

Scheduling Family Connection Meetings

State policy allows schools to use up to three days for the Family Connection meetings with families. These three days count toward the 1,000 hours and 180-day requirements of state-funded, full-day kindergarten. Schools may conduct the Family Connection meetings in other ways, such as:

- Conferences prior to the beginning of school.
- Early release days with conferences in the afternoons
- Evening conferences

2013 principals were asked what strategies their schools used to provide for the Family Connection meetings. Of the 130 school principals responding to the 2013 Principal Feedback Survey,

- 59% used three full school days for conversations with families
- 28% said teachers met with parents before the school year started
- 11% said teachers met with parents on evenings or weekends
- 7% reported other strategies, including combinations of early release days and full days and scheduling substitutes during the first week of school while teachers met with parents

Resources (available on the WaKIDS web page):

<http://k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/default.aspx>

- *Introducing Me!* (available in 10 languages)
- WaKIDS family brochure (available in 14 languages)
- WaKIDS video
- *The Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines Birth through 3rd Grade* (2012), which includes open-ended questions to get to know new families
- *Characteristics of Entering Kindergartners*—family-friendly description of student characteristics in the areas assessed by Teaching Strategies *GOLD*® (available in English and Spanish)

For more information, contact:

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Washington
Kindergarten Inventory
of Developing Skills

FAMILY CONNECTION GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

The Family Connection component of WaKIDS provides an opportunity to welcome families to school, establish a relationship at the beginning of the academic year between the family and the teacher, and create a smooth entry for all new kindergartners.

Purpose

The Family Connection offers families an opportunity to:

- get to know the teacher,
- share information about their child, and
- ask questions.

Family Connection offers teachers an opportunity to:

- understand the student as a whole person,
- learn about the student's interests and culture, and
- learn about the family.



What We Learned About Family Connection from 2013 WaKIDS Teacher Survey Feedback

Of the 402 teachers responding to the 2013 Teacher Feedback Survey,

- 83% of the teachers met with 90 to 100% of their families
- 73% spent 21-40 minutes with each family
- 87% felt that the Family Connection gave them the opportunity to understand their students early in the year
- 86% liked having a conversation without any judgment—they were just there to get to know each other.
- 75% reported that it allowed them to partner with families earlier in the year.

Recommendations for Conducting the Family Connection Meetings

1. Meet individually with families. Individual meetings (rather than small group meetings) create a safe environment for families to share sensitive information about their child, and ensure that families have the teachers' undivided attention.
2. Meet with the families of your own students. In order to initiate a relationship with your students' families, the meetings should be personalized opportunities to meet with them—not simply opportunities for families to meet a kindergarten teacher.
3. Create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.
4. Guide the conversation by asking open-ended (vs. yes/no) questions, allowing the family to share information about their child.
5. Ask if the family has any information to share about the child's prior learning experiences at home and/ or in group settings (such as early learning centers or family child care or care by a relative/ friend).
6. Provide an opportunity for the family to ask any questions they might have.

Using Introducing Me!

Introducing Me! is a guide for conversation that suggests questions teachers might ask families during the Family Connection meetings, enabling teachers to gather information that teachers can use to help children feel safe, welcome, and known in their classrooms. Seventy-three (73%) of the 2013 teachers reported that they used *Introducing Me!* for the Family Connection meetings.

The booklet can be found in different languages on the WaKIDS website, on the Family Connection page. Each teacher will receive a packet of the English/Spanish booklets for use in 2014.

Teachers report that they have used the information from *Introducing Me!* in a variety of ways. If families have not completed the booklet in advance, teachers will often jot down notes as families talk. Some keep the completed booklets on file and refer to them for ideas to tailor assignments to particular students' interests.

The state does not collect the information in any formal way.

Schools share *Introducing Me!* in different ways. For example, some schools:

- send the booklet home to families in spring kindergarten registration packets
- send the booklet home to families in late August for to complete and bring with them to the meetings
- ask families to arrive early for their meetings, so they would have time to complete the booklet while they were waiting for the teacher

Still other schools/teachers create their own conversational guides to elicit the type of information contained in *Introducing Me!*

The conversation is the key to establishing relationships with families and beginning to learn about the students. Which tool is used to aid that conversation is less important.

Note: *Introducing Me!* is written from the perspective of the student, which can be confusing to the adults reading or completing the document, and particularly so to adults for whom English is not their home language. WaKIDS will be seeking input from teachers in the coming year to revise *Introducing Me!* to make it more user-friendly and more consistent with the ways it is actually being used.