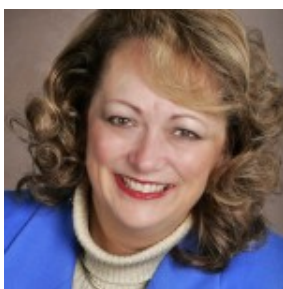


# Opinion: Every day prepares kids for kindergarten

By Vicki Barber

As the doors open to a new school year, more than 3.5 million children in the United States will enter kindergarten. Yes, really, that many. Kindergarten entry means schools all over the country are readying themselves for a new generation of learners. Just think, this will be the graduating class of 2024.

Getting a child ready for kindergarten is a large project. For some it may feel like it starts this month with the purchase of new clothes, pencils, and a ruler. But getting ready for kindergarten truly begins the day a child is born. Just breathing is a new experience. So is hearing and seeing. A first step is new. So is a first word. Any and all of these new experiences help children get ready for kindergarten.



Vicki Barber

I recently spent a few days with a 2½ -year-old little girl. She's gaining words every moment. "What's that?" "Where are you going?" "What are you doing?" She is curious about everything. She wants to attach a word to every item and event within her world. Her parents talk with her and encourage the questions. Although, I did notice a time or two when they requested a break, it is important they recognize that she is getting ready for kindergarten in her own way.

Preschool provides a marvelous opportunity to expand learning. Where else can a child learn about bunnies, goldfish, and sand play all in one place? Where else can a child make cookies and share them with friends in the same hour? Those friends may speak the same language or they may come from families speaking different languages. Over cookies, the language doesn't matter a great deal. At the end of the day, they'll all know the event was a tasty one and each will have words to describe the experience. They're getting ready for kindergarten. From age zero to 5, every childhood experience is setting the stage and now we've arrived. It's time for kindergarten.

This year the schools in El Dorado County are using a new screening tool. It's called the KSEP, short for Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile. The information is used to help the teachers in the schools learn about the words, experiences, and thoughts a child brings to this new world of school. It helps school staff decide how to help each child take the next step into learning.

Education in the next 13 years will bring with it a great deal of excitement and learning. Like the first steps and the first words in the first five years, these years will bring more firsts, opening up an exciting world that includes reading, mathematics, science and social studies. Just as the first five years readied students for kindergarten, these next years will ready them for their lives – all 3.5 million of them.

Ready or not, here they come.

*Vicki Barber is superintendent of El Dorado County Office of Education.*