alejandro, your orange looks like a ball. Another word for ball is sphere,” or “You found the letter *L* on your milk carton; what other words do you know that start with the letter *L*?”

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## Caring for Self and the Classroom

As children become members of the classroom community, they learn to take care of themselves and share the responsibility of caring for the classroom space. It is everyone's responsibility to care for classroom materials, use them appropriately, and clean up after each use.

- Make a sign with pictures and words demonstrating the steps for proper handwashing (Vol. 1, p. 173).
- Create a handwashing song or chant to use in the first few weeks as children learn the procedure, e.g., sing "This is the way we wash our hands," to the tune of "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush."
- Label cubbies or spaces for each child's belongings (Vol. 1, p. 75).
- Become familiar with *Intentional Teaching Experience* SE12, "Classroom Jobs."
- Create and post a job chart (Vol. 1, pp. 76–77).



### Rest Time (full-day programs)

In full-day programs, designated rest times help rejuvenate both children and teachers before the afternoon activities and experiences. All children benefit from having the opportunity to rest and have quiet time to relax and recharge.

- Find a safe space in the classroom to store children's cots and blankets (Vol. 1, p. 75).
- Select a quiet story or two to read before rest time to help children transition into this low-energy time of day (Vol. 1, pp. 89–89).
- Find soft music or recordings of environmental sounds, e.g., ocean, wind, and night sounds, to play during rest time (Vol. 1, pp. 89–90).
- Familiarize yourself with any "lovies" or other comfort items that children will be bringing from home to have at rest time (Vol. 1, pp. 89–90).
- Make plans for the children who do not sleep and/or the children who wake up early and decide which quiet activities and materials you will have available for them. Include a balance of quiet, open-ended math and literacy materials, such as pattern or attribute blocks, magnetic slates, drawing boards, and writing materials (Vol. 1, pp. 89–90).

## Planning for Ongoing, Observation-Based Assessment

When rooted in ongoing observations, assessment is a powerful tool that supports children's learning and informs teachers' instructional decisions. Formative assessment is the practice of using assessment information to guide your teaching, individualize instruction, and scaffold children's learning. When you have a process for ongoing formative assessment, you are able to continuously gather information about individual children that directly informs how you tailor your instruction to meet the unique developmental needs of each child in your class.

- Begin collecting and dating samples of children's work (e.g., writings, drawings, story dictations, photos of creations and constructions). Use this documentation over time as evidence of children's progress (Vol 1, pp. 183).
- Decide on a system to collect, store, and manage observation notes and assessment information (Vol. 1, pp. 180–181).
- Become familiar with best practices for documenting focused observations and writing observation notes that are dated, objective, and factual (Vol. 1, pp. 181–182).
- Familiarize yourself with how to analyze documentation using the learning objectives (Vol. 1, pp. 183–184).
- Encourage families to share their observations and knowledge of their children's development and learning with you (Vol. 1, pp. 210–212).
- Use assessment information to inform and guide interactions with children and to plan for learning experiences (Vol. 1, pp. 192–193).

## Conclusion

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We hope this checklist helps you reflect on and refine your teaching practices as you plan and prepare for the beginning of the year. When you make the learning environment an inclusive, caring, and responsive place for children and their families, you are not only creating a positive and dynamic classroom—you are inspiring children to become enthusiastic and joyful learners.

You are ready to jump into *The First Six Weeks: Building Your Classroom Community Teaching Guide* to begin planning. Get ready for a great year! And thank you from all of us at Teaching Strategies for what you do every day to support the children and families you serve.