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Video Short

Attendance and Achievement: Kindergarten Not Just for Napping

Video Overview

“Five, ten, fifteen, twenty.”

Kindergarteners in Segrid Sevillian’s class not only learn to count by fives, they are also reading, writing and even spelling. All that the tender ages of five and six.

“We’re learning about compounds, homophones, stuff like that,” says six-year old Ryan.

Kindergarten used to be a good place for naps, but these days it is becoming more and more demanding. “We’re always racing ahead,” says Dr. Barbara Meyers, an early childhood education expert. “Trying to get more ‘academic’ sooner. I worry that kids are being stressed again.”

Some educators disagree over how hard young children should be pushed academically.

“The kids are excited, they’re capable,” says Segrid Sevillian, who has taught kindergarten for 25 years. “And the downside I see is not doing it.”

For some children, learning German at age five may not be a problem, but experts say parents need to decide if a tough kindergarten is right for their child, and maybe even consider waiting an extra year to start.

“I think they need to slow down,” Dr. Meyer says, “and step back and think about giving childhood back to children, so that they can play. Play is the work of a young child.”

What We Need to Know

In some school systems, kindergarten educational programs are undergoing a dramatic transformation. Playtime and naps are being replaced by classes including math and foreign languages. While some educators recommend this more rigorous academic training in the early childhood setting, others experts fear that these requirements are forcing unrealistic expectations on our children, as well as adding too much stress at an early age.

According to Dr. Barbara Meyers, an early childhood education expert at Georgia State University, the purpose of kindergarten is to provide the child with time and a safe, appropriate environment to acquire knowledge, to learn to love learning, to learn how to learn, to learn how to get along with other people and communicate, to learn to just feel good about themselves.

Parents can and should be really strong advocates for their children in situations where they have concerns about the way the kids are being taught. Experts recommend parents take advantage early on of opportunities to talk to teachers about their child's individual learning styles. Communicate everything you can about your child to the teacher; especially in regard to what he or she likes to do and the ways that my child learns best from my observations at home. It's important to make sure the teacher knows if a child is showing signs of stress or unhappiness in regard to kindergarten or specific kindergarten activities. Following are suggestions from the National Association for the Education of Young Children for ways to facilitate good communication with your child's teacher:

- Listen carefully to what your child's teacher or caregiver has to say. Remember that they spend a significant amount of time with children and share expertise about their development.
- Don't jump to conclusions. If you have questions or concerns about your child or the early childhood program, speak directly to your child's teacher, caregiver, or program supervisor. Don't panic or merely commiserate with other parents when questions arise.
- Remember that many teachers or caregivers have families of their own, and may share similar responsibilities and time constraints. Be as respectful of their time as you wish them to be of yours.

According to National Association for the Education of Young Children, the following is a list of characteristics seen in good kindergarten classroom settings:

1. Children are playing and working with materials or with other children. They are not aimlessly wandering or forced to sit quietly for long periods of time.
2. Children have access to various activities throughout the day, such as block building, pretend play, picture books, paints and other art materials, and table toys such as Lego's, pegboards, and puzzles. Children are not all doing the same things at the same time.
3. Teachers work with individual children, small groups, and the whole group at different times during the day. They do not spend time only with the entire group.
4. The classroom is decorated with children's original artwork, their own writing with invented spelling, and dictated stories.
5. Children learn numbers and the alphabet in the context of their everyday experiences. Exploring the natural world of plants and animals, cooking, taking attendance, and serving snack are all meaningful activities to children.
6. Children work on projects and have long periods of time (at least one hour) to play and explore. Filling out worksheets should not be their primary activity.
7. Children have an opportunity to play outside every day that weather permits. This play is never sacrificed for more instructional time.
8. Teachers read books to children throughout the day, not just at group story time.

9. Curriculum is adapted for those who are ahead as well as those who need additional help. Because children differ in experiences and background, they do not learn the same things at the same time in the same way.
10. Children and their parents look forward to school. Parents feel safe sending their child to kindergarten. Children are happy; they are not crying or regularly sick.

Resources

[National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)

[Kindergarten Preparation from Family Education.com](#)

[Alliance for Childhood – Why Children Need to Play in School](#)