



# Pennsylvania

**School-Age  
Professional Credential**

**Advisor Instructions**

**Pennsylvania  
Early Learning**



*Keys to  
Professional  
Development*



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# Introduction

You have made a commitment to be an Advisor to a Candidate for the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential. This is a challenging and important role in the assessment process. The purpose of the assessment is to identify individuals who demonstrate the necessary skills and knowledge to work competently and effectively with school-age children.

The Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential is administered by the Pennsylvania Key (PA Key). The PA Key provides statewide leadership in collaboration with the Office of Child Development in the development of an integrated coordinated system of program quality improvements and professional development supports.

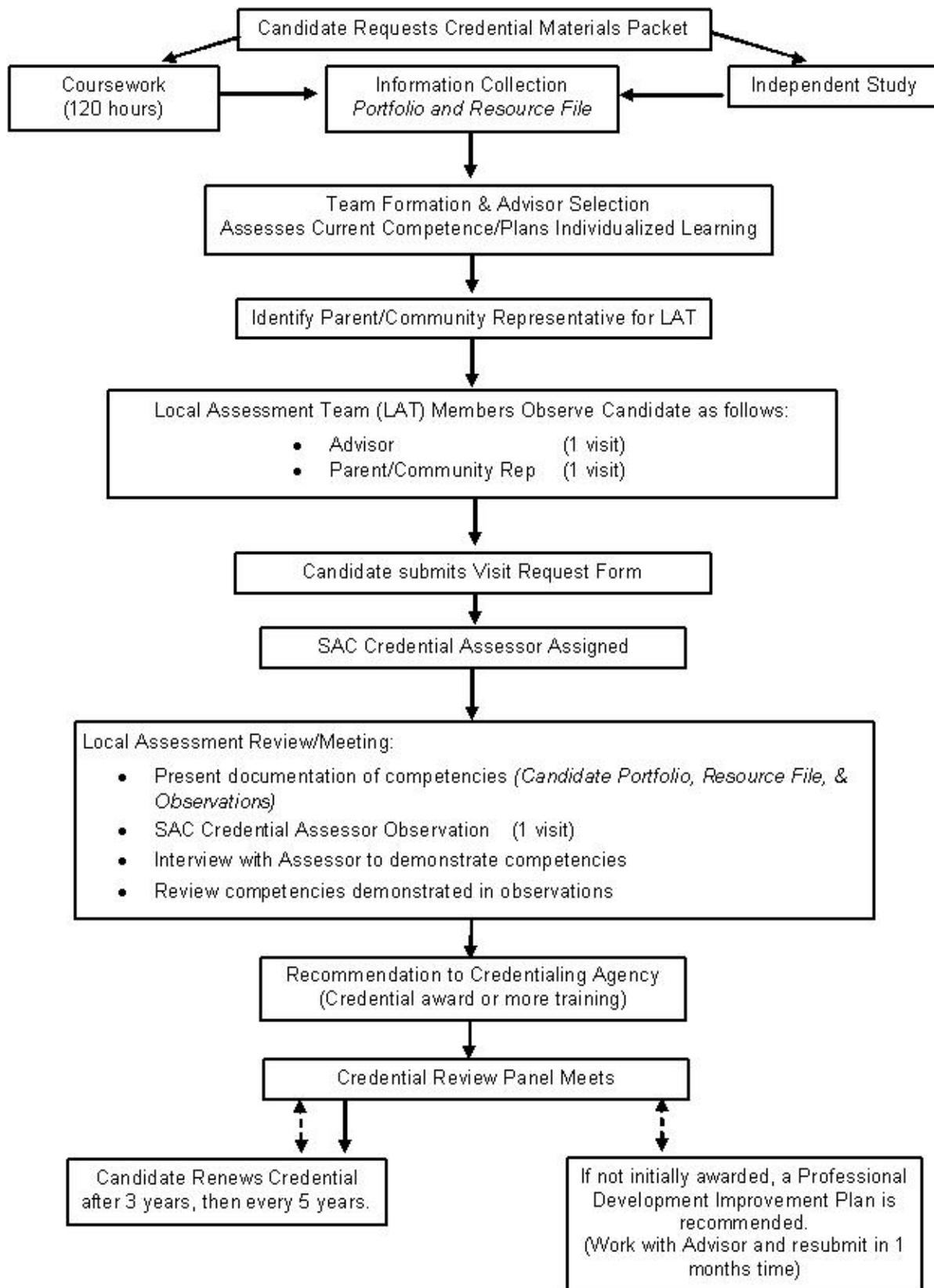
Individuals or Candidates interested in pursuing the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential document and demonstrate their abilities to meet the needs of children through an assessment process which includes the collection of resources and questionnaires, participation in coursework, and observations.

As a school-age professional, your knowledge, experience and guidance will be very helpful to the Candidate interested in pursuing the Pennsylvania School-Age Care Professional Credential and work with school-age children. The information you collect about the Candidate through observation and the guidance you provide through this process are important to the individual's growth as a professional.

The Advisor is one member of the Local Assessment Team (LAT). The LAT consists of the Candidate, the Advisor, the Parent/Community Representative and the School-Age Credential Assessor (assigned by the PA Key when the Candidate requests an assessment visit). Each team member is responsible for collecting specific information relevant to the Candidate's work with school-age children.

Thank you for choosing to participate as a member of the team to support the Candidate through the credentialing process. Your contribution and commitment to this process are tremendously important to the professional evaluation of the Candidate.

# PA School-Age Professional Credential Process



# PA School-Age Professional Credential Process

## STAGES IN THE PROCESS

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### 1. Application

Any interested individual meeting all of the eligibility requirements may apply by requesting application materials from the PA Key. The application packet includes the instructions and forms required for this process.

### 2. SAC Credential Preparation Program

Because the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential is based on competence that is observed and documented, there is flexibility as to how a Candidate develops the necessary competence. The individual may choose to join an organized school-age professional development program (offered by an approved host agency), apply college coursework, do independent study, or a combination of all of these. The Candidate must document 120 hours of instruction covering the thirteen Functional Areas.

### 3. Information Collection

Information collection includes observations by LAT members, parent/family questionnaires and the preparation of a Portfolio and Resource File.

- Portfolio: contains an autobiographical statement, a program description, and three written examples of his/her competence in each of 13 Functional Areas.
- Resource Collection File: A file or collection of thirty-three (33) resource items. These items are not to duplicate items in the Portfolio.
- Observations and Surveys: In addition to the Portfolio and Resource File, the Advisor conducts one (1) formal observation of the Candidate at work. The observation documents the Candidate's behavior and effectiveness in each of the 13 Functional Areas and based on the observation the Advisor can make recommendations for further growth and development.

The Parent Community/Representative also conducts one (1) observation of the Candidate at work. The Candidate must also distribute and collect family questionnaires and ensure that the Parent/Community Representative tallies the family questionnaires.

### 4. Team Formation

Formation of the Local Assessment Team will occur while the Candidate participates in coursework and is collecting their documentation. In addition to the Candidate, three people serve on the Local Assessment Team (LAT). They are the Advisor, Parent/Community Representative, and the SAC Credential Assessor. Each team member must meet the eligibility requirements and has specific responsibilities for collecting information about the Candidate's work with school-age children.

### Identifying an Advisor

The Candidate is responsible for identifying an Advisor who can guide them through the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential process and who serves as a part of the Local Assessment Team. The Advisor works closely with the Candidate to assess current competence, identify professional development needs, and suggests continued professional growth.

### Identifying a Parent/Community Representative

The Candidate is responsible for identifying a Parent/Community Representative who works with the Candidate to collect Family surveys. This individual is also responsible for conducting one observation of the Candidate at their work site. The Parent/Community Representative's role is to represent the interests of parents and the community in the assessment process.

### Identifying the SAC Assessor

The Credentialing Agency is responsible for assigning the SAC Assessor when the Candidate has submitted a request for an assessment visit. This individual is responsible for facilitating the Local Assessment Review Meeting described below.

## **5. Advisor/Candidate Review Meeting**

Prior to submitting the Assessment Visit Request Form, the Advisor and the Candidate may meet to review information that should be collected prior to submitting the request form and to assess the Candidate's readiness to request a Local Assessment Review Meeting. At this time the Advisor will ensure that the Candidate has also gotten the Parent/Community Representative to sign-off on the Assessment Request Form.

## **6. Assessment Visit Request**

When the Candidate has collected all of the required documentation s/he is ready to request an Assessment Visit by submitting the Assessment Request Form. Once the assessment visit request is received, the credentialing agency will assign a SAC Credential Assessor.

## **7. Local Assessment Review Meeting**

The Candidate and the SAC Credential Assessor meet to review and discuss the information collected about the Candidate. The SAC Credential Assessor will conduct an observation of and interview with the Candidate. Information reviewed includes observations, questionnaires/surveys, Portfolio and Resource File. The Candidate has an opportunity to orally present his/her learning as demonstrated in their Portfolio and Resource File through an interview process. The SAC Credential Assessor will follow a standard procedure which will include an interview with the Candidate including eighteen questions addressing the Functional Areas.

At the conclusion of the meeting a recommendation is made to the Credentialing Agency to award the credential or not. If a recommendation is made not to award the credential, then the recommendation will be for the Candidate to pursue

additional professional development in specific areas and reapply for the Credential at a later date.

## **8. Credential Review Panel**

The SAC Credential Review Panel meets four (4) times per year/ or as needed to review the recommendations to award the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential. At this time procedures of the Local Assessment Team and SAC Assessor are reviewed. The Review Panel ensures that the Local Assessment Team followed appropriate procedures and that the Local Assessment Review Meeting was conducted according to procedure. If documentation shows that all procedures were followed, they accept the recommendation.

If a recommendation is made not to award the Credential, then a Professional Development Improvement Plan and timeline for completing the process will be sent to the Candidate. The Candidate should work with their Advisor to make the suggested improvements. Upon completion of this process the Candidate may resubmit to the Credential Review Panel.

## **9. Renewal**

The Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential is valid for three (3) years from award, after which it may be renewed for five (5) years.

## **ADVISOR ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

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Advisors must meet the following requirements:

### **A. Personal**

Be knowledgeable about the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare regulations, Keystone STARS Performance Standard, Pennsylvania Department of Education Learning Standards. Be familiar with school-age child care programs.

### **B. Education**

- B.A., B.S., or advanced degree in education (early childhood, elementary, special education); child development, recreation, or other related fields and successful completion of the Credential Advisor Institute.

Or

- A.A., A. A. S. in a related field and successful completion of the SAC Credential Advisor Institute.

Or

- Successful completion of the Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential and successful completion of the SAC Credential Advisor Institute.

C. Experience

Two years of experience in a school-age setting including at least one year working with children.

- One year working directly with children in the same age range as the children in the Candidate's program as a school-age staff, teacher, family child care provider, social worker or similar role; and
- One year of responsibility for the professional growth of another adult.

D. Conflict of Interest Statement

To promote objectivity and credibility, an individual serving as an Advisor:

- Must not be the relative of a child in the Candidate's program.
- Must not be a relative by blood or marriage of the Candidate.
- Must not be working with the Candidate in a co-teaching situation.

Advisor Responsibilities

An advisor serves as a professional resource for the Candidate during the assessment process and works with the Candidate for at least 12 weeks. An Advisor must conduct at least one observation of at least two (2) hours in length of the candidate at work and provide recommendations for improvement.

**Observation**

1. Observe the Candidate working with school-age children.
2. Complete the Observation Instrument which records observations of the Candidates performance in each of the functional areas.
3. The observation must be completed within six (6) months prior to the final assessment.
  - Provide regular feedback to the Candidate throughout the assessment process.
  - Advise Candidate about the preparation of the Portfolio and Resource File.
  - Review the Portfolio and Resource File.

# Roles and Responsibilities

This section will provide guidance to you in fulfilling your responsibilities as an Advisor. Your primary role and responsibilities are to:

- Develop a professional relationship with the Candidate.
- Prepare for and observe the Candidate working with school-age children on at least one (1) occasion.
- Give feedback to the Candidate on what you saw during the observation and guide the professional growth of the Candidate by suggesting ideas, opportunities, and resources that can help build skills where s/he needs improvement.
- Provide guidance to the Candidate as s/he prepares documentation of skills in the Portfolio and Resource File and confirm by signing verification that the Candidate's Portfolio and Resource File contain all of the necessary information.
- Submit documentation of your observation to the Candidate, in a sealed envelope, for review at the Local Assessment Review Meeting. All information gathered by Local Assessment Team members about the Candidate's performance will be reviewed at the Local Assessment Review Meeting.

## **Developing a Relationship with the Candidate**

Your primary responsibility is to facilitate the Candidate's growth and development as a professional school-age practitioner. Therefore, it is important that you develop a supportive relationship with the individual—one that encourages mutual trust, respect, and honesty.

A key element to being an effective advisor is to be a good listener. Throughout your relationship with the Candidate, encourage the Candidate to talk about his/her work and to clarify thoughts and feelings about his/her professional growth and the work they do with school-age children.

The credentialing process is designed to put the Candidate in the leadership role – which may be unlike previous learning experiences s/he has had. The Candidate is in charge of coordinating the assessment process. Your role is to guide the Candidate in a way that promotes his/her independence. That means helping the Candidate clarify his/her goals, stay focused on those goals. You will want to think carefully about how you structure your interactions with the Candidate. Ask a lot of open-ended questions (usually beginning with “how” or “what” or “Tell me about...”) to show that you are interested in the Candidate's growth, but be clear with yourself and the Candidate that his/her goals should guide your relationship.

You will be the only team member that has an opportunity to work with the Candidate over a period of time. Plan to work closely with the Candidate for a period of at least 12 weeks. Often Advisors will work with Candidates over a much longer period of time. This is a great opportunity for you to influence the Candidate's professionalism and to gain a breadth and depth of information about him or her. Use that information to help the Candidate expand his/her competencies.

### **The Advisor as Observer**

The Pennsylvania School-Age Professional Credential process requires you to observe the Candidate on at least one (1) occasion and complete the Observation Instrument. Time your observation so that you have adequate opportunity to see the Candidate in action, reflect on what you saw, and give him/her practical feedback that suggests growth strategies. Remember the observation must be dated within six (6) months prior to the date the Candidate submits the Assessment Visit Request Form.

### **Preparing to Observe**

It takes practice and preparation to make accurate and objective observations. With this in mind, be sure you are familiar with the Observation Instrument prior to conducting the observation of the Candidate. Reading the Observation Instrument prior to implementation will help you focus your attention on competencies required by the credentialing process. Following are a few practical hints for conducting the observation:

1. Schedule the observation in advance so that the Candidate is prepared for your visit. Be sure to check with the Candidate at least one (1) day prior to the visit to confirm the visit and time.
2. When scheduling the observation visit, be sure that you are scheduling the visit on a "typical" day.
3. Be sure to schedule time to share your observation and provide feedback to the Candidate. This can occur immediately following the observation or on a separate occasion.
4. The observation must occur within six (6) months prior to the Candidate's submission of the Assessment Visit Request Form and must be with the same children the Candidate will be observed working with when s/he is observed by the SAC Assessor.
5. Allow some time (10-15 minutes) for the Candidate and the children to get comfortable with your presence before recording your observation.
6. Be sure you have read the Observation Instrument prior to the observation visit so that you are familiar with the location of the items in the instrument.
7. Observe quietly without interruptions.
8. Follow all instructions and procedures in the Observation Instrument.

## **Giving Effective and Constructive Feedback**

Feedback affirms what the Candidate does well and offers guidance about how the Candidate can become more competent. Preparing to give feedback to the Candidate about what you observed requires you to reflect on what you saw. Use the following questions to gather your thoughts so that you can be effective with the feedback you give.

1. What did you like about what you saw the Candidate doing? How did s/he demonstrate competence? What indicators of competence did you see?
2. What might the Candidate do better? What indicators of competence were not observable on the day that you were there?
3. What help might the Candidate need in order to develop greater competence?

The evaluation process is rarely comfortable for the person being evaluated (the Candidate) or for the person doing the evaluation (the Advisor). Try to keep the process as positive as possible. It is important that the feedback you give be useful to the Candidate. To accomplish this you might use the same kinds of questions you used above to draw out the Candidate's evaluation of his/her own performance before you share your observations. People are often aware of what they do well and where they need to improve. Learning to express ones own strengths and challenges will be useful throughout the credentialing process. You may want to ask the following questions before sharing your observation:

1. What did you like about your performance on the day I observed? What indicators of competence do you think you demonstrated?
2. If you had that day to live over again, what might you do differently? How might you have drawn on additional competencies to help you be more effective? What would you like to try that might stretch your current abilities, and which will increase your program's abilities to meet children's needs?
3. What do you want to work on? How can I help you be successful in meeting your goals?

Listen carefully as the Candidate replies to each of these questions. When s/he mentions something you also noted, take the opportunity to affirm that you had the same perception. Agreement – even when it might be about disagreeable things – builds relationships, and you want to encourage self-awareness in the Candidate. When the Candidate feels that you have fully listened to his/her responses, then s/he will be far more ready to listen to what you have to say.

As a part of the observation and feedback process, you are to make one recommendation for growth for each competency goal area. The recommended growth strategy should be entered in the appropriate worksheet at the end on the Observation Instrument.

Make your suggestions concrete, specific and relevant to improving the Candidate's skills and knowledge. Brainstorming with the Candidate new and/or different ways to apply their existing skills and knowledge, and develop additional competence to better meet the needs of school-age children and their families. Consider activities, materials, techniques, routines, professional conferences, home-study references, and the like –

and help the Candidate focus on growth strategies that will help him/her develop the competencies s/he most needs.

Example #1: Helpful Recommendation

This is the kind of suggestion that helps the Candidate improve her/his performance.

**Provide more opportunities for school-age children to develop their expressive language through: having them tell stories and tape record them; create a writing center for children to write skits and act them out; ask older children to read to the younger children (4-2-00).**

Example #2: Recommendation that is NOT as Helpful

This is less useful. Although it is an important goal for a Candidate, the statement does not suggest ways to accomplish it.

**Encourage children to verbalize routinely their thoughts and feelings.**

*(To make the recommendation more useful, give examples that help the Candidate see how s/he could promote such expression?)*

**Guidance in the Collection of Documentation for the Portfolio and Resource File**

In addition to giving feedback on the Candidate's performance with children and families through observation, you may also provide guidance in the preparation of the Portfolio and Resource File. Portfolio and Resource File preparation are described in the PA School-Age Assessment and Competency Standards Booklet and in the Candidate Instruction Booklet. The Candidate can share this information with you.

Preparing the Portfolio and Resource File is a challenging task. Candidates may need guidance about the kinds of entries to write, how to prepare them so that they meet the standards that are required, and how to schedule their work so that they can complete all the necessary entries. But remember that the Portfolio must be the Candidate's original work and should reflect his/her individual style while still containing all the required content.

In some cases your guidance may be minimal as the Candidate may attend formal coursework that provide some guidance about preparing this documentation. In other cases the Advisor provides that guidance. In either case, it is the Advisor's responsibility to carefully review the final documents and sign the appropriate form indicating that the Candidate's Portfolio and Resource File contain the required information.

The Candidate will present the Portfolio at the Local Assessment Review Meeting and the SAC Assessor will review the Portfolio and Resource File at that time.

## **Guidance with the Request for a Credential Assessment Visit**

As an Advisor you may help to keep the Candidate on track and to act as a second set of eyes to be sure that the Candidate has completed all parts of the assessment process and has collected and submitted all required documentation.

Before the Candidate is eligible to submit the Assessment Visit Request Form to the Credentialing Agency, s/he must verify that the following tasks have been completed.

- Portfolio and Resource File are complete,
- The Advisor completes their observation and identifies a growth strategy for each Goal Area, and
- The Parent/Community Representative must complete his/her observation and tally completed Family Questionnaires.

Upon completion of these tasks, you will be asked to sign the Assessment Visit Request Form. This form is not a statement of the Candidate's competence; your signature indicates only that you have completed your responsibilities. You may counsel a Candidate who may feel they are ready for the Local Assessment Review Meeting to postpone the assessment request if you feel significant improvement is still needed.

S/he may not be ready if

- His/her documentation is not yet complete,
- If you or the Parent/Community Representative have not yet completed your tasks, or
- If significant improvement in skills is needed.

There may be instances when a Candidate is satisfied with his/her performance and chooses to proceed even after you have counseled for postponement. Alert the Candidate that if the result of the Local Assessment Review Meeting is to not recommend the credential be awarded, s/he can apply again at a later time or appeal the process. However, unless the appeal is granted, s/he will be responsible to pay the assessment fee again.

When the Credentialing Agency receives the Assessment Visit Request Form a SAC Assessor will be assigned. The SAC Assessor also conducts an observation and an interview with the Candidate. S/he will contact you to schedule a time to discuss your observation and you should feel free to voice questions or concerns at that time.

# Local Assessment Review Meeting

The Local Assessment Review Meeting is scheduled when the Candidate has collected all required documentation from LAT members and submitted the Assessment Visit Request Form. The Local Assessment Review Meeting is the last major event in the assessment process. Individuals attending this meeting are the Candidate and the SAC Assessor.

Through this meeting the skills and competence of the individual Candidate are assessed. The assessment involves a thorough evaluation of the information collected in the Portfolio, Resource File, Family Questionnaires, Observations, as well as, an Interview including questions addressing each functional area. The Candidate will also have an opportunity to orally present their Portfolio.

As a result of this meeting a recommendation is made to the Credential Review Panel.

## ADVISOR CHECKLIST

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- Read the Advisor instructions carefully.
- Study the Pennsylvania School-Age Care Competency Standards.
- Schedule one observation and feedback session to review your observation with the Candidate.
- Complete Observation Instrument by recording your observations and recommended growth strategies. The completed observation is submitted to the Candidate to be presented to the SAC Assessor at the Local Assessment Review Meeting.
- Offer constructive feedback, including growth strategies, after the observation.
- Guide the Candidate in preparation of his/her Portfolio and Resource File.
- Assist the Candidate and the Parent/Community Representative in completing their responsibilities if requested.
- Notify the Candidate when you have completed your information collection duties.
- Meet with Candidate to review documentation, process and to sign-off on Assessment Request Form. Sign the Candidate's Assessment Visit Request Form verifying that the Portfolio and Resource File contain all the required information.