

Spring 2012 Kindergarten Grade Level Parent Meeting
May 9, 2012

Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist, Nora Ho, Principal
Marcia Gillespie, Kindergarten Grade Level Coordinator

Principal Ho shared basic information about the Common Core academic standards in English/Language Arts and Math, adopted by 45 of 50 of the states, and to be implemented over the next couple of years. The purpose of these common standards will be to increase both the rigor and the consistency of instruction and academic expectations throughout the United States and internationally. More information will be coming as the change takes place. Math will be the first focus.

Questions, issues and concerns in parenting our Kindergarten to first grade children:

What can we expect, in general, about the transition to first grade; how can we prepare our children?

Because of the academic expectations of the current Kindergarten curriculum, the transition to first grade is in many ways a lot easier than it was ten years ago. Students are reading and writing already; they have had practice with sitting and completing assignments, listening to instruction and attending for ten to fifteen minutes.

Of course, one big change is the length of the school day. Expect your kids to be tired after school for the first month or so. They will adjust to this. As the year progresses they will be expected to sit at their desks for longer periods of time to produce work – up to fifteen or twenty minutes. There will be less social time, so they will need to learn when they can talk and when not to bother other kids. As kids get older they will be expected to manage their frustration better and learn to ask for help from the teacher when they don't understand something. Most first graders are pretty good about doing this. Time management will be another skill that they will need to develop – how to complete their short weekly homework, how to stay focused on classroom assignments, etc. There is still a wide range of abilities and achievement levels coming into first grade. Teachers are quite experienced at taking children where they are and moving them right along.

At home it is an excellent time to give them responsibilities. They are eager to help and more capable of doing so. Anything like setting the table, taking the dishes to the sink, feeding a pet, putting laundry in the hamper, cleaning up their rooms, recycling are all tasks that help you out and build responsible behaviors. This kind of responsibility transfers easily to their school life – keeping their desk clean and organized, completing their classwork, managing their materials and possessions.

Should we be worried about wiggly boys or girls?

Whatever concerns we have about kids at this age, we always need to consider development. Little boys, especially, can still be quite wiggly and need to move around or stand up at their desks. Girls tend to “get” school earlier and follow the role modeling of their teachers. It sometimes takes boys until second grade to understand the behavioral expectations of school.

Some children do have true attention problems that appear to be outside the norm of age expectations. Teachers are very good at assessing these behaviors. It sometimes happens that inattention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity does not interfere with learning, though those can interfere with social interaction. If a student seems to have both attention difficulties and is not seeming to be learning well, then it can be a somewhat complex process to sort out whether inattention is preventing information from getting in, or if there are also disabilities that are making the learning challenging. It is usually better to sort out the attention problem first. For many kids inattention is just a maturity issue. Teachers have techniques to use in the classroom to help make kids aware of their focus and attention and to help them improve their classroom behavior. Parents and school are partners in sorting out these issues.

In general, it is very important not to compare children academically, athletically, or socially. Each child is unique, learns at his/her own pace and with his/her own style, has his/her specific interests and talents, and differs in social needs. Don't fall into the competitive trap of “keeping up with the Jones' kids,” because our children are very good at sensing when you think that they're not good enough. Perfectionism (and the accompanying stress) is epidemic in our community, and now, while they are young, is the best time to get some control over your own expectations.

How do we deal with their strong language and opinions?

As children mature they begin to have strong opinions about things. Sometimes they will use language that is not appropriate, e.g. “I hate.....” If your values include not using that kind of language, then let your kids know that it is ok to be annoyed or dislike something, but hate is generally too strong a word to use. Respect is a core value, or should be. Again, kids may express anger, but it is not ok to be disrespectful to you, or anyone else. It is important to recognize that you do a lot for your kids, but you are not their servants. Six year olds can be demanding and testing, but you don't have to do everything they want. This is a great time for them to begin to understand that they have to earn the goodies that you provide – toys, play dates, computer or T.V. time, etc. It's ok to withhold any privilege if you feel they are being disrespectful.

What does “I’m bored!” mean?

This usually means one of three things:

- 1) This is too hard and challenging and I don’t get it.
- 2) This really is boring because I’ve done it before and I completely understand it and I want something more challenging.
- 3) I’m just six years old and I don’t want to be doing this; I want to be playing.

If this is about school work, check it out with your child’s teacher. As stated, kids are at a wide range of levels and the work could be too difficult or too easy. If this is about not being able to figure out how to spend some leisure time, then give your child the chance to figure out how to relieve his/her boredom – make something, read something, go outside and play, stay inside and make up an imaginative game, etc. Try not to use the computer or T.V. as the boredom solution.

What goes on with girls socially in first grade?

Girls are much more difficult, generally, than boys in the social arena. (Boys may be more difficult in the attention to task in class area). In Kindergarten they are still pretty egocentric, but in first grade they develop a heightened awareness of others. From now on, their task will be to figure out who and what makes a good friend, and how to be a good friend. There will be drama because friendships change and girls’ feeling are easily hurt. Listening to stories is a big part of parenting. There are a lot of lessons that children need to learn at this age, and the lessons they do learn can last them a lifetime. Often they can learn these lessons by your asking relevant and thoughtful questions.

We want them to learn empathy – how would/do you feel when someone says that to you? Acknowledging hurt feelings is important.

We want them to learn that their words can hurt others – how else can you say that what something is doing is bothering you or doesn’t feel good, other than just calling names back?

Role playing, sometimes with puppets or dolls is very helpful. Kids this age can learn what to say when they hear someone hurting their own or another’s feelings. E.g., “The next time Susie says ‘that’s an ugly dress’ what do you say?”

We want them not to be silent bystanders, but to stick up for other kids – this takes courage, but kids this age are better at doing this than older kids.

Sharing our own stories (real or made up) is very useful, because they do listen to us: e.g. “when I was your age I had a really close friend, but she started being mean to me and I felt really hurt. I decided not to play with her for a while. A few years later we were in the same class and we got to be good friends again.”

Kids need to learn to exercise their “disappointment muscle,” and develop resiliency. They need to learn when to ignore, when to confront, when to get adult help. The more social connections they make, the more they will have alternatives when a particular friendship goes wrong. They need to learn that they can only

control their own thoughts, words, and behaviors, so they can be empowered to make positive changes in their social world, when they need to.