

EARLY CHILDHOOD

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL READINESS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS | BRIEF 3

WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

Young children entering pre-kindergarten and kindergarten have diverse backgrounds and experiences. For many children, families and caregivers, the movement from home or early learning centers to public pre-kindergarten and kindergarten represents a significant milestone. A child's transition from home or early education program to a new learning environment can be exciting and stressful at the same time.

All children deserve to feel accepted and respected and to know they are celebrated. Diversity is a complex subject that includes race, ethnicity, culture, language, socioeconomic status, cognitive and physical ability and differences in early education experiences. As schools support young children when they move into the early elementary grades, it is important to consider their differences as strengths and recognize that diversity is present in all children.

Young learners are unique in their growth and development and require developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction and assessment that provides exploration, inquiry and play-based learning opportunities. They may be English learners, students with disabilities or advanced abilities, and children of diverse races and ethnicities.

WHY IT MATTERS

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) is committed to quality early childhood programs, in partnership with families, to enable all children to have a strong start and reach their full potential.

The core of a strong school start and ease of transitions lies in intentionality. Teachers make best decisions for children when they:

- Understand child development and learning
- Know what is best and appropriate for individual children
- Know what is culturally important
 - Focus on early intervention, language supports, wraparound services and other developmentally appropriate resources.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Recognize that all children have the ability to learn.

Assess and find ways to narrow and close identified learning and opportunity gaps.

Provide all children with experiences that embrace their uniqueness and respect their differences to help prepare them for a diverse world.

Celebrate student diversity and leverage their abilities and backgrounds to make school a safe, supportive, engaging environment.

Communicate early and continue with ongoing, multiple opportunities for children and their families/caregivers to connect with the school.

Provide opportunities to develop children's ability to interact with others and their capacity to self-regulate.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does the school recognize and celebrate the diversity of early learners and their families and caregivers?
- What practices are in place for families and caregivers to share information about the learning experiences their children engaged in prior to entering school and the support structure their children need?
- How does the early childhood curriculum integrate the knowledge and traditions of diverse cultures?
- How do instructional practices reflect an understanding of how culture may influence children's learning and engagement?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Physical, cognitive, social and emotional development are essential ingredients of a strong and successful school start – and this applies not just to children but to communities, families and schools. Meeting the diverse needs of children and their families and caregivers requires:

- Creating a learning continuum for all young children to develop and learn at their own pace.
- Working with families as critical partners with transitions and educational experiences for young children.
- Recognizing young learners are unique in their growth and development.
- Offering a variety of community resources that support early growth and development.

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