

What is Kindergarten Readiness?

In the spring of 2014, Anya Kayne, a BACNS parent and educational consultant who did her Masters Thesis on Kindergarten Readiness, spoke to BACNS parents about the interviews she has done with many local kindergarten teachers as well as her research in academic journals. She shared with us exactly what Kindergarten teachers are looking for in students at the beginning of the year, answering the question: What skills, traits, and knowledge does my child need to come with on the first day of school in order to be prepared for success and a smooth transition? It was an extremely comforting and informative talk, and really helped me (as a parent of a soon-to-be-Kindergartener myself at the time) discern between the skills that are pre-kindergarten skills and the ones that will be taught in kindergarten. Here is what she told us. \ Jenny L-S

Anya Kayne's Talk

I became interested in the topic of transition from preschool to kindergarten a few years back as an elementary school teacher and then again as a parent. When my daughter was moving from preschool to kindergarten, I saw how much stress parents experienced and I wondered how to support parents and kids with this transition.

So, I have been working on my thesis on this topic. I have done a lot of research, both academic journals and interviews with experienced teachers about what goes into a successful transition and I wanted to share a little bit with you tonight.

One of the most important things that I learned in my research is that parents expect much more out of their children when starting kindergarten than kindergarten teachers do. In a big study that surveyed hundreds of parents and hundreds of kindergarten teachers about what kids should know before starting kindergarten, teachers listed 4 of the skills as very important, 2 of which were self-management skills. Parents on the other hand listed 19 of the 23 skills as very important. And parents were six times more likely than teachers to rate academic skills as very important.

Here are the four skills teachers rated as highly important for children entering kindergarten:

1. Use the toilet independently
2. Be able to put on their jacket independently.
3. Be able to use words to solve problems and
4. Be able to accept behavioral corrections.

In interviewing Kindergarten Teachers, they said that every child is different and brings their own personality to the classroom, but are there any key skills that are important in supporting the child as they enter kindergarten.

1. Play

If the kids have played they are ready to work.

“If they've played as they've needed to and they've been learning about talking to their friends and those social things, then when they come, even if they don't know any letters or that kind of thing, then they're ready in the next setting.”

“I mean if they haven't had the play then they're really not ready to do the learning because they want to keep playing. They're the ones who seem like they are fooling around all the time. Whereas if they've really had their play, then they come in and they're kind of an open slate.”

By sending your child to Beth Ami, you are already giving them a lot of opportunities to play. This is really the developmental foundation for all later learning.

2. Cooperation

With play comes another skill that's critical for success in kindergarten which is the ability to cooperate and solve problems.

Cooperation helps students not only get along better with their peers but also those kids are seen more positively by teachers and other adults.

Cooperation skills in kindergarten strongly predict academic skills 3 years later at the end of third grade.

Teachers also listed cooperation and solving problems with friends as a very

important skill for k.

“That the kids are learning to speak and also to listen. That they're learning that their friends have feelings too, that they're not the only one. And that of course comes with growth.”

This is something that kids have a lot of time to practice in preschool, but can also be practiced at home. Learning that a sibling has different feelings from you in a situation and how to articulate those feelings is very challenging and very important.

3. Working Memory/Attending & Following Directions

The ability to pay attention, hold the information in your mind and do something with it. For example, the kindergarten teacher may say, “Please go to your desk and get out a yellow crayon.”

Working memory predicts academic competence in 5th grade and social competence in 5th grade.

Some of this is developmental and comes with age. Some of it we can practice at home: giving directions clearly, giving the child the support and time to follow through. So - “Please go in your room and bring me your pajamas” is great practice. At the beginning of kindergarten, the expectation is that kids can follow 2-step directions - go to your desk and take out a yellow crayon. At the end of k, they would like kids to be able to hold 3 steps in their working memory.

4. Expect Structure

Talk about that there will be a routine at school. That at circle time, everyone will come to the rug, at math time, everyone will work on a math page at their table group. This is a shift for a lot of kids, but explaining it ahead of time can take some of the shock out of it.

5. Teach Self-Sufficiency Skills Now

Toileting independently with washing hands. Turning coat sleeves right side out.

Making their lunch containers really easy for them to do themselves.

These skills are very important for a number of reasons. They teach kids self-confidence, and help them feel comfortable in a new and unfamiliar environment. Kindergarten involves a much higher teacher-to-child ratio than preschool, and if a child has to wait for all of the other kids to have their jacket buttoned before going outside, s/he may miss a lot of recess and feel less comfortable/confident.

(Speech Given at BACNS 1/2014 by Anya Kayne, Educational Consultant)