

Characteristics of Children Entering Kindergarten



The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) helps ensure that children in Washington get a great start in kindergarten.

WaKIDS is a way to:

Welcome families to school. At the beginning of the school year, teachers meet with each kindergarten family to get to know them and learn about the student’s interests and needs.

Learn about children’s strengths. In the first weeks of school, the teacher observes each student during the course of a normal school day to learn about his or her strengths in six areas of development. Understanding what children already know and can do enables teachers to plan activities that will help them take the next steps in their development. Teachers can also use the information they gather to help parents understand what their children’s strengths are and how to support their development and learning at home.

Share information with Pre-kindergarten communities. After the fall observations take place, staff from early learning programs and elementary schools meet to learn about the strengths of the region’s kindergartners. In this way, communities can better meet the needs of young children and create smooth transitions for families.

Each child develops at his or her own pace and will have different levels of skills upon entering kindergarten. Some children may be very skilled in one area, but not as skilled in another. Parents can support their children’s development by engaging them in conversations, asking them to describe what they are doing, helping them make new friends, and doing things together, such as playing, reading, cooking, painting, working with sand, running, and climbing.¹

WaKIDS teachers will be observing your child to evaluate his or her mastery of the skills outlined in the following table. These are some of the skills that children entering kindergarten are expected to have. Teachers welcome learning about your child’s unique talents and will provide opportunities for your child to continue to develop the skills needed to be successful in the classroom.

¹ For more information about children’s development, contact the Department of Early Learning for a copy of the Early Learning and Development Guidelines in English or Spanish.

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Area: Social–Emotional

- Your child is beginning to look at a situation differently or delay gratification.
 - For example, when all the puzzles are being used, your child might look for another activity.
- Your child is beginning to manage classroom rules, routines, and transitions with occasional reminders.
- Your child is beginning to demonstrate confidence in meeting his/her own needs.
 - For example, he or she might wash hands before eating.
- Your child is beginning to interact with classmates in different ways, and for differing amounts of time.
 - For example, your child might be able to easily join other children at play, and play cooperatively.
- Your child is beginning to initiate sharing of materials.
 - For example, your child may occasionally invite another child to pull the wagon with her.
- Your child will begin to suggest solutions to social problems.
 - For example, your child may ask his teacher to make a waiting list to use the new microscope.

Area: Physical

- Your child keeps getting better at movement skills, such as jumping, running, and climbing.
- Your child is able to walk forward along a sandbox edge, watching his or her feet, and/or jump off a low step, landing on two feet.
- Your child is able to use his or her hands and fingers in a variety of ways, such as stringing beads, holding writing utensils properly, and connecting blocks and puzzles.
- Your child is able to use writing tools.
 - He or she may hold pencils, pens, crayons, or other drawing and writing tools but he or she may hold them too close to one end.

Area: Language

- Your child is able to respond appropriately to specific vocabulary and simple statements, questions and stories.
 - For example, your child might find his favorite illustration in a book when asked.
- Your child is able to follow directions of two or more steps that relate to familiar objects and experiences.
 - For example, your child may wash and dry his hands after being reminded about the hand-washing routine.
- Your child may be able to speak so he or she is understood by most familiar people and sometimes by a visitor to the classroom. Your child uses words correctly in most cases.
 - For example, your child might say, “I saw ants and a hoppergrass (grasshopper).”
- Your child is able to engage in short conversations and is beginning to engage in lengthier conversations.
 - Your child may maintain the conversation by repeating what the other person says or by asking questions.

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Area: Cognitive

- Your child is beginning to sustain his or her attention on an interesting task, ignoring most distractions and interruptions.
 - For example, your child might focus on making a sign for a building while other children are rolling cars down a ramp nearby.
- Your child is beginning to plan and pursue a variety of challenging tasks (for example, working with others to learn how to use a new software program).
- Your child is able to ask for a solution and use it (for example, asking another child to hold his cup while he or she pours).
- Your child is starting to solve problems without having to try every possibility (for example, telling another child, "Put the big block down first, or the tower will fall down.").
- Your child is able to remember and name at least one or two objects that are taken away while playing "*What's Missing?*" and may be able to remember and name more.
- Your child can group objects by using a single characteristic such as shape, size, or color (for example, put all the blue things together).
- Your child may be able to group objects by using two or more characteristics (such as shape *and* color, or size *and* shape).
 - For example, your child might sort buttons and say something like, "These buttons are blue, and these are red," and is learning to re-sort the buttons into groups of big and little buttons with adult support.
- Your child is beginning to be able to plan and then use drawings, constructions, movement and dramatizations to represent ideas.
 - For example, your child might say, "Let's pretend to be the seeds growing like in the book."

Area: Literacy

- Your child shows awareness of language sounds (e.g., rhyming, and hearing the beginning and ending sounds of words).
 - For example, when asked what rhymes with "cat," your child might say, "rat, sat, gat." (The words may not be real but they do, in fact, rhyme.)
- Your child can identify short word sounds.
 - For example, your child is able to join in clapping each word while chanting, "I like ice cream," and is beginning to be able to clap each syllable of a name, such as "Tri-na."
- Your child is able to recognize and name a few letters in his or her own name and is learning how to recognize and name as many as 10 letters, especially those in his or her own name.
- Your child is learning how to identify the sounds of a few letters.
- Your child understands that text is meaningful and can be read.
 - For example, your child can point to the text on the page when pretending to read, and move his or her finger left to right, continuing down the page.
- Your child is able to pretend to read, using some of the language from the text, and describes the action across pages, using pictures to order the events. He or she may need prompts from adults.
- Your child is able to write some letters correctly and some letters in unconventional order.
 - Your child may write his or her name, but he/she may spell other words incorrectly.

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Area: Mathematics

- Your child is able to count to 10, and counts up to 5 objects to understand how many objects there are.
 - Your child may be beginning to count to 20, count 10–20 objects accurately, know that the last number states how many in all, and tell what number comes next in order when counting from 1–10.
 - Your child is able to combine and separate up to five objects and describe the parts, and can recognize the number of up to five objects instantly.
 - For example, your child may say, “I have four cubes. Two are red and two are blue.”
 - Your child is able to explain, “That’s a 3, and there are three puppies on this page.”
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- Your child is able to identify basic two-dimensional shapes “This is a triangle because it has three sides,” and is moving toward being able to describe three-dimensional shapes, “It’s a ball because it rolls.”

Note: *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® online was selected in 2011 as the kindergarten entry assessment for Washington State. It is a Web-based assessment tool that contains progressions of development and learning typical of the early years and predictive of school readiness. Teachers use *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® to observe the characteristics of children identified in this flyer.

Note: For WaKIDS, in all areas except language and literacy, children may demonstrate their abilities in their home languages. For example, if a child is able to count to 20 in Spanish or Russian, it is fine for the teacher to evaluate this math ability in the child’s home language.

Although children will be asked to demonstrate their language and literacy skills in English (except for students enrolled in Spanish immersion classes), families should continue to use their home language and English to support their children’s development.