5 STEPS TO ACHIEVE KINDERGARTEN READINESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM
It’s not just about the technology.

When I listen to people talk about the 21st century classroom I often hear the discussion turn immediately to how to get as much technology in a classroom as possible. Don’t get me wrong—I’m glad to see technology appearing more frequently in schools! There’s plenty of evidence to support having an effective suite of technology in the classroom. Yet for all this technology to have the greatest effect on our youngest learners, it must be used correctly and as part of a holistic strategy that ultimately gets kids ready to enter kindergarten.

Children who are K-ready have a few things in common:
• They have a foundation in literacy and math
• They are emotionally and physically prepared to enter the world of “big kids.”
• They want to have FUN when they learn.

So let’s talk about the ways we can make sure children enter school with the strongest foundation in these areas as possible. That they are happy, curious, and confident; ready to take on a lifetime of learning.

I hope this e-book gives you some ideas about how to build strong foundations in your classroom.

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Before the age of 5, the human brain can form as many as... 700 neural connections per second.¹

That’s why it is so important that children have access to high-quality early education. Children with that access are more likely to show improvement in literacy and math, stay in school longer, graduate from high school, and attend a four-year college².
Let’s get the ball rolling.

While this guide presents five easy ways to think about school readiness in your own classroom, every educator knows there’s much more to it than that.

The Game Plan

1. Equip teachers for success
2. See what children know
3. Make informed instructional decisions
4. Meet children at their level
5. Build parent connections
Equipped for Success

The Right Tools for the Job
While the 21st century classroom isn’t all about technology, it is a crucial component. Capturing authentic work with digital cameras, tablets, audio recorders, and interactive white boards makes it easy to write reports and communicate with administrators and parents. Technology works best when it incorporates or enhances traditional teaching methods.

Education Never Ends
Continued professional development to stay abreast of current best practices is essential. If an expensive conference isn’t in your budget, joining a community of educators on a professional social media site like LinkedIn is a great way to stay up-to-date. Signing up for free newsletters, downloading e-books, and listening to webinars from industry experts are other ways to stay current.

Make the Time
Consistency and support make it all come together. Support from administration is key. Having all the tools available is excellent, but ultimately tools can be counter-productive if they aren’t used correctly and to their fullest extent. Time should be set aside for teachers to participate in regular training and professional development.
Edutainment  [EJ-OO-TEYN-MUH NT]

A form of programming (cinematic, television, live action, and games, especially computer games) that provides both education and entertainment.

Let’s be honest; if you take a look at what’s available in the average app store, it’s clear that some programs focus more on the entertainment factor and make sure the educational value is just ‘good enough.’ Hatch is proud to stand by our commitment to put education first and balance it with healthy doses of fun and engagement.

How does the educational technology in your classroom stack up?

☐ Does it have a clearly defined research basis?

☐ Are the cognitive skills and subject matter age-appropriate?

☐ Is there progress monitoring available to measure learning?

☐ Is training offered so that educators can implement it as part of a larger curriculum?

☐ Is it a simple game or an interactive learning experience?

☐ Is it fun and engaging?
Now that you’ve got the basics, it’s time to map out your plan for each child.
Start

Conduct a baseline assessment of all children.

Overcome the knowledge gaps with comprehensive lesson plans and regular reviews. Bridge by refocusing on the topic(s).

Skill reviews should occur periodically to guide and inform overall academic plan. Adjust goals accordingly.

Send sample work home regularly to stay connected with parents.

Regularly capture authentic work to support periodic skill reviews.

Capture tools:
- digital camera
- interactive display
- video recorders
- tape recorders
- written notes
- digital portfolios

Monitor English Language Learners with non-traditional or alternative work sampling and evidence of progressing language mastery. Make sure exceptional children’s goals align with IEPs.

K-Ready

Children are ready to start school, confident and ready to learn!
While planning ahead is essential to helping children succeed, every teacher knows that there will probably be a few bumps in the road. That’s why regular, consistent progress monitoring is so essential.

**Spice it up**
Varied and frequent play-based activities during center time reinforce core skills taught throughout the day. Consider creating lesson plans that encourage children to visit more than one center to complete an activity.

**Think Small**
When you identify knowledge gaps, create small groups of children with similar gaps so that they can help each other learn the skills they are struggling with. Encourage taking turns and each child leading an activity to boost confidence. Small groups also help to refocus learning.

**Plan Big**
After identifying any gaps in core skills, develop a plan to improve those areas at the child, classroom, school, and organizational level. This is especially important if the gap appears frequently.
Unique Paths

Each child begins an educational journey with different levels of learning and natural aptitude—not to mention vastly different home lives and support networks.

While all these variables are beyond an educator’s control, teachers can help children achieve school readiness by appealing to one of the only things these children have in common: the desire to play!

Appealing to an innate sense of play makes sure that every student gets what they need, no matter how they approach learning.

When making your lesson plans, be sure to follow the three P’s...
1. Playful

How can you make learning more playful?

In the challenge to fit in everything a student needs to be ready for school, it can be tempting to sacrifice play for instruction. It’s possible to do both! By consciously making an effort to include creative engagement (like music, art, and dramatic play) in your daily routine, you can teach core skill sets in a playful way that appeals to all types of learners.
2. Planful

Having fun shouldn’t mean chaos.

By planning for a systematic, graduated level of play, teachers can help ensure that children are growing every time they go to a center. Play time, whether in the computer or the block center, should be part of a scaffolded plan, customized to each child.
3. Purposeful

Saying that play should be purposeful sounds counterintuitive, but really, it makes sense.

To make sure every child continues down a path in a purposeful manner, centers should be refreshed frequently to contain manipulatives that further current goals. Treat technology the same way. Do the educational programs children use throughout the year grow with their personal goals? Or do they only speak to one narrowly defined skill area? Teacher interaction should be purposefully modeled to promote the best possible social-emotional development.
Connecting Through Communication

Parental involvement has an astonishing impact on early childhood performance.

Children with two “high involvement” parents enjoy school 51% more than children with “low involvement” parents\(^3\).

Parental involvement is twice as predictive of a child’s future academic success than a family’s socioeconomic status\(^3\).

With those kind of stakes, it’s vital that there is an open channel for communication at all times. Digital portfolios and regular progress reports with time-stamped, authentic data demonstrates to parents a child’s progress throughout the year, and provides evidence of knowledge gaps. Regularly scheduled letters home connect parents to goals, lessons, and results.
Conclusions

It takes a village.
Success depends on a network of support between administrators, educators, families and communities.

Technology is only a tool.
Technology is a fantastic way to promote k-readiness, but only if it meets certain criteria:
- The content is age-appropriate.
  - It is used to help meet established learning goals, not just for the sake of having technology in the classroom.
- Educators are trained to use the technology
- Developmentally appropriate practices are used to guide decisions about incorporating technology into lessons

Integration is key
Try to incorporate as many aspects of k-readiness into a lesson plan as possible. Making sure lessons incorporate cognitive, social-emotional, physical and technological as appropriate aspects will make for a well rounded student.
How Hatch Supports K-Readiness

Being a 21st century school isn’t just about having the latest technology. It’s about making sure every part of the school day resonates and that kids are learning lifelong skills. Sometimes that means using age-appropriate, research-based technology, sometimes it means using traditional manipulatives. Hatch is here to support early education classrooms in every way.

Hatch also supports educators through free newsletters, webinars from industry experts, and e-books (like this one!)

Explore more at: www.hatchearlylearning.com/resources


The phrase “Playful, Planful, Purposeful” is used with the kind permission of Dr. Susan Gunnewig and the Children’s Learning Institute. For more information, please visit www.childrenslearninginstitute.org