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Ask Evelyn: All-day Kindergarten? **([http://record-](http://record-eagle.com/features/x625418481/Ask-Evelyn-All-day-Kindergarten)**



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By EVELYN PETERSEN
Local columnist (<http://record-eagle.com>)

Dear readers: Starting last summer people started to ask me, "What do you think about all-day kindergarten?" Here's my answer, but this is only the first of several kindergarten questions asked of me. I will continue to address these over the next few weeks.

Kindergarten is a monumentally important year in regard to the child's attitude about school and learning. As to all-day kindergarten, it's not so much the amount of time the child spends at school; it's about the quality of that time.

Six or more hours in a developmentally appropriate all-day kindergarten classroom can be a joyous and remarkable opportunity for the child to learn many new skills — not only intellectual skills, but other skills and abilities that the child needs in order to succeed in school and in life. These are skills such as physical growth and development, social and emotional self-confidence, self-discipline, self- help/independence, and skills in interacting, problem solving and communicating positively with others.

They are, in short, life skills.

Children need this kindergarten year of transition to grow and mature. They need to be encouraged, supported and guided in more challenging prereading, pre-science and math skills before entering first grade.

What they are learning must be relevant to them personally or it probably "won't stick. Most importantly, this is the age that children must develop a positive attitude about school and learning. Research tells us that most of our values and attitudes are formed before age 8. If a child loses a love for school and eagerness to learn, the child is likely to have problems in the future.

Some parents in our community want all-day kindergarten and after-school care because it's imperative that both parents work; school is a safe place for the kids. Others feel that if their particular all-day kindergarten is not developmentally appropriate, they would rather send their children to a good preschool instead. (The compulsory school entry in Michigan is age 6 by Dec. 1)

Other parents are unsure they can successfully work with their children on the skills they need to have (Kindergarten Grade Level Content Expectations) before first grade.

I strongly suggest that any parents who have concerns about their kindergarten-age children go online to the Office of Early Childhood and Family Services at the Michigan Department of Education website to learn more about children are expected to learn in kindergarten by the end of the school year.

Here's how:

Go to www.michigan.gov. Search "Office of Early Childhood." Read the welcome message, then scroll the left column of "resources" and click on "Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten."

On that page, first read the Standards of Quality. It was originally titled "Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten through Second Grade." It is posted with its new title so you can read what kinds of things are supposed to happen in classrooms for young children.

This document not only includes the standards (also called goals, expectations or outcomes) but includes age-appropriate teaching strategies to help children reach these goals and outcomes. Find and read the sections about appropriate learning environments and teaching practices, including inservice training requirements for teachers and their administrators.

Now go "back" and read the Kindergarten Grade Level Content Expectations (goals or outcomes) in each academic content area. These are expected at the END of the year. I personally feel these are fairly reasonable and appropriate for today's children. They also mesh with the national Common Core Standards. (See www.commoncore.org.)

The main problem is that, unfortunately, there's no overall guidance about how to achieve these outcomes or expectations for kindergarten in developmentally appropriate ways.

It is unfortunate that the Office of Early Childhood Education has not yet been able to add more specific advice on how to reach the kindergarten expectations. (Reasons for this will be explained in another column.) More specific direction on how to reach academic expectations appropriately might ease the concerns of parents and teachers about whether the needs of children are still a top priority. It might also provide some helpful guidance for school administrators.

Next week: Some schools are saying that blocks, dramatic play and using learning centers

are not appropriate in kindergarten.

Evelyn Petersen is an award-winning parenting columnist and early childhood educator.



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