



READY, SET, GO!

A CONVERSATION ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS WITH A LOCAL KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Alysha Cooper, a kindergarten teacher at a local school in El Paso County, took the time to talk about kindergarten readiness with Kelly Hurtado, Foundations Program Director at Joint Initiatives for Youth + Families. Through this conversation, four big takeaways rose to the top of the list: 1) Kindergarten looks different than it did when parents were growing up; 2) Families can do a lot to help their child to be ready for kindergarten – the best thing to do is read to them; 3) Starting children in educational experiences early is the best way to prepare them for the future; and 4) Some kindergarteners are having their first social experiences in quite some time in kindergarten – and that’s OK. Children are resilient and will thrive being around peers. Ready, set, go – children are on their way to kindergarten, and the adults in their lives can do a lot to make sure they are ready for what’s to come.

Alysha prepared for her career in an idyllic setting as she attended to the University of Hawaii and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education. She has been a kindergarten teacher for six years now, and shares that she never wanted to teach any other age. Kindergarten is where her heart lies because it’s the first year of public school and as a teacher, one can foster a love for learning right off the bat! Alysha says what she loves most about her job is that the growth that takes place in kindergarten is amazing. Many children start the school year not knowing all the letters of the alphabet and leave being able to read. Also enjoyable are the many stories that children tell her during the school day and the honesty they have when talking about life outside of the classroom.

In discussing what kindergarten looks like now, Alysha shares that although students learn a lot from being with their peers and talking about their feelings, there are many skills that these young learners focus on developing in this very important year. They learn how to count to 100, how to do simple addition, how to tell time, how to read, how to spell, and how to write. Alysha says that learning goes far beyond what she remembers from kindergarten, as children are developing the foundational skills to be successful in school. This learning happens most easily when families are involved in what is happening at school, when they take the time to talk about what the child is learning, and when they support their child with homework. Mrs. Cooper states, “Do the nightly reading and support your child with homework. These interactions make all the difference in school success.”

Families hearing about what kindergarten looks like now may wonder how they can prepare their child for this big transition. Alysha says that first and foremost, families should send their children to preschool – children with this experience come into kindergarten ready to learn. If the pandemic has kept families from sending their children to preschool, don’t worry because there are many things you

can do to help your little one be ready. First are foremost, read to your child. Start with short books with colorful illustrations and follow your child's lead; making this a fun and interactive experience is best. Secondly, start to talk to your child about kindergarten and school in general, and ensure that you are being upbeat and enthusiastic. Alysha notes that how children think about school and learning comes from their first teachers – their parents and family members. If you are excited about school and learning, they will be too!

As many families envision a transition into kindergarten in the fall, various emotions arise such as excitement, joy, and sometimes, a little anxiety or confusion. Alysha shares that there are now many schooling options and it's worth the effort for families to ask questions of various schools so that they can find a school that meets the needs of their child and family. Some schools offer free meals, summer school, and even before- and after-school care. Ultimately, you as a family have choices and an entire school community ready to make this transition one for the books. Ready, set, GO!

Want more information about the transition to kindergarten? Please visit the Alliance for Kids Kindergarten Transition hub at familyspeak.org/kindergarten/, and reach out to us with any questions at 719.205.2691.