1st Grade 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 first grade. 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 first grader. 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

In grade 1, students will expand their knowledge of sounds that various letter patterns can make beyond the alphabet. Students use their letter and sound knowledge to begin to read books. Students will expand their vocabulary through reading, writing, speaking and listening activities. They will write a few sentences to express their ideas and opinions.

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

- Students will expand their knowledge of letters and sounds to more complex letter patterns, including how to use that knowledge to spell words.
- Students will be asked to remember the characters, setting and events of stories.
- Students will apply comprehension strategies when reading and listening to literary and informational texts and collaborating in classroom discussions.
- Students will be asked to gather facts from text to share with others.
- Students will write a short story or share information using sentences.
- Students will learn to read words by rereading familiar text.
- Students will write for a variety of purposes.
- Students will listen to peers and use their speaking skills to respond, staying on the same topic.
- Students will expand their vocabulary as they listen to text being read.

What might my student be learning in their classroom?

- Your student will continue to learn and practice rules for recognizing letter/sound patterns and word analysis skills to figure out unfamiliar words when reading and writing.
- Your student will describe people, places, things and events of a story with relevant details by clearly expressing ideas and feelings in complete sentences.
- Your student will participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., using “how-to” books to write a sequence of instructions).
- Your student will take part in conversations about topics and texts being studied by responding to the comments of others and asking questions when confused.
- Your student will produce and expand complete, simple and compound statements, questions, commands and exclamations.
- Your student will identify the correct meaning for a word that can have multiple meanings, based on the sentence or paragraph in which the word is used (e.g., decide whether the word “bat” means a flying mammal or a club used in baseball).

What can I do to support my student at home?

- Encourage your student to read and reread books based on the letter and sound patterns they have learned.
- Play word games such as ‘I spy’.
- Act out stories together from books, television, or your student’s imagination.
- Pick a “word of the day” each day that starts with a different letter. Have your student write the word and look for other things that begin with the same letter.
- Practice writing in fun ways.
- Read books to your student that he or she cannot yet read themselves and help them learn age appropriate information.
- 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 sound does this letter(s) represent?
- What was this story about? Who were the characters? What was the setting?
- How do you write that letter? What does a sentence start with? What is at the end of this sentence?
- Can you use the sounds you know to try to spell that word?
- What does that word mean?

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 his or her learning outside the classroom?

Mathematics

First grade is a time when students deepen their understanding of numbers, patterns and problem-solving strategies. Your involvement plays a crucial role in their success.

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

- **Numbers and Operations:** Understanding numbers up to 120, counting, comparing and ordering numbers.
- **Addition and Subtraction:** Basic facts up to 20, using strategies to solve problems.
- **Place Value:** Understanding tens and ones.
- **Measurement and Data:** Measuring lengths using standard units, telling time to the hour and half-hour, and interpreting simple graphs.
- **Geometry:** Recognizing and describing shapes and their attributes.

What might my student be learning in their classroom?

- Practicing addition and subtraction with numbers up to 20 through hands-on activities and games.
- Exploring place value and understanding the concept of tens and ones.
- Solving simple word problems using drawings, objects, or equations.
- Measuring objects using standard and non-standard units, such as rulers or paper clips.
- Identifying and sorting 2D and 3D shapes based on their attributes.
- Comparing numbers and using terms like greater than, less than and equal to.

What can I do to support my student at home?

- Count objects around the house, practice skip counting by 2s and 5s, or solve simple addition and subtraction problems during daily routines, such as setting the table or organizing toys.
- Use board games, card games, or puzzles that involve counting, matching, or identifying patterns to make math fun and engaging.
- Encourage your student to help measure ingredients while cooking, compare lengths of objects, or count steps during a walk.
- Build numbers with coins, use building blocks for addition or subtraction, or sort objects by color, size, or shape to reinforce sorting and categorizing skills.
- Ask your student to solve simple word problems and explain their thinking, such as "If we have 3 apples and add 2 more, how many do we have in total?"
- Introduce time-telling using analog clocks and let your student count coins or identify their values during shopping trips.

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

- What math activity did you do today?
- Can you show me how you solved that problem?
- What is something new you learned in math this week?
- Can you count to 100 by tens? By fives?
- What shapes do you see around the house?

What questions can I ask my students' teacher?

- What math skills are you focusing on this month?
- What are my student's strengths and challenges in math?
- How can I help reinforce math concepts at home?
- Are there any resources or activities you recommend for additional practice?

Science

The Iowa Academic Standards for Science empower teachers to provide all students in first grade 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. Parents 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?

- Vibration and sound
- Light and shadow
- Behaviors of animals
- Movements of the sun and the moon

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 makes a sound and how can we see sound in action? What can I do to change sound?
- How do animals and plants use their body parts to survive?
- How are parents and their students similar and different? How do young animals look like their parents but also a little different?
- What patterns do we see in the sky with the sun, moon and stars?

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?