

# Prekindergarten Essentials

## Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines





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Thanks to the many Saskatchewan early learning programs that submitted the photos used in this booklet.

The policy and guidelines outlined in this document complement the following ministry documents:

- *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (2013)
- *Essential Learning Experiences For Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Olds-Into Practice Booklet* (2015)
- *Family Engagement in Prekindergarten – A Resource Guide for Prekindergarten Teachers and Associates* (2012)
- *Leading for Change - Into Practice Booklet* (2008)
- *Creating Early Learning Environments - Into Practice Booklet* (2009)

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*This icon appears throughout the document to provide links or additional information.*

# Prekindergarten Framework

Research and experience demonstrate that high quality early learning programs contribute to improved social skills, better health and higher self-esteem in children. These improvements often lead to increased school success and less likelihood of costly interventions later in life (TD Economics, 2012). Families may access early learning through:

- licensed family child care homes;
- licensed child care centres;
- community preschools;
- Aboriginal HeadStart programs;
- KidsFirst programs;
- public libraries;
- Family Resource Centres;
- Prekindergarten; or,
- Early Childhood Intervention Programs (ECIP).

Each of these options has a unique focus and level of intervention.

In collaboration with school divisions, the Ministry of Education introduced the Prekindergarten program in the province's 26 community schools in 1996-97. In 2017, there were 316 ministry funded programs across the province. The ministry provides funding, program and policy guidelines and consultative support. School divisions hire staff, select children and operate the program.

Saskatchewan's Prekindergarten program enhances the ability of communities and school divisions to provide early educational supports for young children. The program is designed for three-and four-year-old children living in vulnerable circumstances and/or experiencing developmental delays who are not able to access other early learning programs.

This document outlines the vision, principles and key elements that have proven effective in nurturing success in school and life for three-and four-year-old children. It is designed to help teachers, associates and administrators increase their understanding of the Prekindergarten program. There is a section at the end of this document for administrators to better understand their role and responsibility for Prekindergarten.



A list of other booklets, websites and professional development opportunities that support the early learning sector, including Prekindergarten, are available in the appendices of this booklet.



**Ideally, the life of a child is full of wonder, excitement and exploration. However, some families may require additional support to provide a stimulating environment and appropriate supports during the critical stage of early childhood. Schools can play an important role in providing supports to children and their families (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008a).**

## Vision for Prekindergarten

Saskatchewan's Prekindergarten program supports young children's holistic development by using effective educational practices to lay the foundation for school success and lifelong learning. It provides a caring, developmentally and culturally responsive program. The focus is on the healthy development of the whole child; social-emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually. Family members and caregivers are active participants in children's development and are invited to be part of meaningful family engagement opportunities including social and health supports as required. Prekindergarten is the shared responsibility of school divisions, community agencies, family members and the Ministry of Education.

**A holistic approach is foundational to the Prekindergarten program. This means that all aspects of a child's life are considered within the program – the family, the community and his/her language, culture, social-emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008a).**

# Goals for Prekindergarten

## 1. School and Life Success for Children

Children are better able to achieve their full potential and to succeed in school and in life when appropriate development opportunities and supports are provided for them at an early age.

## 2. High Quality Programming

Prekindergarten is holistic, caring, developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive. It is delivered in a safe and caring environment that provides young children with the physical, social-emotional, intellectual and spiritual supports they require.

## 3. Family Engagement and Learning

By participating in the Prekindergarten program, families can develop a good relationship with educators. They also make connections with other families and gain a deeper understanding of their role in supporting their child's development. They are offered opportunities to provide input, actively participate in the program and share their family knowledge, which should be reflected in the program.

**Prekindergarten programs stress the uniqueness of each individual child's trajectory of development and the importance of self-selected, experimental activities (Molnar, 1991).**

# Principles and Strategies

## 1. Child-Centred and Family Focused

Children are the heart of the Prekindergarten program. Their positive development is the focus of Prekindergarten. Emphasis is on the holistic development of the child, providing balanced opportunities for them to develop social-emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually. Children are best served when families are fully engaged with their child's learning.

## 2. Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Teachers and associates collaborate with family members, parent groups and community agencies to strengthen the learning program and to provide the range of supports children need. Teachers recognize the significant and ongoing responsibility of families for the development and well-being of their children. Families should be encouraged to share their knowledge in the classroom.

### **3. Equity and Respect for Diversity**

The unique potential, cultural heritage, languages, gender, life experience and capabilities of each child is respected and reflected in Prekindergarten. The belief that each child is worthy of respect and acceptance is an important part of Prekindergarten.

### **4. Preventive and Responsive**

Prekindergarten is designed to anticipate and offer supports to young children that can reduce the impact of vulnerabilities and the development of significant challenges that may later require major intervention. The program provides a safe, nurturing environment that is responsive to the unique and varied needs of each child. A comprehensive range of supports and services is provided in a coordinated and integrated manner to holistically meet the needs of children and their families.

### **5. Continuous Learning**

Learning begins prenatally and continues through life. Learning and development are enhanced by a strong foundation established early in life.

### **6. Accountability**

Teachers, associates, families, school councils and school divisions each have a role in ensuring that the Prekindergarten program meets the needs of children, preparing them to succeed. There is continuous assessment of the program's effectiveness in meeting its objectives and ensuring that the very best early learning practices are implemented.



Prekindergarten incorporates best practices from research, literature and practical experience about early childhood learning and the needs of developing children. The box below provides a brief description of Saskatchewan's Prekindergarten Program.

### **Prekindergarten offers opportunities for:**

- children in mixed age groups (3- & 4- year-olds) to be engaged while they actively explore their environment through the provision of high quality materials and experiences;
- children to build competencies through interactions that support holistic development;
- children to have access to specialized education supports as required;
- teachers to better understand a child by getting to know the family;
- teachers and associates to experience the satisfaction of helping young children explore and understand their world;
- administrators to build relationships with children and families early on and to take on an exciting challenge by supporting innovative approaches to learning;
- families to gain greater understanding and the knowledge of how their children learn and how best to support them; and,
- community members to participate in and support a quality program for young children.



# Prekindergarten Program

## In the Classroom

### Foundational Documents

The documents that guide the focus of the learning program for Prekindergarten are: *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*, (2013) and *Essential Learning Experiences*, (2015).

To support a deeper understanding of Prekindergarten documents, the ministry provides professional development opportunities online and in person. Information can be found by searching [www.saskatchewan.ca](http://www.saskatchewan.ca). Other support resources and key documents can be found at  
<https://earlylearning.edonline.sk.ca>.

### The Learning Environment: Indoors and Outdoors

A prepared, intentional environment is essential to a quality program. The arrangement and organization of the space helps children engage with each other and the learning materials. The space should be organized, clutter free and look pleasing.



Children will interact in the learning environment based on choices they make and opportunities the educators provide. The way children play and interact in the Prekindergarten classroom can give the educators important information about how to adapt or modify the space to help them continue developing and keep up with students' ever-changing interests.

**The emphasis is on creating an environment where children are actively involved in learning through play. This reflects the understanding that the more direct involvement young children have with their learning activities, the more effectively they learn (Beaty, 1992).**

The teacher, associate (an education assistant who has specialized knowledge about early learning) and children are partners in an emergent learning process. The teacher and associate create a learning environment that will spark curiosity and wonder in the children. By using continuous and authentic assessment, the educators should make adaptations to the learning environment and create learning opportunities that both reflect and support the children's development. This will help make sure that the children's abilities and interests match the opportunities provided for them.

"Children benefit from rich and stimulating play choices outdoors as well as indoors. Finding the balance between the indoor activities and outdoor explorations is part of a purposeful planning process. While climate and weather conditions can affect access to outdoor experiences, it is also possible to bring the natural world into the indoor space. Mixing natural with commercial or recycled resources enhances both settings with a variety of materials and appealing smells, colours, sounds and textures" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009a).



For more information on creating an early learning environment please see:

- *Creating Early Learning Environments*,  
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=76855>.
- *Developmental Benefits of Plants in the Playground*,  
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=76845>.
- *Native Plants-Playground and their Traditional Uses*,  
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=76844>.
- *Outdoor Learning Environments-presentation*,  
<http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=76846>.



## Developing the Learning Program

The following are suggestions for the Prekindergarten team to consider in creating a learning program that is centred on children's development, interests and preferences:

- Play and explore with materials before introducing them to the classroom to ensure that they are open-ended and appropriate.
- Provide children with many opportunities and encourage them to make their own choices. It may be necessary to demonstrate the play possibilities in an experiential centre or to simply observe children until they have achieved their own comfort.
- Encourage children to provide ideas for investigations, activities, experiments, projects and the use of materials.
- Be open and willing to accept suggestions of projects or other ideas from the children.
- Acknowledge and celebrate when children have discovered new ways of playing in a centre, a creative or different interpretation or a learning that they can share.

## The Importance of Play

Play is a key component of Prekindergarten. Play in early childhood settings is defined as:

- enjoyable;
- intrinsically motivating;
- allowing for child choice/self-directed;
- creative/imaginative;
- valuing process over product (participation in the activity is more important than the result);
- open-ended (there are multiple possibilities not only one ‘right’ way to complete the activity); and,
- active/engaging.

Play has many forms and is sometimes negatively viewed as chaos in the absence of supervision, but this is not the type of play that occurs in high quality early learning programs. Prekindergarten teachers see children as active participants in their own learning, capable of meaningful contributions and decision making. The teacher acts with intent, using their professional knowledge to carefully prepare the learning environment and reflects on observations and interactions to make informed decisions that will support and empower children as learners.

**“Given the evidence, CMEC believes in the intrinsic value and importance of play and its relationship to learning. Educators should intentionally plan and create challenging, dynamic, play-based learning opportunities” (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2012).**

Brain research confirms the importance of play in children’s development. Connections have been made between play and abilities such as memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, social skills and success in school (Copple & Bredenkamp, 2009).

Play is a building block for academic learning, not a detraction from it. In a high quality early learning program, children are intellectually engaged while they play. All young children learn best through active exploration and hands-on experiences. Children do this by interacting with the educators, visitors to the program, other children, material and experiences provided (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2005).

## **Prekindergarten from a Child's Perspective**

- My teachers know my name and are always happy to see me. They don't get upset if I'm late for school or if something happened.
- I come to play. There are lots of different things to play with, both inside and outside. I am able to play with other children.
- My teachers let me pick what to play with. I can explore, investigate and pretend with many materials.
- My teachers see when I work hard and are proud of me. They hang up some of the things I make or draw.
- My teachers come to my house to visit.
- There are little chairs and tables for me to sit at in the classroom. There are pictures of me and my family and my dog in the classroom, too.
- The teachers ask me what I like to do at home. Sometimes we can do those things in the classroom. They talk with me a lot.
- There are lots of books to look at. Some have people that look like me and some are in my language (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009b).

## **Adult - Child Interactions**

The quantity and quality of interactions between the adults (teacher, Prekindergarten associates, volunteers, support personnel) and the child has a profound impact on the child's feelings of belonging and his/her intellectual and social development (Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002).

"Positive interactions give children the message that they are good, valuable, competent, and appreciated for who they are and what they are able to do" (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2015).

## **Adult Interactions that support Children**

- Speak using a quiet, gentle voice.
- Use a respectful, caring tone of voice and attentive facial expressions and body language.
- Bend down to the child's level to talk.
- Call children by their first name and correctly pronounce children's names.
- Offer genuine praise for children's endeavours, efforts and successes.
- Ask meaningful questions that interest both you and the child.
- Give children time to think and respond.
- Comment realistically, but positively, about less than successful efforts.
- Talk patiently and privately (when possible) with a child about inappropriate behaviour.
- Take five turns back and forth in conversation with children. This allows oral sharing of information and feedback which builds language skills (Rhyner, Guenther, Pizur-Barnekow, Cashin & Chavie, 2012).
- Encourage interactions between peers as they are important and beneficial for children's learning and development. "Through peer interaction, children learn to: see things from another person's point of view, make compromises, resolve conflicts, share, collaborate and cooperate with others and negotiate and assert themselves" (Hanen, 2002, p.1).

## Daily Schedule

The Prekindergarten daily schedule should reflect a balance of:

- active and quiet times;
- child-led and educator-led activities;
- large and small group opportunities;
- indoor/outdoor activities; and,
- family and community engagement.

(Adapted from Government of Saskatchewan, 2008c)

While recognizing that young children feel secure with a certain amount of daily predictability, some key points to consider when developing schedules are:

- flexibility to accommodate children's exploration, small group projects and unplanned events that capture the children's curiosity;
- a minimum of 60 – 90 minutes of uninterrupted experiential play and interaction. This block of time gives the teacher and associate opportunity to interact with individual children or small groups of children, to observe, document, assess and scaffold children's learning;
- language and literacy, numeracy and scientific exploration should be incorporated throughout the environment and experiential centres;
- create balance by keeping transitions and interruptions of children's activities to a minimum;
- be aware of age and development levels of the children; and,
- plan opportunities for family engagement and relationship building, such as the beginning and end of the day.

A visual schedule, using pictures and words, can help children to know what happens next and begin to learn sequencing. It is easy to make changes to the schedule if required so children are prepared and are not surprised by unexpected transitions.



Further information on daily schedules is available in the audio PowerPoint presentation, *Introduction to Prekindergarten* on [www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca) and is discussed in the Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Basics workshop provided by the Ministry of Education. Samples of daily schedules can be found in the Appendices on pages 31 and 32.



# Additional Key Elements of the Prekindergarten Program

## Understanding and Assessing Child Development

"Children move through stages of development as they mature. The rate of development varies from one child to another. Development is influenced by the experiences children have, as well as by hereditary factors. Children may grow rapidly in one area and more slowly in another. The direction of development is from general to specific, from dependence toward independence and interdependence, and from gross motor control to fine motor control" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2010).



There is a list of developmental milestones in the appendices of this document. For a deeper understanding of how to support the holistic development for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds refer to *Essential Learning Experiences*, [http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/89611-Essential\\_Learning\\_Experiences.pdf](http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/89611-Essential_Learning_Experiences.pdf).

Assessing child development plays a critical role in the ongoing improvement of the Prekindergarten program. Assessment information will help educators understand the children's interests, abilities and ways of thinking and doing. Educators can adapt the learning environment and instructional practices based on this information.

When children first begin to participate in Prekindergarten they need some time to adjust to the new setting, establish relationships with the staff and develop a level of comfort and trust. Only after this period of time, which will vary among children, will it be effective to assess the child's developmental level.

The widest range of child development in a school program occurs during the preschool years. Sometimes changes occur rapidly and may be observable. Other times it may seem that development is not occurring. This is why it is important that teachers and associates continuously record their observations of the children's development over a period of months. By doing this, even subtle changes will be noted.

The purpose of assessment and evaluation of child development is to determine what children do, why they do it and how to scaffold their learning. The teacher and associate assess the children by watching them actively engaged in developmentally appropriate activities, long-term projects and interactions with peers and adults.

If the family or teacher have concerns about a child's development or behaviour, careful consideration of the learning environments as well as teacher expectations need to be explored. The program should be tailored to meet the uniqueness of the child. If after careful observation, questions still remain, further supports/professionals may be of assistance in providing information to guide differentiated instructional strategies.



The resource sheets on pages 36 and 37 in the appendices offers more information on developmentally appropriate guidelines for assessing children.

## Family Engagement

Family engagement is an important part of Prekindergarten and for children's learning. Prekindergarten staff should actively encourage family members to participate, advocate and lead in the education and development of their children. Teachers are expected to:

- build positive relationships with all families;
- acknowledge, understand and value family expertise and diversity; and,
- help families understand early childhood development (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012).

This focus on family engagement reflects the importance of the family in the development of children. Research has demonstrated the significant benefits of parent engagement in children's learning, ranging from improved intellectual functioning to greater school success. Educators also benefit from direct contact with families, gaining greater knowledge and understanding of the children, their families and the communities in which they teach. For many vulnerable children, parent and family engagement is the single most important factor in their school success.

**"The benefits of family-teacher partnerships for children, teachers and families make the learning, uncertainty and challenges of building and nurturing those partnerships well worth the effort" (Keyser, 2006).**

**Home visits have been critical in securing the connection already built by daily contact with the families in the classroom. The home visit helped us to better understand the family context of our students. I believe it helped the families to see that we really care about the health and well-being of the child and it gave them the opportunity to address any questions or concerns that are too private to discuss openly in a busy classroom (*Family Engagement in Prekindergarten*, 2012).**





Details regarding effective family engagement, including information on home visits, are available in the following document: *Family Engagement in Prekindergarten*, <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/82935-family-engagement-booklet%20web.pdf>.

## Connections to Community Services and Resources

Partnering with community services can help Prekindergarten programs meet the needs of children in a holistic way. Supports to meet many of the possible needs of children are available outside the school. Services from health, mental health, social services, justice and recreation professionals as well as supports from the community such as public libraries, churches, service clubs and businesses can contribute to meeting the needs of a child. By partnering with key service providers in the community, Prekindergarten children can be offered a full range of supports that are coordinated and appropriate.

Examples of integrated community services for Prekindergarten children include:

- access to public health programs such as immunizations, hearing and vision screening for children and child health education programs for the parents;
- mental health supports for children and families;
- dental hygienist services for dental screening;
- public library;
- family resource centres; and/or,
- cultural programs such as an Elders program or involvement with programs for new Canadians.

Partnerships with community organizations can also provide:

- a source of expertise, unique experiences and opportunities for field trips;
- classroom enhancements for project and learning support;
- fundraising and other financial supports to the Prekindergarten;
- volunteers to assist with parenting education programming;
- clothing exchanges and winter clothing provision for children and families if needed;
- access to food and nutrition programs; and,
- transportation services when necessary.



*Saskatchewan's Early Years Plan 2016 - 2020*, <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/child-care/saskatchewans-early-years-plan>.

# Prekindergarten Operations

Quality Prekindergarten programs have:

- a qualified teacher and Prekindergarten associate;
- a low child/staff ratio;
- age of eligibility criteria;
- selection process for students;
- mixed-age groupings;
- consistent attendance;
- hours of operation; and,
- sufficient space.

## Qualified Teacher and Prekindergarten Associate

A qualified teacher who is knowledgeable and experienced in early learning is essential to a quality Prekindergarten program. Prekindergarten teachers have the ability to assess children's development and to provide programming that engages the child in learning, extends their knowledge and builds their confidence.

In addition to the teacher, each Prekindergarten classroom has a Prekindergarten associate. Associates provide key supports for the children and the learning program. The associate typically has an early childhood education (ECE) certificate or related training and has knowledge of the community. The associate provides a critical link between the program, families and the community.

In a successful Prekindergarten program, the teacher and associate use a team approach in the classroom. Collaborative working relationships are a strong predictor of high quality early learning programs.

## Low Child/Educator Ratio

A child to educator ratio of 8:1 provides opportunity for quality interaction, modelling and teaching. This allows teachers to provide developmentally appropriate programming, attend to the needs of children, support children's interests and have more time for interaction. When the child/educator ratio is low:

- the teacher has the opportunity to become more actively involved in activities with children and to respond to their needs;
- children are able to interact in small groups, create friendships and reduce behaviour challenges;
- teachers and children have more time to interact, which promotes social stimulation and teaching;

- teachers are able to support children to better regulate their emotions and behaviour; and,
- teachers and families have more opportunity to interact with one another (Canadian Child Care Federation, 1993, as cited in Doherty-Derkowski, 1995, Howes, Phillips & Whitebrook, 1992).

## Selection of Students

Due to the limited availability of Prekindergarten programs, children and their families are selected for the program to ensure the most vulnerable children are served. The school or school division usually receives applications for the program which are reviewed by a selection team to prioritize registration and waiting lists. A selection team may include the Prekindergarten teacher, principal, community school coordinator, social worker, public health or community nurse, speech language pathologist, a representative from *KidsFirst*, Early Child Intervention Program (ECIP) or from other organizations depending upon the nature of the community (e.g., immigrant organizations, First Nations/Métis educational authorities).

For the purpose of Prekindergarten, the Ministry of Education defines vulnerability broadly, prioritizing and giving preference to applicants with:

- low socio-economic status;
- referral from a government or community-based agency;
- social isolation or not having access to early learning programs or child care;
- family health care challenges;
- exposure to family trauma; and/or,
- delays in areas such as social-emotional, language and/or communication development.

In addition to multiple vulnerability factors, other selection considerations may include:

- balance within classroom, such as gender, age, abilities;
- refugee/immigrant families; and,
- family commitment to the program.

Every child who has been in the *KidsFirst* program and is eligible by age, should be offered a spot in Prekindergarten. Participation in *KidsFirst* is considered a high priority for selection. It is highly recommended that schools have a representative from *KidsFirst* on the selection committee to ensure the children and families from *KidsFirst* are included in the selection.

It is recommended that the school division implement a continual entry registration policy for the program, permitting new children to register whenever there is an opening during the school year to ensure vulnerable children are given an opportunity to access the program.



To support the selection committee there is a Sample Selection Criteria Rating Scale on page 46 in the resource sheets.

## **Age of Eligibility**

Prekindergarten primarily targets three- and four-year-old children although Kindergarten eligibility or family preferences may mean some five-year-olds are also served. The date of birth for eligibility will follow school division guidelines. Children with the greatest needs should have the opportunity for two years in the program, when possible.

## **Mixed-Age Groupings**

The Prekindergarten program is made up of mixed-age groupings of three- and four-year-old children. These groupings resemble family and neighbourhood groupings that historically have provided much of children's informal socialization and education. Today, many young children spend relatively little time in either family or neighbourhood settings and consequently are deprived of the learning made possible by mixed-age contact (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008a).

Researchers indicate that interacting in mixed-age groupings enhances children's social development and contributes to leadership and increased prosocial behaviours. As well, research on intellectual development suggests that children with similar but not identical knowledge and abilities stimulate each other's thinking and intellectual growth.

Mixed-age groupings allow some children to spend two years in the Prekindergarten program to get all of the benefits of continuity of care, building a strong relationship with the teacher, associate and peers.

Cooperative learning between children at different developmental stages benefits children both intellectually and socially. In addition, mixed-age groupings relax the learning environment and age-appropriate expectations (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005; Gerard, 2005; Edwards, Blaise& Hammer, 2009; Fosco, Schleser & Andal, 2004).

## **Consistent Attendance**

The school division, administrator and teacher should work together with families to encourage consistent attendance. You can encourage a high rate of attendance by:

- building a relationship with the family and making them feel welcome;
- acknowledging the role of families and incorporating their culture and beliefs into the program helps create a sense of belonging;
- taking photographs of the children regularly to demonstrate learning. When children know that there are special activities where a photograph will be taken, they are often excited to attend. This also seems to be a strong motivator for parents when they understand that they will eventually be able to keep the photographs;
- organizing special events such as educational tours, three-way conferences, gym nights, celebrations of learning, classroom visitors and documentation of children's work/projects;

- showing live and pre-recorded videos of the children as they interact in the classroom. This keeps parents motivated and children excited about being part of the Prekindergarten program; and,
- serving healthy food. This is especially effective when the children prepare the food, extend the invitation to family members and serve the snacks at school.

## Hours of Operation

The Ministry of Education recommends that each half-day program operate for a minimum of 12 hours per week (usually 4 days per week). This amount of time provides children with the opportunity to experience greater benefit from a quality program.

The Prekindergarten team uses the remainder of the time (5th day) to review observations, prepare documentation, plan, create invitations for learning, conduct home visits and/or participate in family engagement opportunities.

Each school division will determine the option that works best in each school and community, including the possibility of having evening or weekend events with families.

## Extended Blocks of Time for Play

Children need large blocks of time allocated for play and investigation during the Prekindergarten day. A daily block of a minimum of 60 to 90 minutes in a half day program is recommended for children to play at the experiential centres. Three- and four-year-old children can take up to 20 minutes to sit and observe other children, or to walk around the classroom and inspect materials at different experiential centres. After this initial exploration time, it is not unusual for children to become absorbed in play for 30 to 40 minutes. As well, an extended time period allows children to play at more than one experiential centre and allows time for small group projects and in-depth investigations.

## Sufficient and Appropriate Space

Children need sufficient physical space to ensure their safety and meet their programming needs. When determining the location of the Prekindergarten classroom, consider the following:

- sufficient window area for natural lighting – refer to The Child Care Regulations, 2015 on natural lighting (Sec. 57);
- minimum of 4 square metres of floor space for each child;
- easy access to washrooms (preferably in the classroom);
- ease of providing nutritional snacks;
- access to an outside space;
- access to a community room or room where family activities can take place; and,
- building and fire codes.

In most situations, some renovations are required to ensure the space meets the needs of the program. School division facility superintendents will have knowledge of building and fire codes and approval processes, as well as knowledge of Ministry of Education facility guidelines for Prekindergarten specifications.



# Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities outlined below are intended to describe what is needed from everyone involved for a Prekindergarten program to be a success. This outline describes expectations of the roles and responsibilities and provides flexibility for variations in contributions, capacities and roles from one program to another.

## Teacher

Prekindergarten teachers are committed to young children and have specialized knowledge about their learning needs. They take an innovative, flexible, cooperative and caring approach to teaching.

Teachers ideally hold professional qualifications with a focus on early childhood education or a related field. These qualifications support their understanding and ability to assess developmental levels in young children and create a learning environment that is developmentally appropriate. Teachers believe in the importance of family engagement and child-centred learning. The teacher is committed to working as a team with the associate.

**“We need a teacher (educator) who is sometimes the director, sometimes the set designer, sometimes the curtain, the backdrop and sometimes the prompter {...} who dispenses the paints and who is even the audience – the audience who watches, sometimes claps, sometimes remains silent, full of emotion” (Loris Malaguzzi, in Rinaldi, 2006, p. 73).**

The role of the teacher is to:

- obtain specialized knowledge in early childhood education;
- work in collaboration with the Prekindergarten associate to provide a caring, safe, enriched, culturally responsive learning program and stimulating environment that promotes holistic development;
- observe children, conduct assessments and share evaluations to provide individualized, developmentally appropriate program responses;
- document children’s learning, accomplishments and progress;
- establish and maintain close relationships with families, including home visits;
- host family engagement opportunities in the school and community in partnership with families;
- participate in diverse, multi-ethnic community events and establish mutual respect and trust with children and families; and,
- work with support professionals and participate in case planning to meet the needs of children.



For more information about the role of the educator see pages 13 – 21 of *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (2013), <http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=74066>.

## **Prekindergarten Associate**

The Prekindergarten associate works in partnership with the teacher to deliver a high quality Prekindergarten program in a warm, safe and culturally responsive environment. Where possible, the associate comes from the community in which the school is located, providing information about the culture and the community to help the teacher and other school staff become more aware of, and sensitive to, the cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the community.

The associate has completed Grade 12 and has a combination of experience and training in early childhood education. The position requires effective interpersonal and problem-solving skills, respect and affection for young children and an understanding and appreciation of the cultures and experiences of the children, their families and the community. Prekindergarten associates commit to working as part of the early learning team.

The role of the associate is to:

- work closely with the teacher in the development and delivery of the Prekindergarten program;
- participate in professional learning to enhance knowledge and skills;
- establish and maintain close relationships with family members, including participating in home visits and maintaining up-to-date knowledge of the families;
- assist in preparation of instructional materials and collecting resource material;
- support the documentation of learning (including observations, photographing children, recording children's words, describing children's actions);
- explore and learn with children in the experiential centres, providing stimulation, extending knowledge, listening and playing;
- participate in planning sessions with the teacher and student support services to coordinate supports for children; and,
- assist in the development and delivery of family engagement activities and initiatives.

## **Family Members**

Family members play a key role in the Prekindergarten program. Their involvement is encouraged and actively sought as it is critical to the educational well-being and development of their child.

The role of the family members may include:

- sharing information with the teacher and associate regarding their child's needs, interests and preferences;
- participating, when feasible, in the classroom. Families can assist by reading/telling stories, helping dress the children, taking them outside to play, helping with the experiential centres, listening to and playing with the children;
- sharing family knowledge, expertise and experiences;
- offering to share cultural knowledge and language;
- ensuring their child attends regularly;

- participating in family events/learning opportunities;
- providing input into decisions about the program; and,
- extending opportunities for their child's learning in the home.

## Administrators

Administrators have a key leadership role to play in the success of a Prekindergarten program. They work with all staff to create a welcoming atmosphere for Prekindergarten families. Prekindergarten families may have negative feelings and experiences with schools or are new to the school community. A welcoming atmosphere is essential to both the Prekindergarten classroom and school building.

Administrators should understand the principles of early learning and developmentally appropriate practice. This understanding allows the administrator to better support teachers and associates. Encouraging staff to pursue further early learning professional development will help them provide a quality Prekindergarten program.

The role of the administrator is to:

- collaborate in the decision-making process regarding student selection;
- encourage collaboration between the Prekindergarten teacher and associate;
- welcome Prekindergarten children, families and staff into the school;
- encourage collaboration between Prekindergarten and Kindergarten to allow the integration of early learning principles in the school;
- support and guide the Prekindergarten team to participate in professional development related to early learning;
- assist the Prekindergarten teacher in establishing community partnerships and connecting to community-based services;
- support the Prekindergarten team with assessment and evaluation, and reporting of children's development to families;
- visit the Prekindergarten classroom regularly to get to know the children and their families so they become familiar and comfortable with administration; and,
- promote Prekindergarten within the community.



Additional information for administrators can be found in the administrators section and resource sheets beginning on page 38.

## **Promoting Prekindergarten to the Community**

**In order for the Prekindergarten program to be effective, the community should be informed of the program's goals and objectives and any concerns or sensitivities should be addressed.**

**The community can be informed through:**

- **brochures or flyers;**
- **information in the school newsletter and on the school website;**
- **invitations for families to come to orientation meetings and to participate in various school events; and,**
- **invitations to the local media to attend Prekindergarten events.**

## **Community Members and Agencies**

Community members and agencies provide a variety of important supports, enabling the Prekindergarten program to meet the needs of the children and their families in a comprehensive, holistic manner. They include:

- human service agencies, such as the Ministry of Social Services;
- health services (public health, dental services, mental health and speech language services);
- local businesses;
- libraries;
- post-secondary training institutions;
- churches;
- service clubs;
- RCMP; and,
- community associations.

The role of community members and agencies can include:

- serving as a member of the selection committee for Prekindergarten;
- working with the teacher, school council and family members to provide a range of supports to meet the needs of the children and their families;
- respecting the values and rules of the school;
- providing learning opportunities for children and families; and,
- maintaining the confidentiality of student information.

## **Boards of Education**

Boards of education that administer Prekindergarten programs work in partnership with the provincial government, school division personnel, communities and families in the development, maintenance and evaluation of high quality Prekindergarten programs. School divisions provide direction and support to the program and staff.

## **Ministry of Education, Early Years Branch**

The Ministry of Education works in partnership with school divisions to provide the vision, policies, guidelines and funding support for Prekindergarten programs. The ministry collects data and evaluative information, preparing reviews and reports as needed. It maintains close links with the school divisions and provides professional development supports, consultation and advice upon request.

The role of the ministry is to:

- consult with school divisions to ensure high quality early learning programs;
- communicate throughout the school year with school division superintendents/consultants who are responsible for early learning programs;
- arrange a meeting every two years to review the school division early learning programs;
- organize annual Prekindergarten - Kindergarten Basics professional development event for teachers, associates, administrators and division personnel who are new to Prekindergarten and Kindergarten;
- develop, collect, analyze the PreK Biennial Report;
- provide feedback and professional resources as requested by the school division;
- establish policies and guidelines for the Prekindergarten program; and,
- fund the operation of the program.

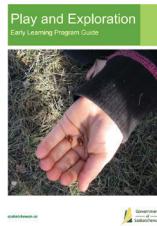


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# Resources and Professional Learning Opportunities

## Foundational Documents



### *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide (2013)*

Link: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/82946-ELPG%20Complete%20document.pdf>

### *Essential Learning Experiences: For Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Old Children*



Link: [http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/89611-Essential\\_Learning\\_Experiences.pdf](http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/89611-Essential_Learning_Experiences.pdf)



### *Family Engagement in Prekindergarten*

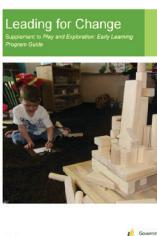
Link: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/82935-family-engagement-booklet%20web.pdf>

## Support Documents



### *Creating Early Learning Environments*

Link: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/86149-Creating%20Early%20Learning%20Environments.pdf>



### *Leading for Change*

Link: <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/11/82952-Leading%20for%20Change.pdf>



### *Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Connections*

Link: [https://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/library/Curriculum%20Website/Kindergarten/Resources/Core/prek\\_and\\_kindergarten\\_connections.pdf](https://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/library/Curriculum%20Website/Kindergarten/Resources/Core/prek_and_kindergarten_connections.pdf)

# Professional Learning Opportunities

1. Introduction to Prekindergarten (audio powerpoint). [https://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/orgs/play\\_and\\_exploration\\_kathryn\\_cooper\\_2014/Intro\\_to\\_Prekindergarten/index.htm](https://www.edonline.sk.ca/bbcswebdav/orgs/play_and_exploration_kathryn_cooper_2014/Intro_to_Prekindergarten/index.htm).
2. Prekindergarten - Kindergarten Basics Workshop – This in-person workshop is offered by the Ministry of Education at the start of each school year. The workshop is designed for teachers, associates, administrators and school division personnel who are new to Prekindergarten or Kindergarten.
3. *Play and Exploration: Phase 1 Workshop.*

This on-line workshop was developed as a professional learning opportunity for all those working with children ages three to five years old. The workshop provides an introduction to the *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* examining the vision and principles in the *Guide* and exploring the importance of indoor and outdoor learning environments.

The workshop includes an introduction and six modules that take between three to six hours in total to complete. To enroll in the workshop send an email indicating that you want to register for the workshop to [ece@gov.sk.ca](mailto:ece@gov.sk.ca). Be sure to include your name and place of employment in the email. You will receive an email from the Ministry of Education Network Services with a user name and password and instructions for opening the workshop.
4. *Play and Exploration: Phase 2 Workshop* delivered in-person at various locations and dates.

The Phase 2 workshop focuses on *How Young Children Learn and Using Documentation: Supporting Young Children's Learning*. It is the second part of a series of workshops supporting the implementation of *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*.
5. *Responding to Children's Interest: Phase 3 Workshop* delivered in-person through the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit (SPDU). Explore and connect with educators in early learning settings as you clarify and deepen your understandings of emergent curriculum and project-based learning. <https://www.stf.sk.ca/professional-resources/professional-growth/events-calendar/responding-childrens-interests-day>.
6. *Early Learning Site Visits:* provide an opportunity to observe and experience best practices in person. Selected sites represent a variety of early learning programs that showcase a deep understanding of the principles of early learning. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/education-and-child-care-facility-administration/training-and-workshops-for-teachers-and-educators/host-or-visit-an-early-learning-site>.
7. *Virtual Site Tours:* offer you the opportunity to visit other early learning programs online. [https://rover.edonline.sk.ca/en/rover/resources?q%5Bseries\\_id\\_eq%5D=223](https://rover.edonline.sk.ca/en/rover/resources?q%5Bseries_id_eq%5D=223).
8. Stewart Resource Centre at the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation provides resources and professional development opportunities. <https://www.stf.sk.ca/professional-resources>.
9. Canadian Association of Young Children (CAYC) is a “national organization concerned with the wellbeing of children, birth through age nine – at home, in preschool settings and at school.” There is a chapter of the CAYC in Regina and Saskatoon. <http://www.cayc.ca/>.
10. Saskatchewan Early Childhood Education Council is a “professional growth network affiliated with the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation. The council actively supports teachers to meet the needs of children throughout their primary years.” <http://saskecec.ca/>.

# Daily Schedule Samples

Adapted from a **full-day** Prekindergarten program in Saskatchewan Rivers School Division.

Approximate Time	Activity	Explanation
	Arrival	Greet children as they arrive. Children choose and play in a learning center. Breakfast available for children who are hungry.
9:00 - 10:15	Exploration Time	Children choose the area of the classroom where they would like to play. At the beginning of the year, children tend to need more guidance. The teacher sets out specific materials in each area and interacts with children as they explore the materials.
10:15 - 10:35	Group Gathering Time	Children can listen to a story, share a thought or story, sing a song, talk about the day, etc. This time is adjusted based on the interest of the children. It should involve a balance of active (e.g., dancing, jumping, wiggling) and quiet activities (e.g., story, sharing, counting).
10:35 - 10:45	Washing up	Teacher and associate spend time with children teaching them to wash their hands properly and settle in for snack time.
10:45 - 11:15	Snack	Children help prepare and distribute snacks then gather at the tables. The staff can use this time to sit and interact with the children while they eat. When children are done, they may explore a book on the carpet.
11:15 - 12:00	Gym	Provide a balance of group (organized games) and individual activities (e.g., riding bikes, balls, hoops).
12:00 - 12:30	Table Top	Children choose from one of three activities to do at the tables such as puzzles, painting/drawing, Lego, fine motor games, patterning, beads and string, matching, teacher created material, etc.
12:30 - 12:40	Prepare for Lunch	Wash up and help children to settle with their lunches.
12:40 - 1:30	Lunch	Teacher and associate sit with children as they eat.
1:30 - 2:15 (This amount of time may decrease as the children require less rest).	Rest and Reflection	Dim the lights and play soft music that is relaxing for children. Teacher and associate help children relax: rub backs, share a thought, encourage children to breathe and rest, listen to audio books or music. Children who do not fall asleep can engage with favourite books.
2:30 - 3:20	Outdoor Play	Provide children with equipment and loose parts to play. Guide children to safely use the playground equipment. Bring the indoors out – blocks, dress up clothes, cars, books, etc. can be used to create an outdoor classroom on nice days.

Rest time does not need to occur right after lunch but can if the Prekindergarten team feels this is a good fit. Flexibility within the daily schedule will allow the team to meet the majority of developmental needs within the day.

# Daily Schedule – Half Day Program

Adapted from a half-day Prekindergarten program at École St. Mary School, Regina Roman Catholic Separate School Division.

Time	Activity	Details
9:00 – 9:10	Arrival	Parents sign-in, bathroom, prayer, announcements, choice of activities as children arrive.
9:10 – 9:30	Morning Meeting	Discussions about project work. Children share and discuss plans for the day.
9:30 – 10:00	Snack Time, Book Time or Gym Time	Children transition from their snack to looking at books and often a story is read to the class at the end of time.
10:00 – 11:00	Play and Exploration	Children may play in any area of the classroom for as long as they like. They may move items from one area to another and explore freely. Invitations are set up to encourage learning through play. Children's interests are followed and their ideas are respected. Project work by small or large groups continues in this time.
11:00 – 11:10	Prepare for Outdoor Time	Reminders for children, prayer, help children put on outdoor clothing and backpacks.
11:10 – 11:40	Outdoor Playtime	Usually begins with a walk around the school to explore familiar areas and notice changes in nature, usually ends at the playground area with children climbing, chasing, balancing, sliding, running and inventing games. Parents sign a sheet as they pick up their child from the outdoors.

Please note that on the days there is scheduled gym time, snack time is at 10:00 a.m. and play and exploration is for one hour at 10:30 a.m. Children prepare for home at 11:30 a.m.

## Outdoor Experiences

Spending time outside daily is important for healthy holistic development. Exercise is good for muscle development, eye-hand coordination and flexibility. Outdoor experiences help children develop a closer connection to nature, creating wonder and curiosity. Observing seasonal changes, plants growing, insects, and birds teaches respect for the world and leads to many learning opportunities. With proper rain boots and umbrellas, children and educators can enjoy the rain.

## Snack Time or Nutrition Break

Gathering at a table and sharing food is an important part of human culture. The food provides nutrients for a healthy mind and body while the environment promotes conversations and sharing. *Canada's Food Guide* provides ideas for a variety of healthy snacks. Food experiences can be an excellent opportunity to learn about nutrition, personal hygiene, developing oral language and cultural diversity. As children participate in the preparation of snacks and serve themselves, they gain independence, fine muscle control and a sense of accomplishment.

Snack time can be included during play and exploration time to avoid another transition. Attractively setting out snacks on a table allows children to come and go as they are hungry. The educators should monitor the table in order to talk with children and ensure they wash their hands.

# Developmental Milestones

Ages	Social-Emotional Skills	Intellectual and Language Skills	Fine Motor Skills	Gross Motor Skills
<b>Two-Year-Olds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plays alongside other children</li> <li>Copies the behaviour of adults and other children</li> <li>Gets excited about being with other children</li> <li>Observes others to see how they do things</li> <li>Asserts independence</li> <li>Exhibits high degree of self-interest (egocentric)</li> <li>Builds emotional vocabulary</li> <li>Identifies and labels emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May talk mostly to self</li> <li>May use "me" instead of name</li> <li>Enjoys showing and naming objects</li> <li>Uses a 200 to 300 word vocabulary</li> <li>Starts to put two words together and speaks in two- or three-word sentences</li> <li>Answers yes/no questions</li> <li>Follows two-step commands</li> <li>Uses modifiers such as "some", "all", "one"</li> <li>Understands concepts of big and little, up and down</li> <li>Begins make-believe play</li> <li>Enjoys songs &amp; nursery rhymes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turns board book pages easily, one at a time</li> <li>Can imitate drawing a circle or line</li> <li>Can work fingers to scoop up small objects</li> <li>Constructs simple two- and three-piece shape matching puzzles</li> <li>Enjoys short, simple finger play games</li> <li>Strings large beads on shoelace</li> <li>Builds tower of four blocks or more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kicks or throws large ball</li> <li>Pulls a toy while walking</li> <li>Carries a large toy while walking</li> <li>Climbs into and gets down from chairs without help</li> <li>Begins to run</li> <li>Walks up and down stairs with help</li> <li>May use whole arm to paint or colour</li> </ul>
<b>Three-Year-Olds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows spontaneous affection for playmates they know</li> <li>Plays in groups of two or three children</li> <li>Begins to take turns</li> <li>Anticipates daily activities</li> <li>Asks for help</li> <li>Shares with friends</li> <li>Enjoys independence by doing things for self</li> <li>Understands the concept of "mine" vs. "someone else's"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matches an object in their hand or the room to a picture in a book</li> <li>Includes animals, dolls and people in make-believe play</li> <li>Sorts easily by shape and colour</li> <li>Names body parts and knows colours</li> <li>Asks "how", "what", "when" and "why" questions</li> <li>Uses verbs such as "could", "need", "might" and "help"</li> <li>Understands pronouns "you" and "they"</li> <li>Understands smaller and larger</li> <li>Answers "how" questions appropriately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds tower with more than six blocks</li> <li>Snips with scissors</li> <li>Makes vertical, horizontal and circular lines with a pencil or crayon</li> <li>Screws and unscrews jar lids or big nuts and bolts</li> <li>Draws a person with two to four body parts</li> <li>Strings beads and can arrange by colour and shape</li> <li>Works latches and hooks</li> <li>Uses a knife to spread food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catches ball with arms extended forward</li> <li>Throws ball overhand</li> <li>Walks up and down stairs with alternating feet</li> <li>Rides a tricycle</li> <li>Runs, walks, jumps and gallops easily</li> <li>Throws ball without losing balance</li> </ul>

Ages	Social-Emotional Skills	Intellectual and Language Skills	Fine Motor Skills	Gross Motor Skills
<b>Four-Year-Olds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoys other children and having a friend</li> <li>Bases friendships on shared activities</li> <li>Seeks approval of friends</li> <li>Plays in small groups and cooperates with other children</li> <li>May imagine monsters</li> <li>Negotiates solutions to conflicts</li> <li>Delights in humorous stories</li> <li>Excludes children they do not like</li> <li>Loves to whisper and tell secrets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has trouble telling difference between reality and fantasy</li> <li>Enjoys silly words and repeating them</li> <li>Vocabulary of 1200 to 1500 words</li> <li>Begins to identify letters in own name</li> <li>Understands counting</li> <li>Follows three-part instructions</li> <li>Recalls parts of a story</li> <li>Begins to appreciate bugs, flowers and birds</li> <li>Learns simple card games and dominoes</li> <li>Understands "same" and "different"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buttons and unbuttons</li> <li>Cuts on a line with scissors</li> <li>Copies some letters and numbers</li> <li>Zips separated fasteners</li> <li>Draws a person with four to five body parts</li> <li>Does a finger-to-thumb sequence (e.g. Itsy-Bitsy Spider)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skips on one foot</li> <li>Rides a bicycle with training wheels</li> <li>Hops and stands on one foot for up to four seconds</li> <li>Kicks a ball forward</li> <li>Catches a bounced ball</li> </ul>
<b>Five-Year-Olds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prefers playing in small groups</li> <li>Prefers friends of same sex and age</li> <li>Protects younger children</li> <li>Plays well with older siblings</li> <li>Respects property of others</li> <li>Becomes competitive</li> <li>Develops sense of fairness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retells main details of stories</li> <li>Recognizes the cause and effect of actions</li> <li>Tells original stories</li> <li>Follows three-step commands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses a knife</li> <li>Copies and writes many letters and numbers</li> <li>Traces objects</li> <li>Colours within lines</li> <li>Copies square, triangle and diamond shapes</li> <li>Models objects from clay</li> <li>Beginning to tie shoes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tries various equipment for movement such as skateboard, scooter, skating</li> <li>Catches a ball</li> <li>Jumps from heights</li> <li>Jumps rope</li> <li>Skips</li> <li>Climbs fences</li> </ul>
<b>Six-Year-Olds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engages in cooperative play involving role assignments</li> <li>Enjoys being praised and complimented</li> <li>Enjoys show and tell</li> <li>May be argumentative</li> <li>Competitive and wants to win</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Counts ten objects</li> <li>Completes a 15-piece puzzle</li> <li>Acts out stories</li> <li>Recognizes letters and words</li> <li>Identifies right from left hand</li> <li>Repeats an eight to ten word sentence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishes hand preference</li> <li>Reverses letters while printing</li> <li>Draws detailed pictures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plays hopscotch</li> <li>Enjoys ball play</li> <li>Plays organized games such as hide-and-seek</li> </ul>

Adapted from Herr and Libby, 1995 and [www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts) (2015)

\*Milestones outline typical development but each child is unique. If there are concerns, closer observations may be required. The following resources provide additional information.

The Centre for Disease Control from the United States has developed video clips of developmental milestones that may be useful for teachers and families. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/milestones-in-action.html>.

The Canadian Paediatric Society provides information for parents on child development on the *Caring for Kids* website. [http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/your\\_childs\\_development](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/your_childs_development).

# Guidelines for Assessing Young Children

## Guidelines for Assessing Young Children

In a Prekindergarten program, there are a number of points for consideration when conducting assessments on young children.

### Developmentally Appropriate

In order for child assessment within Prekindergarten to be meaningful, it needs to be based on the individual child. This acknowledges that children are individuals who develop according to their own speed and readiness. The uniqueness and individuality of each child is stressed and the development of natural curiosity, exploration and intelligence is encouraged (Jasmine, 1995).

### Based on Continuous Observation

Careful observation of children as they play in real situations is more effective and efficient than simulated situations. Continuous observation in the Prekindergarten environment provides information to the teacher, who can then make adaptations.

Assessment should be developmentally appropriate and:

- involve exploration, discovery, potential change and creativity. Children are creative and curious and like to explore their environment. They can also move from activity to activity or devote extended periods of time to one area. The purpose of assessment is not to label children, but rather to better understand how they learn and what they want and need to learn. Educators need to be flexible in order to meet the ever-changing needs and desires of the children;
- be exciting, informal and empowering to children and to adults. Developmentally appropriate assessment is exciting because it gives educators regular opportunities to observe change and development. Informal assessment procedures allow educators to quickly change methods as the children change course in the classroom. Emphasis is not on wrong and right or on a product. There are many ways to do a good job and to be competent;
- explore a variety of intelligences. There are many types of intelligence, so an open mind to assessment is important. Examination and exploration of new and different kinds of assessment tools are essential; and,
- help children develop as individuals. Assessment focuses on the whole child and teachers acknowledge each child is different even though there are many similarities in development. Teacher practices and assessment tools need to celebrate diversity.

## Variety of Methods

Assessment of child development involves a systematic process for gathering evidence that reflects what a child can do. Information is collected through observation of process, product, conversations and family conferences. Some examples of methods to gather evidence are:

- Writing and art samples
- Audio recordings
- Learning stories
- Case studies
- Documentation: posters, panels and books
- Interviews with caregivers
- Checklists
- Videotapes
- Anecdotal records
- Journals
- Photographs
- Observation forms
- Interviews with children

For more information on observation methods see pages 37 & 38 in *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (2013).

## Using Assessment Information



Assessment information, gathered in a variety of ways, is valuable to gain a deeper understanding of each child, their learning styles, interests and strengths. Documenting the information and sharing it with the child and family builds family engagement, a strong sense of belonging, and strengthened relationships. Assessment information can inform a targeted response to support a classroom or an individual child's needs. Another benefit of assessment is the opportunity to redirect resources to better respond to children.

# Information for Administrators

If you are implementing a new Prekindergarten program in your school, or if you are a new administrator coming into an existing Prekindergarten program, you have the opportunity to experience and support a unique program targeting three- and four-year-old children and their families who are experiencing some form of vulnerability. This program is valuable for children, educators, families and the community.

Prekindergarten is a unique program, with specific guidelines and targeted funding from the Ministry of Education. Here are some suggestions for gaining a deeper understanding of this program.

## Getting Started

### **1. Review Documents**

Become familiar with the available documents related to the Prekindergarten program. They will help you develop an understanding of the Prekindergarten philosophy and the indicators of a high quality program. Appendix 1 page 29 lists the foundational documents for Prekindergarten. Support documents and professional learning opportunities are also included in the appendices.

### **Recommended Readings:**

*Prekindergarten Essentials: Effective Practices Policy and Guidelines for Prekindergarten* (2017); *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (2013); and, *Leading for Change: Into Practice Booklet* (2009) written for administrators of early learning programs.

### **Recommended PowerPoints:**

*Introduction to Prekindergarten* (audio slide show) available at [www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca) under the Prekindergarten tab.

### **2. Tour Prekindergarten programs in your division and other divisions**

Guidelines for site visits are available on pages 19 to 21 of *Leading for Change*. The curriculum website offers information about in-person site visits and virtual site tours. [www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca).

### **3. Attend a Prekindergarten - Kindergarten Basics Workshop**

In the fall, the Ministry of Education offers a Prekindergarten - Kindergarten Basics Workshop in both Regina and Saskatoon. The workshop is intended for teachers, associates, administrators, consultants and superintendents who are new to Prekindergarten or Kindergarten. The workshop provides an overview of the background, policies and guidelines for the Prekindergarten program.

### **4. Establish a Prekindergarten Budget**

Communicate the budget allocation for the next school year to Prekindergarten staff well in advance, if possible. Remember that family events, snacks, home visits and unexpected situations or activities will require funds. Check with your school division central office regarding support for transportation and additional professional supports such as speech language services.

All documents are located on the Saskatchewan curriculum website listed under the Prekindergarten tab. [www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca)

## **Developing Appropriate School Policies for Prekindergarten**

Well-developed school policies ensure consistency in operations. Some policies to address are:

### **1. Consistency in Personnel**

Having consistent Prekindergarten teachers, associates and substitutes gives young children the opportunity to build important relationships and feel secure. The Prekindergarten teacher and associate, in particular, should remain consistent throughout the entire school year.

### **2. Transportation**

Transportation deserves serious consideration because it can be a barrier to participation and consistent attendance. A transportation policy is typically in place at the school division. Contact the early learning consultant or superintendent for further information on transporting Prekindergarten children.

### **3. Support Services**

Many children in Prekindergarten programs are from families that may live in vulnerable circumstances and need the support of professionals other than the classroom teacher. School division procedures outline how Prekindergarten teachers and families can access professional supports such as speech-language and occupational therapy. In most cases, accessing supports for Prekindergarten children will follow the same protocols as accessing supports for other students in the school, though for some children the services may be provided by the Regional Health Authority.

## **4. Supporting Staff Professional Development**

Although it may be challenging, it is essential that administrators support the professional development of their staff, especially if the Prekindergarten teacher and/or the associate do not have early childhood backgrounds.

Teachers and associates must be well-prepared and receive sufficient support to ensure that they are able to deliver a high quality program that is developmentally appropriate for 3- and 4-year-old children. Administrators can encourage staff to participate in ongoing professional development and give them time to interact with colleagues and mentors to discuss and observe best practices.

The Prekindergarten teacher and associate require time to debrief and keep each other informed on their observations of child development. They are also expected to complete documentation and to plan learning experiences and family engagement. Administrators can support this time in whatever manner works best for the staff.

The teacher and Prekindergarten associate should be encouraged to work as a team. This can be supported by having the teacher share Prekindergarten-related communication with the associate. Encourage them to attend professional development opportunities together. It is recommended that the team also include the Kindergarten teacher when possible. Kindergarten and Prekindergarten share the principles of early learning as the foundation for their classroom and collaboration between teachers, builds strength and continuity for children and families.

## **5. A Smooth Transition to Kindergarten**

The administrator supports teamwork among Prekindergarten teachers, associates, families and support professionals to develop a transition plan from Prekindergarten to Kindergarten.

If Prekindergarten children will be going to another school, the school administration should contact the receiving school(s) and forward relevant information. Arrangements can be made for the Prekindergarten teacher and family to visit the receiving school(s) to meet with the school team to share an understanding of the children who will be coming to their Kindergarten program. Kindergarten teachers from receiving schools may also be invited to the Prekindergarten classroom to meet the children and their families and observe them in their school environment.

Throughout the school year, Prekindergarten and Kindergarten children can be involved in field trips and other learning activities together. Prekindergarten children can also be integrated into the larger school community as the year progresses by participating in assemblies and other school-wide events.

The administrator can provide time for the Prekindergarten and Kindergarten teachers to collaborate and plan for transitions. A visit by the Kindergarten teacher can be arranged to the Prekindergarten classroom when possible.

Towards the end of the school year, Prekindergarten children may visit the Kindergarten classroom.

Though based on a similar philosophy, Prekindergarten is not simply Kindergarten for younger children. Administrators are responsible to ensure staff employ age-appropriate practices that benefit young children.

The document *Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Connections* provides information on the intersection of both programs.

# Ministry Supports

1. Funding –The Ministry of Education provides school divisions with complementary services funding for each half-time Prekindergarten program. All school divisions are required to report on their Prekindergarten programs to the Ministry of Education every second year at biennial review meetings.
2. The Ministry of Education Early Years Branch staff meet twice a year with superintendents, consultants responsible for early learning as well as First Nations education organizations from across the province that are responsible for early learning. The purpose of these meetings is for ministry updates, professional development opportunities and to enhance knowledge and expertise in early learning.
3. Professional Development - The Early Years Branch offers a variety of professional development opportunities. For more information on all professional development opportunities, including times and locations, refer to the Government of Saskatchewan website [www.Saskatchewan.ca](http://www.Saskatchewan.ca) or [www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca) under the PreK tab.
4. Consultation Services – The Early Years Branch provides consultative services. Each school division is assigned a ministry contact who:
  - consults with the school division to ensure high quality Prekindergarten programs are offered;
  - distributes communication materials and professional development opportunities through the school year;
  - arranges a meeting every two years to review the division's early learning programs;
  - collects and analyzes data on Prekindergarten through the biennial reports;
  - provides feedback and professional resources as requested by the school division; and,
  - develops and revises support documents for Prekindergarten and the entire early learning sector.



**“Research also shows that leadership is second only to teaching as an influence on learning, and that the quality and practice of leadership is linked in a consistent and demonstrable way to improved student outcomes and educational equity” (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 4; Mitgang, 2012, p. 3).**

# Resource Sheets for Administrators

- 1. Assessing Prekindergarten Practices and Environments**
- 2. Recruitment Suggestions for Prekindergarten Teacher**
- 3. Recruitment Suggestions for Prekindergarten Associate**
- 4. Sample Selection Criteria Rating Scale**
- 5. Frequently Asked Questions**

# Considerations for Administrators to Assess Prekindergarten Practices and Environments

Key Practice	Applaud	Question
Assessing Children's Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The educators use a variety of methods to collect information about children's unique qualities and develops appropriate goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher sees only the needs of the children and does not plan to provide support to overcome the needs</li> <li>Unrealistic expectations for 3- &amp; 4-year-olds</li> </ul>
Bulletin Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work displayed is created by children and is of interest to children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Features commercial posters and crafts that all look the same (e.g., pattern animals)</li> </ul>
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiential Centres: provide a variety of open-ended materials and props to encourage children to investigate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing mostly commercial toys that are used for a single purpose (e.g., pop-up toys)</li> </ul>
Family Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A place for adult family members to sit while waiting for children</li> <li>Photos are displayed in the room so children can see their families throughout the day</li> <li>Events are planned that support families in their learning with their children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of dialogue between the educators and the families</li> <li>The same event happens each month (e.g., cookie baking)</li> </ul>
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators allow large blocks of time for children to engage in activities, which creates fewer and smoother transitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators change activities too quickly and control children's time with little flexibility</li> </ul>
Interacting with Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators support language, communication, initiative and problem solving by the children in individual, small and large groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators primarily direct and infrequently interact with children during experiential centre time</li> </ul>
Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe and healthy indoor and outdoor learning environments</li> <li>Thoughtfully designed layout that is uncluttered and encourages investigation and exploration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children have no access to outdoor learning experiences</li> <li>Room is overcrowded or unorganized</li> </ul>
Long Range Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher considers the ideas of the children and their interests when planning for the upcoming year. Plans may be summarized at the end of the month and submitted to administration (emergent curriculum)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher has the entire year planned with themes, field trips and activities prior to meeting the children</li> </ul>
Age-Appropriate Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large blocks of time that allow children to engage in play experiences</li> <li>Children interacting in small and large groups with ample opportunities for conversation and oral language development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher tends to introduce the primary school curriculum into programming for Prekindergarten children</li> <li>Children sitting at tables and chairs to complete individual worksheets</li> </ul>
Build Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaboration that provides smooth transitions to Kindergarten</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher works independently from other early learning and community programs</li> </ul>

Adapted from *Leading for Change*, 2008, p. 23.

# Recruitment Suggestions – Teacher

Category	Teacher Qualities	Importance to Prekindergarten
Aptitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Reflective practitioner</li> <li>• Continuously seeking best practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that the Prekindergarten program adapts to the needs of children and their families</li> <li>• Assesses the effectiveness of the Prekindergarten program on an ongoing basis in order to implement best practices for three -and four-year-old children</li> </ul>
Interests and Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing positive relationships with families</li> <li>• Organizing, planning and facilitating events and activities to engage families</li> <li>• Involving community programming and partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging families is a primary goal of the Prekindergarten program. Children are the heart of Prekindergarten and are best served in the context of the family</li> <li>• Building relationships that support families contributes to successful transitions into the learning environment and helps families better understand their important role in their child's education and development</li> <li>• Working collaboratively with colleagues and community partners benefits vulnerable children and families</li> </ul>
Knowledge, Skills & Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Collaboration skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to interact with families from various backgrounds and to ensure families and children feel they belong is important to the success of Prekindergarten</li> <li>• The Prekindergarten teacher is part of the team that includes an educational assistant and other support personnel (e.g., speech language pathologists, occupational therapists). Together the team collaborates to provide appropriate supports that are responsive to the children in the program</li> </ul>
Post-Secondary Qualifications  * Required  ** Strongly Recommended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor of Education &amp; Teaching Certificate*</li> <li>• Formal classes in Early Childhood Education**</li> <li>• Knowledge of and experience in development and learning of 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prekindergarten teacher has theoretical knowledge to plan and implement a high quality early learning program</li> <li>• The Prekindergarten teacher understands how to plan and program holistic (physical, social- emotional, spiritual and intellectual), age-appropriate activities within the classroom and outdoor environments. The teacher makes learning visible using children's work, photos and ideas</li> </ul>

# Recruitment Suggestions – Prekindergarten Associate

Category	Associate Qualities	Importance to Prekindergarten
Aptitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Reliable in attendance</li> <li>• Reflective practitioner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prekindergarten children develop a sense of belonging when adults value and respect their ideas and capabilities.</li> <li>• The adults in the Prekindergarten program need to be flexible and reliable in their attendance, as these actions support relationship development with the children and their families.</li> <li>• Adults who reflect on observations about the children and offer additional props to support the children's learning contribute to high quality programming.</li> </ul>
Interests & Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing positive relationships with families</li> <li>• Assisting with planning, organizing, attending family events &amp; activities</li> <li>• Supporting community programming &amp; partnerships</li> <li>• Working as a team member</li> <li>• Facilitating children's development through play, exploration and investigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging families is a primary goal of the Prekindergarten program.</li> <li>• Interacting with families from various backgrounds and ensuring that families and children feel they belong is important to the success of Prekindergarten.</li> <li>• Building relationships that support families contributes to successful transitions into the learning environment and helps families better understand their important role in their child's education and development.</li> <li>• Working collaboratively with colleagues and community partners benefits vulnerable children and families.</li> <li>• Participating as part of a team provides a strong foundation for the children in the program. The team includes the Prekindergarten teacher and other support personnel such as speech language pathologists. The Prekindergarten associate takes part in planning sessions with other support personnel and maintains confidentiality in all aspects.</li> <li>• Observing and listening to how children interact and manipulate materials in the Prekindergarten environment help the educational team plan how to extend the learning.</li> </ul>
Knowledge, Skills & Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Collaboration skills</li> <li>• Keen observation and listening skills</li> <li>• Knowledge of and experience in development and learning of 3- to 5-year old children</li> <li>• Effective working relationship with the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interacting with families from various backgrounds and ensuring that families and children feel they belong is important to the success of Prekindergarten.</li> <li>• Living in the community in which the school is located is desirable.</li> <li>• Assisting the teacher in understanding the community enhances family engagement and community partnerships.</li> <li>• Understanding young children and the importance of a play-based program increases positive interactions with the children and enhances oral language and social-emotional development.</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Secondary Education</b> <b>** Strongly Recommended</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Certificate or Diploma**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Prekindergarten Associate has a background in Early Childhood Education acquired through formal post-secondary training and/or professional development opportunities.</li> </ul>

# Sample Selection Criteria Rating Scale

The criteria listed below are used to broadly define vulnerability and can be helpful in selecting children and families (applicants) for the Prekindergarten program. For each application, a rating scale can be used by the selection committee who assigns a numerical value to each criterion. For applicants that are "highly impacted" by the criterion, a numerical value of 5 is given. Criterion that has a low impact on the applicant are given a numerical value of 1. When prioritizing applicants for the program, it is recommended that the total scores for each applicant be completed and reviewed by the selection team.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age as of Dec. 31: \_\_\_\_\_

Criterion	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Low socio-economic status (housing or food insecurity would indicate "high impact")						
Referral by government or community-based organization (past participation in the <i>KidsFirst</i> Program would indicate "high impact")*						
Teen parent(s)						
Family health care challenges (drug & alcohol addictions, mental illness or post-partum depression would indicate "high impact")						
Child exposure to domestic violence, abuse or neglect						
Family trauma or crisis						
One or both parents has less than high school education						
Single parent (no contact with other parent would indicate "high impact")						
English as an Additional Language learner, immigrant/refugee family						
Social isolation/ no access to early learning and/or child care						
Frequent parent absence (both parents frequently absent for long periods of time would indicate "high impact")						
Delays in language and communication development						
Delays in social-emotional development						
Child living in foster care						

\* Every child who has been in the *KidsFirst* program and is eligible by age, should be offered a spot in Prekindergarten, as participation in *KidsFirst* is considered as high impact.

Please note that barriers for the family to access alternative learning opportunities such as high quality child care, community literacy programs or preschool, infrequent interaction with siblings or other children, and family commitment to the program may impact likelihood of selection.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. What is Prekindergarten?**

Prekindergarten is a targeted program operated by the school division for children aged three- and four- years- old living in vulnerable circumstances. A qualified teacher carefully prepares experiential centres in the classroom where children play and actively explore their world. The teacher models language, behaviour and extends learning at every opportunity. The aim of Prekindergarten is to lay the foundation for school success and lifelong learning.

## **2. Why is Prekindergarten targeted?**

Limited resources make it necessary to target this program primarily for children living in vulnerable circumstances. Research indicates vulnerable children benefit the most from high quality early learning programs, although high quality programs provide positive opportunities for all children.

## **3. How are decisions made about who can attend?**

Information about the Prekindergarten program is communicated to the public, parents and early childhood organizations. Families complete an application for their child to attend. A home visit may occur before selection is made. A selection committee composed of school personnel, outside agency personnel and/or relevant community organization personnel uses criteria to prioritize children who would benefit most from enhanced opportunities. Decisions are made by this committee or a smaller school-based team.

## **4. Why are groupings of three- and four-year-olds recommended for Prekindergarten?**

Mixed-age groupings are advantageous for both social and intellectual development especially for younger children. Mixed-age groups allows children to spend two years in the Prekindergarten program to reap the benefits of continuity of care, building a strong relationship with the teacher, associate and peers.

## **5. Does the program involve a cost to families?**

No. The Prekindergarten program is supported by funding provided by the Ministry of Education through the school division.

## **6. What are the expectations for families?**

Family commitment to the program and involvement in its operation are key components of the Prekindergarten program. Families are invited and encouraged to participate in planned events and informal visits to the classroom and to be involved in home visits.

Families are committed to consistency of attendance for their child. Teachers usually visit families in their homes (or in another agreed-upon location) two or three times a year. The visit is informal – parents and teachers get to know one another and share information about the children. Families and children usually enjoy having the staff visit their home.

## **7. What options exist for transporting children to Prekindergarten programs?**

School divisions use a variety of transportation options, depending on community and family circumstances. In some programs, parents are responsible for transportation of their children. In others, the school division provides transportation or subsidizes parents for their costs associated with transportation. Contact the local school division for further information.

## **8. What are the start dates and end dates for the Prekindergarten program? Are these the same as the rest of the school?**

Prekindergarten is funded for ten months. School divisions make adjustments in the days of children's participation to accommodate family engagement activities, teacher planning, reflection and professional development. Prekindergarten teachers' work schedules follow the same calendar as the rest of the school.

The school division selection process may affect the start date and end date for children's attendance. If the selection process takes place in June, children's participation in the program may end in mid-June but begin early in September. If the selection process happens in September, children's participation may begin in mid-September and end in late June.

## **9. How can the school administrative support staff support the Prekindergarten program?**

The school administrative support staff, who are often the first point of contact for families interested in the Prekindergarten program, are welcoming and friendly. The staff provides the families with a Prekindergarten package (application form, brochure, letter from the teacher) and explains the application and selection process, including the completion of the forms. The staff may invite the families to the school to pick up the package, or mail the package if coming to the school is not an option. In either circumstance, the staff indicates that the Prekindergarten teacher will follow up with the families.

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