

Appropriate Preschool Goals

All programs should have goals to guide activities and to provide a base for teaching methodologies. Without goals it is easy to end up teaching just about anything. Although the goals of preschools vary by state and individual programs, all should have certain essential goals.

Social and Interpersonal Skills

Human beings are social, and much of students' learning involves social interactions:

- Getting along with other children and adults and developing good relationships with teachers
- Helping others and developing caring attitudes
- Playing and working cooperatively
- Following classroom rules

Self-Help and Intrapersonal Skills

Children must learn how to manage their behavior and their affairs:

- Taking care of personal needs, such as dressing (e.g., tying, buttoning, zipping) and knowing what clothes to wear
- Eating skills (e.g., using utensils, napkins, and a cup or glass; setting a table)
- Health skills (e.g., how to wash and bathe, how to brush one's teeth)
- Grooming skills (e.g., combing hair, cleaning nails)

Approaches to Learning

I am sure you have heard the old saying that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. In some regard, the same is true for children. Even though on the one hand we talk about children always being ready and eager to learn, on the other hand, professionals understand that all children are not equally ready to learn. Consequently, with today's emphasis on early learning, there is an accompanying emphasis on supporting children's motivation to learn and helping them develop positive dispositions toward learning. This is particularly important for children who are at risk for school failure. Approaches to learning (also known as dispositions to learning) include these components:

- Self-regulation of attention and behavior
- Effective social skills to develop a positive relationship with others
- Positive attitude toward learning
- Self-motivation for learning
- Listening skills
- Ability to set goals and develop and follow through on plans
- Understanding, accepting, and following rules and routines
- Finding more than one solution to a question

Learning to Learn

Learning how to learn is as important as learning itself—in fact, learning depends on the acquisition of learning skills:

- Self-help skills to promote a good self-image and high self-esteem
- Knowledge of self, family, and culture
- Sense of self-worth
- Persistence, cooperation, self-control, and motivation to learn
- Growing confidence
- Responsibility for age-appropriate tasks
- Turn taking during activities with other children

Academics

As academics plays a more central role in preschool curriculum, some key areas of knowledge include these:

- Names, addresses, and phone numbers
- Colors, sizes, shapes, and positions, such as under, over, and around
- Numbers and prewriting skills, shape identification, letter recognition, sounds, and rhyming
- Simple sentence structure
- Simple addition and subtraction
- Ways to handle a book (California Department of Education, 2007)

Language and Literacy

There is a great emphasis on helping preschool children learn literacy skills. To develop language and literacy skills, preschoolers must work on a variety of capabilities:

- Oral language skills
- Vocabularies
- Conversations with other children and adults
- Proficiency in language
- Literacy skills related to writing and reading
- Letters of the alphabet
- Listening comprehension
- Motivation to read
- Print awareness
- Ways to use and appreciate books (Texas Education Agency, 2007)

Character Education

Many schools and school districts identify, with parents' help, the character traits they want all students to demonstrate. Children need multiple opportunities to learn about and demonstrate character traits such as these:

- Positive mental attitude
- Persistence
- Respect for others
- Cooperation
- Honesty
- Trustworthiness
- Sensitivity

Music and the Arts

Brain research supports the use of music and the arts to encourage learning in all areas. Preschoolers can learn about music and the arts in many ways:

- Varied materials (e.g., crayons, paint, clay, markers) to create original work
- Different colors, surface textures, and shapes to create form and meaning
- Art as a form of self-expression
- Music activities
- Varieties of simple songs
- Movement to music of various tempos
- Dramatic play with others

Wellness and Healthy Living

When children are not healthy, they cannot achieve their best. Helping children learn healthy habits will help them do well in school. Healthy habits include the following:

- Good nutritional practices
- New foods, a balanced menu, and essential nutrients
- Management of personal belongings
- Ability to dress oneself appropriately
- Personal hygiene, such as washing one's hands and blowing one's nose

Independence

Skills of independence help children have the confidence they need to achieve in school activities:

- Doing things for themselves
- Taking responsibility for passing out, collecting, and organizing materials
- Learning self-direction

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