

Kindergarten roundup is coming to Sisters

By Edie Jones
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Kindergarten Roundup, an important event for the five-year-olds in Sisters, is set for Thursday, May 5, at 9:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. This is one of those milestones that marks the beginning of a special journey – the journey into the formal education of our youngest citizens. To register, parents need to call 541-549-8981.

Of course, a lot of education has been happening during the years building up to this time, through family outings, preschool experiences, day-care and every relationship each child has known. Much of the success of what is to come will depend on the quality of the “education” during those formative years.

Hopefully, by the time a child reaches kindergarten they will have developed an enthusiasm toward learning, have solid oral-language skills, can pay attention and listen, possess a desire to be independent, plays well with other children, can use a pencil easily and cut with scissors, and knows basic letters and numbers. Sounds

like a lot.

It is, but it’s quite doable by taking everyday experiences and consciously thinking about how they fit into the picture. If there are children attending the event that aren’t quite “up to snuff” in each of the areas, there’s still time to get ready, so by day one of the school year they can be off and running.

Let’s take “enthusiasm toward learning.” Just by setting time aside each day to investigate the world, answer endless questions, and point out what’s in their surroundings, parents can create that enthusiasm. When watching how things work, children begin to explore science skills — forming a hypothesis, testing it out, and coming up with questions and theories. All of that builds curiosity and takes them that much closer to being ready for kindergarten.

The way to help kids become solid in oral-language skills may seem obvious, but it doesn’t always happen. All parents talk to their kids. Taking time to notice how you talk and what you talk about makes a big difference. It’s important that preschoolers hear lots of

descriptive adjectives, that they are exposed to lots of different ideas and that they are encouraged to express themselves. The more words kids hear and understand, the better their vocabulary. So, taking time to read and discuss lots of different books, using “sophisticated” language and explaining what it means, has a big impact.

One of the best predictors of later reading success is a well-developed oral vocabulary. During the preschool years children learn five to six new words a day, retaining those they hear used in several different context and conversations. So, parents, make plans to engage your youngsters in lots of meaningful discussion.

Listening is one of the most important skills a child needs when starting kindergarten. It’s a skill that develops by hearing lots of stories, playing games that have directions and rules, and by engaging in conversation. Don’t overlook the library and all it has to offer. The more exposure a child has to “having to listen” the better the skill develops.

When reading to your child be animated and fun,

use lots of different voices, and ask questions like, “Why do you think that happened?” or “Have you ever felt that way? Tell me about it.” Invite your kids to clap or stomp or dance to rhyming words and let them finish sentences for stories they know. Help them sound out letters they see written, so when reading begins to happen they will have an idea what sounds letters make.

All of the other skills mentioned (becoming independent, knowing what’s socially acceptable, using pencils and cutting, and knowing basic letters and numbers) are developed through experience. If there’s any one of them that is lacking, be sure your child has concentrated time developing them.

This doesn’t mean quizzing, flash cards, workbooks or phonics kits. Whatever you do, make it fun. Otherwise, the learning that is happening will be stressful and take your child in the wrong direction for loving school.

In talking to the kindergarten teachers at Sisters Elementary School it is evident that kindergarten

has changed. First of all, it is now a mandated all-day experience. That day is full of learning! Learning to read, understand numbers and math, geometry, P.E., art, music and even Chinese. And, of course there’s recess (several during each day), snacks, lunch, science projects and time for play and creativity. Yes, there still is some (not much) time allowed for play kitchens, block play, Legos, trains, trucks and all of those things we use to think were part of kindergarten.

When the teachers were asked what’s most changed they replied it is probably expectations of what the child is able to do. However, with reading specialists, special-education teachers and collaboration between the three kindergarten teachers, each child is considered as an individual, with efforts to provide for their individual needs. The hope is that the experience will be free of stress, and that the kids will know the school is a caring place.

In the meantime, between now and that first day of school, the message is to relax, and enjoy your child.

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