

Worcester’s Characteristics of Kindergarten Readiness: Transitioning from Preschool to Kindergarten

Let’s Get Ready

The years prior to entering kindergarten are full of development and learning for young children. The experiences and skills practiced before formal schooling begins lay the foundation for later academic and life success. One of the special milestones in a child’s life is his/her entry into Kindergarten. It is a magical – if not overwhelming – time of transition, when children are eager, excited and ready to explore. Educators work tirelessly to make that transition positive and rewarding. Worcester’s early educators are setting forth a set of identifiable goals, experiences and skills that provide a lens through which we identify characteristics of kindergarten readiness.

Readiness begins with a strong foundation that encompasses all domains of learning and seeks to identify both strengths and needs of young children. Building a strong foundation for growth and learning requires:

1. Equal emphasis on all domains of early childhood development;
2. Acknowledgement of how these domains are interrelated; and
3. Recognition of individual abilities, strengths, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and needs.ⁱ

Children from birth through grade 3 who are on a path to lifelong success need to build competencies in five interrelated core areas.



Relationships and Play are Key Ingredients

The intersection of the five core areas is predicated on two basic learning principles: (1) Children learn within strong, positive relationships, and (2) Children learn primarily through play – the creative, active exploration and manipulation of materials and objects with ample time to engage with peers, materials and their environment. Children are active participants in the learning process; the environment including nurturing, responsive engagement with adults and peers, provides the context for their learning.

Essential Competencies and Experiences Establish the Foundation for Success

Continuous access to emotionally and physically safe, culturally and linguistically inclusive, and high-quality learning and play experiences in homes, educational settings, and communities will lead to the development of the following competencies in young children. Worcester blended the Commonwealth's seminal document, *Building the Foundation for Future Success for Children from Birth to Grade 3* with the latest research on child development to align a set of developmental characteristics that bridge preschool into kindergarten.

At Kindergarten entry we look for certain characteristics in each domain to inform our curriculum and instruction. We recognize that children's development exists on a continuum towards mastery. Our measurement of these skills and competencies tells us where they are in that development, which enables us to adjust instructional approaches and resources to support children's individual learning trajectories.

BIRTH TO 3RD GRADE ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES, FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCES and TRANSITIONING TO KINDERGARTEN

Approaches to Learning

Children should:

- Develop curiosity about the world around them and excitement about exploration and learning
 - Increase confidence about their ability to learn knowledge and skills
 - Become proactive, independent and collaborative learners
- Essential experiences provide opportunities for discovery, problem solving, and the acquisition of knowledge through interesting and interactive activities; promote creativity, cooperativeness, and persistence; and support individualized growth, learning, and multiple pathways to success.*

What we look for as children enter Kindergarten

- ❖ Demonstrates persistence
- ❖ Demonstrates independence
- ❖ Demonstrates curiosity
- ❖ Organizes self and materials
- ❖ Demonstrates problem solving

Social and Emotional Development

Children should:

- Develop and maintain trusting, healthy, and positive interactions and relationships with adults and peers
- Develop a positive sense of self and self-efficacy
- Express a healthy range of emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways
- Engage in constructive social interactions
- Develop the skills needed to regulate attention, impulses and behavior

Essential experiences provide emotional stability, security, and mental well-being; promote the development of self-regulation and executive functioning skills; increase social awareness; create positive and enriching opportunities for social exploration, growth and learning with both peers and adults; and promote the development of collaborative and positive relationships between early educators and families

What we look for as children enter Kindergarten

- ❖ Demonstrates self confidence
- ❖ Demonstrates self-control
- ❖ Transitions between activities
- ❖ Demonstrates sharing and turn-taking
- ❖ Demonstrates empathy
- ❖ Follows classroom rules and routines
- ❖ Demonstrates conflict resolution strategies
- ❖ Develops relationships with peers and adults

Cognitive Development and General Knowledge

Children should:

- Interact with adults and peers, objects, and materials in their environment and learn how to think and reason
- Develop curiosity and knowledge about the world around them
- Understand they are active contributors to their environment
- Continually enhance their ability to acquire and utilize multisensory knowledge and skills

Essential experiences promote the active exploration of both physical and social environments; provide opportunities to explore linguistic, artistic and mathematical concepts, including the quantification, classification, and categorization of objects; and promote the exploration of numbers, letters, words, sounds, and stories.

What we look for as children enter Kindergarten

- ❖ Demonstrates flexibility and inventiveness
- ❖ Makes symbolic connections

- ❖ Engages in socio-dramatic play
- ❖ Sorts, classifies and compares objects
- ❖ Demonstrates interest in identifying letters and numerals
- ❖ Identifies sounds in words, such as rhyming or beginning sounds

Language and Communication

Children should:

- Learn how to use sounds, gestures, and language to effectively and creatively express emotions, thoughts and needs
- Interact and exchange information with adults, peers and other individuals
- Develop knowledge and ideas
- Build the skills necessary for reading and writing proficiency (in multiple languages as applicable)

Essential experiences promote the creation of language-and-literacy-rich environments – those that celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity – in the home and community; and these experiences also provide continuous opportunities for expanding vocabulary; engaging in active conversation and storytelling; developing listening skills; and building skills needed to read, write, and respond to/ask questions in multiple media.

What we look for as children enter Kindergarten

- ❖ Speaks in complete sentences
- ❖ Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary
- ❖ Participates in class and peer discussions
- ❖ Uses social rules of language
- ❖ Demonstrates comprehension

Physical Development and Well-Being

Children should:

- Have access to primary preventative health care and mental health care
- Opportunities in their home and learning environments that will enable them to achieve physical developmental milestones as well as gain gross, fine, sensorimotor, and oral motor skills

Essential experiences promote physical safety; include indoor and outdoor movement and fitness activities; and provide opportunities to develop healthy eating, nutrition, sleep and exercise habits.

What we look for as children enter Kindergarten

- ❖ Cares for personal needs independently
- ❖ Coordinated eye-hand movement
- ❖ Grasps drawing and writing tools appropriately
- ❖ Demonstrates control of writing, drawing and art tools
- ❖ Demonstrates balance and control in movements
- ❖ Demonstrates increasingly complex movement patterns

Conclusion

Children benefit from a strong foundation in skills and dispositions that are developmentally appropriate and are essential for academic growth and success. This Characteristics document is meant to be the foundational bridge between preschool and kindergarten, sparking dialog around curriculum, practice and instruction, and serving as a springboard for shared professional development across all educational settings serving our young children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks is extended to the Characteristics of Readiness Subcommittee which was comprised of educators and leaders from Worcester Child Development Head Start, Worcester Public Schools, Community-based Providers, and Quinsigamond Community College: Jill Arrell, Kim Davenport, Laurie Kuczka, Charlene Mara, Diane Smith, Shirley Sherman, and Kristina Young. The Subcommittee worked in partnership with Worcester’s Alignment Partnership Council on the development and review of this document. Additional comments and review were solicited from Worcester’s Division of Public Health, and pediatric school health consultant, Dr. Beverly Nazarian.

ⁱ Building the Foundation for Future Success for Children from Birth to Grade 3. (2015) Massachusetts National Governing Association State Team. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Boston: MA.