

# Characteristics of Children Entering Kindergarten



The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) helps ensure that children in Washington get a great start in kindergarten.

WaKIDS is a way to:

**Welcome families to school.** At the beginning of the school year, teachers meet with each kindergarten family to get to know them and learn about the student’s interests and needs.

**Learn about children’s strengths.** In the first seven weeks of school, the teacher observes each student during the course of a normal school day to learn about his or her strengths in six areas of development. Understanding what children already know and can do enables teachers to plan activities that will help them take the next steps in their development. Teachers can also use the information they gather to help parents understand what their children’s strengths are and how to support their development and learning at home.

**Share information with prekindergarten communities.** After the fall observations take place, staff from early learning programs and elementary schools meet to learn about the strengths of the region’s kindergarteners. In this way, communities can better meet the needs of young children and create smooth transitions for families.

Each child develops at his or her own pace and will have different levels of skills upon entering kindergarten. Some children may be very skilled in one area, but not as skilled in another. Parents can support their children’s development by engaging them in conversations, asking them to describe what they are doing, helping them make new friends, and doing things together, such as playing, reading, cooking, painting, working with sand, running, and climbing.<sup>1</sup>

WaKIDS teachers will be observing your child to evaluate his or her mastery of the skills outlined in the following table. These are some of the skills that children entering kindergarten are expected to have. Teachers welcome learning about your child’s unique talents and will provide opportunities for your child to continue to develop the skills needed to be successful in the classroom.

<sup>1</sup> For more information about children’s development, contact the Department of Early Learning for a copy of the Early Learning and Development Guidelines in English or Spanish.

## Characteristics of Children Entering Kindergarten

### Area: Social–Emotional

- Your child will begin to manage classroom rules, routines, and transitions with occasional reminders.
  - For example, your child might begin to clean up when the music plays.
- Your child is able to make good decisions about health habits.
  - For example, he or she might wash hands before eating.
- Your child interacts with classmates in different ways, and for differing amounts of time.
  - For example, your child might be able to easily join other children at play, and play cooperatively.
- Your child knows how to develop relationships with other children and with adults.
  - For example, your child may join the same two children in a game of tag at the neighborhood playground several days in a row. He or she is developing the ability to play regularly with a specific friend.

### Area: Physical

- Your child keeps getting better at movement skills, such as jumping, galloping, and skipping.
- Your child is able to walk forward along a sandbox edge, watching his or her feet, and/or jump off a low step, landing on two feet.
- Your child is able to throw a ball or other objects, trap a thrown ball against his or her body, and/or kick a ball forward by stepping or running up to it.
- Your child is able to use his or her hands and fingers in a variety of ways, such as stringing beads, holding writing utensils properly, and connecting blocks and puzzles.
- Your child is able to use writing tools.
  - He or she may hold pencils, pens, crayons, or other drawing and writing tools but he or she may hold them too close to one end.

### Area: Language

- Your child continually learns new words and is expanding his or her verbal vocabulary.
  - Your child may be able to name the cow, horse, chicken, pig, sheep, and goat as he or she sees them on a trip to the farm and is beginning to be more descriptive, such as “The red barn had three sheep inside.”
- Your child is able to speak clearly enough to be understood by a visitor to the classroom and uses words correctly in most cases.
  - For example, your child might say, “I saw ants and a hoppergrass (grasshopper).”
- Your child can express himself or herself with more complex grammar, such as “Momma came to pick me up, because dad had to work.”
- Your child is able to speak clearly to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas, including descriptions of familiar people, places, things, and events.
  - Your child might describe something he or she did, such as, “I’ve got new shoes. I went to the shoe store,” and is beginning to use more detailed speech, such as, “I went to the shoe store with Gran. I got new red shoes.”
- Your child is able to take turns speaking and listening in short conversations, remembering and responding to what is said.
  - Your child may interrupt or direct talk back to himself or herself.

## Characteristics of Children Entering Kindergarten

### Area: Cognitive

- Your child is able to ask for a solution and use it (for example, asking another child to hold his cup while he or she pours).
- Your child is starting to solve problems without having to try every possibility (for example, telling another child, "Put the big block down first, or the tower will fall down.").
- Your child is eager to learn about and talk about a range of topics, ideas, and tasks.
- Your child is able to be flexible and inventive in approaching tasks and activities.
  - For example, your child might use a table, sheets, and towels to build a tent.
- Your child is able to remember and name at least one or two objects that are taken away while playing "What's Missing?" and may be able to remember and name more.
- Your child can group objects by using a single characteristic such as shape, size, or color (for example, put all the blue things together).
- Your child may be able to group objects by using two or more characteristics (such as shape *and* color, or size *and* shape).
  - For example, your child might sort buttons and say something like, "These buttons are blue, and these are red," and is learning to re-sort the buttons into groups of big and little buttons with adult support.

### Area: Literacy

- Your child shows awareness of language sounds (e.g., rhyming, and hearing the beginning and ending sounds of words).
  - For example, when asked what rhymes with "cat," your child might say, "rat, sat, gat." (The words may not be real but they do, in fact, rhyme.)
- Your child recognizes and can say words that repeat sounds.
  - For example, your child may repeat the "b" sound by singing, "I'm bringing home a baby bumble bee." Your child is beginning to be able to identify sound patterns: "Max and Maya... our names start the same!"
- Your child can identify short word sounds.
  - For example, your child is able to join in clapping each word while chanting, "I like ice cream," and is beginning to be able to clap each syllable of a name, such as "Tri-na."
- Your child is able to recognize and name a few letters in his or her own name and is learning how to recognize and name as many as 10 letters, especially those in his or her own name.
- Your child is learning how to identify the sounds of a few letters.
- Your child understands that signs and labels convey information.
  - For example, your child can point to the text on the page when pretending to read, and move his or her finger left to right, continuing down the page.
- Your child can memorize or participate in reading poems and familiar books.
  - When listening to a story read aloud, your child can anticipate and contribute a line from the story at the appropriate time, such as by saying, "Fifty cents a cap!" when the teacher pauses while reading *Caps for Sale*. Your child may be beginning to ask and answer questions about the text, based on the pictures; for example, "He was mad. He threw his hat down."
- Your child is able to pretend to read, using some of the language from the text, and describes the action across pages, using pictures to order the events. He or she may need prompts from adults.
- Your child is able to retell some events from a familiar story when prompted by an adult.
  - For example, when the teacher asks, "What does the first little pig do with the straw?" your child might say, "The pig builds a house from it," and when the teacher asks, "What does the wolf do to the house?" your child might say, "The wolf blows it down." Your child may be starting to retell familiar stories using pictures or props as prompts; for example, retelling the basic events of *The Three Little Pigs* using felt pieces on a felt board.
- Your child is able to write some letters correctly and some letters in unconventional order.
  - For example, your child may write his or her name, but she/he may spell other words incorrectly.
- Your child forms letters, and shows increasing knowledge of letters and sounds.
  - Your child may be beginning to separate groups of letters with spaces and may copy words seen in his or her surroundings.

## Characteristics of Children Entering Kindergarten

### Area: Mathematics

- Your child is able to count to 20, and count up to 20 objects to understand how many objects there are.
- Your child is able to compare two groups of objects to decide which is more, less, or if they are equal.
- Your child is able to explain, "That's a 3, and there are three puppies on this page."
- Your child is beginning to understand measurement in the form of size, weight, area, and/or volume.
  - For example, your child is able to lay two short pieces of paper on top of a long piece of paper to see if it's the same length and is moving toward being able to measure by using paper clips, cubes, string, hands, feet, or other objects.
- For example, your child is able to string beads imitating a pattern (for example, red, blue, blue, red, blue, blue, red, blue, blue, red), and is beginning to be able to add on to a string of beads using the same sequence.

**Note:** *Teaching Strategies GOLD*<sup>®</sup> online was selected in 2011 as the kindergarten entry assessment for Washington State. It is a Web-based assessment tool that contains progressions of development and learning typical of the early years and predictive of school readiness. Teachers use *Teaching Strategies GOLD*<sup>®</sup> to observe the characteristics of children identified in this flyer.

**Note:** For WaKIDS, in all areas except language and literacy, children may demonstrate their abilities in their home languages. For example, if a child is able to count to 20 in Spanish or Russian, it is fine for the teacher to evaluate this math ability in the child's home language.

Although children will be asked to demonstrate their language and literacy skills in English (except for students enrolled in Spanish immersion classes), families should continue to use their home language and English to support their children's development.