

Nursery School News

A Monthly Newsletter of St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School

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From Jane: Kindergarten Readiness

For many of you this is the time of year to think about kindergarten readiness. Some children are obviously ready to move ahead, in chronological age and all other areas of development. Others, though meeting the legal age for kindergarten entry, are not ready for the shift. It is only January and that is part of the difficulty. It is very hard to predict how much young children will mature in the months prior to September.

Children develop in unpredictable and uneven ways. This is further complicated by the fact that the average age of kindergarten entry has dramatically increased over the past 30 years. Along with the increase in age, not surprisingly, there has been a steady increase in the academics presented in the kindergarten year. What we have today is a typical chronological age spread in many kindergarten classes of almost two years. Mt. Lebanon has recently changed the legal entry age to 5 years by September 1st from 5 years by January 31st in order to eliminate the wide age range among kindergarteners.

In reality a group of young children cannot all succeed at the same time when pressed to learn on schedule, especially when that group ranges in age anywhere between 5 and 6 & ½. It is unrealistic and unfair to assume that all students in the class will master the same concept or skill at the same time. Children need to be allowed to acquire skills at their own individual pace. Because of the diverse age spread and levels of development, those children who are the youngest and least mature may be at risk. The critical question that parents must ask themselves is whether or not behaviors of immature children or very young children will simply proceed forward with the passage of time. In other words, will another year in nursery school protect these children from the stress of possible over placement or will it be a waste of their time because they will naturally catch up later?

The research of Chess and Thomas in a longitudinal study of children found that high activity level, distractibility, and shy or slow to warm up behaviors are the result of inborn temperamental traits. While these traits tend to persist throughout childhood, they become less dominant with age and improve when children are thoughtfully cared for by adults. More mature behaviors can then emerge when children are provided with the needed time to grow in non-stressful situations. However, children who start school too soon often become stressed and turn inward, focusing primarily on their own concerns. Not only is this the case in Kindergarten, but also with each additional year of over placement, the pressure increases and they are likely to become even more self centered and less able to cope with the increasing academic demands.

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From Jane: (Continued)

So there are a number of complex issues that we must attend to at the same time when we consider what is the best decision for each individual child:

1. We must consider the chronological age of the child.
2. We need to understand each individual child's strengths and weaknesses.
3. We must consider the expectations of the particular kindergarten that the child will enter in September.

This third issue has been less well defined and articulated in the literature than psychological readiness. In most of the communities in our area, there is a component of readiness, which is primarily a cultural process through which members of the community develop their unique local meaning of readiness. We are aware that readiness in Upper St. Clair differs from that of Mt. Lebanon. Not only are the children on average older in Upper St. (even with the recent age change), the kindergarten program is more academic than Mt. Lebanon's.

Another example of readiness that differs from one community to the next is the City of Pittsburgh, which distinctly differs from that of Mt. Lebanon and many communities in the South Hills. I have a nephew with a late August birthday who lives in Squirrel Hill. When my brother and sister-in-law decided to send him to kindergarten when he was a very young 5 I was frankly alarmed. But once I saw the diverse levels of maturity that were acceptable in the city, I understood their decision.

So, there are clearly defined formal elements of readiness derived from child development theory and informal elements generated in local communities, neighborhoods, schools, and families. What is interesting and of real concern is that by most standards one would think children from our population would be less likely to be at risk for kindergarten unreadiness. This thought is based on the fact that most of our children enter kindergarten with a rich base of quality preschool experience and strong parental support for their

education. Thus most parents have very high expectations for their children's kindergarten performance. The result is that our kindergartens have been caught in a system of ever increasing standards as children are held out of school and the entry age has increased over the years in an effort to make sure that they can meet the high standards and expectations. It is a bit like the "tail wagging the dog!" The more we hold our children out of kindergarten in order to ensure readiness, the older the average entry age becomes. The final result is expectations and standards then escalate in response to the overall age of the children, thereby causing many children who are less mature or young to be at risk.

Readiness for kindergarten is increasingly being recognized as a crucial component in the education of children. It would simplify matters if parents routinely sent any child of legal age to kindergarten, and schools would in turn ***appropriately deal with and accept the wide range of young children's varied and unique patterns of development.***

According to David Elkind, parents tend to focus primarily on skills and academics when considering kindergarten readiness. He feels that this is not a very useful approach, and suggests that the following 3 abilities are the most important expectations that a child needs to have mastered prior to kindergarten entry.

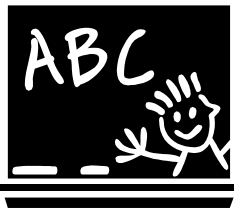
1. The ability to listen to and follow instructions given by an adult.
2. The ability to start a task and bring it to completion.
3. The ability to work cooperatively with other children, take turns, stand in line, and generally follow the standards of reasonable behavior when in a group setting.

Elkind explains that, "These are all essentially social skills. It is important that parents read to children, talk about numbers and letters etc; *but*, parents need to understand that all the research shows that children *must* have first mastered these skills in order to begin to learn academics."

From Jane: (Continued)

As things stand now, there are distinct strengths, skills, and abilities that children need to have mastered for a good beginning in kindergarten. As long as we observe children closely, are aware of the issues, put our children's needs first, and keep an open mind about the best time for each individual child to move on; we are far more likely to make good decisions and send our children on when they are ready and able to succeed!

If you have concerns or questions about your child's readiness be sure to schedule a conference with your child's teacher. Our teacher's have observed many children over the years and really can help you make your decision about the best time to start your child in kindergarten. I am, of course, also available to answer questions and address your concerns.



Is Your Child Ready for Kindergarten?

Gerriane Bobrosky, Ph.D., has developed the following guidelines for kindergarten readiness. You may be interested in them as you consider your own child's level of readiness.

1. A child must be *physically* healthy and strong enough to enjoy the challenge of going to school and dealing with the increased stresses.
2. Emotionally, a child must be able to *separate comfortably* from his/her parents and spend a significant number of hours each day in an initially unfamiliar place with new adults and children.
3. A child must have a long enough *attention span* to be able to sit for periods of time such as listening during story time, or *persisting in the completion of tasks* such as simple games or puzzles.
4. A child must be able to *tolerate some frustration* in not getting immediate attention from the teacher and others, and be able to wait and take turns. This implies a degree of mastery and control over impulses so that he or she does not have to discharge or react to internal or external stimuli.
5. A child must be able to follow 2 or 3 component directions.
6. A child must be obedient in that she is able to take what is said and act on it.
7. A child must be able to do some table work (eg. Puzzles, coloring, cutting).
8. A child must be able to understand the concept of sequencing and have the ability to do and put things in sequence.
9. A child should have a solid self-concept and sense of competency, and not be unduly threatened by new or difficult tasks.
10. A child should be able to express herself verbally so that she can indicate needs and carry on reciprocal conversations. Examples are: baby talk should be given up; sentence structure should be basically grammatically correct; should be able to participate in group discussions.
11. A child must be able to *retain information*.
12. A child should be *socially mature*. This includes daily living skills, self-help skills, tasks around the home, school, and neighborhood, and socialization skills (not requiring an adult to help in solving all problems).
13. Developmental levels should be commensurate with chronological age. For example:
 - Language (expressive and receptive): be able to answer questions about age, birth date, siblings etc.
 - Fine motor: print first name, copy a square, cross, circle, draw a person. Handedness is usually established by age 5.
 - Perceptual skills: ability to remember and differentiate forms, simple puzzles, etc.
 - Memory: verbal and nonverbal experience.
 - Conceptual: ability to classify and generalize colors, animals, shapes, etc.
 - Gross motor: stand on one foot, hop, walk a straight line, balance, etc.

Significant deficits in any area should be evaluated.



Aid for Tsunami Victims

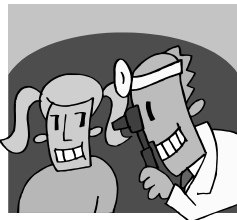
Many thanks to the parents of Ava and Fallon King for their generous donation of Steeler playoff tickets raffled off to raise funds for the tsunami victims in South Asia. So far we have raised over \$2000.00 that we will send to the Episcopal Relief and Development program! This program is currently providing assistance to children and families in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Somalia, Indonesia, and Thailand who have suffered devastating losses due to the December 26th tsunami. Specifically, so far ERD has sent \$100,000. USD to Sri Lanka, \$50,000. USD to the Church of North India to give assistance to Nicobar and Anadaman Islands, \$50,000. USD to the Church of South India to give aid to Chennai/Madras, \$50,000.USD to Colombo, Ceylon, and \$25,000.USD to Christ Church, Bangkok, Thailand to aid those is southern Thailand. Thanks to everyone who bought raffle tickets so that we can send the funds off to help continue the effort to provide aid to these people.

Valentines Day

Please check with your child's teacher before planning valentines. In any event, **do not** put the name of the recipient on the outside of the envelope. Simply include the correct number of cards for everyone in your child's class. Names on envelopes add confusion to a hectic day and make it very difficult for the teacher. This is not only the case for the very young children who cannot read names, but even the older children who can read names tend to become confused in the midst of the excitement! Finally – *Please – no candy in the valentine cards...*

Snow Days

Be sure to listen to KDKA and WTAE for snow closing information. The Nursery School usually doesn't close when the Mt. Lebanon schools are delayed, as this has more to do with children walking on sidewalks that may not have been cleared of snow. If the Mt. Lebanon Schools are closed the Nursery School is generally closed. We also have a phone chain that your child's teacher will initiate for each class when school is canceled. Sometimes the phone chain is ineffective, so listen to the radio or TV if it is snowing. Most important of all, whether we close or not – use common sense. This is preschool, your child will not receive an unexcused absence if they are not present. If you are not comfortable driving on the roads, please do not take chance



Speech and Hearing Screening

On January 24 – 28 Easter Seals will be offering a speech and hearing screening for the children here at St. Paul's. Pam Sigfried is the speech and hearing pathologist who will be administering the screening. The cost will be \$12.00 per child. You will be receiving further information including a permission form in the next few weeks from Easter Seals.

This is an excellent opportunity to get speech and hearing help for those children who need it at an early stage of their development. It is strongly recommended by Easter Seals that all preschoolers be screened so as not to overlook potential problems. Written results will be supplied to parents, and will include any recommendations for further evaluation if needed.

Thanks to the Parents and Children of St. Paul's from Mindy

Thank you to all of the kind families of St. Paul's Nursery School who donated hats, mittens, gloves and scarves to the *Tree of Hope*. Jane and I were able to deliver 2 large boxes filled with warmth to children of Pittsburgh who have lost a loved one to a crime. Adriene Young, founder of the organization, distributed our donations at the Christmas Party for the children and wrote to thank us for our generosity. Thank you for making it possible.



Also, on the bulletin board in the Big Room, there is a large painting that the children from Farrell Talarico's Head Start class painted for us thanking us for the board books that many of you donated. The children were all thrilled with their classroom's new books!

Many thanks for all of your help and cooperation during a very busy time of the year!

Room 6 disaster

Room 6 is flooded once again! Susan Bicket and I met with the Sr. Warden (Eric Linn) and plumbers yesterday. The church is going to do some major work on that room which includes more french drains, a sump pump, and a larger drainage system. It should do the trick – it will be costly to the church, but it must be done. Last year when we had the same problem they tried some less costly solutions, but obviously they did not work. Hopefully we will be back in that room by early February at the latest. Thanks to all of you and your children for being so flexible about our flooding.



Mayfair Picnic

This year Mayfair is going to be combined with our yearend picnic on the afternoon of Saturday, May 21st. Because the parents worked so hard on our fall fundraiser and we did so well, we don't really need to use Mayfair as a fundraiser any more. As a result, Mayfair will be combined with the picnic. We will still have the train ride, pony rides, moon bounce, and all of the little games with "prizes." Families can bring a picnic lunch and during that time your children can participate in all of the fun Mayfair activities. We will also include the plant sale, so you will have the opportunity to purchase plants the day of Mayfair. We will offer pre-orders as in the past, but for those who would simply like to purchase plants the day of Mayfair, a limited selection will be available. And finally, as a thank you from the staff, our teachers have offered to run the little games. So plan to bring your family for a fun afternoon of games, prizes, rides, a picnic, and a time to socialize with families and staff in order to say goodbye to another school year. It should be a fun day for everyone!

Laverne Duffy (412-344-2204) and Rosetta Coco (412-341-6557) are co-chairing Mayfair this year, so if you have suggestions or would like to get involved give them a call.

Mark Your Calendar For St. Paul's Activities and Events



January 2005



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 New Year's Day!
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 MLK Day No School 	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 Registration for 2005-2006 School year begins.	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 Last day of Registration for the 2005-2006 school year.					No School Friday, February 18. Staff Inservice Day.

