

Most preschools will provide the tools your child needs to start kindergarten



Preparing for Kindergarten

Local education experts share their tips on how to prepare your child for this big step

Written by Leigh Ann Mitchell

Kindergarten is a special time for your little ones. They enter a world like never before - full of friends, learning, and play. Most times, this transition is harder on the parents than it is for the children, but parents want to make sure their children are prepared for this big step in life.

Kindergarten Basics

Many children attend preschool before entering kindergarten where they learn basic skills in a classroom setting. This can prepare them for more structured schedules and school routines. Some children do not attend preschool, but are also very successful through parental involvement in home schooling, daily exposure to real-world experiences, and a structured, interactive home environment.

According to Kim Lawson, Ph.D., executive director of elementary curriculum and instruction in Katy ISD, kindergarten is a full-day program available to all children who have turned 5 years old on or before September 1 of the current school year. Like all school curriculum, kindergarten's program of study is created by in-district leaders and master teachers. It is all centered upon the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills or TEKS.

"There is no preparation required for children entering kindergarten," states Lawson. "Children will enter kindergarten on a variety of levels academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. This is absolutely normal." Children will have every chance to develop and mature as the school year progresses.

Getting Kids Ready

Kate Fuller, head of primary and Clair Wain, director of early years at The British International School of Houston, stress that the most important preparation for any kindergartener is play. Play is natural work for young children and it is not necessary to start core academics too early. The benefits of age-appropriate play contribute to physical and mental well-being of children. It helps children handle boundaries, motivates them to enjoy achievements, persevere in learning, and enables children to problem solve on their own.

Lawson states that parents can help in the transition into kindergarten in many ways. Getting children excited about such a big year is one way. "We want children to be enthusiastic about school, not anxious or nervous," she explains. Building confidence in children can also ease stress.

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Preparing your child can include fun activities you do together



Children enter kindergarten at different levels



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Sheri Adams, a kindergarten teacher at Roosevelt Alexander Elementary in Katy ISD, expresses that it is helpful if children come into kindergarten knowing letters and their sounds, numbers one through 10, and if they are able, how to write their name. "This gives them a good start and they are able to begin pre-reading quickly if they haven't already begun," she adds. "We do cover all of this at the beginning of the year since we get children from all developmental stages entering kindergarten." Once teachers are aware of core knowledge, students are sometimes grouped together according to their abilities where individual needs are met.

Fuller and Wain encourage vocabulary building. "The number of words a child is familiar with and uses in their day-to-day vocabulary is a direct indicator for how successful they will be

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academically,” says Fuller. A simple way to increase vocabulary in children is to talk with them regularly using rich, varied dialogue. An example of this is to use regular adult language instead of simplifying words or phrases for young children.

Parents can help prepare their children for kindergarten socially and emotionally by exercising taking turns in playing games, sharing toys at playdates, and praising their successes and failures. “Model that it’s okay to make mistakes and let your child know this,” Wain states. “Socially, children should be able to share with other children. This includes sharing an adult’s attention as there is only one teacher to 22 students generally,” Adams adds.

Gifted Education

Many parents wonder if their child is gifted. While Katy ISD does have a program to identify and serve gifted children, it is important not to place pressure onto children at such a young age. “Children who are so young should be allowed to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding at an age-appropriate level rather than being accelerated out of childhood,” Fuller stresses. Katy ISD will provide information on testing for giftedness in the fall semester.

Registration and Orientation

Registration for kindergarten begins April 6, 2017. All Katy ISD schools will hold kindergarten orientations and curriculum nights to provide parents with valuable facts and figures for the coming school year. These orientations will provide information on schedules, expectations for students, and information on district services which include gifted and talented, special education, bilingual education, and more.

Kindergarten is an exciting year for children. It is the stepping stone for becoming lifelong learners. **KM**



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- Kim Lawson, Ph.D.,
Executive Director of Elementary
Curriculum and Instruction, Katy ISD

Kindergarten Fast Facts for Katy ISD

- ✓ Registration begins April 6, 2017 at all Katy ISD elementary schools. Your child must be 5 years old on or before September 1 of the current school year.
- ✓ Schools will host kindergarten orientations to help provide information for the upcoming school year.
- ✓ Katy ISD kindergarten's website provides up to date information and a calendar of events for parents. Visit katyisd.org.

LEIGH ANN MITCHELL is a former teacher, has a son in third grade, and is a huge supporter of education.



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