



Tracking Development

By: *Claire Bainer*

These days most early childhood programs have some form of developmental assessment that they give to parents biannually. Tracking the progression of the child's development always follows each child's unique trajectory, and is affected by the influence of inherited biology, the intimacy of the child's care and rearing, and by the current culture he or she is growing up in. It is not learned like a math lesson but learned through life experience and genetic aptitude. One very prevalent and strong early childhood tenant is that limiting beliefs about children are unconstructive. The human organism has the capacity to surprise you! Another tenant is that while growth is individual, it does build on itself and is generally predictable, following a similar pattern for each child. People grow and develop in paradoxical ways that are both predictable and unpredictable. This is part of why assessment forms can be difficult to fill out and to trust.

Making these forms has become a big business, and, unfortunately, play in groups is often not understood by researchers, developmental psychologists, or elementary school teachers, who tend to be making the forms. Now most forms require trainings to learn to use the "tool," and special materials and aids are needed to be sure the forms are correctly filled out. These forms usually look at skill acquisition. The federally-funded Head Start programs and the state-funded Child Development Centers both use the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). This assessment instrument advertises its ability to help teachers reflect on the child's learning and development during the preschool years. (There is also a DRDP for children in TK, kindergarten, and first grade.) Most of the teachers I've spoken to dislike this tool because it requires a lot of time away from teaching as they gather data and document. Teachers feel their teaching time is being interfered with when they spend days and days documenting and photographing specific details to use as proof that they are teaching and children are learning. It is a rather unrewarding process for teachers and parents often don't understand why teachers care about the developmental markers the form calls out.

For the last 35 years BlueSkies has given parents developmental assessment of their children's progress. We work and refine our assessments, hoping to share the exciting progress of a child in clear and helpful ways to parents. Good preschool programs know that parents are always the child's first teacher and most important in the child's life, and we know that the parent-teacher relationships are very important for the success of the child at school. In the HEDCO program children enter the school about every two or three weeks so developmental reports come out as the children move through their 6th, 9th, 15th, 21st and 27th month, and teachers are writing these reports year-round. In the upper school, the developmental progress reports come out at the same time to the whole class: once at the end of October (before the parent conferences) and again around April or May. (The exception is for the children leaving BlueSkies

Upcoming Events

Thursday, Oct 11

Parent Ed Event: Choosing Kindergarten Pt. I
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct 17

Parent Scholarship Committee Meeting
6:15 - 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Oct 23

Parent Ed Event: Choosing Kindergarten Pt. I
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Monday, Oct 31

Parent Scholarship & Fall Mailer Stuffing Party
6:15 - 8:00 p.m.

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for kindergarten: These children do not get the April progress report but get a more extensive progress report written closer to the child's exit date from the school.)

At first we used standard developmental charts, writing in the date the teachers saw the skill emerging. Later, we rewrote the developmental charts and used an assessment form from developmental charts which listed activities that children at various ages typically are able to do. We did not want teachers to separate children from the group and ask them to do things on the checklist so we looked at our school environment and chose developmental markers that could be easily seen during the child's day. Did you know that being able to alternate feet going up and down stairs is an important milestone? It indicates that the myelination of the neural pathways have grown enough to cross the corpus callosum at the center of the brain. Connecting the right and left hemisphere of the brain creates a huge expansion in the speed with which the brain can function, adding variables and allowing understanding to become more complicated and interconnected. The physical body also changes. The child's center of gravity changes and a baby who had the choppy, belly-out gait of a toddler starts to walk more upright. The gait becomes smooth because the leg is now swinging in the hip socket. These changes result in an increase in the child's mobility. We expect to see this in the child's second year, but asking teachers to evaluate how their children go up and down stairs when the classroom and yard don't have a set of stairs is a half-baked request. Pedaling the bikes is another way to see this stage, and while it doesn't acknowledge that the leg is now swinging in the socket and hangs differently, it does show the bilateral ordering of the mind and body and the new upright balance center. The form is made to fit the teachers' environment and deliver appropriate information without interfering with the child's school experience.

We also use the developmental schedules to reassure parents. We want parents to know that their children are progressing on a healthy, predictable trajectory, and that we are noticing and watching these little glitches. Usually they subside and, if they don't, we'll let you know and suggest options to help keep the typical trajectory on track. The human organism is self-righting so correcting small things is usually easy when caught while the brain is young and growing, before unhelpful habits are formed and the brain becomes less flexible. We want parents to understand the importance of supporting developmental progression. Like any living thing, development grows in a sequence, building on itself. Development is an integrated system and is dependent on all the systems progressing through the developmental domains to become optimal. A good child care program evaluates every developmental domain to support this well rounded approach to development. The baby's leg needs the center of gravity to shift so the leg can hang from the hip and that takes the neural development and myelination of the brain to cross the mid line. All these things need to come together and integrate for the progression of the developmental trajectory. Once the integration of the wholeness is established in the developing brain, the brain can begin to segregate and categorize (this is typically between five and seven years old). Supporting the child in developing all the skills they need at each age means that when the child is headed to elementary school the child will be ready for the rigors of academia and will be able to problem-solve and think creatively.

When you receive your child's progress report, notice that it is not judgmental but instead simply states where the child is along the growing process. "Some of the time or not yet" is for the youngest ones who have just turned that age, and "All of the time" is for the children old enough to be on the next form. If you keep the checklists, it can be interesting to look back and see how much they have developed in the short six-month intervals. It might be helpful to know that it is common when one area of development seems to excel, other areas can seem to lag or even seem to regress. For instance, children learning to walk will talk less until the walking has stabilized. If this is reflected on the child's progress report, know that it is normal and not a concern. It is considered normal for children around three-and-a-half to have an increase in anxiety as they transition out of babyhood into being a preschooler, and tics like blinking, stuttering, thumb-sucking, masturbating, and nail-biting may surface and just as quickly disappear when the adjustment occurs. These behaviors just let us know that change is occurring: The brain is growing and making things seem to add up differently, resulting in a new worldview, which causes legitimate concern until it diminishes. Parents and teachers lovingly carry on reminding children that this too will pass and suggesting other ways to self sooth.

Director's Report Cont...

The developmental schedules are not “report cards,” but they are to help you know the areas where the child is working and focusing their energy as they progress through their current stage. Teachers are watching to be sure the child’s overall progress is proceeding naturally and with ease and grace. It would be typical for a child who seems very precocious in one area to be lacking in another area. Great talkers are not necessarily good at listening to other children’s opinions and getting along with others. Seeing this, the teacher creates curriculum to help strengthen the weaker areas. Parents, too, may decide to have more play dates to help build social skills, or sign up for dance class to build physical skills, or join the children’s choir to help with language articulation. Lucky children, to be here, where the focus is always on balance and the well-rounded wholeness of being! With even progress in each of the developmental domains the child can function at maximum capacity in every situation, for once the strong foundation is in place healthy progress should continue even when no longer at BlueSkies. So please enjoy the progress reports, and if you wonder about why we chose something as significant, stop by and ask! Our goal is for the reports to be useful and meaningful, so please let us know if there are places that are unclear.

A Happy Un-Halloween from BlueSkies

This is a reminder that BlueSkies for Children is a “holiday free” zone. As you know, young children are reading clues from the faces as well as from words. This is why young children can be frightened by masks, and confused or over-excited by costumes, so we ask you to please save all Halloween costume dress-ups for home or neighborhood events rather than bring them to BlueSkies. In keeping with our nutritious meals and snacks, and food allergy policies, we also ask you to keep Halloween candy at home.

This is a wonderful time to talk to children about the changes in the seasons and how big and bright the moon is, how dark the sky, and about the leaves turning color and the harvest of fall foods, even the air and light feel different. All these things align children with the seasons and help child learn to love the beautiful earth and celebrate fall. Scare crows and pumpkins are concrete things the children can enjoy and understand. Soon they will be big and running around like the elementary school kids so don’t forget to enjoy them where they are now. Save the “big kid” elementary school Halloween fun to come a little later when children are more able to understand real and pretend and can laugh at ‘scary’.

As parents, it is so delightful to see how cute our children look all dressed up, and we all remember the fun of trick-or-treating and Halloween parties. If your child has a sibling in elementary school Halloween has certainly been a major topic in your household for some time now! It is important to remember that even when preschool children seem big and ready for fun, even when they beg to do what bigger siblings do, they still need our protection. Older children can look and act very scary even if you only see them from the safety of your own front door as you help hand out the candy. So think of BlueSkies as an oasis in this big confusing world, and help us keep the school feeling safe and calm. We will have autumn gourds and pumpkins around to connect the children with the season’s change, but that is about as exciting as we want to be!

Thanks for your cooperation.

– Claire



Staff out in October

The following staff will be out this month:

- * Albina out 10/5 - 10/8
- * Rosalia out 10/5 - 10/8
- * Scottie out 10/9 - 10/16
- * Rebecca out 10/29 - 11/2



Mills College Honors Claire

On Saturday, September 29th, the Alumnae Association of Mills College honored Claire Bainer with the 2018 Distinguished Achievement Award. The award was presented during Mills' 2018 Reunion Weekend, attended by hundreds of Mills alums. Claire and Liisa both shared remarks during the program.

Claire received two degrees from Mills College - a BA in 1974 and a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education in 1976. She has worked in the field over 35 years and been an advocate for young children and as a teacher of both teachers and young children in child care centers and college classrooms throughout the Bay Area.

This award recognizes Claire's extensive career and field building work in the early childhood education realm. In addition to her work at BlueSkies and as an educator, she has co-authored two books, *Second Home: A Day in the Life of a Model Early Childhood Program* and *The Bridge to School: Aligning Teaching with Development for Ages Four to Six*, and has written and created many booklets and teacher training DVDs .

In her role as interim chair of the Alameda County Child Care Planning Council in 2004 she arranged for the school to receive an annual grant for \$300,000 for 3 years to provide scholarship monies for the School of Early Childhood Education at Mills College from Alameda County First Five. This money contributed to an effort to increase the numbers of quality Early Childhood Education professionals in the field, and to strengthen the leadership roles in the field as well. Again, in 2007, Claire connected Mills College with the Bernard E and Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation and arranged for the College to receive an ongoing annual gift of \$75,000 from the foundation to provide stipends to graduate assistants working in the Mills College Children's School.



BlueSkies has a long history with Mills College. Founder Anne Copenhagen graduated from Mills College in 1944 with a primary teaching credential allowing her to teach children from age 3 to third grade. She drew from her friends and colleagues as she built the team of founders who became first board members and the first teachers at BlueSkies, then called Association of Children's Services (AOCS). Anne Copenhagen, Barbara Forth, Gwen Foster, Helen Lore, Doris Hutchings, Yvonne Byron, Amy Clough, Claire Bainer, Liisa Hale, Gail Myers, Maggie Greenblatt, and current hire Tracy Neal all went through the Mills College Early Childhood Education program and all were and are contributing to the quality of the children's education and the caring community that is BlueSkies today.

We applaud Claire for receiving this award and her hard work in developing and expanding the Early Childhood Education field!

Introducing the BlueSkies for Children Board of Directors

By law, non-profit agencies must be run by a Board of Directors. At BlueSkies we have been fortunate to have Boards composed of collegial, skilled, and committed people for the past 35 years. Although the Board members occasionally disagree about the best way to move the agency forward, the Board has always operated with great respect among the membership and between the Board and the Executive Director. The Board ByLaws require that it include current parents in its membership, although not more than 49% of the voting membership can be current parents. We are taking this opportunity to introduce the current Board members, an extremely talented and well-qualified group.

Board President Brooke Abola works as a Deputy City Attorney in the Office of the San Francisco City Attorney and has spent her legal career advising public agencies on finance-related matters. She is the proud parent of two BlueSkies graduates and has served as Co-Chair of the Parent Scholarship Committee for the past three years.

Board Vice President Julie Nicholson, Ph.D is WestEd's Deputy Director for the Center for Child and Family Studies. For the past ten years, Dr. Nicholson was an Associate Professor of Practice in the School of Education at Mills College. She is the proud parent of three teenage daughters and lives in San Francisco.

Board Secretary Lisa Freitas is an Attorney/Mediator at Sawyer Mediation and provides family law consultation and mediation services for parties with divorce, parenting, custody, support and other family law disputes, as well as cohabitation, premarital and post marital agreements. One daughter is a BlueSkies graduate now in First Grade, and her younger daughter is in the Wobbly Walkers.

Board Treasurer Bryan Quevedo has a decade of public sector management service, with experience in budgeting, finance, grants, assessment, and strategic planning. He is currently a Policy & Planning Analyst with the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Bryan's daughter is in the Homeroom.

Dr. Aara Amidi-Nouri is a pediatric registered nurse and Associate Professor at Samuel Merritt University School of Nursing. She is the proud mom of a BlueSkies alumna now in sixth-grade, and is forever grateful to the BlueSkies community for helping raise Roxy.

Christa Edwards is the Head Teacher in the Baby House and Assistant Program Director at BlueSkies. She is also the parent of a child in the Todds.

Riana Hensel is a Spanish teacher at St. Paul's Episcopal School, and has the distinguished pleasure of being the first AOCS (the former name of BlueSkies) alumna to serve on the Board of Directors! In fact, she is still friends with some of her classmates from 30 years ago.

Maggie Greenblatt is currently the Coordinator of the Hospital School Program at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland (BCHO) where she has worked since 1986. Her son is an alumnus from the 1999 class, and now a graduate of the University of Oregon.

Meghan Horl is a city planner currently working in the affordable housing field. Her daughter is a BlueSkies graduate now at Chabot Elementary School, and her son is in the Homeroom at BlueSkies.

Board, Cont.

Claire Bainer, BlueSkies Executive Director, holds one vote on the Board.

Rory Darrah has worked in the field of Early Care and Education for over 40 years. Rory has written numerous reports, articles, booklets, and curricula on early childhood education (ECE) and has been a strong advocate at local, state, and national levels for quality ECE and family support services.

Murali Naidu was most recently Vice President, Chief Clinical Officer for Sentara Healthcare, where he was responsible for delivering reliable, high quality, customer-satisfying care across the continuum.

The Board of Directors meets almost every month during the school year. The Board will be deeply focused in the coming year on structuring BlueSkies to continue to meet the needs of working families, and the needs of young children, for decades to come. As you can see from this brief outline of its membership, it is well equipped for this important work! If you are interested in contributing to the work of the Board, please feel free to discuss your interests with a current Board member.



BlueSkies-isms

Parents often hear their children using phrases that they suspect they learned at BlueSkies. Each month's "BlueSkies-ism" will include a phrase the teachers use all the time at BlueSkies, and some context to help you use the phrase at home too.

"Tell me about..."

...your drawing, your painting, your building, your digging. Children live in present time and often paint, draw, dig, or build just because it is interesting but without planning for any particular final product. They are enjoying the process of creating in the flow of ideas, so often don't have an answer to a question like 'what did you make?' We want children to know that we value just being in the flow of imagination and creative exploration, rather than requiring an end goal, so we ask instead to be included in the process with 'tell me about.' It won't be long before they learn to value the end product and will be eager to tell you what they made.

