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The Guide for Families



The What, Why, and How
of High-Quality Schools
for **Kindergartners**



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The What, Why, and How of High- Quality Schools for Kindergartners

What do I need to know about kindergarten?

When will my child learn to read?

How can I help my child make new friends in kindergarten?

What an exciting time in your child's life! What she learns in kindergarten will help her succeed in school and as an adult. This includes reading, writing, math, and communicating with others. She'll also get to practice working with others to reach a goal and how to think flexibly—looking at problems in different ways until she finds a solution.

Kindergarten teachers are committed to helping your child gain these skills and become a confident, curious learner. In this booklet, you'll learn more about the ways kindergarten children learn and develop and how teachers support their learning.

Getting Ready for Kindergarten

Excited about your child going to kindergarten? A little worried? Many parents wonder if their child is ready for kindergarten. To prepare for this change, there are things you can do together. Before he enters kindergarten, it's helpful if your child can

- Take turns talking and listening to others
- Follow directions
- Play and cooperate with others
- Take care of personal needs, like using the bathroom and tying his shoes
- Choose materials and activities on his own
- Spend time drawing, writing, cutting, and building with blocks
- Recognize a few letters, some letter sounds, and some numbers
- Count while doing everyday activities, like figuring out how many plates to put on the table for dinner

How teachers help. Teachers want to help you and your child make a smooth transition to kindergarten. To do this, they might

- Invite you and your child to visit the kindergarten classroom and meet the teachers
- Send a letter or an email to welcome your child to the class
- Ask you about your child's favorite songs and books, interests, fears, and health
- Provide ways for you to ask questions and share information, like a classroom message board, email, blog, or website
- Recommend children's books about starting kindergarten and other new experiences

What you can do. Boost your child's confidence and excitement about starting kindergarten with these tips:

- Before school starts, visit the school together and meet your child's teacher.
- Read books together about starting school. Talk about what to expect, like riding the bus or going to the lunchroom.
- Adjust to new bedtimes or wake-up times a few weeks before school begins. This helps your child get used to his new school schedule.
- After the new school year begins, ask your child to tell you about some of the children in his class. (This is less stressful for him than asking if he's made friends yet.)
- Tell your child's teachers that you want to help him learn and grow. Ask for specific suggestions for things you can do at home, or how you can get involved in his classroom.



How Kindergartners Learn and Develop

Through relationships with attentive adults. Every day, teachers help your child feel secure and important. From the morning greeting (“Hello, Emma! Have you lost that tooth yet?”) until the end-of-the-day goodbye (“Emma, you really worked hard on writing your story today”), teachers interact warmly with your child. Children who feel safe and cared for grow in all areas of their development.

Through active, hands-on, “minds-on” play and learning. As your kindergartner explores, experiments, plays, solves problems, and interacts with others, she’s learning a lot. She learns concepts in math, language, science, social studies, and art. She discovers how to find answers to things she wants to know. Here’s an example of hands-on, minds-on learning. A teacher encourages the children to plan an experiment to find out the answer to the question, Which seeds do the birds outside the classroom like the best? The children put different seeds in the birdfeeder and watch the birds for a few days. To answer the question, they write down what they see in a journal and make a graph of their data. Through this project, children develop skills that help them think, question, and explore the world around them.

By connecting new ideas and skills to what children already know and can do. Children learn more easily when adults help them connect new information to what they already know and are interested in. When a teacher reads a book to the class, she might say, “This was similar to the book we read yesterday. How did that story end? How is it like the ending of this book?”

By exploring and making sense of their world. Kindergartners are active learners, figuring out the world around them. To support this, teachers provide interesting objects for children to touch and explore. They encourage children to investigate,

Play in Kindergarten

Imagine you're at Open House night at your child's school. A teacher divides the parents into two groups, and you're in Group 1.

Group 1: Your group goes to the block area. You play with wooden blocks and learn about their three-dimensional shapes (cube, sphere, rectangular prism). You work with the group to make buildings. Some blocks stack, some quickly fall over, and others roll away.

The teacher asks questions that make you think a little deeper: "Why did you decide to use those shapes for your building?" "Can you use **all** the shapes in your building?" "How can you get the sphere to stay in place?" There is a lot of talking in the group as you try different solutions and try to meet the teacher's challenges.

Group 2: This group of parents listens to a different teacher talk about shapes. Then they fill out a worksheet about shapes.

Later, everyone in the classroom talks about what they learned. Everyone agrees that those in Group 1 were more actively involved and probably learned more. Without noticing it, the people in Group 1 explored concepts in math, science, language, and social studies. They solved problems, took turns, tried out different ideas, and made adjustments.

Just like Group 1 learned a lot by experimenting and talking together, your child learns through play and interaction with others, too. In a high-quality kindergarten, the teacher combines play with learning. Your child might work with other children to plan a play with puppets, write the story with the teacher's help, create the puppets and the stage, make and sell tickets, and put on a show. Or, your child and a couple of classmates might invent a math game and create a game board for it. Activities like these help him learn important concepts and skills he'll use now—and when he's older.

experiment, and think about how or why something happens. For example, if the class is learning what makes an object sink or float, the teacher has the children work in small groups to build different objects that they think will either sink or float, test their creations, and determine why each object floated or sank.

Through teacher-guided learning. Whether children work with the teacher, with a small group, or independently, teachers carefully plan learning activities to give each child the right support. To help children better understand what they're learning, teachers

- **Ask questions** that help children think in new ways and explain their ideas: "What do you think would happen if you tried that again? Do you think you would see the same thing? Why? Why not?"
- **Offer choices** so children become more independent and more involved in their learning: "There are three activities in the science center today. Think about which one you'll do first. What will be your second choice?"
- **Recognize each child's efforts** and the results: "That wasn't easy, but you kept trying different things. You figured it out."
- **Add a challenge:** "I noticed you split a set of nine cubes into two sets— a set of five and a set of four. Is there another way to split them? How many ways can you find?"
- **Encourage children to think** about what they learned: "What did you discover about the clay?"
- **Ask a child to share** what he's learning with other children: "Look at the different seeds with your partner. Tell each other what you notice."

Kindergarten Learning Centers

Many kindergartens have **learning centers**—different areas in the classroom where children explore materials, learn concepts, and practice skills. Centers can be filled with books, drawing and writing supplies, things to build and create with, materials for exploring math, science, and art, computers, or other learning tools. Teachers usually set up learning centers with activities that have specific goals for children. At other times, children can choose a center to work in, what they do there, and how much time to spend in the center. During center time, your child may work by himself or with other children. Sometimes, teachers observe your child and give him instructions or comments.

Working in centers helps your child

- Get deeply involved in his learning
- Learn and apply concepts in different ways and situations
- Learn to work with other children
- Share materials and space, take turns, manage time, and solve problems
- Explore his interests and develop a love of learning

In a construction learning center, for example, your child might work with her classmates on tasks like these:

- Make simple machines with LEGO bricks or sets
- Draw plans and use them to build something
- Read books and watch short videos on a tablet to learn about machines and robots
- Take photos of their creations and write about them for a class newsletter
- Solve challenges, like designing a city made out of blocks or building an airport where passengers can get to their planes quickly

During these activities, your child learns concepts in math, engineering, science, language, and technology.

What Does “High Quality” Mean?

No two kindergarten classrooms look or feel exactly the same. Many different teaching styles and methods can support your child’s learning. But every high-quality classroom has certain characteristics.

Teachers in high-quality programs build on what your child already knows and can do. They also help her stretch to learn what she doesn’t know or can’t do yet. Teachers use *developmentally appropriate practice* to provide materials and experiences that are challenging to children, but that they can do with a little help.

When teachers choose materials, activities, and strategies to support children’s learning, they keep in mind

- What most kindergartners need—such as objects they can count, sort, and measure for math activities
- What individual children might need—like a beginning level I Can Read book that Vivian can read with help, and higher level books that Keyon can read on his own
- Ways to support each child’s family background and culture—such as having Spanish versions of books on the classroom tablet for Lucia and Diego

Have you ever heard teachers talk about developmentally appropriate practice (sometimes called DAP)?

Developmentally appropriate practice means

- Teaching in ways that are based on each child’s age and stage of development
- Helping each child meet goals that are just right for him
- Valuing and including each child’s family and culture

This booklet describes many features of classrooms that use developmentally appropriate practice.

To help children meet important learning goals, teachers use what they know about the children and what is important for all kindergartners to know. Teachers keep track of what your child is learning so they know what he's ready to learn next and can help him succeed.

Teachers also want to know what you think is important about your child's development and learning. You are partners exchanging information about your child's experiences and learning, both at home and in the classroom.



What Do Children Learn in a High-Quality Kindergarten?

In kindergarten, your child will learn many things, including social and emotional, physical, language and literacy, and thinking (cognitive) skills.

Social and Emotional Skills

The children in Miss Sanchez’s class know they can ask each other for help when they have a question and she is busy. Dion is trying to make a graph of the number of pockets the children have in their clothing that day. He asks Ms. Sanchez how to begin. She tells him, “Tywana knows a lot about graphs. I bet she can help you.” Dion tells Tywana about his problem. Tywana says, “Oh, it’s like the bar graph we did about our pets. Remember? Here, I’ll show you.”

Dion, Tywana, and the other children are gaining **social and emotional skills**:

- They know they can learn new things by working together.
- They understand that everyone has some knowledge to share.
- They feel more confident and capable when they help others.

Miss Sanchez helps the children learn social and emotional skills:

- She encourages them to find other solutions instead of only relying on a teacher’s help.
- She helps the children see themselves and each other as capable.
- She suggests ways they can get assistance when they’re stuck so they don’t get frustrated.

Along with learning concepts in math, reading, and other subjects, your kindergartner is gaining other skills that will help her in school and in life—like learning to get along with others, being independent, and using self-control. Teachers help children develop these skills.

Social development. Teachers support children’s social development by helping them work together, share information, make and keep friends, and solve disagreements. To help children develop social skills, teachers

- Set up the classroom and activities so it’s easy for children to work together. For example, in the writing area, children might sit facing each other so they can share ideas while they work.
- Talk with children about things that are important to them and listen respectfully when each child speaks: “Cho, how was your trip to your grandma’s? I’d like to hear what you did when you visited her.”
- Explain ways to help, share, and solve problems with others: “Lily, I see that Gianna is upset because you accidentally broke her invention. Please let her know you want to help her rebuild it.”
- Point out helpful things children say or do: “Ben, I heard you ask Takeo to join your group. You are a good friend to him.”
- Suggest ways for children with special needs to communicate: “Antonio, when you and Ellie talk about how you’ll work together on this project, please repeat what you hear Ellie say. Then you can be sure you both know what to do.”

Social skills help your child get along with others.

Emotional skills help him understand and manage his feelings, and the feelings of others. A teacher might tell you, “We support children’s social and emotional skills by acting out what they can do in different situations. We practice strategies for working well together. We also talk about ways to be a good friend.”

Emotional development. Even for us adults, it can sometimes be hard to control our feelings. It's even harder for young children. But teachers support children's emotional development by showing respect for all children, encouraging their efforts, and providing times for them to share their feelings and ideas. They also talk about emotions and ways to express them. A teacher might say, "Let's think of different words you can use to explain your frustration. Please tell me why Malika is upsetting you. Use gentler words."

Young children are developing *self-regulation*—the ability to manage their emotions and behavior. Self-regulation helps your child follow directions, focus on tasks, interact well with other people, handle frustration, and be more independent. Teachers set up the classroom and interact with children in certain ways so that they develop self-regulation. For example, having choices increases children's interest in an activity and encourages them to take responsibility for their learning. So a teacher might offer several ways for children to do an activity or meet a learning goal.

Approaches to learning. If, for example, your child is fascinated by earthworms, insects, and other tiny creatures, she'll spend a lot of time outside studying them. Your child also wants to figure out how the world works, so she may ask you lots of questions: "What if the sun didn't shine?" "Why do birds have feathers?" "What are toenails made of?" She may try to name letters and read words she sees around the house or when you go out together. These are some of the many ways your child is showing you her *approach to learning*—how she responds to learning situations.

For children to have a positive approach to learning, they need skills like these:

- Being curious and eager to learn
- Exploring the world and trying to figure out how things work
- Sticking with a task even when it's hard



- Trying a different way when something doesn't work
- Staying focused on a task or project

Your child's teacher supports these skills in many ways. For example, she uses your child's interests—whether it's worms or outer space or drums—in learning activities. She encourages him to come up with different ways to complete a task or solve a problem.

Physical Skills

As music plays in Mrs. Kerr's kindergarten classroom, she calls out ways for the children to move: "Let's hop! Remember to slow down or speed up so you don't bump into anyone." The children hop around the room on one foot, moving in the same direction, like Mrs. Kerr taught them. Mrs. Kerr hops, too, reminding some children to stay on the same foot.

Physical skills are how your child uses his body to make large movements with his arms and legs (**large motor skills**) and small movements with his fingers and hands (**small motor skills**). A teacher might say, “When children roll and shape clay, they’re strengthening their fingers and developing their small motor skills. This helps them with writing.”

When the music stops, Mrs. Kerr calls out, “Make a curved shape! *Hinh cong!*” Because a number of children in the class speak Vietnamese, she gives the direction in that language, too. The children find partners and make different curved shapes—standing up, sitting down, or lying on the rug. “I see you made a curved shape with your backs and arms,” the teacher says to Mai and Sophie.

Mai, Sophie, and the other children are learning **physical skills**:

- They practice skills that help them gain coordination, balance, and control of their movements.
- They experiment with moving and arranging their bodies in different ways.

Mrs. Kerr helps Mai, Sophie, and the other children learn physical skills:

- She helps them learn and practice basic movement skills. She gives children individual help when they need it, like those who are still learning to hop.
- She encourages them to figure out how to arrange their bodies in different ways.
- She teaches them how to move safely in their space.

Let’s get moving! Physical activity builds strong, healthy bodies and active minds. Moving throughout the day has lots of benefits. It helps your child focus on schoolwork, reduces stress, improves her mood, and helps her grow.

Playing outside and doing other physical activities during the school day is just what your child needs. Your child’s class might take breaks by doing jumping jacks, running in place, or stretching. His teacher might use movement in learning

activities, like having children use blocks or pieces of rope to measure how far they can jump.

There are also times children practice specific skills, such as balancing or throwing and catching balls. Learning basic movement skills now will help your child learn more complicated ones later in activities like sports, dance, and physical games like freeze tag.

Your kindergartner does lots of activities that develop his hand and finger control, like drawing, writing, doing puzzles, using scissors, building with small blocks, and working on a computer or tablet.

Language and Literacy Skills

Mrs. Thomas reads *Fancy Nancy*, by Jane O'Connor, to her kindergarten class. The book has many interesting words the children do not know, like *plume*, *posh*, and *accessories*.

To help the children learn these new words, Mrs. Thomas makes a chart that says “plain” on the left side and “fancy” on the right. She first lists “plain” words from the story—words they already know. She then discusses the new, “fancy” words that have similar meanings. For example, Mrs. Thomas writes *feather* on the “plain” side of the chart and asks the children for a “fancy” word from the story that means the same thing. “Plume!” they shout, and the teacher writes *plume* on the “fancy” side across from *feather*. After the activity, she puts the chart on the wall and encourages the children to use the new words when they write, tell stories, or talk to each other.

The children in this class are building **language and literacy skills**:

- They learn the meanings of new words, how to say the words, and how to spell them.
- They refer to the word chart so they can write the words on their own.

- They use words they already know to learn new words that mean almost the same thing.

Mrs. Thomas helps the children learn to read, write, listen, and speak:

- She pronounces new words carefully and explains what they mean.
- She puts the word chart on the wall so children can look at the words when they need to.
- She helps children learn new vocabulary that improves their reading and writing skills.

Literacy is a big focus in kindergarten. The listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills that your child learns in kindergarten are important now and throughout her life.

Listening and speaking (oral language). During the school day, your child has many opportunities to listen to and speak with children and adults—at whole group time, during small group work, when working with a partner, or while spending time with the teacher one-to-one. To support these skills, teachers

- Explore new vocabulary words with children during science, math, social studies, and art, while on field trips, and, of course, during reading time.
- Give children opportunities to talk about what they already know about a subject and make connections to their own lives. After reading *The Lonely Beast*, by Chris Judge, the teacher might ask, “Why did the Beast go looking for other Beasts?” “Was there a time when you felt lonely, like the Beast? What did you do?”
- Encourage children to take turns when talking to each other so they learn to politely listen and speak with others: “I’m sorry, Rachel, I don’t think we all heard what you said about your tent. Would you please say it again so we can all hear it?”
- Ask children to explain what they’re doing and what they notice. “How did you get your paper shapes to stand up that way, Chen?”

Reading. Children come to kindergarten with different reading experiences and skills. Your child might recognize some words and be able to name the letters of the alphabet. Another kindergartner might be able to connect some letters with their sounds and read familiar words. No matter what children know, teachers help them develop beginning reading skills and a love of reading. To do this, they

Literacy is the ability to understand language and to communicate through reading and writing. Listening, talking, reading, and writing are all part of early literacy. A teacher might say, “Kylie’s literacy skills are growing. Now she can read her name and the names of a few other children, and she can point out the ones that start with the same letter and sound.”

- Share books and display other types of print (like the daily schedule, helper charts, labels on shelves) to show that reading and writing are useful and fun. Samples of your child’s writing may be displayed in the room.
- Read with children every day, individually or in a group. Teachers include many kinds of books—stories, informational books, poetry—in the classroom. Listening to stories and exploring books boosts children’s understanding of words. Reading with expression (“RAWR!” says the lion) helps them learn how print and speech are related, shows them a wide range of writing styles, and makes reading fun.
- Teach children letter sounds. Teachers help children practice putting together sounds to make words and breaking words apart into individual sounds.
- Point out and explain parts of written language, like capital letters and punctuation: “See this period we put at the end of the sentence? It tells us to stop. The sentence is done. ‘Sparky got out of his cage, but we found him.’”
- Use many ways to support children who are learning English. For example, when teaching the beginning sounds of words, teachers might start with sounds that are the same in English and the child’s home language.

As your child learns about her world, this new knowledge helps her better understand what she reads and what is read to her. It also helps her learn other subjects, like science and social studies.

Writing. Your child will work on many skills to develop his writing. For example, he might draw pictures to help him think of a story he wants to tell. When he writes words, his teacher might encourage him to use his own spelling. She'll show him how to form the letters and separate one word from the next. It's a lot to learn and practice, and his writing won't look like an older child's does. But when he's encouraged to write about things that interest him, he'll think of himself as a writer—and he'll want to keep writing. And the more he writes, the better he'll get at it.

To support children's writing, teachers

- Provide lots of writing materials, like different kinds of paper, pencils, markers, crayons, and colored pencils. Children also write in different forms. They might write every day in journals made of stapled paper, draw and write about experiments in their science notebooks, write stories, create signs, or write letters to friends.
- Model—show and explain—specific skills. They might model how to write a word by saying, "I want to write *box*. Watch how I do it. First I listen to the sound at the beginning . . ."
- Encourage your child to go over his writing and look for ways to improve it: "Kellan, I see you wrote a few words about the kite you drew. What other details could you add?"
- Share the pen. On a large sheet of paper, the teacher writes some of the words of a story, and the children write some of the words.

Thinking (Cognitive) Skills

Mr. Karl brings in a few marble mazes for the children to explore. He encourages the children to notice how the mazes work and why. After several days, Mr. Karl

challenges the children to work in small groups to build their own mazes.

Isabelle, Tomás, Jasmine, and Avery talk about the materials they need, the steps to build the maze, and who will do each step. They measure, cut out, and tape the materials together to make the maze. Mr. Karl asks them to guess how fast the marbles and balls will go through the maze, and which type of ball they think will be the fastest. They make charts to record their predictions.

The first marbles jump out of a tube and fall to the floor. Mr. Karl asks why they think this happened. “The tape isn’t strong enough to hold the tube to the cardboard!” says Isabelle. They try it again using duct tape, and this time, the tube holds and the balls roll through the maze. Using a timer, they compare how fast each type of ball is, and they write the times on a chart.

Mr. Karl challenges the children again: Can they make the marbles and balls go even faster? After several changes to the maze, they succeed. The children take turns recording their creations with a digital camera. After a few days of experimenting, all the groups demonstrate their mazes.

Isabelle, Tomás, Jasmine, and Avery are learning to think in more complex ways:

- They do lots of planning: what types of materials to use, how to make the pieces stay together, and what angles to place the tubes for the balls to go through the fastest.
- They work together to solve problems and challenges.
- They use math to measure materials, time the balls going through the maze, and compare the times.
- They use both science and creativity to figure out how the different materials can fit together so the maze works.
- They develop social studies skills as they work together.
- They use technology to record what they have built and what they have learned.

Mr. Karl supports the children as they develop their **thinking (cognitive) skills**:

- He encourages the children to explore mazes and use what they learn to make their own.
- He puts out different types of materials and asks the children to work together to build more complex structures.
- He challenges them to think more deeply about design, speed, and building materials.

Your child develops her thinking (cognitive) skills when she does any of these activities: explores, observes, creates, asks questions, tries new tasks, and tries to solve problems. When she learns how to think and use information, she understands the world around her in new, deeper ways.

To help children build thinking skills and enjoy learning, teachers

- Build on what children already know. For example, children first explore making different types of lines with yarn (horizontal, vertical, curved, zigzag). Then the teacher asks them to use the yarn pieces to form a shape with three straight sides and two curved sides.
- Help your child plan what she's going to do, and afterward think about what she learned: "How will you display the signs for your store? What materials do you need?" And later: "How did the tape work out for hanging your signs?"
- Encourage children to discuss ideas with each other: "Do you agree with Maddie's answer? Is there another way to think about it?"
- Include children when making decisions: "What rule can we use to decide who goes first?"
- Encourage your child to record and share his learning. Your child might write in a journal about something he's learned, draw pictures about it, or make diagrams and models.



Executive function. This refers to processes in the brain that help your child organize and manage her behavior, emotions, and thinking. It includes being able to focus, plan, organize her thoughts, ignore distractions, and keep information in her mind when doing a task. Teachers help children learn these skills in the same way they support the development of math or reading skills. For example, if children are planning an experiment with magnets, the teacher might say, “Think about the steps of your experiment. What will you do first? Second? Third? How will you know when you’re done?”

Your kindergartner is learning a lot!

Math. Math is part of everyday life. When your child’s class is learning about patterns, for example, she might discover them everywhere—on the kitchen tile at home and on her striped shirt. She’ll notice she can measure how things change over time: Her shoes feel smaller as her feet grow. The sunflower that she sees every day is two inches taller than it was last week.

To support children’s math learning and interest in math, teachers

- Use math concepts in everyday activities. For example, a daily question on the board might let children vote on a topic, like their favorite season. Then the class discusses the findings: “Which season had the most or least votes? How many more votes did summer have than spring?” When the children line up to leave the room, they might line up in a pattern: solid shirt–patterned shirt–solid shirt–patterned shirt.
- Discuss a math problem with a group, have children work on the problem in pairs, and then ask them to share their solutions with the group.
- Ask questions to extend your child’s thinking and learning: “How is the square like the other shapes in this group?”
- Encourage children to explain their answer: “How do you know that putting five dots and two dots together equal the same as three dots and four dots together?” “How did you figure out how to . . . ?”

Science. Most kindergartners ask a lot of questions about the world and how things work. Teachers encourage children to be curious and to make discoveries by doing different things: building with blocks and other materials, taking things apart, exploring and examining objects, observing events around them, reading books about scientific facts, thinking about why certain things happen, and explaining what they find out. Teachers help children do these things so they learn to think like a scientist.

To encourage science learning, teachers

- Provide materials children can touch, smell, see, compare, measure, change, and experiment with. In the classroom, there might be rocks, soil, seeds, blocks, magnifying glasses, tweezers, pulleys, scales, measuring tools, and paper for drawing or writing observations.
- Encourage children to predict what will happen and come up with solutions: “Which of these frozen shapes we made do you think will melt the fastest? Let’s write down our predictions. How can we find out if we’re right?”
- Use new science words: “Let’s observe what happens when we try to pick up this mixture of water and cornstarch we’ve just made. Is it more like a solid or a liquid?” Your child might learn words like *estimate*, *measure*, *evaporate*, *atmosphere*, *fossil*, and *graph*.
- Have children record, or document, their learning. This can include drawing pictures, making charts and graphs of experiments, writing or dictating observations, and taking photos of their work. Documenting helps children think about what they did and how it relates to other things they’ve learned. It also helps teachers and parents see what children understand.
- Encourage children to share their learning and ideas with others: “You’ve shared your thoughts and you’ve listened to other children’s ideas. What do you think now? Do you want to make any changes to your prediction?”

Social studies. In kindergarten, children learn how their family and their class are part of their community. As they learn more about their community, they might have questions like these: How do people in my community get food? Where do they work? How do they get from place to place? The children might make a map of their classroom, playground, school, or community.

Kindergartners learn how to be part of a classroom community through daily routines (like hanging up their backpacks when they arrive, and starting the day with a class meeting). Teachers work with children to set up rules for the classroom and decide what happens if the rules aren't followed. They'll offer lots of opportunities for children to share their opinions, listen to other children's ideas, respect the rights of others, and solve disagreements.

Teachers also use long-term projects in geography and history to teach social studies concepts and skills. They'll connect this learning to familiar events. For example, your child's teacher might have the children start a class newsletter and write about what's going on in the classroom and in their homes.

Social studies also includes learning about the children's languages and cultures. Your child's teacher might plan to create a book about the children in the class. She'll ask each family to make a page for the book. She'll put the pages together and put the completed book in the class library for everyone to enjoy.

Creative Arts

Children express their feelings, ideas, and creativity in many ways—by making art, telling stories, singing, dancing, making music, and pretending. In a high-quality kindergarten, your child explores art and music materials by using different techniques. For example, he might explore rhythm with instruments. His teachers might demonstrate techniques like pinching clay to make a small pot and encourage children to try it out. The creative arts let children experiment and try new things.

When your child uses his imagination, he learns to think about problems in a new way. For example, if the class acts out a story your child invented, he might have to figure out how someone can pretend to be the house in his story. Art activities help your



child develop skills that are important for learning, like focus and persistence.

Technology

Computers, tablets, smartphones, digital cameras, and other technology can encourage children’s thinking and problem solving. In many classrooms, children use them to find information, solve problems, understand concepts, and learn at their own pace. For example, your child may use a computer program that can move shapes around, learning that a shape stays the same even if it’s turned. The teacher might use a

Early learning standards describe what children need to know and be able to do when they leave kindergarten. To decide how they can best help children learn, teachers use these standards along with a few other things: what they know about children’s development and learning, children’s individual needs, and their family and culture. In other words, teachers balance *what* children need to learn with their knowledge about *how* children learn best.

camera to take photos of the children’s writing, put the photos up on a large screen, and use the children’s writing samples to talk about when to use capital letters.

Children learning both English and their home language might use a tablet or computer to search online for stories in their home language. A child with special needs might use devices that

help him communicate with other children. When children use technology together, they learn to discuss what they’re doing, cooperate while doing a task, consider different ideas, and make decisions together.

Kindergarten teachers use technology to keep track of your child’s progress and show you what’s happening in the classroom. For example, the teacher might record your child’s group presenting a project they worked on, and then email the photos or a video to you or post it on the class blog.

Assessment

How can teachers tell what children have learned? To understand what each child knows and can do, teachers use many types of assessments. They

- Observe children working
- Take notes on what children do and say
- Collect samples of children’s writing, drawing, and other work
- Take photos or videos of what children are doing

Samples like these make up a portfolio that shows what your child has learned over time. Teachers look through this information to figure out what your child is ready to learn next.

Teachers use other types of assessment, too, like checklists and tests. Checklists give them a quick look at what your child has learned, such as sounds at the beginning of words. Screening and diagnostic tests show when a child needs support from other adults. Standardized tests show the whole class's progress over time. To get a better idea of what your child knows in different areas, his teacher may collect information a few times: before teaching a topic or concept (such as measurement), during the teaching, and afterward.

Teachers also encourage children to think about and evaluate their own work: "How do you think that turned out? What do you feel went well? What might you do differently next time?" As the teacher looks at your child's writing, she might ask if he understands that each word gets a space after it. She'll check if he needs more help or time to practice this.

Teachers will share information with you about what your child is learning and what progress she's making. They might share her portfolio during conferences or other times. Some schools also give report cards for kindergartners.

What Does a High-Quality Kindergarten Look Like?

High quality is about more than the materials in a classroom (although those are important too!). Teachers focus on the following to help children learn best:

1. Creating a caring classroom community of learners
2. Teaching to support children's development and learning
3. Planning learning experiences within the curriculum
4. Assessing children's development and learning
5. Developing respectful relationships with families

Creating a Caring Classroom Community of Learners

In high-quality kindergartens, children have positive relationships with teachers and with each other.

To help children feel like they belong and that everyone is important, teachers

- Have children work with partners and in small groups. Teachers encourage children to help each other, share ideas, and make friends.
- Respect children's ideas. If there's a problem that affects the whole class, teachers work with children to think of ways to solve the problem.
- Include the culture and language of every child in the class. They ask families about materials, books, pictures, and songs that children know. If teachers do not speak a child's home language, they learn a few words in that language to communicate with that child.

Teaching to Support Children’s Development and Learning

Teachers set up the classroom, offer materials, and plan interactions that support children’s learning and interests. Sometimes they lead the activities. Other times, children choose what to do and who to work with.

To help children learn and enjoy learning, teachers

- Arrange the room for different types of learning: space for group meetings, tables where children work together, a place where teachers work with a small group, and a library area and other quiet spots for independent work.
- Provide materials and activities that interest children, challenge their skills, and help them grow a love of learning. Teachers often schedule plenty of time for children to use the materials and do the activities that have been set up in learning centers.
- Encourage children’s efforts and deep thinking with specific comments: “That wasn’t easy, but you kept trying different solutions until you figured it out.” “You predicted that the salt would dissolve in the water. And your experiment showed that you were right. Why did you think the salt would dissolve?”

Planning Learning Experiences Within the Curriculum

Your child’s school has a curriculum and goals that state what most kindergartners should know and be able to do, and how they will learn these things. It includes the methods, strategies, and approaches teachers use to help children learn. Teachers use the curriculum to plan lessons and activities. For more information on specific areas of kindergarten curriculum, see “What Do Children Learn in a High-Quality Kindergarten?” on page 10.

To plan learning experiences that help children meet goals, teachers

- Pay attention to what children are interested in, what they know, and what they can do. They use this knowledge to choose materials, plan activities, and work with individual children and with groups of children.
- Talk about children's goals with families and find out what they want their children to learn.

Assessing Children's Development and Learning

Teachers use several methods to find out what children know and can do. This information helps them plan what experiences and activities to do next so that children continue learning.

To assess children's learning and use that information to plan, teachers

- Regularly check each child's progress by taking notes, collecting samples of children's work, and documenting their work. They make sure the assessments clearly show the skills of all children, including those learning both English and their home language, and children with special needs.
- Regularly share with families how children are doing and what they're working on at home and at school. They have meetings with families to discuss children's goals and progress.

Developing Respectful Relationships With Families

Teachers work hard to build strong, trusting relationships with families. They know that families are the most important people in each child's life.

To include families as partners in children's education, teachers

- Support children's learning by doing some of the same things at home and at school.

- Welcome families' visits. Teachers encourage families to participate in the school and classroom. Family members might listen to children read, play a math game with children, or go on a field trip with the class. They might bring materials for children to use in the classroom or write something for the class blog or newsletter.
- Look for ways to communicate with families whose home language is not English. They may translate handouts or have staff available who speak a family's home language.

5 Signs That a Classroom Might Not Be Appropriate for Your Kindergartner

There are many excellent, high-quality kindergarten classrooms. However, you could see some practices that don't help children learn and develop. A few are listed here. If you're concerned about something you see in the classroom, talk to your child's teacher or an administrator at the school.

- Children spend a lot of time in their seats. The whole class often works on the same thing at the same time. The children don't interact with each other much. Teachers mostly teach the whole group at one time.
- Children mostly use worksheets, workbooks, and flashcards for learning and practice. They're usually expected to understand abstract ideas without first using objects to help them learn the concept (for example, doing math worksheets about adding without first working with blocks they can count).
- Teachers rely on rewards, like stickers or special treats, to get children to do their work. They typically compliment children's work using words that don't help children understand what they did well (saying "Good job!" or "Nice!" instead of "You tried many times to find a solution to that problem" or "I noticed that you helped Miko identify the letters in his name").

What Does a High-Quality Kindergarten Look Like?

- Assessment focuses only on some areas (like math and reading) but not others. Teachers only use assessments at the end of a project or school year, which doesn't give them a chance to change and improve their teaching.
- Teachers don't communicate regularly with families. They may contact families only when there's a problem.

Kindergarten is an important time in your child's life—and in yours, too. We hope this booklet shows how a high-quality kindergarten will help your child develop and learn. With support from you and from knowledgeable, caring teachers, your child will view kindergarten—and school—as a fun, fair, great place to learn. Together, you can enjoy the many learning opportunities ahead!



What is a high-quality kindergarten? How does it help your child learn and grow?

Your child is a unique, curious individual who deserves the very best school experience to meet his or her needs. This booklet explores the ways kindergartners learn and what teachers do to support their learning and development—and why.

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