



Early Childhood School Readiness Series

Preparing Children for Kindergarten: Arrival

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Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox reported in 2000 that 40% of young children were simply unprepared for the demands of kindergarten classrooms. Recent interviews with kindergarten teachers and elementary school principals in Indiana suggest this statistic holds true a decade later.

Over the past four years, we investigated early education practices that promote school readiness and contribute to successful school outcomes. As a result of these studies, we have developed a series of papers identifying the skills and routines associated with successful school readiness for all children.

This paper is part of a series of briefs that examine 4 common kindergarten routines: arrival, whole class instruction, seat work, and learning centers. The briefs describe the routines and the critical skills children need to successfully engage and learn in them. They also suggest strategies early educators can use to bridge preschool practices with kindergarten expectations.

Hanna and her brother Karston have been dropped off at the front entry of their elementary school. The children enter and proceed to the gymnasium where they separate and go to meet their classmates in groups. Hanna joins her classmates as they walk to Ms. Hudson's kindergarten classroom at 8:35. Ms. Hudson greets each of the children by name and chit-chats with questions about their weekend activities or families. Hanna and her best friend, Janie, drop their backpacks next to their coat hooks near the door. Hanna digs in her backpack for the colored folder that holds her homework and places the folder in a basket on a table nearby labeled "homework folders." The girls then move their self-decorated magnets from the "outbox" to the "inbox" on a magnetic board and proceed to their work table, where the teacher has placed morning work. Both children take sharpened pencils from a can on the table and start working.



Every child must enter the classroom to begin his or her learning day. On average in the classrooms we observed, arrival routine lasted 20 minutes, but we found arrival ranging in length from 20-60 minutes. Table 1 offers a summary of some of the key skills and behaviors children used during their arrival. Some of the skills and behaviors reflect the physical, social, and instructional designs that supported the children's success during their learning experiences.

The physical design of the space allotted for children was comparable across sites. All children are given a place to hang their clothing and store such personal belongings as lunch boxes and



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back packs. Also in all observations, once the children arrived at the school building, they gathered in a common spot such as a gym or cafeteria before moving toward the classroom. The children were sometimes met there by the teacher, but they were often brought to the classroom by older students. Children who arrived late for that gathering came directly to the classroom. While classroom routines were similar, some schools had specific physical designs and accompanying rules for children to follow. Like the story of Hanna, above, once children arrived at the classroom they would enter, disperse of their outer clothing on hooks or cubbies, remove backpacks and lunches, put away their homework or other notes and papers from home, and move to either a table area for morning work or to a carpeted area for a morning meeting or group activity. (See briefs on *Seat Work* and *Group Instruction*.) Teachers across the sites used the arrival routine to multi-task: collecting various bits of information, reviewing the schedule, welcoming children, etc. This became part of the social design of the classrooms where

we observed. The expectation was that children would enter the classroom independently. In some schools children were allowed to chat with friends, but in others, children were expected to remain silent until the routine was completed and they were at work or gathered for

Table 1 - Essential Skills for Kindergarten Arrival

Skill	Examples of Behaviors
Follows classroom routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enters the classroom and puts away coats. • Responds to the teacher’s greeting. • Puts papers from home in assigned spots. • Recites the Pledge of Allegiance. • Gets out materials for “morning work.”
Uses speech that is understandable	<p>Uses understandable speech when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to the teacher • Speaking with classmates • Asking for assistance • Reciting the pledge.
Follows classroom rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walks rather than runs. • Asks permission to use the bathroom. • Stops work to listen to announcements and the pledge. • Remains seated in chairs. • Returns books so others can use them.
Sees a simple task to completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completes tasks involved in putting away coats, mittens, and paperwork that came from home. • Completes “morning work” (usually worksheets).
Understands and follows directions	<p>Follows directions for tasks such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting mittens in sleeves • Putting names on papers • Putting pencils down • Raising hands if eating lunch today.
Communicates needs and wants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks permission to use the restroom. • Requests to borrow a crayon from another child. • Asks the teacher where to put a book from home that was brought to share.
Accepts guidance and limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abides by classroom rules when reminded by teacher. • Receives encouragement for the day ahead. • Completes projects and tasks when reminded.
Listens to gather information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens for the teacher cue that indicates instructions will be given. • Listens for updates during all-school announcements in the morning. • Listens to the teacher’s directions.



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instruction. Across all observations, we noted that arrival is an opportune time for teachers to check in with children. Teachers may comment on a child's health (e.g., How are you feeling today?) and gather information about other family dynamics that may affect a child's school day. The teacher might ask about what the child had for breakfast or what time the child went to bed, both of which activities may affect the child's active participation and attention to a lesson. Teachers often use this time to give directions on what is to happen next or to request feedback from a question or observation. Arrival gives the teacher **an opportunity to ask about books or materials sent home overnight, remind children to place materials in their proper places in the classroom, give permission to use the bathroom, or provide instruction for the morning work that is laid out for them on tables.** It sets the tone for the business of the day—the work of children in their classroom. In our observations, children seemed comfortable sharing information with their teacher and were often able to talk with their peers, discuss their worksheets with classmates, or seek assistance from the teacher.

Although we observed similar arrival routines, there was some variation across classrooms about what happened after the children entered the classroom and removed outer clothing. In some cases, children got right to work on a preprinted worksheet that usually reinforced what they were learning at school. (See brief on *Seat Work*.) Other times the children would go to the carpet or meeting area and sit with the teacher to review their day. (See brief on *Group Instruction*.) Here the children might check the weather for the day, count the number of days in school, identify the current day, month, and year or plan the rest of the day's activities. Most often, within the first 10 minutes of arrival, a loud speaker located in the classroom broadcast school information such as the menu, awards, cautions, and usually, the Pledge of Allegiance.

The instructional design of arrival focused on the teacher's strategies to ensure that the routine progressed smoothly yet quickly so that children got right to the work of the day. For both children and adults alike, arrival was welcoming yet business-like. Arrival was not chaotic, it was not noisy, and the children knew exactly what was expected. Teachers offered individualized support where needed while multi-tasking the business of attendance, lunch money, notes from home, materials, etc. As the kindergarten vignette, above, shows, Hanna knows of whom she should ask questions and how to follow through with the directions from the teacher. As listed in Table 1 children are expected to act independently during arrival: unzipping or unbuttoning coats, zipping or unzipping backpacks, taking appropriate materials from backpacks, and placing those materials in designated locations such as tables or baskets. Although children follow a daily routine, they are also expected to follow school and classroom rules such as being silent during school announcements and attentive when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with the rest of the school. During classroom meetings children are expected to listen and participate as requested. Children are all expected to know and are often reminded of school rules to raise their hands to speak, request permission to leave the group, and sit appropriately during arrival activities. The teacher employs a number of strategies to gain attention, ask for silence, or transition to the next activity. Most specifically, teachers use their experience and common sense to guide this first routine of the day.



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Preschool Arrival Routine

Preschool vignette

Liz's mother, Avie, parks the car and walks Liz into the childcare program, where she assists Liz in removing her coat and putting her favorite blanket in one of the cubbies. Avie greets the teacher and encourages Liz to do the same, letting Ms. Thompson know that Liz had a restless night and might be tired during her day at childcare. Ms. Thompson asks if Avie has brought in the permission slip for the upcoming field trip and if she is still planning on accompanying the class. Avie then takes Liz over to the sand table and plays with her awhile, talking to her about the many colored cups that are on the table. Alyssa is playing nearby, and Avie encourages Liz to play with the cups with Alyssa. She then says goodbye to Liz and leaves the room. Ms. Thompson calls the children together to a morning meeting to talk about the day ahead.

Every preschool establishes an arrival routine that will continue in some aspects as children enter kindergarten. The physical space is often similar for children in preschool and in kindergarten, but there are usually marked differences in the routine itself. In preschool, for example, children don't often carry materials back and forth between home and school. They are more likely to take their creative works home along with notes or reminders, while children in kindergarten typically use more learning tools (books, papers, markers, pencils, etc.) that they move from school to home and back again. Preschool children will need to learn the skills involved in meeting the rules and expectations of kindergarten.

The social design of the routine is another area of difference. In both preschool and kindergarten, children learn to follow some routine of getting in and out of their program. Preschool teachers usually focus on making children feel comfortable when they arrive in the classroom, while kindergarten teachers often focus on getting all the children in and settled quickly so that they can begin their school work. In preschool, parents usually bring the child to the classroom and guide their child's involvement. In kindergarten, children are expected to move independently—first into the classroom and then immediately to the next classroom routine (e.g., independent seat work, group instruction) in the timeliest manner. As children arrive in the kindergarten classroom, teachers rather than parents guide and direct children to more academic activities. Simultaneously, teachers are building relationships by welcoming each child and checking in with children with regard to personal events.

In kindergarten programs, teachers must plan and implement standards and requirements so that children enter school ready to learn. Preschools also support this goal by helping children become self-confident and successful when they begin their elementary school experience. As discussed above, kindergarten teachers are often engaged during arrival in classroom management efforts while the children are expected to move directly to their academic work. More often in preschool arrival, children will meet as a group to talk and plan their day with the



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teacher taking the lead role. The emphasis is often on getting children as comfortable as possible, as soon as possible after arrival. To be prepared for the challenges of kindergarten, these children will need to practice completing tasks and following directions. Kindergarten children, with little instructional guidance, know exactly what is likely to happen next, how to participate in a meeting, how to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and how to get right to their seatwork. They have learned the skills necessary to act more independently. By supporting children and making them feel secure, preschool teachers can ease their transition to more independence and self-control in the kindergarten classroom.

Strategies for Bridging Preschool and Kindergarten Arrival

Arrival is just one of many routines that may be different from what children are used to in preschool. Preschool arrival is often restricted because of building and/or classroom location but the routine is more similar than different once the child reaches his classroom. Removing outerwear and getting ready for the day ahead are common practices of young children in both preschool and kindergarten. Most probably the main difference is that kindergarten teachers must use this time to juggle lots of administrative duties while at the same time moving children into the day's curriculum.

Table 2 highlights some of the similarities and differences that may exist across preschool and kindergarten arrival and the bridging strategies teachers can use to promote a smooth transition for children into the kindergarten classroom. In the kindergartens we observed teachers who still have an opportunity to gather information and build relationships with the children while facilitating the significance of a more formal learning environment. Each of the strategies listed also emphasizes the increased opportunities for children to learn essential school readiness skills that include; following school and classroom rules, controlling frustration, completing tasks, resolving conflicts etc.-- all while increasing the child's independence and practicing for the structure that is part of the kindergarten classroom.

The following four general strategies help prepare preschoolers meet the expectations for independence and skill performance in their kindergarten arrival routines:

- 1. Help young children practice the self-confidence they will need for the independence expected in kindergarten.**

Children love to role-play school, and kindergarten arrival can be acted out as part of the preschool dramatic center to support skills such as—

- Entering and exiting the classroom
- Saying the pledge
- Listening to an announcement
- Following an adult's direction about an emergency
- Putting worksheets in basket.



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2. Increase the expectations of children as they arrive from home.

Give them more opportunities to say good-bye to parents when they get out of the car instead of in the classroom. Work toward independence in moving from the care of the parent to the responsibility of the caregiver.

3. Implement a regular arrival routine.

Encourage children to put their things away and get right to work in their preschool classroom. The goal is to build a child's confidence so that he or she feels comfortable in knowing what will happen next.

4. Give children more responsibilities and reinforce positive behaviors.

In kindergarten, children will not be told every day what is expected of them when they arrive in the classroom. Give children notes that require them to bring back a verbal or written response from their parents or give them specific tasks to do when they go home that require them to bring back something to the program. Examples are a favorite storybook to share with the other children, or finding an item of a certain color at home.

Summary and Implications

Children need to know what is expected of them in the classroom, and kindergarten teachers put forth extra effort at the beginning of each school year to set expectations for classroom routines so that children can concentrate on the job of learning. To ensure that children can transition from child care or preschool to kindergarten, the teacher must think carefully about the routines the children will be facing. The demands on preschool teachers and young children are high to ensure that children have the essential skills needed for success in school. The arrival routine provides structure and often sets the tone for the rest of the school day. Arrivals should be pleasant and reassuring for young children so they can build security and trust with new adults. Before the move to kindergarten, it is necessary to discuss with children how similar routines—such as arriving in the classroom—may be different in elementary school. It is worthwhile to invite children to talk about what differences they expect in their arrival routines when they begin kindergarten as well as solutions or strategies to address them.



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Table 2

Strategies for Bridging Differences

in Arrival Routines between Preschool and Kindergarten Settings

	Preschool	Bridging Strategies	Kindergarten
Physical Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have a designated area in which to place coats, items brought from home. • Children may bring favorite blankets and playthings for show-and-tell. • Children are brought to the classroom by their parents or an adult who may help them put away coats etc. • Tables and desks are not assigned to specific children or groups of children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put children’s names on cubbies with directions to match locations with names. • Encourage children to say good-by at the door and remove outerwear independently. • Give children specific assignments and materials with directions to bring them back to the classroom. Provide specific locations for papers, notes, and books. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space is delegated for homework, lunch money, materials taken from the classroom, etc. • Classroom space may be larger with worktables and other spaces assigned for children to do individual work. • Children may bring lunch and usually leave playthings at home. • Children know exactly where to move in the classroom after removing outerwear.
Social Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher greets children and parents and often directs the parent to help a child get started while the teacher greets next family. • Children are encouraged to greet friends and vocalize a response. • Children are encouraged to move directly into an activity that will capture their interest so parents may leave. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer children opportunities to role-play arrival at their elementary school. • Encourage children to visit their kindergarten programs with parents to meet their teachers and see where materials are to be placed. • Introduce some of the language and verbal cues kindergarten teachers use for transitions or attention-getting. . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are clear about expected outcomes. They place coats and other materials in proper locations and move into the classroom. • Children have routines to follow and are not likely to need cues until a change in routine. • Children are encouraged to resolve questions or conflicts with one another in acceptable ways.



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	Preschool	Bridging Strategies	Kindergarten
Instructional Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children enter the program with assistance from significant adults.• Children are directed from one activity to the next.• Teachers are engaged in most incidents involving children's learning, using various hands-on strategies rather than direct instruction.• Teachers offer more direct instruction as to where children should be at any time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand expectations for children to complete drawings or simple worksheets independently.• Offer children a place to hang clothing that is labeled with their names.• Encourage children to move quickly from entry into the classroom to an activity or meeting.• Offer children options for places to put completed work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children are expected to complete work independently, but they may ask the teacher or peers for assistance• Children see their names in various places, and they are expected to copy, match, and print on a writing board or paper.• Children know they must complete whatever task they are involved in before moving on.



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Summary of our Research

Over the past four years, we have been investigating early education practices that promote school readiness and contribute to successful school outcomes for all young children. Our work has focused on determining what early childhood programs can do to effectively prepare children for the social, physical, communicative, and instructional rigors of kindergarten. In October 2006, we wrote a series of briefs in which we identified skills that the research literature suggests are important for children to learn as they enter kindergarten.

Building on our previous work, we conducted a series of small studies (2007-2010) to validate the skills that kindergarten teachers identified as important and *essential* for children to have when they enter kindergarten. The results indicated 74 skills that kindergarten teachers ranked as important, of which 22 skills were identified as critical. Table 3 presents those 22 skills in alphabetical order.

Table 1

Essential School Readiness Skills

Their Frequency of Occurrence Across Kindergarten Routines (Percentage of observed routines)

Skill	Learning				Total
	Arrival N=14	Centers N=12	Seat Work N=16	Whole Class Instruction N=33	
Accepts guidance and limits	64%	83%	56%	64%	65%
Asks for help	43%	67%	50%	24%	40%
Communicates needs and wants	79%	67%	44%	39%	52%
Controls feelings of frustration	43%	67%	38%	48%	48%
Copies or writes own name	43%	58%	63%	18%	39%
Disposes of bodily wastes	7%	17%	19%	21%	17%
Follows basic health and safety rules	50%	33%	50%	42%	44%
Follows classroom routines	100%	100%	94%	94%	96%
Follows different rules/routines	14%	25%	31%	30%	27%
Follows simple classroom rules	93%	92%	100%	85%	91%
Gives name, age, and gender	14%	17%	13%	9%	12%
Listens to gather information	64%	92%	88%	91%	85%
Recognizes five colors	29%	8%	25%	27%	24%
Recognizes own name in isolated print	21%	17%	13%	6%	12%
Resolves conflicts	21%	75%	25%	24%	32%
Sees a simple task to completion	86%	100%	81%	58%	75%
Stays on adult-directed task 10 or more minutes	29%	92%	81%	82%	73%
Takes care of toileting needs	36%	67%	6%	55%	43%
Understands and follows directions	86%	92%	81%	85%	85%
Uses speech that is understandable	100%	92%	75%	85%	87%
Washes hands and face	7%	42%	19%	12%	17%
Watches/listens to stories	14%	17%	13%	42%	27%



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We also began to examine the importance of these skills in the context of children's successful engagement in typical kindergarten routines. In our most recent study, we observed children in kindergartens to determine whether they demonstrated these critical skills as they navigated routines such as arrival, whole class instruction, seat work, and learning centers. This latest work further validated the importance of the 22 observed skills and highlighted the significance of looking at common kindergarten classroom routines as important units of analyses. Table 3 presents data summarizing these observations. It presents the percentage of observations each skill was observed during the four different kindergarten routines mentioned. For example, the first skill in Table 3, *Accepts guidance and limits*, was occurred in 64% of all observed *arrival* routines (N=14). That same skill was observed to occur in 65% of all instances of the four kindergarten routines we studied (N=75). *Follows classroom routines* was the most frequently observed skills, occurring in 96% of all observed routines.

References

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(2), 147-166.

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Preparing Children for Kindergarten: Arrival

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Essential Skills for Successful School Readiness Research Project

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This document was developed and disseminated by the Early Childhood Center (ECC). Its mission is to advance the universal design of early education practices that promote school readiness for all children.

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