

Early Learning Network: A Guide for Parents

In Pennsylvania, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) provides funding to a variety of statewide early education programs including: Early Intervention Programs for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers, Head Start State Supplemental Assistance Programs, Keystone STARS Child Care Centers and Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts programs.

Electronic data systems are needed to maintain individual child records and to collect data for improving early childhood programs. OCDEL and your local program use this data to make sure that early childhood programs are of high quality and will enhance the development of young children.

What is the Early Learning Network (ELN)?

The Early Learning Network (ELN) is Pennsylvania's electronic data system for gathering information on early childhood programs and for studying the development of children in those programs. ELN combines information about the program including the quality and experience of the staff, with information on your child's development over time. This information is then used to build and maintain high quality early childhood programs.

ELN benefits you, your child, and your child's teachers or therapists by providing:

- Information on your child's development in his/her early childhood program;
- Information for the teacher to improve classroom instruction;
- Ideas on how to prepare your child for school; and
- Strategies to help children who have different kinds of learning needs.

Pennsylvania's early childhood programs also benefit from information in ELN. The information in ELN will be used to maintain a high level of quality across all early childhood programs, to provide information on the types of programs that work best for children, and to assure that OCDEL is accountable for state funding that is invested in early childhood programs.

What Information is Collected in ELN?

The information collected in ELN was determined by statewide focus groups that included parents of young children, early childhood teachers, Early Intervention therapists, researchers, and administrators of early childhood programs. The focus groups reviewed the latest early childhood research to determine what information would be most helpful when making decisions about program quality.

As a family participating in a state funded early childhood program, you may find it helpful to know what data is collected about your child and family. Information collected in ELN includes:

- Program demographics (number of days open per week, number of hours per day, education and experience of teachers or therapists, etc.);
- Family demographics (name, address, contact information, etc);
- Child demographics (date of birth, program enrollment, etc.);
- For children in Early Intervention, your child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP); and

- Information on your child's progress as measured through an ongoing assessment of his/her development.

All of the information that you provide about your child and family will be maintained securely in ELN, following all state and federal data security requirements. Each child in ELN is given a unique identifying number, which provides security, continuity, and consistency.

As part of the process to give your child an identifying number, you may be asked for your child's Social Security Number (SSN). Providing your child's SSN is voluntary. Your decision to provide or not provide your child's SSN will not impact on your child's enrollment in any OCDEL program.

ELN only asks for your child's SSN once during the process of assigning your child a unique identifying number. By providing your child's SSN, you help OCDEL ensure that all the data entered into ELN is as accurate as possible and that any required state or federal reporting is as accurate as possible. Your child's SSN is never used in analyzing data.

Federal law requires OCDEL to provide the legal authority for its request for a social security number. That authority is different for each program, as follows: Infant/Toddler and Preschool Early Intervention program - 11 P.S. § 875-305; Head Start State Supplemental Assistance program - 24 P.S. § 15-1505-D(a); Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts – 24 P.S. §15-1513-D(1)); Accountability Block Grant Pre-Kindergarten program - 24 P.S. Section 25-2599.2 (e)(1); and Keystone STARS Child Care Centers - 62 P.S. §§ 911(a)(2), 911(b), 916, 1016, 1018

Who Can See My Child's Information?

All information about your child is kept secure. All federal and state confidentiality, privacy and security requirements are honored. This means that:

- Your child's program will have access to your child's personally identifiable information;
- A child's teacher or therapist will only be able to see information about the children with whom they work;
- Reports to the state and federal government **do not identify specific children**; and
- Information about your child will not be shared outside of your child's program, except as permitted by law.

How will ELN Measure My Child's Progress?

ELN makes it possible to measure quality of early childhood programs and the impact that quality has on children's development. It will do this by gathering information about children's learning and development in areas such as:

- Approaches to Learning;
- Cognitive Thinking;
- Physical Development;
- Language and Literacy Development
- Social and Emotional Development

The United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires every state to collect accountability data to determine the effectiveness of the Part C (Infant/Toddler) and Part B (Preschool) Early Intervention programs. Progress for children participating in Early Intervention is determined in the following three child outcome measures:

- Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships);
- Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills (including early language/communication); and
- Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs.

Information on children's progress will be gathered using an authentic assessment tool. An authentic assessment tool is based on observations of your child in typical activities in their program. There are no formal tests, no traditional grades, and no "pass" or "fail." With these authentic assessment tools, your child's teacher will collect information about your child's development in a number of different ways. For example, your child's teacher or therapist will collect samples of your child's work, ask you what you've noticed about your child's development, and make observations during classroom activities or therapy sessions.

Teachers and therapists will observe and document your child's learning over time. In early childhood programs, information on your child's progress will be gathered several times during the year. In Early Intervention Programs, your child's progress will be gathered at the beginning and end of their participation in the Early Intervention program.

How can Parents and Families Help?

As a parent, you have a great deal of information about your child. Ask your child's teacher about your child's progress; talk with your child's therapist about what your child is learning and doing at home and in the community; and, most importantly, ask about ways that you can help your child to learn, grow and develop.

OCDEL values the time you spend helping us continue to shape the policies and programs that benefit children across the Commonwealth.

For more information contact ELN
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