



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY  
Vanderbilt Child and Family Center

# Kindergarten Readiness

*the disposition, experiences, and skills  
that help children to succeed at school*



VCFC early childhood programs reflect the research-based understanding that play is essential to children's health and well-being and foundational to children's learning.

The Acorn School provides a Whole Child (mind, body, spirit) approach to early childhood care and education.

Inspired by social-constructivist systems thinking theories, children's conceptual understandings emerge through their engagement with the world.

The Acorn School is PLAY-based and offers an Emergent Curriculum.

# WHAT ARE 21ST CENTURY SKILLS? THESE 4 C'S:

C

COMMUNICATION

Sharing thoughts,  
questions, ideas &  
solutions

C

COLLABORATION

Working together to  
reach a goal. Putting  
talent, expertise,  
and smarts to work

C

CRITICAL  
THINKING

Looking at problems in  
a new way and linking  
learning across  
subjects & disciplines

C

CREATIVITY

Trying new approaches  
to get things done equals  
innovation & invention

“Not only do Pre-K programs encourage project-based learning, opportunities for outdoor learning, and active engagement in meaningful experiences and hands-on work, but research shows long term benefits that significantly close achievements gaps, improve social-emotional well-being and physical health.”

Phyllis Phillips,  
MNPS Director of Pre-K Program







## Kindergarten Readiness

VCFC understands that the attitude and disposition that children bring to exploring the world with all five senses develops the skills that will support their successful year in kindergarten.

This includes the important development of social and emotional competencies by working (playing) cooperatively in relationship with peers and caring adults.

The following is a simple checklist of habits and experiences a child should ideally have before their first day of kindergarten:

Able to identify own feelings, and use the words for feelings (e.g., glad, mad, sad) in the primary language spoken at home.

Able to ask an adult for help using spoken words (e.g., “Where is the bathroom?”)

Able to focus for 15 - 30 minutes (e.g., listen to stories, painting, play a boardgame, ride a bike) – this does not include screen time.





Able to wait 5 - 15 minutes (e.g., “I want a popsicle” “Ok, in ten minutes.”)

Able to manage an experience of “No” (e.g., “I want a popsicle.” “No, we are eating dinner in 20 minutes.”)

Brushes teeth and gets dressed without adult assistance.

Cleans up 5 – 30 toys (e.g., legos from the floor to a basket) without adult help.

Climbs or lifts something that makes them feel very powerful (e.g., helps carry a bag of groceries, hikes a hill, lifts the laundry basket.)





Washes hands for 20 seconds, with soap, dries them thoroughly.  
(Without creating a tidal wave!)

Manages toileting and wipes own bottom without adult assistance.

Makes their own bed – spreads up covers and places pillow (almost wrinkle free.)

Touch counts 20 items correctly sequencing numbers (saying numbers in the primary language spoken at home.)



Understands the concept of kindness as being considerate and respectful of others and their things.

Draws a self-portrait with crayon, marker, or pencil.

Recognizes their own printed first and last name.

Can print phonetic spelling of their first name (backwards letters are ok!)

Visited the public library (wonderful if child already has their own library card!)





“Reading is thinking deeply about a text’s meaning and how it builds knowledge of the world around us. Why would we read if not to learn about authors’ ideas and enter new worlds that engage our imaginations, invite our questions, and advance our knowledge? **Yet this goal for reading is often lost** within instruction that overstresses particular aspects of literacy learning while diminishing attention to others.”

(TN Read to be Ready [www.tn.gov](http://www.tn.gov))



“Sign language, music-making, and storytelling are among the many pathways to literacy, particularly when they are experienced socially, connected to culture, and shared with family and community.”

- Alyson Shaw, MD

## Early Literacy Key Concepts for Families

When K–5 educators use the word *literacy* they are referring to an umbrella term that includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as motivation, comprehension, and vocabulary (Frankel et al. 2016).

Children as young as 2 years old begin to imitate the act of writing by creating drawings and symbolic markings that represent their thoughts and ideas (Rowe & Neitzel 2010; Dennis & Votteler 2013).

Resource children with a wide variety of tools (e.g., crayons, paint, pastels, pens, pencils) to support their storytelling impulse – this will evolve from pictures to letters over time.

Although parents can build their children’s vocabularies by talking to them, reading to them is more effective. Reading aloud is the best way to help children develop word mastery and grammatical understanding, which form the basis for learning how to read. Picture books are two to three times as likely as parent-child conversations to include a word that isn’t among the 5,000 most common English words (Massaro 2015).



Reading can provoke and enhance an experience.

Reading can be a form of research and research is a way of thinking about ourselves in relation to the world.



“In kindergarten, literacy instruction *prepares* children to learn to read, as it has for decades. It includes letter names and letter sounds; concepts about print (e.g., left to right, letters make up words); phonological awareness (e.g., recognizing rhymes, beginning sounds); writing; comprehending stories and information read aloud; learning new vocabulary; and, toward the end of the year, reading some simple words and easily memorized stories (usually with less than fifty words total).

This multifaceted approach is consistent with the standards of all fifty states and the Common Core State Standards (NGA & CCSSO 2010). Although letter instruction is important, it is not the only facet of instruction, and it should not be isolated from meaningful print and language. (Invernizzi & Tortorelli 2013; Justice & Pullen 2003; McKay & Teale 2015; Neuman, Copple, Bredekamp 2000).”



“Time in nature is calming, the ability to focus and pay attention is increased and natural light is beneficial for children’s eyesight. All of this lays the foundations of healthy child development that is needed for learning to read.”

-The Joy of Reading Outside  
by Juliet Robertson

Most children (globally, with access to schools) learn to read by age 6 or 7, meaning first or second grade. A small percentage of children are hyperlexic and learn earlier, some as early as preschool, but despite a remarkable strength in early word-level reading and an intense interest in written material many of these children present with poor reading comprehension (Macdonald, D., Luk, G., & Quintin, E. M. (2022)). Both decoding skills and language comprehension must be present for sustainable literacy competency.

A head start on reading doesn't guarantee a child will stay ahead as they progress through school. Abilities tend to even out in later grades. U.S. Department of Education reading programs often say children should learn to read by age 8, or third grade, because learning to read transitions into reading to learn other subjects soon thereafter.



These articles may help families better prepare for their child's transition from early childhood care and education to an academic environment in August:

[Is My Child Ready for Kindergarten?](#)

[Ready or Not Kindergarten, Here We Come!](#)

[Transitioning to Kindergarten](#)

[MNPS Kindergarten readiness](#)

[I Can Be a Super Friend!](#) (social story)