

CONTENTS

- Key areas of child development
- The importance of New York State Learning Standards
- Tips to help support your child
- Suggested book list
- Resources to learn more

STRONG FOUNDATIONS

What Families Need to Know

Watching a child grow up is an emotional experience—with plenty of ups and downs, joys and challenges along the way but these milestones aren't just emotional, they help us understand what children are ready to do. The more you know about what to expect, the better prepared and confident you'll be as a parent or caregiver to help support your child's successful mastery of the New York State learning standards which describe the foundation of what students should understand and be able to do in each grade.

Children move through stages of development in a predictable way for example, most children start crawling, then walking, then running but every child is unique. It's normal for children to develop at different rates. Sometimes children make bursts of progress--one day they're saying their first word and the next day suddenly it seems they are talking nonstop. Sometimes a week or two will go by with no big changes and there may even be some backsliding. This is normal. These milestones build on each other and provide your child with strong foundations for learning readiness.

KEY AREAS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Experts recognize key areas of child development (sometimes called children's milestones), a term used to describe all of the skills and abilities children learn in early life. It describes those key areas of child development – language and literacy, cognitive, physical and social-emotional development. Here we discuss what those keys areas of child development mean for your child's early school years.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

This area encompasses children's understanding and use of language and their ability to communicate. Communicating involves speaking and listening and as children get older reading and writing to express themselves. Some language and literacy skills are asking questions, rhyming, learning new words, telling stories, writing the letters of the alphabet and reading aloud.

In Pre-K, typically three and four year olds, children rapidly expand their language skills. They begin communicating in complex and compound sentences, have very few pronunciation errors and expand their vocabulary daily. They can follow multi-step directions and understand explanations given for things they can see. Children will start conversations and are less likely to change the subject of conversation to areas of personal interest. They are getting better at sharing personal experiences without adult prompts.

Strong Foundations will help you support your child in their pursuit to successfully master the New York State Learning Standards and thrive in the New York City schools.

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More on the next page>

Four-year-olds are building their knowledge of written language. They want to know the words in their environment and can recognize many letters and familiar words like their name. Four-year-olds are also developing an understanding that letters can be found in many places like signs and menus. Most children can also write some letters. They also know that writing goes from left-to-right and top to bottom. Four-year-olds typically understand the parts of a book and how it is read.

By the end of Pre-K, many children understand that letters represent the sounds in spoken words and may associate some letters with their sounds. As four-year-olds begin to make connections between letters and letter sounds, they may start to play with the sounds of words. Children practice using sounds that make up words by putting the sounds together to make words or break them into parts. They are able to understand and participate in rhyming games and songs (e.g., Anna Banana). Four-year-olds can come up with words that sound like other words (e.g., All the words that rhyme with cat.) They also enjoy creating nonsense words and phrases to practice the sounds of words and letters.

In Kindergarten, typically five-year-olds, children have well developed language skills. They pronounce words clearly, speak in complex and compound sentences, use correct grammar for the most part and have a basic vocabulary that grows quickly. Other adults can clearly understand what they are saying at this stage. Children at this age enjoy starting conversations, can wait their turn to speak during group conversations and can include appropriate details when sharing personal experiences.

Five-year-olds begin to extend their oral language skills to reading and writing. They know their uppercase and most lowercase letters. They have a much better understanding that letters represent specific sounds in spoken words. This knowledge helps them to sound out words in print and write out words based on their sounds. They are also beginning to recognize how words play different roles in sentences (e.g., verbs show action). They can discuss stories, recall parts of a story, put stories in correct sequence and are able to tell their own tales.

In First Grade, typically six-year-olds, children develop increasingly complex language skills throughout the year. Their vocabulary develops quickly. Their language use and ability to communicate provides a foundation for learning, including the development of independent reading skills. In general, their pronunciation of words is clear and they use complex grammatical forms.

In first grade, children transform into true readers. They apply their knowledge of how print works and practice strategies to decode unfamiliar words. They learn to read aloud with fluency, accuracy and understanding. They read a variety of texts for pleasure (e.g., fiction, non-fiction and poems) and use a variety of comprehension strategies to understand and enjoy literature. Children at this age write stories, notes and descriptions. Most are able to develop an idea beyond a sentence and will add some details to describe or explain things in their world. They enjoy sharing their writing with others.

In Second Grade, typically seven-year-olds, children have language skills that reflect the increasing impact of language and literacy instruction. The two areas interact because literacy activities enhance children's recognition of language (e.g., its sounds, patterns, meanings and uses). This improves literacy skills (e.g., reading and writing) by offering experiences that dramatically expand a child's familiarity with words. The interaction of language, literacy and cognition form the basis for a child's academic development.

In second grade, children recognize more words by sight and can apply reading comprehension strategies in flexible ways so that they read with greater fluency (e.g., speed, accuracy and expression) and independence. Reading is a pleasurable activity for most children and they demonstrate their understanding through discussion, written response and participation in school performances. Their vocabulary grows and their writing becomes more developed and engaging.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Cognitive development refers to thinking and understanding. Some examples of cognitive skills are counting, dramatic play, identifying colors and using creative thinking to tell and illustrate stories.

In Pre-K, children are developing greater self-control and resourcefulness. Their pretend play is more complex and imaginative and lasts for longer periods of time. They can also make plans and complete tasks. Four-year-olds want to try new experiences. They also want to be more self-reliant and seek to expand the areas of their lives where they can be independent decision-makers.

Four-year-olds have an increased ability to learn math concepts. They use logical reasoning to solve everyday problems and can effectively use language to compare and describe objects and shapes. They can typically count to ten, recognize written numerals zero to nine and add and subtract using numbers up to four. Four-year-olds know shapes (e.g., circle, square, triangle and rectangle). They know days of the week, months and the seasons, but cannot tell time yet.

Four-year-olds approach the world with great curiosity and use their imaginations to help understand it. Hands-on explorations help them to separate reality from fantasy. They can plan and can complete simple scientific investigations. Over the course of the year they will increase their abilities to make observations, gather information, compare data, identify patterns, describe and discuss observations and form explanations.

In the area of creative arts children are able to sing songs of their own creation as well as memorize songs. Their visual art becomes more realistic and may incorporate letters. Four-year-olds love to dance and are able to move to the music. Their dramatic play is very imaginative and has the structure of specific situations, like going to the grocery store or playing firefighter.

In Kindergarten, children are creative and enthusiastic problem solvers. They offer more imaginative ideas for how to complete a task, make something or solve long-term or more complex problems. As they participate in a variety of new experiences, five-year-olds ask more critical questions and weigh their options before making a decision. They are also more social as they learn new things and prefer activities that involve other children.

In mathematics, children this age become more abstract thinkers which includes a greater understanding of shapes and numbers. They can count a collection of up to 20 items, do simple addition and subtraction and identify large and small numbers in a set. Five-year-olds understand and use words that indicate position (e.g., under or behind). They can sequence events in order and are now learning to tell time. They can also sort objects based on more than one characteristic.

Five-year-olds want to know more about how the world works. Hands-on experiences help them to form explanations for how and why things happen. They can use tools like thermometers and scales to gather information and are able to carry out simple investigations more independently. Five-year-olds also use increasingly descriptive language to share information, ask questions and give explanations.

In the creative arts, five-year-olds listen to variety of music. They create realistic visual art with recognizable subjects and more detailed settings. They also understand that art can tell a story. The dramatic play of five-year-olds is organized and more elaborate. They are able to perform simple plays and perform puppet shows.

In First Grade, children have longer attention spans and continue to prefer structured activities to more open-ended experiences. They enjoy taking on new roles and responsibilities, but still need direction from adults and often ask questions to make sure they are completing tasks the *right way*.

In mathematics, six-year-olds can typically count up to 200 and count backwards from 20. They understand the difference between odd and even numbers and can identify numbers on a number line or with written words. They use increasingly more complex ways to solve addition and subtraction problems. They also count the sides of shapes to identify them and can combine shapes to create new objects. Six-year-olds can also give and follow directions.

For children at this age, scientific discovery is influenced by their tendency to incorporate make-believe into real world situations. Six-year-olds might continue to give animals human characteristics (e.g., suggesting what a worm might be thinking, or drawing a butterfly with eyelashes). Children are prompted to observe more objectively. Science experiences involve children in first-hand investigation of the world around them. These experiences help their thinking become more sophisticated.

A child's development in the creative arts varies based on their experiences with art, music, dance and theater. Through exposure and practice, six-year-olds use a wider variety of materials to create visual art that combine colors, forms and lines. They can remember the words and melodies to a number of songs and may sing or play many songs on instruments. Through dance, six-year-olds can create, imitate and explore movement in response to a musical beat. The dramatic play of six-year-olds shows more creativity and complexity with the use of props, costumes, movements and sounds. Children at this age can also recite simple lines when participating in school performances.

In Second Grade, children enjoy having the opportunity to share their knowledge with others. They display a longer attention span. Seven-year-olds are curious and frequently ask adults and peers questions to satisfy their need to know more information. They use increasingly complex and creative strategies to solve problems at home and at school.

In mathematics, seven-year-olds have strong number sense and estimation skills. Children at this age can do simple addition and subtraction and can apply strategies necessary to solve simple word problems. They can work with three-digit numbers and have improved abilities for problem solving. Seven-year-olds can use rulers to measure units. They also understand how to measure angles and can apply their knowledge of shapes to three-dimensional objects and structures in their environment.

In visual arts, seven-year-olds express ideas and feelings in artwork, using a variety of colors, forms, and lines. They create effective works of art using colors descriptively that mirror objects in real life. They also continue to develop knowledge of the different mediums (e.g., paint, clay, wood and video), techniques and processes. They can remember the words and melodies to a variety of songs and can play these songs on instruments either alone or in a group. Children at this age can act out real-life and imaginative situations through a variety of performance styles.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical development includes large and small muscle skills. Large muscle skills involve a child's strength and coordination. These are activities like balancing, throwing, running and jumping. Small muscle skills involve a child's coordination and control of muscles in their hands. These are skills like tying shoes, holding a pencil or scribbling with a crayon.

In Pre-K, children can participate in active play and exercise for longer periods of time. They are skilled at walking, climbing, balancing, jumping, hopping, skipping, marching and galloping. Children this age are also better able to throw, catch, kick and bounce balls. For example, most four-year-olds can kick a ball forward with some accuracy. They can catch large balls with two hands. They can walk up and down stairs with more coordination. Improved finger dexterity allows them to hold writing tools with a more mature grip. Better hand-eye coordination helps four-year-olds do puzzles, play with toys that have small parts and dress and undress with little help.

In Kindergarten, children like to be active and learn new games. They have an increased ability to balance and coordinate movements which allows them to ride a bike with training wheels, swim, jump rope and perform most ball-related skills. They are able to vary the direction, speed and quality of their movements (e.g., walking and running). They can walk up and down stairs while holding objects in one or both hands. Most five-year-olds have developed the ability to skip with skill. Children at this age can kick a ball in a specific direction with some accuracy. Five-year-olds can remove and replace lids and make paper objects with assistance. They can also use their fingers to control writing and painting tools, dress and undress dolls and manage zippers and buttons.

In First Grade, children continue to enjoy moving in a variety of ways. They are able to run in various directions and can manipulate their bodies in sequences (e.g., somersaults and cartwheels). Their hand-eye coordination is still developing, so skills like throwing and catching are still growing. Their motor skills continue to improve. Children's skill levels will vary based on the amount of physical activity they are involved in. Inactive children will not mature as quickly as those who participate in activities like dance lessons, team sports or outdoor play.

In Second Grade, children begin to combine motor skills like running to kick a ball, rolling after landing from a jump or moving rhythmically to music. They are enthusiastic about physical activity in all forms. Children who have spent a substantial amount of time outside of school on skills like riding a bike, swimming, dance or gymnastics begin to show true proficiency.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Interacting, getting along with others, and demonstrating self-control are signs of social and emotional development. Some examples of social and emotional skills are forming positive relationships, following rules, and waiting for a turn on the playground.

In Pre-K, children continue to learn what causes certain feelings and realize that other children may react differently. They learn to better manage intense emotions with coping strategies like talking it out or drawing a picture. Four-year-olds also show more progress in their social interactions with peers, for example, they may smoothly join in a group play situation, show sympathy for other children or suggest ways to resolve conflicts.

Four-year-olds are learning to separate more easily from parents and caregivers without as much difficulty. Four-year-olds make and maintain friendships with other children. They are able to make decisions with adult assistance and are often able to negotiate with other children to solve problems. Children at this age continue to seek emotional support from parents and caregivers.

They begin to describe themselves within a group context (e.g., part of a team or family) and understand relationships between various people in their environment. They are developing the ability to identify feelings, likes and dislikes and can explain why they have them. They are better able to adapt to changes and can predict what comes next when routines are established. They are also able to follow simple directions.

In Kindergarten, children can manage feelings and social situations with greater independence. For example, they might try strategies like negotiation and compromise to resolve a conflict before seeking adult help. They also have improved skills for forming and keeping friends. Being accepted by "the group" is becoming more and more important.

Five-year-olds become more interested in developing relationships with other children and with teachers, coaches and extended family members. With guidance, children are better at following directions, taking turns and demonstrating capacity to follow rules and routines.

Five-year-olds can share information unique to themselves. For example, a five-year-old can talk about what they like to play compared with what a friend likes to play. They can express their feelings. Children at this age want to be taken seriously. They can be very demanding or cooperative at times.

In First Grade, children are confident and enjoy showing off their talents. They start to display an increasing awareness of emotions and begin to develop better techniques to control their own emotions. They are beginning to understand the concept of fairness and right and wrong. Six-year-olds are beginning to enjoy sharing toys and snacks with friends, although conflicts among peers remain quite frequent. Tattling is a common way for six-year-olds to attract adult attention. Routines are an important source of stability and security for children this age.

In Second Grade, children enjoy making new friends and take pleasure in imitating the actions of friends and peers at school. Seven-year-olds demonstrate increasing independence from parents and family and may pay more attention to friendships. While they typically prefer structure and routines, they may also choose to work or play independently in certain situations. Children at this age often choose to develop games with rules and try to treat peers with respect during play. They are starting to make their own friends.

NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

The sections above describe key areas of child development, which are important for understanding how children relate to their world. Understanding these key areas can help parents understand *how* children learn as they enter school. With the key areas of development as a backdrop, it can be easier to understand *what* children might be learning at different grade levels and *why* it is appropriate to learn specific concepts in particular grade levels. This is where the New York State Learning Standards come in. The New York State Learning Standards describe the foundation of what students should understand and be able to do in each grade. The New York State Learning Standards cover the following areas of study: Health, Physical Education, and Family and Consumer Science; Mathematics, Science, and Technology Education; English Language Arts; The Arts; Career Development and Occupational Studies; Languages Other Than English; and Social Studies. These standards ensure that all children are prepared at the end of each school year to move forward to the next grade level.

In addition to the New York State Learning Standards, the New York City Department of Education has developed guides for families of children in Kindergarten through Eighth Grade, entitled “Great Expectations, Partnering for your child’s future.” These guides provide even more detail about what your child should know by the end of each school year in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, social studies and other areas. While the learning standards provide a blueprint for what children are expected to learn at each grade level, it is important to remember that each child develops at their own rate. What children are taught in school (e.g., the curriculum) is tied to these learning standards but this learning shouldn’t stop at the end of the school day. The home is also a powerful learning environment for children to extend their learning. The more families understand what children need to know at each grade level and how to support their development at home, the more successful their students will be in school. Families play a crucial role in supporting their children through these important stages of child development which will build a strong foundation that will help their children meet the New York State Learning Standards.

SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN IN THE EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS

First and foremost, children need love, affection, encouragement, and protection. Young children also need lots of opportunities to experience the world, develop independence and build strong bodies and minds. Here are some ways you can work with your child to support healthy child development and school readiness. One of the best ways to help your child grow and get ready for school is by talking

with them. Talking builds cognitive *and* language skills – the skills that prepare your child to think and learn, read and write.

Pre-Kindergarten

- **Language and Literacy** – Try to keep books, paper and things to draw with handy. Sing, read, talk and visit the library often.
- **Cognitive** – Have blocks, manipulatives and costumes available. Sort objects, organize things, create visual art and engage in dramatic play regularly.
- **Physical** – Visit parks, jungle gyms and have crayons and paintbrushes for children to use. Jump, climb, stretch, dance and paint frequently.
- **Social-Emotional** – Have group play time and opportunities to share. Work together, play simple games, take turns and provide leadership opportunities every day. Praise positive self-regulation and provide leadership opportunities and child-centered group activities.

Kindergarten

- **Language and Literacy** – Label things in your child’s environment, find books based on songs or rhymes and make lists of favorite words. Point out letters and sound out familiar words in signs. Get your child a library card to support this development.
- **Cognitive** – Use puzzles, explore parks and visit historical sites. Point out patterns, collect objects, encourage creativity and sing to help your child develop.
- **Physical** – Try new sports or physical activities. Run and dance to enhance this development.
- **Social-Emotional** – Have imaginative play opportunities and play dates with friends. Help your child make new friends and play group games to create strong relationships.

First Grade

- **Language and Literacy** – Read to your child and encourage your child to read to you, too. Work with your child to learn new words, write simple stories with illustrations. You can also take your child to the library regularly.
- **Cognitive** – Play board games, discuss the weather, make recipes together, visit the zoo and develop a family history. Count, pattern, experience and explore new things.
- **Physical** – Play team sports and do the hokey pokey. Dance, tumble, do yoga and throw a ball back and forth to further develop these skills.
- **Social-Emotional** – Have children keep a picture/word diary to explore their many moods and feelings. Share, take turns, validate emotions and model appropriate social interactions to develop these skills.

Second Grade

- **Language and Literacy** – Have your child read to you, play literacy games online with your child on age-appropriate websites (e.g., pbskids.org or “On-Lion” at nypl.org). Decode words and write down stories to develop these skills.
- **Cognitive** – Play cards, take care of plants and share family pictures or traditions. Solve math problems, observe and discuss things in your environment to develop these skills.
- **Physical** – Ride bikes, try gymnastics and discuss healthy foods. Dribble, balance and make healthy foods together to develop these skills.
- **Social-Emotional** – Allow children the chance to resolve conflicts and do things independently.

GREAT BOOKS FOR STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Books are an important tool to support your child's language development. There are many wonderful books that you can share with your children to support what they are learning and feeling through every stage of their development. This is a selection of grade appropriate books to get you started.

Pre-Kindergarten

Language and Literacy – *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson

Cognitive – *Go Away, Big Green Monster!* by Ed Emberley

Physical – *Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes: And Other Action Rhymes* by Zita Newcome

Social-Emotional – *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn and *Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown

Kindergarten

Language and Literacy – *The Neighborhood Mother Goose* by Nina Crews

Cognitive – *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

Physical – *Head to Toe* by Eric Carle

Social-Emotional – *Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister and *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes

First Grade

Language and Literacy – *Aunt Chip and the Triple Creek Dam Affair* by Patricia Polacco

Cognitive – *Dory Story* by Jerry Pallotta and David Biedrzycki or *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina

Physical – *Oh the Things You Can Do That Are Good for You!* by Tish Rabe

Social-Emotional – *A Splendid Friend Indeed* by Suzanna Bloom

Second Grade

Language and Literacy – *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James

Cognitive – *One Grain of Rice A Mathematical Folktale* by Demi

Physical – *The Busy Body Book: A Kid's Guide to Fitness* by Lizzy Rockwell

Social-Emotional – *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth

RESOURCES

The material on *Key Areas of Child Development* is adapted from:

PBS PARENT CHILD DEVELOPMENT TRACKER

www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopmenttracker/

Some other websites to check out with more information on Strong Foundations:

SCHOOLSOURCE NYC

www.thirteen.org/edonline/schoolsourcenyx

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION GREAT EXPECTATIONS LEARNING GUIDES

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/Great+Expectations.htm>

THE HEAD START EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE CENTER

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

www.aap.org/healthtopics/stages.cfm

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

www.NIFL.gov