

Dear Families,

"Is your child ready for kindergarten?" Have you heard this before? Maybe friends, family, or a significant other have asked this question of you. It can place a fear in your heart that your child won't be 'ready for kindergarten'. But what does being ready for Kindergarten ACTUALLY mean? Most families think it comes down to letter and number recognition, counting, and maybe starting to know letter sounds. This is a very SMALL piece of the 'whole child pie'. We are breaking school readiness down for you so you can celebrate the special place your child is at this moment!

The Whole Child Pie

The 'whole child pie' includes all things your child is developing and how they bake together. There are some basic categories that early childhood educators split the pie into. These are language and literacy, social and emotional, physical, and last is cognitive. Below, you will find *some* skills each of these categories include. For a very detailed description, you can find a document called "the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress" at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/ind/>

Language and Literacy

- follows two step directions
- responds to prepositional words (behind, top, next to)
- ask questions to seek help or get information
- actively participates in reading activities
- retells familiar stories
- plays with sounds in language
- recognizes some parts of a book
- points to words and attempts to read or says "what does it say?"
- writes own name and words that interest them

Social/Emotional

- confidence in range of abilities
- consistently uses social/emotional resources such as adults, peers or things for support
- uses words to express emotions
- responds to others' emotions
- makes self directed choices
- ability to remember and follow simple two-step directions
- expresses feelings in appropriate ways
- actively solves problems with others

Physical

- crawls under and around things
- walks up and down stairs without adult support
- climbs on play equipment
- jumps over and out of spaces
- can throw a ball
- catch a ball
- kick a ball
- grasps simple puzzle piece
- draws freely on paper
- strings large beads
- starting to dress self

Cognitive

- verbally identifies similarities and differences
- expresses curiosity
- can make a plan
- makes predictions when prompted
- changes plan when outcome not expected
- recites number words aloud, up to 29
- can count a set of items larger than four
- estimates quantities
- compares and orders items in more than one way
- uses comparison vocabulary
- copies patterns
- can apply a simple pattern rule to different materials

Will Your Child Be Ready For Kindergarten?

The answer is, yes. Your child develops at their own pace and in their own way. No two brains are alike. Your child is ready for what they are ready for and readiness skills will come to your child on their own development schedule. Remember when your child learned to walk? You didn't expect them to walk when they were three months old. You didn't spend time holding them up and moving their legs so they would be ready for walking. Some children learn to walk at 8 months and some at 15 months. And it is OK and they can all walk now. Rest assured that the same happens for early brain development. Your child IS getting ready for Kindergarten just by living and experiencing the world around them. Trust them.



Dear Families,

Let's talk about risk baby. Let's talk about you and me... For real. Let's talk about you and me. Adults. Our perception of risk. We hear risk and we hear BAD. We want to run in the other direction because risk could cause injury and someone could get hurt. Well guess what? Eating grapes is super risky. They are the number one choking hazard in young children. And we give them to our kids anyway. Because we know they are good for the body and they just taste so darn good. But we cut them in half or quarters for our little ones. We know the hazard, so we take precautions to provide this nourishment for our kids. And that is just the same as physical risk.

Risk Vs. Hazard

Risk and hazard are different. A whole grape and a two year old - hazard. A tall ladder and a three year old with rusty nails poking out of a board underneath and no adult nearby - hazard. A room of cute rabies infested puppies and a five year old - hazard. You get it. A hazard is something that could hurt or endanger a child that may not be on the child's radar.

Now, walking along a moss covered log in the rain - risk. Trying to sit in a hammock with more than one person - risk. Climbing on a chair to make the block tower just a bit taller - risk. Risks are the challenges a child encounters in their environment - physical, emotional, cognitive and/or social. (We are focusing on physical risk today!) It is our duty as parents and caregivers to provide opportunities for children to take risks each day! Why?

Growing Bodies Need Risk

By giving children the opportunity to take risks, we are giving them time to practice trying out consequences before they get older and are faced with larger risks. As much as we want to be, you won't be there to hold their hand forever. When teachers/caregivers/parents support risk taking in early childhood, we are giving the children the tools needed to grow up in the world safely. Through risk, we are giving children confidence and teaching them to trust their bodies.

A childhood without risk is like never allowing your child to learn to hold a pencil. Yep. You would feel kind of rotten if your child never learned to hold a pencil. Children need risk for the benefits to their growth and development. They gain strength, dexterity, executive function, balance, and body awareness through risk taking. Taking risks is how children learn new things! They need experience moving their bodies and trying out their bodies as they grow and gain strength to find out what more than can do with it! So, instead of saying "Get down from there!" or "Be careful!", ask, "Do you feel safe?"



Dear Families,

Did you know that we are all born creative geniuses? Well, technically, only 98% of us are. This is according to a longitudinal study developed by some smart guys a few decades ago. NASA was looking for astronauts and rocket scientists who could use divergent thinking in crunch time situations. They developed a test for this and it worked so well, they hired some people to do the study on children. There were 1,600, four and five year olds given the test. NINETY EIGHT PERCENT passed. This was incredible seeing that only 2% of all adults can pass the test. The children grew a bit older and they were given the test again at 10 years old and 30% passed. Again at 15 years of age they were given the same test and only 12% passed.

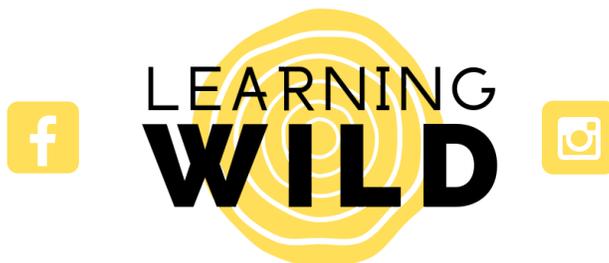
What does this mean?

Our schools were developed during the industrial revolution. The US needed factory and line workers. The school day was developed to prepare children for the work force they would be entering. Creativity wasn't honored as a skill to spend time developing. And sadly, the current school day still looks very similar to what it was back then. Our school culture celebrates the right answers and the right way to arrive at those answers. Often times children are not given the freedom to brainstorm, create and use their divergent thinking skills to come up with their own solutions to a problem.

How can we foster creativity so it isn't lost?

We won't lose it if we use it! Children need time to play. Play is creativity in it's purest form. Playtime at home and at preschool/daycare/childcare should allow time for children to make their own choices about how they spend their time. Secondly, children need access to open ended materials. Things such as boxes, sticks, cardboard, spools, corks, paperclips, wooden blocks, fabric pieces - really anything "loose parts" (google it if you don't know what that means!) should fill the shelves at home and school. This allows children to interact with items in their own way with their full imaginations. An adult brain can think of about 10-20 things to do with a wooden block, but a child can find over 100!

I give you permission to stop feeling guilty if you aren't spending every waking hour entertaining your child. They need 'white space' just as much as adults to free their minds and get creative. Through boredom comes the greatest moments of creation! And, most of the jobs our children will have in 20 years haven't even been created yet. They will need creativity skills to keep up in this ever changing world!



Dear Families,

Scene: You are given a book about the periodic table of elements and told to read it. You do because that is what is expected of you. Will you remember any of that book in a few months? Chances are, you won't, unless you LOVE the periodic table of elements and take interest in it. Maybe this sounds familiar to experiences you had in school. Is there something you have wanted to learn how to do recently? Maybe it was changing a spark plug in your car or sewing a cute bib for your best friend's baby. I bet you learned pretty quickly and probably enjoyed what you were doing. You maybe felt a sense of accomplishment because you picked this up on your own. There is a point here.

Play IS learning!

Play is often seen as a break from learning. It is seen as the reward for working hard. But in reality, the best learning happens through play! Play can be defined as an activity that is self chosen, self directed and the player can choose to stop when they are done. Real, true play does not start with a teacher or an adult, it starts and ends with the child. Allow your child time to interact with the environment around them. They will discover, inquire, and create accordingly.

Here is the point...

When we are interested in something, we pick it up very easily. When we are motivated out of necessity, we learn things. The same is true for children. When your child loses an art project because their name wasn't on it, they will pick up a crayon and write their name on the next one. If their block tower topples over because the base wasn't large enough, they will learn through trial and error how to make it tall and sturdy. Your child is learning all day long. ALL DAY. And they don't need a teacher sitting in front of them teaching AT them in order for learning to happen. We are your child's guide. We ask open ended questions to get the brain thinking. We offer suggestions in subtle ways to make connections to what your child already knows. We set the stage for learning through a carefully planned out environment filled with open ended materials. When your child is interested in something, we notice and plan accordingly! Trust your child, trust brain research and trust the teachers. Play is the way!

