Kindergarten Family Guide

What is the purpose of this family guide?

This guide was made to help families understand the Iowa Academic Standards and to show what students will learn by the end of kindergarten. It provides information about the key ideas and skills teachers will introduce in mathematics, English Language Arts/Reading and science. It also includes possible examples of what students will be asked to do in class, how to help your student at home, questions you can ask your student and questions families can ask the teacher.

This guide was also designed to help families understand how they can work with teachers to support the learning of their kindergartener. When teachers and families work together to help students master Iowa's Academic Standards, students can develop the skills they will need for success in school and life. If you have questions about this information or if your student needs extra help, please contact the teacher.

Why are Iowa's Academic Standards Important?

Academic standards are important because they help ensure that all students, no matter where they live or what school they attend, are prepared for success in college and the workforce. The standards help set clear and consistent expectations for what students should know and be able to do from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Standards are a set of goals, not a curriculum, so decisions about teaching remain with local schools. They guide families and teachers to know when students need extra assistance or when they need more of a challenge in the classroom. They also help your student develop critical-thinking skills in preparation for college and career.

English/Language Arts

Students in kindergarten explore language through listening, speaking, shared reading and shared writing. By the end of kindergarten, students know the letters and sounds for the alphabet and can write some letters independently. Students learn to speak on a specific topic and listen to their peers.

What might students be learning in their classroom in connection to the standards?

- Students will participate in many experiences with books, both fiction and nonfiction.
- Students will participate in writing experiences by drawing pictures and writing some words.
- Students will spell the words according to their sounds.
- Students will discuss the characters and settings of books. They will use details from books when they answer questions.
- Students will expand their listening and speaking vocabularies by listening to texts read aloud, participating in conversations, and learning to collaborate effectively with others.

What might my student be learning in their classroom?

- Your student will learn the parts of a book and how it has pictures and sentences.
- Your student will practice rhyming, matching words with similar sounds, and blending sounds into words.
- Your student will name upper and lower case letters, connecting them to their sounds, and writing them.
- Your student will be immersed in books and stories.
- Your student will be encouraged to ask questions and use books and experiences to find the answers.

What can I do to support my student at home?

- Use letters at home to practice naming and saying the sounds of the letters.
- Engage your student in listening to stories as you read to them.
- Provide opportunities for your student to write using different types of writing tools.
- Support your student by expanding their ideas when speaking by asking questions.
- Visit the library with your student every week. Have your student sign up for a library card.

What questions can I ask my student about the learning happening at school?

- What letter makes that sound?
- What characters were in the book we read?
- Where were the characters in the story?
- Can you tell me what happened during the story?
- Did you like this story? Why or why not?

What questions can I ask my student's teacher?

- May I see some of my student's work?
- Is this piece of work satisfactory? How could it be better?
- Is my student on track?
- How can I help my student?
- Are there resources to help my student's learning outside the classroom?

Mathematics

Kindergarten is a time when students begin to explore foundational math concepts, such as counting, shapes and patterns. These early experiences help spark curiosity and build confidence as they develop important problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Your encouragement and involvement at home will play a key role in helping your student enjoy learning and succeed in mathematics.

What might students be learning in their classroom in connection to the standards?

- **Counting and Cardinality:** Counting to 100 by ones and tens; understanding the relationship between numbers and quantities.
- **Numbers and Operations:** Recognizing, writing and comparing numbers 0–20.
- **Addition and Subtraction:** Understanding the basics of adding and subtracting using objects, drawings, or numbers.
- **Measurement and Data:** Comparing objects by size, length and weight; describing simple data using graphs or charts.
- **Geometry:** Identifying and describing shapes (e.g., circles, squares, triangles); understanding positional words like "above," "below," or "next to."

What might my student be learning in their classroom?

- Counting objects and practicing number recognition.
- Learning to sort and categorize objects based on size, color, or shape.
- Exploring addition and subtraction through hands-on activities, like counting blocks or fingers.
- Identifying and describing 2D and 3D shapes in their environment.
- Comparing objects and understanding simple measurements (e.g., longer/shorter, heavier/lighter).

What can I do to support my student at home?

- Practice counting with your student during daily activities, like counting steps, toys, or groceries.
- Use games and puzzles to teach numbers, shapes and patterns in a fun way.
- Explore mathematics through play, like building with blocks or measuring ingredients in recipes.
- Encourage your student to talk about what they notice, like "This toy is heavier than that one!"
- Read books with counting or math themes to reinforce key concepts.

What questions can I ask my student about the learning happening at school?

- Can you show me how to count to 20 (or 100)?
- What shapes do you see in the room?
- How are these two objects the same or different?
- Can you show me how to add or subtract using your toys or fingers?
- What math game or activity did you do in school today?

What questions can I ask my students' teacher?

- What are the main mathematics skills my student is working on this month?
- How can I help them practice counting and number recognition at home?
- Are there specific games or activities you recommend for learning shapes or patterns?
- How can I support their understanding of addition and subtraction?
- What should I focus on to help them build confidence in mathematics?

Science

The Iowa Academic Standards for Science empower teachers to provide all students in kindergarten with engaging science instruction that emphasizes data analysis and interpretation, critical thinking, problem solving and interdisciplinary connections—all while maintaining high expectations for academic achievement.

The science standards work in harmony with English/Language Arts and mathematics standards, allowing classroom instruction to better reflect real-world problem-solving, which often draws on multiple disciplines. Additionally, these standards aim to ensure all students have access to an equitable, high-quality science education.

What might students be learning in their classroom in connection to the standards?

The Iowa Academic Standards for Science incorporate the most current research and developments in modern science. To prepare students to think critically, analyze information and solve complex problems, the standards are structured to allow students—starting in elementary school and continuing through high school—to build on prior knowledge and skills. Key concepts are revisited and deepened over time, helping students strengthen their understanding of connections across scientific disciplines. Families should be aware that while some content may seem familiar, the way it is taught may differ from their own school experience.

What might my student be learning in their classroom?

- Motion of objects
- Sunlight, temperature and weather
- Relationships between animals and plants

What can I do to support my student at home?

- Encourage your student to begin to make sense of the world around them by asking questions and making observations. Ask them what they notice and what they wonder about the world around them.
- Extend classroom experiences at home by encouraging your student to explore, using their own language to describe lived experiences.
- Use the information on these pages to ask your student's teacher meaningful, informed questions.

What questions can I ask my student about the learning happening at school?

- What can I do to make things move? What can I do to change how they move? How could I build something that moves?
- Where do animals live and why do they live there? How do plants and animals survive if we aren't there to grow and feed them?
- How does the weather change what we do? What patterns can we find in the kinds of weather we have?

What questions can I ask my student's teacher?

- What kinds of phenomena is my student going to be making sense of this year?
- How is my student going to be engaging with the practices of science?

Social Studies

Social studies helps students understand the world around them and how they can engage in it. In kindergarten, students are just beginning to dive into basic social studies concepts including asking questions about different sources, exploring ways to participate in their communities, and understanding basic financial concepts.

What might students be learning in their classroom in connection to the standards?

Kindergartners will learn to ask and answer questions about a topic using different sources such as books, pictures, maps, and interviews. They will practice sharing facts and opinions about what they have learned through talking, drawing, or writing. Students will also learn ways to participate in their communities. Students will explore various communities they belong to, compare how life today is different from the past, describe how and why people move from place to place, and create simple routes to specific locations. Additionally, kindergartners will learn about rules and responsibilities for a variety of settings. Finally, they will identify needs versus wants, understand basic money concepts like buying and borrowing, and make thoughtful choices about spending.

What might my student be learning in their classroom?

- Belonging to a community
- Comparing the past to the present
- Rules and responsibilities
- Needs and wants

What can I do to support my student at home?

- Encourage your student to begin to make sense of the world around them by asking questions and making observations. Ask them what they notice and what they wonder about while at home and in different locations throughout the community, and/or state.
- Show images of friends or family in the past. Ask students what they notice and wonder about the image? What things look the same? What looks different?
- Ask your students if they know the difference between a need and a want. Give students examples of things such as water, books, bicycles, houses, and toys. Ask students to identify whether the item is a need or want. Finally, ask students to indicate why they said it was a need or want.

What questions can I ask my student about the learning happening at school?

- Do you know the route from our home to school? From home to the library? From home to the gas station? Why is being able to create a route to a specific location an important skill?
- Can you describe what life was like in the past? Can you put events in order from the oldest to the most recent event?
- How do you think people can work together to solve a problem?
- What is the role of community helpers and leaders? You might want to give a specific example such as a firefighter, police officer, the mayor, etc.
- What is the difference between buying and borrowing?

What questions can I ask my student's teacher?

- How can I help my student better understand the social studies skills and/or content they will be learning about this year?
- How can I help my student ask better questions about what they are learning?