Getting Ready for Kindergarten at the Cottage School Program

There is no one quality or skill that children need in order to do well in kindergarten. A combination of factors contributes to school success. These factors include physical well-being, social and emotional maturity, language skills, the ability to solve problems and think creatively, and a general knowledge about the world. Academic success also depends upon the "match" between a child's skills, his knowledge base, and the expectations of the curriculum. While the Cottage School Program partners with you as you home school, it's important for you to develop academic and social readiness in your child so he or she can be successful during his/her weekly time with us.

Academic Skills

During your child's weekly time in his/her Cottage School classroom, he or she will be offered a variety of stimuli and challenges. We seek to not only give your child academic support through language arts, but we also offer a social environment that might be difficult to produce in a home classroom. The following is a simple list of basic academic and social skills that should be in place before your child joins us. We offer these recommendations from our perspective of experience in the field of education as well as our knowledge of what skills will need to be in place when your child joins our academic environment.

Kindergarten Readiness

What skills should a student ideally have in place before starting Kindergarten?

- State their first and last name
- Take turns, share and act respectfully toward peers and adults
- Participate in group experiences (familiarization through activities like Sunday school, preschool, library time, etc.)
- Dress themselves (snap, button, zip, tie shoes) - this is helpful for using the bathroom independently
- Demonstrate large motor skills such as skipping, hopping, jumping, and balancing
- Apply fine motor skills proficiently using pencils (with proper pencil grip), crayons, scissors (held properly), and glue
- Follow one, two, and three step directions
- Identify the front cover of a book, hold it correctly, and listen intently to an entire story
- Recite portions of basic nursery rhymes from memory
- Stay focused while sitting and listening for a period of 15 minutes at a time
- Write first name with a capital letter at the beginning followed by lower case letters
- Count from 1 to 25 and name the days of the week
- **Identify and name all 26 letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case), basic colors, basic shapes, and numbers to 25* (see suggestions below)**

Suggestions for Learning to Identify and Name Letters of the Alphabet

Exposure and repetition are needed for successful alphabet letter identification and naming. Even 5-10 minutes per day can help give the repetition needed for learning and retaining letter naming skills, especially over the summer as school approaches. Please consider increasing time spent doing the following with your child:

- Sing and say the alphabet often
- Read all sorts of alphabet books, pointing to/identifying/naming letters as you go along
- Practice identifying/naming letters with alphabet cards that have pictures for association and fun
- Play alphabet games
- Do alphabet puzzles together while identifying/naming the letters

Suggestions for Reading and Listening Comprehension

Background knowledge contributes tremendously to your child's success in reading and listening comprehension. Give your child a vast variety of experiences in order to provide a broad base of background knowledge. Reading and listening comprehension correlates directly to success in learning not only in school but throughout life. Take nature walks around your neighborhood, in our local parks, and up in our beautiful mountains. Visit museums, zoos, nature centers, botanical gardens, art displays, government buildings, concerts, dance performances, farming and ranching communities, and other historical sites. Travel to other cities, states, and countries where your child will experience other customs and cultures. Explore all of the above in a vicarious way by reading fiction and nonfiction books and periodicals to your child that will open up the world even beyond what you are able to do through actual travel.

An expansive vocabulary is the second most important factor in setting your child up for success in reading and listening comprehension. As you read with your child and offer varied experiences, you expose him or her to new words in a meaningful context. This is a powerful way to expand vocabulary. The more you talk with your child about the new words and use them in your own speech, the better chance that these words will actually become a part of your child's vocabulary bank. Be purposeful in having conversations at the dinner table where family members talk about their daily adventures and/or the books they are reading. When traveling in the car, pop in audio books or children's radio theater productions. Turn off or limit screen use, to include TV, tablets, smartphones, and video and computer games. Saturate your child in an environment of real human interaction with rich vocabulary and you will encourage the development of profound reading and listening comprehension. We recommend you listen to this thought provoking TEDTalk by Dimitri Christakis, a pediatrician speaking on Media and Children: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoT7qH_uVNo&t=11s

Suggestions for Learning in a Group Setting

Have the ability to perform multi-step directions. Continue to give your child opportunities to follow multi-step directions. Increase the number of steps incrementally and have your child tell back the steps he/she is to follow. For example: brush your teeth, put on pajamas, and bring me your favorite book. This will help your child learn to listen and follow directions in class and do tasks in an orderly fashion.

Be developing responsibility. Give your child chores to do on a regular schedule so he/she develops life-long habits and becomes familiar with routines. Examples: bedtime, story time, dishes, trash, putting toys away, etc.

Consistently show respect toward adults. Your child needs to learn this before he or she can enter a group setting with an adult facilitating the learning. Teach your child to respect you, others, his/her own possessions and those of others, and to be helpful to classmates. Your child needs to be able to listen to a teacher and not interrupt. If your child currently has a habit of interrupting you or others, then now is a wonderful time to develop this habit of respect.

Be developing eye/hand coordination and small motor skills. Help your child build large motor skills by spending time playing outside. Provide opportunities for your child to paint, draw, work with puzzles, cut fun shapes, build with Legos, sew, etc. to develop small motor skills. Make sure you child knows how to properly use a glue stick and scissors. We will work to strengthen these skills regularly, but a basic understanding is very helpful.

Have a 15-minute attention span. One excellent way to strengthen a young child's attention span is to read to him/her daily. Read often and from a variety of genres. This expands your child's vocabulary and knowledge of the world. It also gives him/her an ear for sounds, cadence, and directionality, all of which need to be in place for fluent reading to begin. This cannot be overstated. Books and conversations about books plow the soil to grow a future passion for reading. Nursery rhymes and fairy tales are especially good for young children. Several titles you might look for are a *Treasury of More than 300 Classic Nursery Rhymes* and *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes* by Robert Frederick (please do not use the Disney version), fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen, Aesop's fables, and books by A.A. Milne, Beatrix Potter, Dr. Seuss, and Eric Carle.

Demonstrate independence in performing basic life skills. Encourage your child to tie shoes, put on clothes, zip jackets, and button buttons. He/she will be expected to take care of his/her own personal care during class. Every child should be able to go to the bathroom unassisted. **Please teach your child to wash hands well after using the restroom**. Help us to cut down on illnesses in the classroom. Teach your child to sneeze and cough into his or her elbow.