



Getting Ready for Kindergarten Begins Early

August signals the close of summer and "Back to School" for many families. Back to School sales fill the local stores and newspaper pages. For parents of young children, Back to School can be a reminder that one day (all too soon) their babies, toddlers, and preschoolers will enter school. Preparation for academic success can never begin too early. Check out this "Back to School" skills list for parents to do with their young children, especially four-year-olds who will be entering kindergarten in Fall 2014.

Read: Reading with your child helps "...develop a longer attention span, a larger vocabulary, an eagerness to read, the ability to predict a storyline, and book-handling skills, all of which will help with learning to read later." (www.talkreadplay.org)

Play: Playing with your child helps develop imagination, problem-solving and social skills. Grab some Legos or dolls, or simply build a fort with blankets and cushions. Your undivided attention is more valuable to your kids than any expensive toy.

Routine: Establishing and following a routine helps children develop a sense of what to expect next and what you expect them to do. Routines give children consistency and allow them to begin to independently follow step-by-step directions. A good bedtime routine is critical to success in school because tired children perform poorly and act out behaviorally.

Preschool: Consider enrolling your child in preschool, even a few mornings a week. Preschool will give them a chance to socialize, learn to follow directions, and interact with a group of children.

New Experiences: Give your child experiences outside of your home, and opportunities to interact with other adults and children. Some activities include Story Time at Cortez, Dolores or Mancos libraries; MECC Family Nights; sports or dance teams (soccer, swimming, wrestling, dance, etc) or any of the activities that appear in the Community Calendar each week in the Cortez Journal.

Practice Separation: Whether it involves hiring a sitter for the night or leaving your child at a dance class, helping your child learn to be "away from you" for small amounts of time will help make the transition to school easier. These short periods of time away from you help them build trust that mom and dad will return and they are not being left forever.

Limit Screen Time: Limiting your child's screen time (TV, computer, tablet and video games) is not only critical to developing attention span, but also to keeping them active and moving. Children under age two should not watch any TV and children up to age five should be limited to 1-2 hours a day.

Social-Emotional Skills: Social skills are as important as academic skills for success in kindergarten. Preparing your child socially and emotionally for school success is critical. Sharing, trying new things, understanding feelings, expressing feelings, controlling anger, taking turns, and waiting are important skills for kindergarten.

Academic Skills: Helping your child learn basic academic skills gives him or her confidence and a desire to learn more. Some skills for entering kindergarten include: write his or her first name; count to 20; rhyme words; sing the alphabet; recognize some letters and their sounds; hold a pencil; draw simple pictures; compare shapes and sizes; and know colors and basic shapes.

Self-Care Skills: Your child will be more successful in kindergarten if he or she can independently use the bathroom; zip and unzip a coat; open food items and packages for lunch; clean up personal space including toys and materials; pack and unpack a backpack; and wash hands properly.

Visit the School: Throughout the year before kindergarten starts, familiarize your child with the school he or she will attend, by visiting on weekends; playing on the playground; visiting the school for a scheduled tour during the day, and, if possible, taking your child to eat lunch at the school cafeteria. Taking pictures of your child doing these activities, printing and putting them in a binder will help your child anticipate and become familiar with the new school setting. Know your options and decide which school will be best for your child and your family.

School readiness is critical to Back to School success, and it should start early to ensure maximum success!

Written by Liisa Mecham, MECC's former Transition Coordinator.