ECDC’s Support of School Readiness and Beyond
How ECDC Prepares Young Children to Read and Supports Emerging Readers

Rich Teacher Talk
- Teachers talk to children in large group, small group and one-on-one situations.
- Teachers extend children’s comments into more descriptive, grammatically mature statements.
- Teachers use project work to promote cognitively challenging content.
- Teachers use words that children are unlikely to encounter in everyday conversations and help children learn the meaning of new vocabulary words.
- Teachers listen and respond to what children have to say.

Storybook Reading
- Children are read to throughout the day, exposing them to stories, poems, and information books.
- Conversations and activities before, during, and after reading take place to stimulate children cognitively.
- Favorite books are read over and over again to increase the likelihood that children will attempt to read those books on their own.
- Books that positively reflect the children’s identity and culture are read.
- Phonological Awareness Activities
- Children are provided with activities that increase children’s awareness of the sounds of language. These activities include books, poems, and songs that involve rhyme (words which end with the same sound), alliteration (several words that begin with the same sound), and sound matching (matching words which begin with a specific sound).

Alphabet/Letter Recognition and Phonemic Activities
- Teachers encourage children to use materials which promote identification of alphabet letters. These materials include alphabet books, magnetic letters, alphabet blocks, alphabet stamps, and puzzles.
- Teachers use direct instruction to teach letter names which are meaningful to the children, such as talking about the letters in a child’s name or in a word that is of interest to the child.

Support for Emergent Reading
- Teachers encourage children to attempt to read by providing a large collection of books which children have access to throughout the day, by rereading favorite books, by creating and allowing children to read books created by the children, by creating a print rich environment which is functional to the children (helper charts, labels for toys, labels for cubbies and lockers, etc.), and literacy materials in the dramatic play and block learning centers (signs, menus, telephone books, etc.).
Support for Emergent Writing
- Teachers encourage children to use emergent forms of writing, such as scribble writing, random letter strings, and invented spelling by providing a writing center stocked with various writing materials, paper, and book making materials, play-related writing materials in the dramatic play and block learning centers, and functional writing opportunities connected to class activities (computer sign-up sheet, signs for saving a block structure, etc.),
- Teachers use shared writing demonstrations in which the teacher writes down text dictated by the children.
- Teachers create written webs of vocabulary and ideas related to projects.

Shared Book Experiences
- Teachers use small and big books to point to the print as it is read.
- Teachers teach basic concepts of print such as the distinction between pictures and print, left to right, top to bottom sequence, and book concepts (cover, title, author, illustrator, etc.).

Integrated, Content-Focused Activities
- Teachers use the project approach to curriculum and provide children with opportunities to hear topic related information books, gather data using observation, experiments, interviews, etc., use emergent writing to record information, and engage in dramatic play to express what they have learned.

Literacy Support Materials for Families
ECDC offers families the opportunity to borrow quality early childhood materials to support the development of literacy at home. Literacy bags may be checked out in the office area for families to use. ECDC also has a variety of children's books in our lending library and families are welcome to borrow books at any time.

Indiana Academic Standards/Indiana Foundations – ECDC’s curriculum is guided by the Indiana Foundations for Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers and Indiana Kindergarten Academic Standards.

Indiana Foundations for Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers can be found at http://www.doe.in.gov/earlylearning and

Kindergarten Standards can be found at https://learningconnection.doe.in.gov/Standards/Standards.aspx?st=&sub=2&gl=165&c=0&stid=0
How ECDC Incorporates Math as a Part of Everyday Experiences and Activities to Help Children Become Successful Mathematical Thinkers

**Number and Operations:** Counting; Quantity; Comparisons; Order; Numerals; Operations (combining/addition, separating/subtraction, sharing/dividing)

- Teachers model and provide practice counting objects during independent and small and large group activities, including during the reading of books, singing of songs and “work time.”
- Teachers provide a variety of materials and activities to help children develop an understanding of quantity.
- Teachers use everyday activities to use ordinal numbers (first, second, third, etc.)
- Teachers use small group activities to model a variety of problems that involve combining, separating, sharing, or set-making.
- Teachers create a numerically rich environment. Number books, counters, games with dice, attendance charts, lunch/snack numbers lists, manipulatives with numerals, etc. are used in various learning centers throughout the classroom.

**Geometry and Spatial Sense:** Shape; Space; Transformations; Visualization

- Teachers facilitate activities to allow children to use the appropriate vocabulary and scaffold children as they explore both two and three dimensional shapes.
- The Block area allows children to explore the attributes of three-dimensional shapes. Teachers provide a variety of shapes for investigation. Blocks are organized on the shelf so children can match the various shapes.
- Teachers label shapes with correct names as the children use them as well model and describe how to make two-and three-dimensional shapes.
- Through books and activities, children are provided opportunities to use positional and spatial words.
- Teachers make class maps and have children use them to find objects.
- Teachers plan activities and provide materials so children can sketch their building plans so they can be remembered.
- Children work with puzzles and teachers help children learn to manipulate the shapes to see how the pieces fit together.
**Measurement:** Measurement Attributes; Comparing and Ordering; Measurement Behaviors and Processes

- Standard (rulers, yardsticks, measuring tapes, balance scales, and measuring cups) and non-standard (children’s bodies and manipulatives) are available for children to use in the classroom. Teachers provide various opportunities for children to solve problems and answer questions by measuring.
- Teachers model measuring in the classroom and talk about what they are doing and measurement concepts.

**Patterns (Algebra):** Patterns and Change

- Teachers identify patterns in daily routines and encourage children to also identify and talk about patterns. A variety of representations of patterns are used (sounds, words, objects, and movements). Patterns begin with colors, and then move on to shape and size.
- Teachers read books that incorporate patterns and create class pattern books.
- Teachers point to numerals whenever possible when counting out loud.

**Data Analysis:** Sorting and Classifying; Representing Data; Describing Data

- Classroom routines are used to represent data through charts and graphs. Teachers plan small group activities that included chart and graph making.
- Children are encouraged to sort objects in their own way. Teachers then use their words to label graphs and model appropriate vocabulary. Teachers describe collections in multiple ways.
- Children are provided a variety of materials that are interesting and that pertain to the class’ study to sort and classify.
How ECDC Incorporates Science as a Part of Everyday Experiences and Activities to Help Children Become Successful Scientific Thinkers:

**Physical Science:**
Physical Properties of Materials

- Teachers provide a variety of materials in each learning center that allow children to explore and learn about weight, size, shape, color, and how things move and change.
- Teachers provide tools such as magnets, magnifying glasses, balancing scales, and mirrors to help in the investigation process.
- Teachers pose open-ended questions to encourage children to think about the physical properties of materials. Often the open-ended questions are formatted in the “I wonder” approach, which creates opportunities for children to investigate as well as model this approach to learning through research.

**Life Science:** Living Things

- Teachers plan projects/studies about Animals as well as Health/Nutrition each year.
- Children go on field trips to Potawatomi Zoo. The zoo also comes onsite, bringing animals and providing children with firsthand experiences to learn about animals.

**Earth and the Environment:**
The Natural World

- Teachers plan projects/studies around topics such as Seasons, Water, Recycling.
- Teachers talk with children about the weather, particularly what clothing to wear, why we can’t go outside, etc.
- Teachers add natural, seasonal items to the science/sensory areas such as leaves, pumpkins, gourds, acorns, snow, sunflowers, etc.
- Field trips are planned with naturalists to learn about nature and the world around us. Love Creek Nature Preserve, Bendix Woods, and Rum Village are a few examples.
- Naturalists visit the classrooms to talk with the children about the natural world. Hands-on activities and books extend these special programs.
- Nature Walks allow children the opportunity first hand to see seeds, rocks, flowers, and experience the seasons.
Is your child ready to begin school? Most adults remember kindergarten as a relaxed opportunity to learn the formal reading and math skills needed for first grade through guided play activities. However, because current public policy demands that schools meet higher standards, young children today often find themselves in increasingly rigorous academic programs beginning as early as kindergarten. Beginning kindergarten students are now often expected to be ready to learn what was previously taught in first grade. Given these expectations, parents worry that their preschoolers may not have the preparation or maturity needed to succeed in today’s kindergarten programs. Parents’ worries regarding their child’s school readiness have occasionally resulted in the delaying of kindergarten entry for their child in order to assure a higher level of readiness.

School Readiness

The concept of school readiness typically refers to the child’s attainment of a certain set of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive skills needed to learn, work, and function successfully in school. Unfortunately, this common philosophy of “ready for school” places an undue burden on children by expecting them to meet the expectations of school.

A more constructive way to consider school readiness is to remove the expectations from the child and place those expectations onto the schools and the families. Young children have wide ranging needs and require support in preparing them for the high standards of learning they will face in elementary school.

Who Is Ready for Whom and When

States designate a specific, arbitrary cut-off date to create consistency in school entry practices. If a child reaches a certain age by the cut-off date (usually 5 for kindergarten and 6 for first grade), a child may begin school. However, cut-off dates vary considerably across states. In addition, age is not the best determinate or most accurate measure of how well a child will adjust to school. However, these policies are relatively fair because all students are treated equally.

Research about the relationship of school entry age to later school success suggests that children who do not meet the cut-off date and begin kindergarten do not suffer any harm in the long run. It is difficult, though, to imagine that all entering kindergarten students will have similar skills and needs. Often school districts and communities hold kindergarten screening programs designed to help parents determine if their child is ready for school and to identify problems in development that might warrant attention or extra services. In spite of the kindergarten screening programs, young children are very difficult to evaluate accurately owing to their rapid development, short attention spans, and often inconsistent performance on demand. Children also may be entering the school system with, for instance, varying linguistic abilities, varying cultural heritages, and varying levels of both personal experience and cultural exposure.

In addition, because it is normal for children to learn different skills at different rates, it is inappropriate to judge school readiness based on a prescribed set of skills and abilities. While schools may reasonably expect that children enter kindergarten as active, curious, and eager learners, it is not reasonable to expect that all 5-year-olds have the same level of preparation needed to acquire early reading, math, and social skills, or have the same attention spans or motor dexterity. It is the school’s job to teach children at their own level and to meet each child’s needs, not the child’s job to meet the school’s expectations upon entry. School readiness should signify the need for educators to be ready for the child as much as it has come to signify the child’s need to be ready for the school.

Characteristics of School Readiness

Stated in simple terms, school readiness means that a child is ready to enter a social environment that is primarily focused on education. Research has suggested that many aspects of children’s lives influence their preparation for formal school learning, including cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development, and, most importantly, early home, parental, and preschool experiences. Consideration of school readiness must take into account the range and quality of children’s early life experiences,
the normal wide variation in young children’s development and learning, and the extent to which the school’s expectations of beginning kindergarten children are appropriate and respect individual differences.

The following list of behaviors and/or characteristics are often associated with early school success:

- Ability to follow structured daily routines.
- Ability to dress independently.
- Ability to work independently with supervision.
- Ability to listen and pay attention to what someone else is saying.
- Ability to get along with and cooperate with other children.
- Ability to play with other children.
- Ability to follow simple rules.
- Ability to work with puzzles, scissors, coloring, paints, etc.
- Ability to write their own name or to acquire the skill with instruction.
- Ability to count or acquire the skill with instruction.
- Ability to recite the alphabet (or quickly learn with instruction).
- Ability to identify both shapes and colors.
- Ability to identify sound units in words and to recognize rhyme.

**Parent and Family Influences on School Readiness**

Family environment is very important in shaping children’s early development. Some family factors that can influence school readiness include:

- **Low family economic risk:** Poor readiness for school is often associated with poverty.
- **Stable family structure:** Children from stable two-parent homes tend to have stronger school readiness than children from one-parent homes and from homes where caregivers change frequently.
- **Enriched home environment:** Children from homes where parents talk with their children, engage them in conversation, read to them, and engage in forms of discipline such as time-out that encourage self-discipline have stronger readiness skills.

**What Parents Can Do to Help Prepare Children for School**

A great deal of variability exists in developmental and skill levels within young children. This is normal, and many children will not have developed to the level of others at the same age. Nevertheless, parents can help their children develop the skills they will need to be ready for school. The following list is a collection of activities that parents can do with their children to increase their child’s general readiness for school:

- Read books to and with your child.
short high interest books and reading the same favorites over and over; connecting story and titles by predicting the story from the title; making predictions about stories and following simple plots by asking questions while reading (“What’s going to happen now?”) and allowing children to retell stories; and communicating feelings and ideas by allowing children to talk and tell stories even when they do not appear to make much sense.

Print awareness. Another important readiness skill that helps children learn to read is called print awareness. Print awareness means that the child:

- Knows the difference between pictures and print.
- Recognizes environmental print (stop signs, McDonald’s, Wal-Mart).
- Understands that print can appear alone or with pictures.
- Recognizes that print occurs in different mediums (pencil, crayon, ink).
- Recognizes that print occurs on different surfaces (paper, computer screen, billboard).
- Understands that words are read left to right.
- Understands the lines of text are read top to bottom.
- Understands the function of white space between words.
- Understands that print corresponds to speech word-for-word.
- Knows the difference between letters and words.

Parents can build print awareness by pointing out print as distinct from pictures in everyday life (e.g., “That’s a sign for ‘women.’ That says ‘women.’”); pointing out store and restaurant marquees; pointing out print with and without pictures (e.g., “Here’s a page with just words!”); pointing out words written in different media and on different surfaces (e.g., “Look, someone wrote on that wall with spray paint!”); occasionally tracing words with your finger as you read; note that we begin reading at the top (point to the top and say, “Here’s where we start!”); playing find the word games with your child; and teaching the alphabet via songs and rhymes and talking about which letters make up familiar words.

Book handling. Children also need to learn book handling skills such as orienting a book correctly and recognizing the beginning and the end. Giving children their own books or letting them take books from the local library helps. Allowing children to hold books while being read to and asking them to open the book at the beginning and close the book at the end of the story facilitate book handling skills.

Ten Signs of a Great Preschool

Placing your child into a preschool program will supply further reinforcement of your child’s general school readiness skills. However, as with anything else in life, some preschool programs are better than others. What follows is adapted from a list of 10 indicators of quality preschools prepared by the National Association for the Education of Young Children:

1. Children are mainly active in the classroom; that is, playing and/or working with other children or materials.
2. Children have access to various hands-on materials and activities.
3. Children receive individual and small-group time with the teachers, and not solely large-group time.
4. Children’s work is displayed in the classroom.
5. Children learn numbers and the alphabet throughout the entire day; that is, their learning of these constructs is embedded into everyday activities.
6. Children are given at least an hour to play and explore with little worksheet use.
7. Children are provided a daily opportunity to play outside.
8. Children are read to by teachers, individually, and in small-groups.
9. Children receive adapted curriculum dependent upon their own individual needs.
10. Children and parents are excited about the preschool; that is, children are happy and do not regularly cry or complain.

Resources


Websites

National Association for the Education of Young Children—www.naeyc.org
See Position Statement on School Readiness and Signs of Quality Programs.

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