

## **Creating an Inclusive Experience: Preschool Registration Paperwork**

For my Family Communications Project, I have decided to redo sections of the preschool registration paperwork that families have to fill out at preschool registration. The current paperwork was created by my local Educational Service Center, and it is used at all the local elementary schools with preschool programs that work with the ESC. I have changed the paperwork to be more inclusive to all types of family structures, disabilities, cultures, and individual children. I used a strengths-based approach and asked questions to gather information about the whole child and their ecological system. The original document has thirteen pages. I decided to redo the first, second, and sixth page of the original document. The other pages that I did not change included granting permission to do assessments on their child (Brigance, ASQ:SE, observations, etc.), permission for release of information from other agencies, medical history, basic school permissions, financial information, and medical and dental statements. All of this paperwork seemed fine as is. What I did decide to change was the paperwork for the basic enrollment information, transportation, information about the child and their family, and developmental history and information on the child.

The first page of the document asks for basic information about the child and their parents/guardians. The original document asks about the child's ethnicity and native language on the front page. I decided to move this to the child and family information page. The original document asks parents/guardians to provide information about the Mother/Guardian and the Father/Guardian. I have decided to take away the gender assumption and just ask for guardian information. I think that it's unfair for families who have two mothers, two fathers, etc. to word it in a gender-assumption manner. I also added in a section for each guardian to mark their relationship to the child. They can mark that they are their biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or other. This gives more of an opportunity for families to feel comfortable with whatever family structure they have, instead of assuming that all families have one female mother and one male father. I also added in a question about the child and guardian's preferred

pronouns. This is important information to gather from the start to make sure that the school system is being respectful and referring to people as they prefer. I added in a section about the family's custody schedule if they have shared-parenting. Although the parent might want to elaborate more in-person, this gives some information for the teacher to understand right away.

In the original document, it asks about the child's residency and transportation. I decided to make a new page for this (page 2 of my form) so that I can go more in-depth about some of the questions. I added an additional section to write down a child's address in case the child has a shared-custody schedule. Adding this to the form normalizes different family structures instead of assuming that a child only lives in one home. Nowadays, it is more and more common for children to have a shared-custody arrangement. I also decided to add in a section about child and family transportation. Instead of assuming that all families have reliable transportation, I wanted to include questions to help determine if the school needs to provide transportation in case a child gets sick while at school or for families to come to events at the school. If the school is not willing to pay for transportation, then an outside resource could be contacted about public transportation in these situations. Having questions like this available will hopefully help break some of the stigma around poverty and help families feel more comfortable bringing up things that they need help with, such as transportation.

On the third page of my new Preschool Student Registration Form, I used an Ecological Systems Theory approach. I ask questions to gather information about the whole child including their ethnicity, the languages used at home, community involvement, their culture and religion, and hobbies/interests/activities that the child and their family participate in. Learning this type of information about the family will help me better understand who they are, what they are involved in, and what they value. Having information about their language, culture, religion, and hobbies/interests/activities, can also be used as a learning resource for the classroom. During the family's preschool orientation or throughout the school year, I could ask the families if they would be willing to come in to be a special guest for a lesson or take the class on a field trip to

explore something that the family values. This would be a great school to home connection and learning opportunity. I also ask about their preferred school-home communication method and if they need translated papers and/or an interpreter for school events. This information will help me build a stronger relationship with them so that communication is not a barrier between us. I also ask if they have cell phone service and internet access at their house since my school district is in a rural area. I don't want to assume that they have those things and then have a miscommunication when trying to get a hold of them.

The fourth page of my document focuses on the development history and information about the child. I used some information from the original document and then expanded it to learn more about the child and to be more inclusive about a child's abilities or disabilities. I tried to word my questions in a way that does not assume anything about the child since I do not know them yet. Although a child might come to registration with a known disability, sometimes that is not apparent right away or the family does not share the information/details right away. This document gives them an opportunity to share information about their child without assuming that their child is able-bodied and verbally speaking. I also added in more information about what it means to be potty trained since this question is often misunderstood on the original paperwork. I added in an area about self-help skills since these are very important skills for a child to obtain around this age. It is helpful to know what a child can or cannot yet do independently before coming to school. I put in an opportunity for families to mark always, sometimes, or rarely so that it is not a straight-forward yes or no. I did this so that families hopefully do not feel bad if their child cannot do the self-help skills independently yet. In the original document it asks about a child's history with other types of childcare centers. If I were to redo the entire packet, I would add this in where it asks about therapies that the child has participated in, and on that page I would take out the information about food since I include it somewhere else.

On the fifth page of my new form, I focus on asking about the child's sensory needs, strengths, how the families respond to their child when they are upset and/or demonstrating challenging behaviors, and I ask if the families have any concerns about their child's development. I ask about the child's sensory needs because having this information will be a great tool to use in the classroom. If the family knows that the child struggles with bright lighting, I can easily change my classroom environment to fit the child's needs (such as more dimmed lighting and warmer lighting). Learning this information before they begin school will help me set up the environment the best way that I can and prepare for other accommodations and modifications that the child may need. I ask about the child's strengths to help approach the family in a strength-based approach. I want to know what they think that their child's strengths are so that I can build upon them once they start school. I ask about how the family responds to their child when upset so that I am more prepared to comfort their child during school. I ask about how they respond to challenging behaviors so that I have background knowledge of what the child is used to experiencing. Although not all families will tell the truth, it helps give me some background information. Both of these questions will also help me understand any cultural practices that revolve around behavior management. In my new document I wrote a very similar list of possible developmental concerns as the original document had. I did change some of the wording to "difficulties" instead of "problems" because it sounded not as harsh. I also elaborated on some of the areas more, such as explaining that a child that age should be able to focus on one activity for at least five minutes. Although this section might not feel like it is strength-based, I think that it is important to include. In my past experience, parents are very honest in this section and it helps the educators determine if we need to further evaluate the child before beginning school to make sure that we are placing them in their least restrictive environment.

I believe that this new Preschool Student Registration Form will help families feel more comfortable and included. I think that it is a great starting place for building a relationship between the school district and the child's family. This form would be used at preschool

registration which takes place in the spring before the following school year. I would also like to note that at registration parents also fill out an ASQ:SE-2 assessment which looks at the child's social emotional development. That is why I didn't include questions about their social emotional development in my form. At the beginning of the school year new students and their families come in for a one-on-one orientation with the teacher. During this time the teacher would review the information that the family filled out at registration, along with the ASQ:SE-2 to see if any changes need to be made. At the orientation the teacher also asks more questions to get to know the family better, completes a Brigance Screener to screen the child's development, reviews the daily schedule and expectations of the classroom, practices some of the routines with the child, and works together with the family to create goals for the child. This last part is very family-led. The teacher talks about the strengths and areas of need that the child demonstrates on the Brigance Screener, and then gives the family the opportunity to decide what they want their child's goals to be for the year. It can be anything from social emotional skills (sharing, making friends) to learning how to write their name. The important thing is that it is what the family wants. I do this because although I have plenty of goals for the child, I want to know what the parents are hoping for their child to get out of the preschool experience. We review this goal sheet during parent-teacher conferences twice a school year.

I also believe that this new form will help the teachers learn more about the child and their ecological system. It is important to know where they come from and what makes them who they are. We can use this information to make connections, build relationships, build upon their strengths, and help provide resources when needed. It is important to me that all families feel included which is why I have changed the wording to the original document to be more inclusive to all types of family structures, disabilities, cultures, and individual children. I also want families to feel comfortable sharing when they need help with things such as transportation. My hope is that this document will help families feel more comfortable and connected to the school, while providing more useful information to the teachers.