

Centers in Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a time for young children to build on their natural curiosity about the world around them, socialize with their peers in large and small groups, explore carefully organized learning centers, and develop foundational skills in age and stage appropriate ways.

Kindergarten is an introduction to formal schooling for young children; and it is important that the classroom environment, schedule and experiences are based on developmentally appropriate practices, research-based curricula and culturally relevant materials. This guidance document will focus on the use of centers in Kindergarten.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has a position statement and several publications that define, describe and expound on the principles and guidelines of developmentally appropriate practices. Key messages of their position statement are listed at: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/KeyMessages.pdf>. The NJ Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education has also developed various guidance documents, resources and modules to support developmentally appropriate practices in Kindergarten classrooms, which are available on our [website](#). "The [New Jersey Kindergarten Implementation Guidelines](#) (NJKIG) are designed to give administrators, teachers and teacher educators guidance and resources to effectively implement the components of a high-quality kindergarten program" (p.5, NJKIG).

Young children learn best through interacting and engaging with their peers and teachers in learning centers, through open ended activities, and hands-on experiences with a wide variety of materials. The use of workbooks, dittos, rote activities and a focus on isolated and discrete skills should not be part of a kindergarten program. These activities are not based on how young children learn, and they do not constitute an "academic" kindergarten; instead they are indicative of an inappropriate kindergarten. The goal of Kindergarten is not to get the children ready for "the test" – it should be to provide them with stimulating and exciting hands-on, open ended experiences that foster their self-esteem, develop their independence and increase their knowledge of foundational academic skills, which are the building blocks to future academic success.

The Kindergarten day should include an extended time for intentional play in various learning centers to support and facilitate intentional play as the primary medium for learning and development. This time of day is generally referred to as Choice time or Center time. This should consist of at least one hour of uninterrupted play in carefully prepared centers. The materials in each center should be purposefully chosen to make connections to children's background and interests and to support and develop skills and concepts in each of the learning domains. Materials should be rotated on a regular basis to support various thematic units or

studies and to build upon young children's emerging interests and understandings.

These learning centers should consist of: dramatic play, blocks, art, library (literacy materials and writing), manipulatives (math & fine-motor), discovery (science), sand, water, and computers. These centers should be open and available daily for an extended period of time to allow open exploration with materials, along with guiding questions from teachers that scaffold children's learning. For detailed information on each center and related materials, refer to the [Kindergarten Implementation Guidelines](#).