



Ensuring Your Child's Success in Kindergarten

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As parents with children entering kindergarten, we want our child's education to start with a strong foundation. Do you know what you should expect from a quality kindergarten experience? What to look for in your child's classroom? What questions to ask regarding academics and special services? What are your parental rights and responsibilities? What is red-shirting and is it a good idea?

A quality kindergarten experience actually begins with the continuation of learning from preschool. The process of assessing what each kindergarten student knows, areas needed for growth and determining each child's learning style represents the spiral effect of learning. A quality kindergarten program conducts these assessments either before the first day of school or within the first few weeks of the kindergarten program. After all assessments are completed, the expectations and goals for the first semester of kindergarten can be established. The process of developing individual and classroom goals are the result of reviewing each child's assessments, classroom observations, preschool records, parent input and the teacher and school specialists discussions regarding curriculum expectations and learning styles.

The word kindergarten literally means 'children's garden'. Therefore, a parent should expect their child's classroom to display numerous centers representing an array of learning styles. Classroom materials should be inviting for children to explore, question and wonder. A sense of purpose for each center should be established and communicated to the parent and child through newsletters, print in the classroom and daily morning meetings/circle times. An area for small group projects should be established, as well as an area for one-to-one learning. The display of children's work allows each child to feel a sense of contribution to the classroom and a purpose to their learning.

The State of Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks determines the academics of kindergarten. Every teacher must follow these frameworks to determine their classroom and individual student expectations. It is of great importance every parent is aware of the kindergarten curriculum and state expectations. Parents may request a workshop at the school during open-house night for an explanation of the kindergarten curriculum and resources used to accomplish the goals established by the No Child Left Behind Act. Parents may also request to view their child's assessments and discuss the individual goals in place for their child. An open communication between the school and parent is important to establish in the very beginning of the school year. As a result, concerns regarding students who have already mastered kindergarten expectations, students with

special learning styles or parental concerns regarding the classroom environment can be discussed amongst all parties with an equal respect and knowledge of kindergarten expectations.

Many parents are unaware of their rights and responsibilities in the public school system. As the parent, the main focus should be on your child receiving an appropriate and quality education. Unfortunately, many schools today have placed a greater emphasis on achieving 'acceptable' test scores, than promoting a student's 'learning gains'. A parent must be aware that many teachers are required to 'prepare' students to pass standardized tests, and therefore have decreased their classroom time to promote individual learning. An open communication by school staff of what is being taught in the classroom, why it is being taught and how it will improve student learning are all requests parents may ask from their child's school, and administrators must answer.

Possibly the most frequent question asked by parents is: 'Should I red-shirt my child?' Red-shirting is the decision by parents to wait another year before enrolling their child in kindergarten, even though the child is age-appropriate to attend kindergarten. The decision of when to enroll a child in school must be decided by the parent, not the school administrator or an educational consultant. A parent must review the kindergarten curriculum, the resources provided in their school system and honestly reflect if waiting another year will provide their child with 'quality time'. The decision should not be influenced by ending the hassles of day-care or allowing a child to be at the 'top of the class' academically.

Ensuring a successful kindergarten experience requires a parent's diligence, involvement and commitment to stay informed of the many expectations in the public school system today. As the parent, you must consistently advocate for your child to ensure a quality education is being provided.

Interested in attending a workshop to further explain the school curriculum, state expectations and parental rights & responsibilities? Please contact L&M Educational Consultants at 860-871-2827 and ask for Linda.