

# NEWS RELEASE

Guest Columnist Article

Date: Friday, January 30, 2010

Contact: Erin Hinton, Early Childhood Specialist

Smart Start of Davidson County: 249-6688



## Kindergarten Readiness is more than ABC's and 123's

While preparing for this article on getting children ready for school I thought I might do an internet search. I wanted to see what kind of information was out there to help parents prepare their children for kindergarten. This is, after all, the biggest transition for parents and children alike in the first 5 years of life. "Kindergarten Readiness" is what I typed in and overwhelmed is what I started to feel.

Some sites had lengthy checklists, others had do-it-yourself tests. I found worksheets, templates for flashcards, request for memorizing addresses and phone numbers, letter recognition, the need to know rhyming words, how to tie shoes, and how to write your own name. Some sites suggested that children be able to count to 10, others suggested 20. The lists and articles kept coming and I found myself wondering, "What did my own mother do to prepare me for school?" So I asked.

There was no anxiety or worry, she simply waited for me to turn 5 years old and registered me for school. Just like many years ago, kindergarten entry is still based on age rather than mastery of skills. However, while age is still the entry point, mastery of skills on these checklists seems to have taken the driver's seat thus confusing school readiness with entrance eligibility. Many parents' anxiety, these days comes from the kindergarten screenings. It is important to remember that these screenings are used to gather information to assist teaching. Screenings are not tests with pass or fail results.

It is no secret that schools are under more pressure these days to perform. With end-of-grade testing starting around 3<sup>rd</sup> grade for most children, the preparation for these tests has started trickling down to younger and younger ages. The trickling effect has given kindergarten a more academic feel. With the focus being on intellectual development, there are some other areas that we must be careful to not neglect.

The Department of Public Instruction identifies 5 areas of early childhood development including intellectual development. The other 4 areas are: Language and communication, health and physical development, emotional and social development and children's attitude and interest toward learning. It is important to remember that children develop in a predictable order, but at their own time. For example, while one child may be well-developed in small muscle skills, making him more able to write and trace letters, his kindergarten counterpart may be more advanced in language skills. This would allow her to express her feelings more readily. With rapid development in any early childhood age group, it is likely that children will possess more control in one area over others. It is also important to know that this is normal.

While surfing through the many articles and checklist, there was one area of child development that seemed to be almost non-existent. The subject of children's social and emotional development was barely addressed. Sure a child might be able to sing his ABC's or write his full name but if he cannot get along with others or control his emotions during a disagreement, imagine how difficult it will

become to function in a room full of 20 other children. If a readiness checklist only looks at certain areas of child development, children who are in a normal range of development could be falsely labeled as inadequate or “not ready”.

In my experience in the Early Childhood field I found some very different checklists that may be able to help. The Center for Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning out of Vanderbilt University suggests these skills for kindergarten readiness: Confidence, capacity to develop good relationships with peers and adults, concentration and persistence, the ability to effectively communicate emotions, and the ability to solve social problems. When children do not possess these social and emotional skills, they often exhibit challenging behaviors in school. If parents and early educators start teaching social and emotional skills at a young age, more and more of these behavior issues would start to disappear.

The North Carolina Ready School Initiative tells us that school readiness comes in 2 parts. It looks at the skills and abilities that children have as well as the readiness of the school to meet the needs of individual children. As you are thinking about your child going to kindergarten, consider using the NC Ready School Initiative website for some simple ideas at [www.ncreadyschools.org](http://www.ncreadyschools.org). A few of their suggestions for parents to help children be successful learners are: listening to them, reading to them, asking children complex questions with more than one or two-word answers and setting limits for your children while sticking to them.

My last and final suggestion, this one hopefully being a little more manageable: Bottom line is if your child is 5-years old by August 31<sup>st</sup> then they are ready for kindergarten!