



Kansas Prekindergarten Guide



KANSAS PREKINDERGARTEN GUIDE

Acknowledgments

Throughout this guide, the term “prekindergarten” refers to those classrooms and programs serving children who have reached age 3 but are not yet age-eligible for kindergarten.

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Introduction

“ Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.”

– Kansas Vision for Education, Kansas State Board of Education¹

The Kansas State Board of Education vision sets our Kansas Can vision for education: Kansas leads the world in the success of each student. This vision for education calls for a more child-focused system that provides support and resources for individual success and will require everyone to work together to make it a reality. Kindergarten Readiness is one of five measurable outcomes that will move Kansas toward this vision because early childhood experiences lay the foundation for a child’s future academic success. Thank you for the key role you already have played in learning and growing with your child.



Why Kindergarten Readiness?

The Kansans CAN initiative motivated the creation of this document. Kindergarten Readiness is one of five Kansas State Board of Education measurable outcomes, which also include:

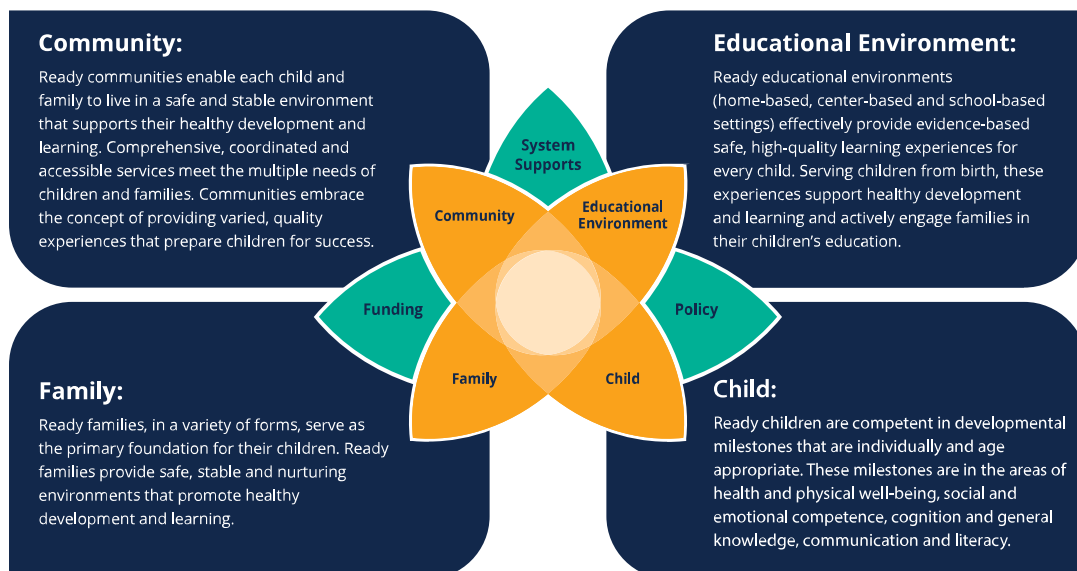
- Social-emotional growth measured locally
- Individual Plan of Study focused on career interest
- High school graduation
- Postsecondary

The goal of the Kindergarten Readiness outcome is that “each student enters kindergarten at age 5 socially, emotionally and academically prepared for success.” The Kansas State Board of Education understands that early childhood experiences and settings are the foundation for lifelong success.

School readiness occurs within a broad context and includes four components: community, educational environment, family and the individual child. These four components function as interdependent systems of support with multidirectional influences. Rich early childhood experiences, from birth through age 8, are necessary for school success and directly influence children’s future successes. Experiences to support health and physical well-being, cognitive development, communication and social-emotional development provide a foundation for school readiness. However, kindergarten readiness also requires policy, funding and effective systems supportive of children’s ability to thrive and succeed in learning environments throughout their lifespan.

This Kansas Prekindergarten Guide is not designed as a mandate for prekindergarten. This resource provides prekindergarten teachers, providers and administrators with common references for high-quality and evidence-based prekindergarten practices. This guide supports the implementation of developmentally appropriate and academically rigorous prekindergarten programs. Prekindergarten teachers and administrators are encouraged to discuss the contents of this guide together. This guide will be reviewed and may be updated, in response to feedback from those implementing high-quality prekindergarten practices across Kansas.

Kansas School Readiness Framework



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Transitions

“Successful transitions are most strongly influenced by children’s home environments, the preschool programs they attend and the continuity between preschool and kindergarten.”

– Riedinger, S.A., 1997

Prekindergarten is a special milestone in a child and family’s life. A child’s transition into prekindergarten or from prekindergarten into kindergarten, can be filled with joy, anticipation, apprehension and concern. A child enters prekindergarten with a wide range of abilities and experiences. A high-quality program is prepared to welcome and respond to each child in a manner that intentionally promotes developmentally appropriate practices. Prekindergarten is a place for a child to learn, play, grow and prepare for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Prekindergarten involves two major periods of transitions: a child’s transition into a prekindergarten program and, then, the transition from prekindergarten into kindergarten. A child transitions more successfully when program administrators, teachers and families plan and prepare together. Using a systems approach can assist in smooth transitions. Coordinating transition efforts, prekindergarten and elementary programs help a child maintain and maximize his or her success.



Early Learning Collaboration

“Transition practices need to be effective to make a difference. Effective transition practices are activities that teachers, families and community members can use to create supports and foster familiarity across early childhood settings and kindergarten.”

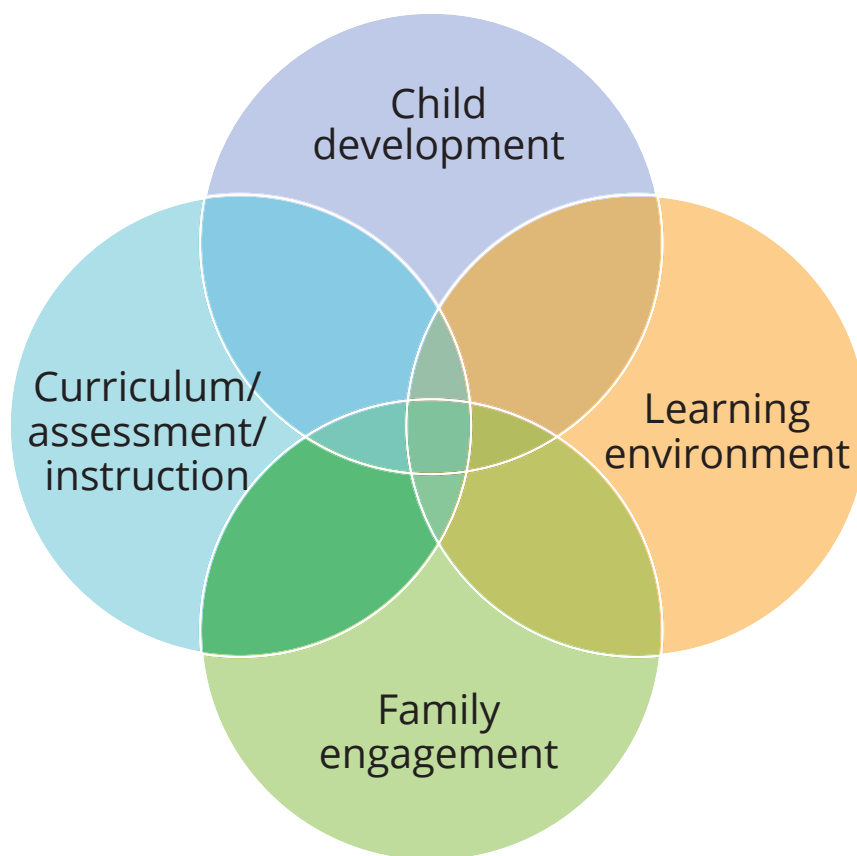
– LoCasale-Crouch et al.²

The goal of collaboration is to increase communication and build connections among early childhood, kindergarten and other essential support programs to promote smooth and successful transitions. [*The Kansas Early Learning Standards*³](#) and [*Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood*⁴](#) may assist with collaboration efforts between prekindergarten, families and kindergarten programs.

Collaboration components:

- Building and strengthening relationships between early learning providers and kindergarten teachers.
- Developing and sharing common expectations for kindergarten readiness.
- Sharing emerging best practices.
- Analyzing and sharing data across programs to inform practices and improve future school success
- Guiding principles for high-quality prekindergarten.

Guiding Principles for High-Quality Prekindergarten



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Child Development

“The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child’s own natural desire to learn.”

– Maria Montessori⁵

“All children are ready to learn more than they already know; it is the teachers who need to know how to create appropriate instruction for each child, whatever his or her starting point.”

– Dockett and Perry⁶

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), child development is a complex phenomenon of interrelated domains. The following principles recognize these domains and importance when making decisions to meet the needs of young children.



Principles of Child Development that Inform Practice



Understanding Child Development

“The early years matter because, in the first few years of life, more than one million new neural connections are formed every second. Neural connections are formed through the interaction of genes and a baby’s environment and experiences, especially ‘serve and return’ interaction with adults or what developmental researchers call contingent reciprocity. These are the connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all later learning, behavior and health depend.”

– Conel⁷

All children are unique, yet follow similar patterns of development.

Prekindergarten children are in a phase of tremendous growth and development. It is essential educators understand the traits and characteristics of prekindergarten children in order to plan environments and experiences that best meet their needs. The daily schedule, curriculum, educational activities and teaching practices are the foundation for prekindergarten learning experiences.⁸

Early childhood educators must understand the interconnectedness of a child’s social, emotional and cognitive development because early learning experiences shape a child’s brain. While it is never too late to support development, earlier is better.⁹ High-quality prekindergarten programming hinges on fostering a child’s development and learning in all domains, including cognitive, social-emotional, physical and language.

Kansas addressed child development by adopting the Kansas Early Learning Standards. These standards, written through the collaborative work of early learning professionals, communities and cultural organizations, provide parents and educators information regarding the development of children from birth to age 5. Educators can match supports with the needs of children by being aware of the characteristics of a developmentally or chronologically diverse range of children. Educators use the standards to design individually appropriate learning experiences.

“Plasticity or the ability for the brain to reorganize and adapt, is greatest in the first years of life and decreases with age.”

– Levitt¹⁰

Cognitive

Cognitive neuroscience research reveals the brain develops rapidly during the first five years of life.¹¹ Strong early learning experiences are critical in laying the foundation for a successful future. It is essential teachers know and understand the sequences in which children gain specific concepts, skills and abilities.

“Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities and together they are the bricks and mortar of brain architecture.”

– Levitt¹²

Social-Emotional

Forming and sustaining relationships with adults and other children is central to a young child’s development. Studies show children who fail to develop minimal social skills and suffer neglect or rejection from peers are at risk for later outcomes, such as school dropout, delinquency and mental health problems.¹³

We know prekindergarten students vary in their ability to self-regulate by intentionally controlling their emotions, behaviors and thought.¹⁴ Teachers can minimize sources of frustration, overstimulation and stress in the early learning environment, which might overwhelm young children. However, age and situation-appropriate frustrations and stress can provide opportunities for children to develop problem-solving skills.

Physical

In developmentally appropriate early childhood settings, teachers appreciate and encourage children to use their bodies in many different ways. Research shows the areas of the brain activated during academic learning tasks are the same areas a child uses while doing vigorous physical activity ... moving while learning helps build connections in a child's brain and solidifies what is being taught along with the movement.¹⁵

“The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process.”

– Vygotsky¹⁶

Language

Literacy is the foundation for creating a well-educated and responsible citizen. Given appropriate experiences, children are more likely to be successful in learning to read and write.²

Child-Centered Learning

Understanding how children learn is also essential to creating responsive environments that encourage and support children. Children learn by talking, exploring, practicing, rehearsing, approximating and making meaning.¹⁷ They actively construct their understanding of the world through continuous interaction with their environment. Children are eager to discover ideas, to look for patterns and relationships and to form generalizations. They learn through spontaneous activity, play, carefully prepared materials and guided experiences. A high-quality prekindergarten learning environment provides a balance of adult-directed activities, child-initiated play, experiential learning and daily time for intentionally planned learning centers.

Play and academics are not an either/or. Play is an essential component in learning for young children. Rigorous standards for math, language, literacy and social and emotional skills can be provided through playful experiences to support children in reaching benchmarks.

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Learning Environment

“When children are in environments where learning is occurring in a meaningful context, where they have choices and where they are encouraged to follow their interests, learning takes place best.”

– Singer, Golinkoff and Hirsch-Pasek¹⁸

The developmentally appropriate and rigorous classroom provides opportunities for experimentation, exploration, discovery, inquiry, challenge and interaction. A primary goal of a prekindergarten program is to develop independent, confident learners excited by challenges and opportunities to learn, while also developing a strong base for future learning in each child. The prekindergarten environment, including its physical, social and organizational attributes, plays a critical role in learning. Children feel more secure and learn more readily in programs that:

- Are well organized,
- Provide predictable routines,
- Have consistent expectations,
- Represent the children culturally,
- Demonstrate mutual respect and
- Foster positive relationships with teachers and peers.



Physical Space

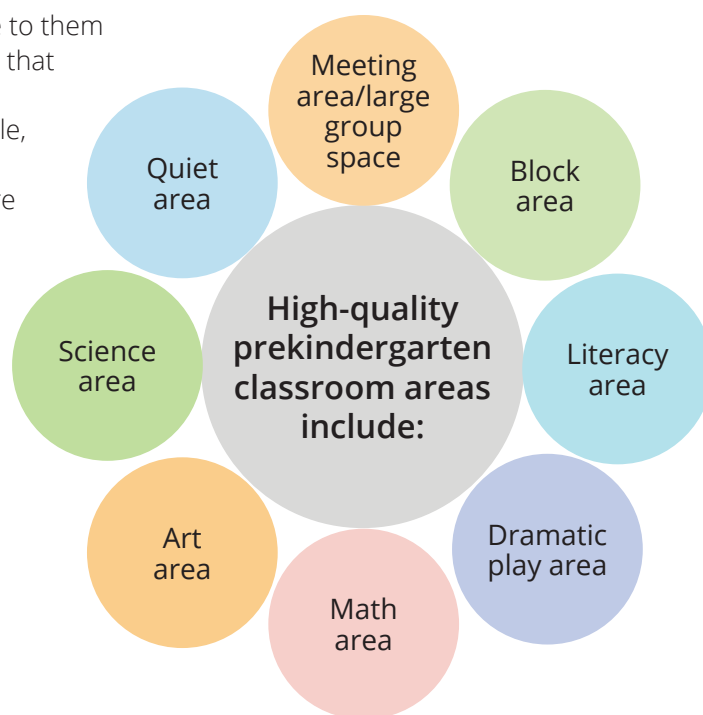
A rich, well-organized classroom environment is an essential part of the curriculum. The manner in which a room is arranged can promote choices and provide direction to children using both materials and space productively. The classroom should be intentionally designed so that purposeful and intentional play-based activities can be supported as a vehicle for a child's learning. Both the room arrangement and the materials within it send an important message to the learner that affects both engagement and behavior. Teachers need to continually evaluate and monitor the environment, ready to make changes and adjustments to meet the needs and interests of their children. As children grow and change, materials will change along with the needs of the children.

Preschool classrooms will differ from one another, but certain elements should be present in the physical environment of each kindergarten classroom. According to Heroman and Copple,¹⁹ classrooms should include:

- A space for children to store their work and personal belongings.
- A comfortable place for group meetings that allows children to see one another during discussions.
- A variety of spaces for working that may include tables, centers and open-floor areas.
- Quiet places for working independently, with a friend or in a small group.
- Places for materials that allow for easy access and clean-up after use.
- Places to display children's work in a respectful, attractive manner.

The physical arrangement of the room should allow children to see and easily move through all areas with purpose. It is important to be mindful as to what the arrangement communicates to children. If a teacher sets his/her classroom up like a racetrack, the children will use it as such. However, if the teacher creates dynamic spaces that allow children to question, create and explore, then that is the type of learning that will take place.

Children should have a variety of activities available to them throughout the day, providing open-ended choices that are directly aligned to development and standards. Equipment and materials should be easily accessible, in a definite location, and clearly labeled so the children know where to get the materials and where to put them away. Both conventional (e.g., blocks, Legos) and unconventional (e.g., cut pieces of wood or Styrofoam noodles) materials will be used throughout the room to support problem-solving and the construction of children's knowledge. Teachers need to rotate items within and across centers to foster new ideas and encourage cooperation, collaboration and creativity. When selecting materials and designing the learning environment, consider multiple entry points, size of the space and independence when accessing and using materials.



● Meeting Area/Large Group Space

In this space, whole-group lessons can occur, such as writing, story time, gross motor activities, morning routines and music. Children can learn valuable skills and standards (e.g., speaking, listening, reading, writing, social-emotional, responsibility, mathematical thinking, inquiry, problem-solving) during whole-group activities.

● Block Area

Block play is a critical element in a high-quality learning environment. Research strongly suggests working with blocks increases a child's spatial reasoning, which leads to higher achievement in geography, science, technology, engineering and mathematics.²⁰ The block area can house conventional and nonconventional materials for various building and exploration opportunities to extend pretend play (i.e., rocks and sprigs, magnifying glasses, felt shapes, and/or various figurines).

● Literacy Area

Literacy spaces in a high-quality prekindergarten classroom include a child library, a writing area and other literacy materials. In the literacy area, children can explore books, become comfortable with various genres, develop writing skills, read or write alone or with a friend and create stories orally or through print. A literacy area is filled with both fiction and nonfiction books. However, literacy activities will not live in these spaces alone. For example, the book "How a House is Built" by Gail Gibbons²¹ may be in the block area and a menu from a local restaurant can be in the dramatic play center. Consider various materials (e.g., clipboards, felt and/or magnetic letters and chalk) to engage prekindergarten children in literacy play.

Dramatic Play Area

The dramatic play area gives children opportunities to use their imagination to act out real-world experiences and explore places from their world, such as home, stores, the post office, restaurants or a pet shop. The dramatic play area also is a powerful place for teachers to intentionally scaffold children's social skills. Children can make meaningful connections in math, while they are measuring, pouring, comparing, counting and playing with money. They can deepen their literacy understanding when they take an order, read from a recipe, write a grocery list or make a birthday invitation. Scaffolding naturally occurs through imaginative play as children explore different roles (e.g., family member, community helpers), use new vocabulary words, generate stories and work through feelings and emotions.

Math Area

The math area supports opportunities for fine motor work, language and cognitive development, collaboration and social skills. Children engage in reasoning, sorting, classifying, sequencing, comparing, counting, measuring, inquiring, joining and separating sets, recording, defining, estimating and solving meaningful problems at their own level of development and interest. A variety of materials (e.g., unifix cubes, stringing beads, counters, dominoes, playing cards) can extend a child's thinking and engage their peers in language necessary for solving problems.

Art Area

Art is where all children can find a level of success regardless of previous experiences. In the art area, children explore a variety of materials to express his/her experiences and feelings. A child can use imagination to plan and create. They are able to deepen their understandings around technique, two-and three-dimensional studies, spatial relations and learn to persist at open-ended tasks, while also using vocabulary and developing fine motor skills. The classroom walls display artwork and need to include student language. Children can be encouraged to create materials to be used in other learning areas, (e.g., child-made puppets in the dramatic play area, trees and people made of paper in the block area).

Science Area

Children are naturally inquisitive and full of wonder. Using a child's interest, meaningful connections through observations occur with living and nonliving things. Investigation using the five senses to observe, explore, compare and classify, ask questions and make predictions will build vocabulary. Opportunity to model and use inquiry encourages children to ask questions regardless of experiences.

Quiet Area

Children need a comfy, private area to be away from others and still feel part of the classroom community. Children will have multiple opportunities throughout the day to self-select this space to think, reflect, relax or problem solve. Items in this space will vary because of a child's needs and may not need to be placed directly in this space (e.g., calm down tools, blankets, stuffed animals, books).

Teacher-Child Interaction

“Young children benefit from opportunities to develop ongoing, trusting relationships with adults outside the family and with other children. Notably, positive teacher-child relationships promote children’s learning and achievement, as well as social competence and emotional development.”²²

– National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC]. (2009).

A key factor in the quality of a prekindergarten learning environment is the caliber of the adult-child interactions. The emotional support teachers give to children provides a solid foundation for developing the motivation and cognitive skills critical to positive long-term academic outcomes.²³

It is the role of the teacher to be responsive to children’s needs in a caring and respectful manner. Validating a child’s feelings and interests, showing children daily they are cared for and scaffolding a child’s ability to self-regulate will support a teacher in establishing positive relationships with children. Social activities are an ongoing part of a prekindergarten’s day. Through coaching and encouragement, the teacher can play a significant role in providing opportunities for a child to engage with others in social problem solving. Children need time and a safe environment to work cooperatively with others.

By demonstrating skills the teacher desires for children to emulate, a teacher can support the children in identifying emotions and expressing those emotions in an appropriate manner. While some children require coaching to work in a group, problem solve or enter into a task with peers, other children may need more direct instruction. Knowing the learner allows teachers to select strategies intentionally.

A child’s ability to self-regulate happens gradually through strong adult-child interaction and opportunities for learning. Genuine acceptance of all children is the first step in creating a safe learning environment where children can learn to manage their emotions and behaviors. Effective adult-child interactions are an essential ingredient for children’s social and academic development. Changes in how adults interact with children do not happen overnight. Quality improvement efforts focused explicitly on teacher-child interactions maximize impacts for children. Carefully designed and implemented professional development support can improve the quality of teacher-child interactions.

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Classroom Management

Establishing Classroom Rules and Procedures

“ Child achievement at the end of the year is directly related to the degree to which a teacher establishes good control of the classroom procedures in the very first week of the school year.”

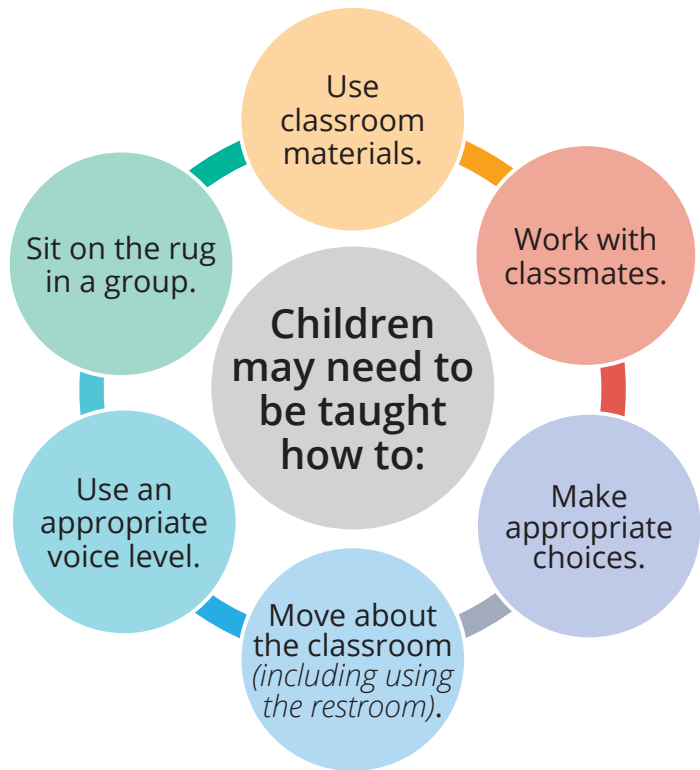
– Wong and Wong²⁴

Establishing the routines, structures and expectations begins the very first day of school. The materials available in the classroom will influence your success in teaching these elements. It is up to the teacher to set the tone of the classroom. A teacher who is relaxed, happy and speaks softly is more likely to draw similar responses. The use of positive reinforcement is better than dwelling on misbehavior. For example: “I see you are being very careful to put the blocks back in their proper places. That will make it really easy for the next person to find the ones they are looking for.” Notice and comment on specific behaviors and respond with encouragement rather than praise.



It is important for children to understand the teacher's expectations. The child needs to know which behaviors are acceptable in the classroom and which behaviors are not.

In a high-quality classroom, there is shared control. Teachers consciously give children some control and decision-making opportunities (*e.g., self-selected projects during work time, daily classroom job, creative play*). Classroom agreements (*rules*) are clear, concise and consistent. Children have age-appropriate choices and nonnegotiables are known to all. Every classroom has nonnegotiables. Nonnegotiables will always include health and safety rules, but also will include school and teacher standards and expectations. In addition to introducing classroom procedures, it is important to establish building rules and procedures. Rules should be discussed, demonstrations given, and time provided for practice.



Developing Behavior Patterns

Establishing a pattern of working within a group as a positive member is the educational focus during the first months of kindergarten. Learning this pattern teaches the child a set of group work skills such as:

- Individual decision-making.
- Independent problem-solving.
- Responsible group membership behavior.

These skills are transferred to other large- or small-group or individual-learning situations, thus providing a foundation for future schooling. For this reason, it is particularly important to provide each child with time for developing and practicing these skills. Listed below is a sample pattern routine:

- Choose a job/activity/center and work at it appropriately.
- Work for a reasonable period of time.
- Clean up when your work is completed.
- Choose another job, and go to work.

Elements of the Day

High-quality prekindergarten classrooms will have a healthy balance of child-initiated and teacher-led learning opportunities throughout the day. Offering choices to young learners provides deeper engagement in learning. However, a heavy emphasis on child-initiated activities is not a free-for-all. It is in the intentional planning on the part of the teacher for the materials, room arrangement, adult-child interactions and structure in how the children engage with peers. Teachers must plan the daily schedule, yet remain flexible, to maintain the balance between child-initiated and teacher-led activities.

The daily schedule includes a mix of whole-group activities, small-group workshops and independent area/centers.²⁵

Whole-group times are used to:

- Build community and common experiences.
- Do group problem-solving activities.
- Introduce and teach skills and concepts.
- Practice and review skills not yet mastered.
- Perform:
 - Sing
 - Dance
 - Act

Teacher-led small-group times are used to:

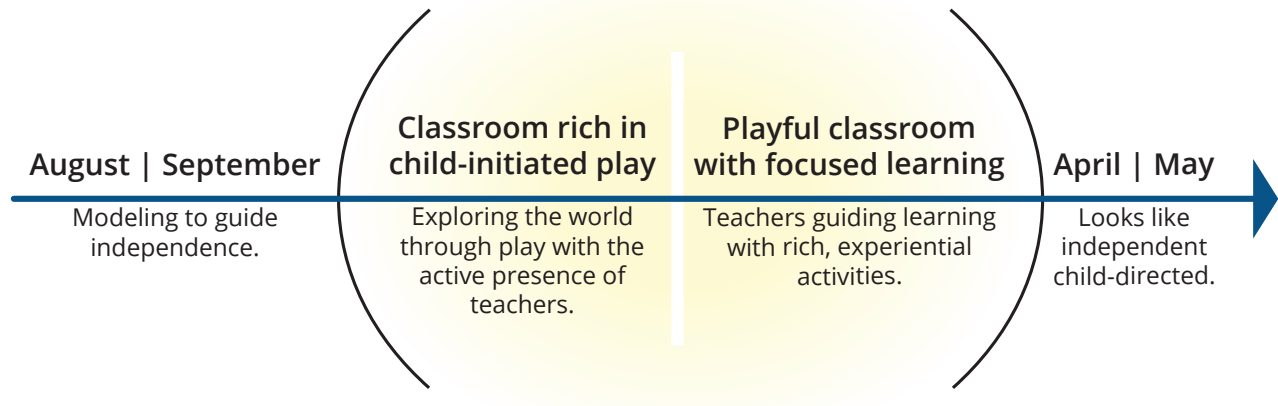
- Reinforce skills.
- Provide corrective feedback during guided practice.
- Provide differentiated instruction.

Independent Centers/ Areas are used to:

- Provide independent practice of familiar skills.
- Provide connecting and extending activities.
- Build independence and self-reliance skills.

As the year progresses, the prekindergarten schedule will evolve along a continuum from looking like a prekindergarten classroom to looking like a kindergarten classroom.

Transition THROUGH Prekindergarten



Miller and Almon, "call for educators, their professional organizations, and policymakers to develop as fully as possible the two central methods in the continuum... of approaches to education."²⁶

A key element of a high-quality prekindergarten is a balanced daily schedule to include play-based learning across the content areas. Not only does play allow children to be creative and use their imagination, play helps children develop decision-making skills, learn to work with others and learn to negotiate in order to solve conflicts. Play is also important for healthy brain development and to increase the child's physical and emotional strength.²⁷ A balanced schedule allows children to fully engage in planned activity without interruption for extended periods of time. The schedule includes time for content area specific experiences. Literacy, math, science and social studies will be blended across segments of the day. Content learning does not happen in silos. The schedule is based on the premise children spend most of their time in nonsedentary activities. Hands-on experiences dominate a day and asks each child to explore, apply and extend concepts and ideas from each content area through investigations and projects. Quieter and more active moments are balanced throughout the day. The earlier portion of the day is scheduled with activities requiring more focus.

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Family Engagement

“The evidence is consistent, positive and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement. When schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more.”

– Wong and Wong²⁸

Family engagement is a crucial component of high-quality early care and education. Engaging families in their children’s growth and learning can support the healthy social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of young children. These affirmative relationships also support positive lifelong outcomes for children.



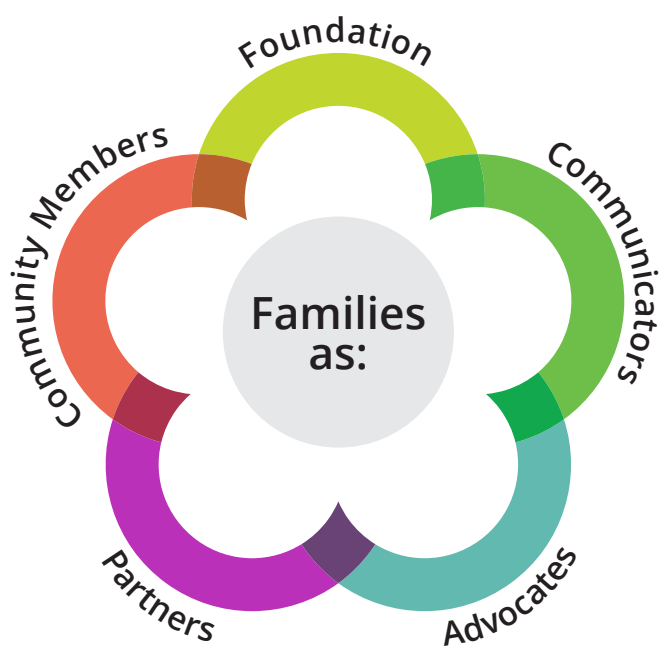
Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark and Moodie (2009) highlight six key factors in their comprehensive definition of family engagement:

1. Early childhood education programs encourage and validate family participation in decision-making related to their children's education. Families act as advocates for their children by actively participating in decision-making opportunities.
2. Consistent, two-way communication is facilitated through multiple forms and is responsive to the linguistic preference of the family. Communication is both program and family initiated, timely and continuous, and is about both the child's educational experience as well as the larger program.
3. Families and early childhood programs collaborate and exchange knowledge. Family members share their unique knowledge and skills through volunteering and actively engaging in events and activities. Teachers seek out information about their children's lives, families and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and instructional practices.
4. Early childhood programs and families place an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home and in the community to enhance each child's early childhood program.
5. Families create a home environment that values learning and supports programs. Programs and families collaborate in establishing goals to enhance each child's early learning.
6. Early childhood programs create an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers and educators are dedicated, trained and receive the supports they need to fully engage families. (p. 3-4)

Recently, the [Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood](#)²⁹ were created to:

- Recognize the importance of family engagement as an essential component of early care and education.
- Provide common language for family engagement across the early childhood service systems and among early child care and education professionals.
- Offer family engagement practices and identify resources to support the implementation of those practices.

These standards include:



Families as:

- Foundation
- Communicators
- Advocates
- Partners
- Community Members

In 2008, the Kansas State Board of Education endorsed the [PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#)³⁰. The PTA Standards align with the Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood and provide a continuum of family engagement beginning at cradle and continuing through to career.

Sample Evidence-based Practices for Family Engagement in Schools³¹

1. Create a welcoming school climate.
2. Provide families information related to child development and creating supportive learning environments.
3. Establish effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication.
4. Strengthen families' knowledge and skills to support and extend their children's learning at home and in the community.
5. Engage families in school planning, leadership and meaningful volunteer opportunities.
6. Connect children and families to community resources that strengthen and support a child's learning and well-being.

Kansas Curricular Standards: Prekindergarten

Kansas Curricular Standards provide information on what students should know and be able to do at different grade levels. Kansas curricular standards are guidelines school districts can use to develop their curriculum. **They are not the curriculum.**

In Kansas, each school district develops its own curriculum and teachers decide on how they will provide instruction to ensure student learning.



APPROACHES TO LEARNING

- Persistence and engagement in learning
- Initiative
- Creativity

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Fine motor skills
- Physical fitness
- Nutrition/healthy eating
- Safety

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Character development
- Responsible decision-making and problem solving
- Personal development
- Social development

COMMUNICATION AND LITERACY

- Speaking and listening
- Language
- Literature
- Reading skills
- Writing

MATHEMATICS

- Counting and cardinality
- Operations and algebraic thinking
- Measurement and data
- Geometry

SCIENCE

- Scientific inquiry
- Movement and simple machines
- Living things
- Environment and climate
- Habitats and human impact

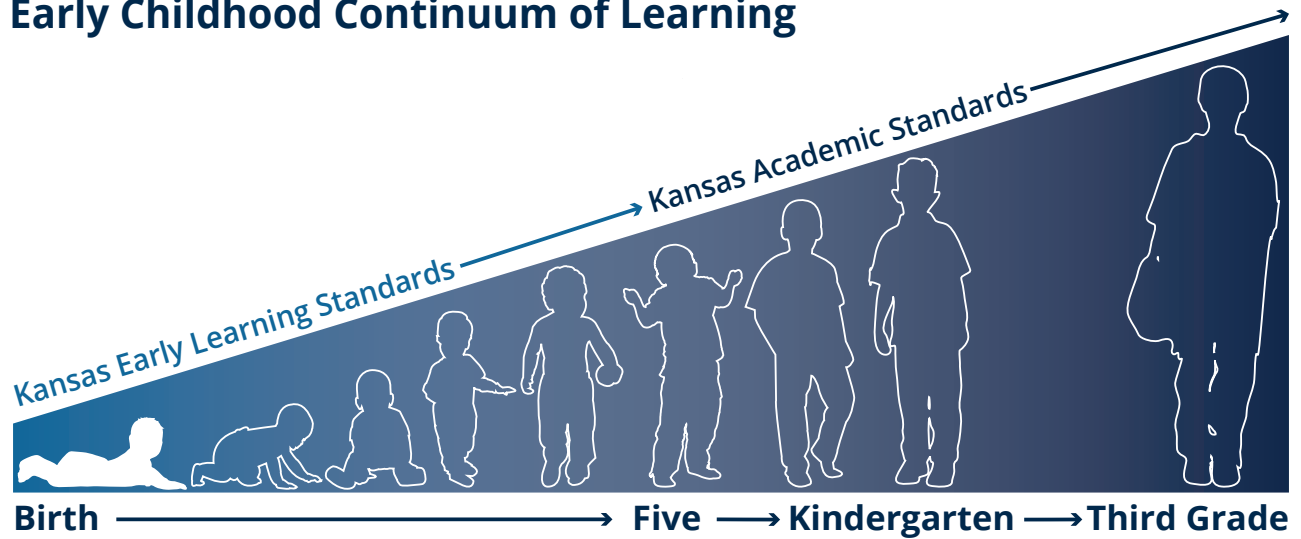
SOCIAL STUDIES

- Economics
- Geography
- Kansas, United States and world history

CREATIVE ARTS

- Dance
- Music
- Visual arts

Early Childhood Continuum of Learning



APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Approaches to learning focuses on the different ways that children engage in learning. Standards in approaches to learning create a foundation for successful learning habits by encouraging persistence, engagement, initiative and problem-solving. Children develop positive learning habits when familiar experiences are encouraged and supported to reinforce new and more in-depth experiences, ideas and concepts. Providing opportunities for self-directed play allows them to be motivated and practice problem-solving, social interactions, leadership and trying new experiences.³²

Activities in this area include:

- Sustaining attention to task despite distractions.
- Gathering information through listening. Remembers what was said in brief group discussion
- Remembering and following one- or two-step directions.
- Initiating play with other children.
- Identifying a problem, demonstrating flexibility in solving it and changing plans if a better solution is proposed.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Health and physical development include nutrition, safety, wellness (physical, vision, hearing, oral), and coordinated movements through active play skills of all young children. In gross-motor development, infants begin as non-mobile beings, and in a matter of months, most roll, crawl, stand and walk. Toddlers develop balance and coordination as they run and jump and climb. Preschoolers refine their movements and learn to use their large muscles to move with purpose and intent, to kick, throw, catch, climb and gallop in coordinated movements. Children's hands and fingers (fine-motor development) continue to develop as they learn to feed and dress themselves, and use tools for drawing, writing and cutting.³³

Activities in this area include:

- Using locomotor skills with increasing coordination and balance during active play (e.g., *runs with a stride, jumps, kicks a ball, uses alternating feet when climbing stairs*).
- Using classroom and household tools independently and with eye-hand coordination to carry out more complex activities.
- Completing personal care tasks with increasing responsibility (e.g., *bathroom routines, brushes teeth, etc.*).
- Demonstrating an ability to follow emergency routines with adult support (e.g., *lining up to exit building during a fire drill*).

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kansans said they want each student to develop the social, emotional and character competencies that promote learning and success in life. Social-emotional well-being determines how children think, feel and act. Social skills are the foundation for optimal learning in all areas of growth and development. Social skills, self-regulation, friendship skills and social problem-solving will continue to be taught jointly beside academic skills in early childhood classrooms since they are likewise critical for school success.³⁴

Activities in this area include:

- Follows adult guidelines and expectations for appropriate behavior.
- Becomes increasingly aware of effects of own behavior on others.
- Anticipates and usually accepts consequences of own actions.
- Uses simple conflict resolution techniques.
- Expresses and responds to a range of emotions in socially acceptable ways.
- Makes personal needs and desires known.
- Expresses concern for the needs of others and people in distress.

COMMUNICATION AND LITERACY SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Through exposure to quality literature, children develop early literacy and communication skills in concepts of print, letter knowledge, narrative skills and oral language. Literacy is the foundation of reading and writing. It is a combination of word recognition and language comprehension, far more than printed words alone. As young children engage in language-rich environments where a variety of materials, activities and interactions are promoted, their ability to make the mental connection between sounds and letters begins to emerge. Children discover written words are another way to share their thoughts, needs and ideas.³⁵

Activities in this area include:

- Participates in conversations in increasing group sizes.
- Begins to describe objects and actions depicted in pictures.
- Produces complete sentences in shared language activities.
- Uses pictures and illustrations to tell and retell parts of a book or story.
- Interacts with a larger variety of books and text.
- Shows an understanding that print conveys meaning.
- Recognizes rhyming words.
- Begins to identify own name in print.
- Uses a combination of drawing, dictating or emergent writing to express thoughts and ideas.

MATHEMATICAL KNOWLEDGE

Early in life, young children spontaneously explore and naturally use mathematics in their environments. Children begin to learn essential math skills through play. They compare, notice similarities and differences, and group toys and materials. This ability to organize information into categories, quantify data and solve problems helps children learn about time, space and numbers. Over time, they develop the vocabulary and skills to:

- Describe relationships between objects in the environment.
- Describe patterns.
- Express order and position.
- Measure.³⁶

Activities in this area include:

- Counting in sequence.
- Demonstrating an understanding of number names represented with a written numeral.
- Understanding the relationship between numbers and quantities to 10.
- Identifying whether the number of objects in one group is more or less as compared to the number of objects in another group.
- Using concrete objects including shapes to copy simple patterns.
- Describing objects in the environment using names of shapes and uses actions and words to indicate relative positions of these objects (*e.g., over, inside, close to, far away*).

SCIENCE

Children are natural scientists. They possess an intrinsic desire to explore the world around them, and science feeds the curiosity and engagement of children. Through scientific explorations, children learn to record and document their observations of changes, identify patterns, and discuss relationships to help build understanding. Science engages children's senses and encourages them to ask questions, investigate and develop new ways of thinking. By participating in varied and consistent opportunities to observe, manipulate, test, reflect and respond to open-ended questions, children have an opportunity to develop knowledge about their environment and learn important scientific skills to foster the ongoing development of problem-solving abilities. Adults can help children grow into curious and confident scientists through intentional teaching.³⁷

Activities in this area include:

- Exploring and experimenting with familiar and unfamiliar objects to examine how objects move when acted on by force (e.g., *pushing, pulling, throwing, twisting, gravity*).
- Understanding and explaining why plants and animals need air, food and water.
- Observing and discussing changes in weather and seasons using common weather-related vocabulary (e.g., *rainy, sunny, cold, windy*).
- Demonstrating an understanding of living things that exist in different habitats (e.g., *fish can live in the ocean because they can breathe underwater*).



SOCIAL STUDIES

Young children need to learn about and understand life within their families and communities. Social studies includes learning about the world in which one lives- and understanding how one's family and community fit into a larger world of the state and the country.³⁸

Activities in this area include:

- Naming family members by relationships (*e.g., dad, sister, cousin*) and identifying leaders at home and school (*e.g., parents, guardians, teachers, principal*).
- Recognizing people have wants and must make choices because resources and materials are limited (*e.g., offers to take turns with scissors when only one pair is available*).
- Demonstrating an understanding of money (*can be exchanged for goods and services*).
- Using words to indicate direction.
- Demonstrating an emerging understanding of helping with home and classroom routines improves the quality of the environment.
- Using word or phrases to differentiate between events that happened in the past, the present and the future (*e.g., "when I was a baby ..." or "before I moved into my new house"*).
- Describing some of the holidays, foods and special events related to his/her own culture or acts them out in dramatic play.
- Naming city and state where he/she lives.

CREATIVE ARTS

The arts are open-ended, imaginative activities that encourage the exploration of their environment. By focusing on the creative process in artistic play rather than the product, children can build confidence, strengthen independence and develop problem solving skills.³⁹

Activities in this area include:

- Dances to music with varying tempos.
- Sings familiar, simple songs.
- Takes a role in acting out a story.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a set of evidence-based practices implemented across a system to meet the needs of all learners. Horner stressed the importance of supporting children both academically and behaviorally to enable them to reach their fullest learning potential.⁴⁰ The application of an MTSS system in preschool looks slightly different than what may be put in place for school-aged students. However, the basic processes and practices will look similar.

For more information about the application of Kansas MTSS in preschool programs, see the [Kansas MTSS Early Childhood Structuring](#)⁴¹ and [Implementation](#)⁴¹ Guides.



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Assessment

“Developmentally appropriate assessments can be a means of maintaining and regaining joyful learning. Assessment can inform teaching so that developmentally and culturally appropriate practices are preserved and academic standards are met.”

– Gullo as quoted in Hughes and Gullo⁴²

Early childhood assessments gather and provide educators, parents and families with critical information about a child’s development and growth. Prekindergarten programs will incorporate a variety of developmentally appropriate formal (e.g., assessment tools, questionnaires and standardized testing) and informal (e.g., natural observations, collecting data, child work samples) screening and assessment methods and tools to guide curriculum implementation and monitor children’s growth over time.



Developmentally Appropriate Assessments

According to *Resources for Early Learning*,⁴³ early childhood assessment methods include:

- Observations can be made with minimal or no intrusion into children's activities. Educators can observe all facets of development, including intellectual, linguistic, social-emotional and physical development, on a regular basis.
- Portfolios are a record of data collected through the work children have produced over a period of time. The collection clearly shows the progress of a child's development. Portfolios can be an important tool in helping facilitate a partnership between teachers and parents.
- Educator ratings are useful in assessing children's cognitive and language abilities as well as their social-emotional development. These ratings can be linked to other methods of assessment, such as standardized testing or other assessment tools.
- Parent ratings integrate parents into the assessment process. Parents who are encouraged to observe and listen to their child can help detect and target important milestones and behaviors in their child's development.
- Standardized tests are tests created to fit a set of testing standards. These tests are administered and scored in a standard manner and are often used to assess the performance of children in a program.

One of the best contexts for observing children's development is within familiar settings and routines. Authentic assessment methods can provide a more accurate representation of development and learning and include methods such as work samples with teacher narratives; child portfolios; and photographs and learning stories that capture learning through photographs, videotapes and anecdotal documentation. It is essential for early childhood educators to include authentic assessment, embedded within everyday activities, to understand the growth and progress of individual students.

One of the main purposes of a prekindergarten assessment system is the linking of assessment results with the planning of curriculum and intervention when necessary. The use of ongoing, evidence-based assessments help educators plan individualized educational experiences to enhance the development of each child. When schools implement a multi-tiered system of supports, universal screening assessments can be used to more closely monitor reading, math and social-emotional skills and help identify children who may need targeted and intensive intervention.

The use of accurate, valid and reliable assessments throughout the year, combined with prevention strategies and interventions, can ensure prekindergarten children receive timely and successful instruction and support. Assessments must be purposeful. Programs shall take time to consider the assessments they administer and ensure assessment practices are streamlined without overlap or duplication of the information already collected.

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Program Structures

“High-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs employ knowledgeable, highly skilled teachers who receive strong support and coaching, use research-based curricula, provide access to a variety of developmentally appropriate materials and activities and have small class sizes and low child to teacher ratios”

– Barrett et al.⁴⁴

As school districts recruit and employ teachers, it is important to carefully consider educators' training and prior teaching experiences. Aside from the teacher having the proper credentials, administrators shall consider the individual's experiences working with young children, particularly with prekindergarteners.



Holding the proper credential(s) does not necessarily ensure the candidate has the knowledge and expertise to support the youngest learners. In order to provide intentional instruction, a teacher must be able to call upon sound judgment, content knowledge, developmental knowledge, and knowledge of individual child's needs in order to provide instruction to ensure outcomes (across all domains) are met. Without specialized training, prekindergarten teachers are less likely to be able to provide effective intentional instruction. Having a deep understanding of how children grow and learn is essential in setting up a learning environment for prekindergarten children.

A highly qualified teacher can take into account what a child may know and be able to do, and infuse these milestones into lesson planning, the classroom environment, adult-child interactions and the curriculum. A prekindergarten teacher, as an early learning instructor, is nurturing and understands the importance of play as a required instructional strategy. A highly qualified, prekindergarten teacher uses ongoing observational assessment to make formative instructional decisions. He or she is able to set up structures to teach children to be independent, problem solve and self-regulate through play-based learning.

Some qualities effective teachers display include:

- Passion for prekindergarten children and their learning.
- Ability to develop meaningful relationships with families and children.
- Ability to create a warm, responsive classroom environment.
- Understanding of content material and developmentally appropriate pedagogy.

Professional Development

Formal, informal, ongoing and job-embedded professional development will be provided at the local and state level to help educators hone their craft. This type of professional development will ensure Kansas prekindergarten educators have a deep understanding of developmentally appropriate practice and the skills to apply knowledge to their instructional practices.

State and Federal Programs

A number of state and federal programs provide additional support for children in prekindergarten classrooms. These programs include a range of support including providing services for English language learners, children with special needs, and children who are considered highly capable. Information regarding some of these programs can be found in the links below:

Special Education*

https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Special_Education



Federal Title I Program, Part A*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Title-Services/Federal-Programs/Title-I-Part-A>



Bilingual Education*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Title-Services/Title-III-State-ESOL>



Migrant Education*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Title-Services/Migrant>



Gifted Highly Capable*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Special-Education/Gifted-Education-Services>



** Please be advised that these links will no longer work as of April 2026 due to a redesign of the www.ksde.gov website.*

Teacher/Principal Evaluation*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Teacher-Licensure-and-Accreditation/Educator-Evaluations/KEEP-Districts>



Kansas Academic Standards*

<https://sites.google.com/ksde.org/kesa-2-0-four-fundamentals/standards-alignment>



Child Care Aware

<https://www.childcareaware.org/state/kansas/>



Kansas Parents as Teachers*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Early-Childhood/Preschool-Programming/Kansas-Parents-as-Teachers>



Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE)

<https://www.ksde.gov>



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Appendix

K Today: Teaching and Learning in the Kindergarten Year. Dominic F. Gullo, ed.

Kansas Kindergarten Guide. KSDE.*

<https://www.ksde.gov/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/Kindergarten/Kansas-Kindergarten-Guide.pdf>



Kansas Early Learning Standards. KSDE. (2024).

<https://kels.ksde.gov/>



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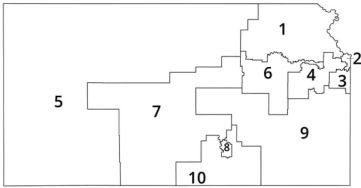
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