

Kendall prepares for kindergarten
at Primrose School

Am I Ready
for

Kindergarten?

Choosing a Bridge to Kindergarten Program in Katy

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Photography by Marissa Hugonnett*

What Should My Child Know?

Kindergarten teachers in Katy ISD will expect your child to have some basic skills prior to starting the school year. The district provides a full-day kindergarten program with lessons in language arts, math, science, social studies, health, physical education, music, art, and technology. For the safety of your child, she should know her first and last name, street address, parents' names, phone number, age, and birthday.

Beyond the basics, you can determine if your child is prepared for school by reviewing a school readiness skills list. Children develop skills at different rates, but having a measure for what your child knows already will give you an idea of the areas that need work. This is where a kindergarten bridge program comes in.

What is a Bridge to Kindergarten Program?

Cheryl Sage of British Private Prep explains the concept of a bridge program. "The bridge to kindergarten program has been designed for the child who is academically, emotionally, and socially ready for a kindergarten classroom, but will not turn 5 before the Katy ISD cutoff on

Sept. 1," she says, adding, "It is also intended to accommodate the child who is truly not ready for kindergarten. This program will give that child another year of educational growth, guaranteeing them a more successful kindergarten year. Children don't even notice they are in their preschool for an extra year and rather than repeating a grade level in the elementary school, which can be detrimental for any child."



Michael and Carter enjoy a day of learning at Primrose School

Bridge programs introduce children to the structure of kindergarten classes and experiences, teaching basic skills that set the foundation for learning. Lou Ann McLaughlin of Primrose School shares that bridge to kindergarten classes act as a connection for children who need the gift of more time to become more confident as they move to the next level of academic achievement. "Sometimes, the gift of time is literal – they don't quite fit the age cutoff for kindergarten, but have gotten all they can out of preschool," McLaughlin says. "Bridge programs provide a way for children to enter the school environment at different levels of social-emotional and interpersonal maturity. Since children in kindergarten are expected

Jake enjoys a lesson at Kids R Kids in Cinco Ranch



British Private Prep's bridge program includes lessons in language, math, science and social studies



Kate is becoming more confident in her learning at Primrose School



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to have longer attention spans and greater ability to concentrate, bridge programs offer practice in these areas.”

What Children Will Learn

Curriculum in bridge to kindergarten classes usually covers topics like language and literacy, math, science, and social studies. “These early learning experiences are the building blocks for future academic success,” says Sage. “The goal is to prepare the whole child for a lifelong love of learning, while turning them into a well-mannered, trustworthy, responsible member of the community.”

McLaughlin shares that a good bridge program will also teach children how to make their own choices, cooperate with others, join in appropriately in a group situation, listen to and follow several instructions, and take responsibility for their own possessions, their classroom materials, and their behavior.

Bridge Programs Versus Preschool

Steve Sandweiss of Tiger Land Childcare Center stresses the importance of differentiating between pre-kindergarten and bridge programs. “Each school may have very different names for their pre-kindergarten and bridge programs, so it’s important to understand exactly what they are offering and whether there is a difference between their pre-kindergarten program and bridge to kindergarten program,” he says. “Some schools have distinct differences between the two programs, and others refer to the pre-kindergarten program interchangeably with bridge and do not really distinguish between the two. Make sure you understand whether the program you are hearing about is a true bridge program or whether it’s the name they use for the pre-kindergarten program.”

A common misconception about bridge to kindergarten programs is that they are substitutions for kindergarten or are

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Kids R Kids students, Olivia and Sophie ask questions during class

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Students at British Private Prep enjoy reading a book

The goal is to prepare the whole child for a lifelong love of learning, while turning them into a well-mannered, trustworthy, responsible member of the community.

- Cheryl Sage, British Private Prep

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babysitting services. They are not. Bridge programs are specifically designed to reinforce the structure of school and be developmentally appropriate for the child in terms of both educational and social aspects of learning. "A bridge program has more of a developmental curriculum, even in an academic environment, including more of an activity-based program, and functions as preparation for kindergarten," shares McLaughlin. "There is more one-to-one attention according to individual needs, abilities, and academic and social-emotional readiness."

Bridge programs help strengthen a child's social skills and teach them how to compromise, be respectful of others, and problem-solve, according to Sage. Preschool is a great place for children to gain a sense of self, explore, play with their peers, and build confidence. Bridge to kindergarten programs offer all of the above and so much more, though, she adds. "The importance of reading readiness, early math, and writing skills are an essential part of the bridge class," she shares. "A well-established bridge program helps children find answers through exploration, experimentation, and conversation."

Which Bridge Program Is Right for My Child?

If you've decided a bridge to kindergarten program is right for your child, now you need to determine which one will best meet their needs. A good bridge program curriculum should be age-appropriate, offering continual growth of each individual child.

In any bridge class, teachers with strong knowledge of child development are a key factor in the growth of each child academically, emotionally, and socially. "The teacher is probably the number one most important component," says Sage. "What are her credentials (keeping in mind the state of Texas does not require anything other than a high school diploma)? What is her teaching philosophy? Is the classroom controlled, inviting, and fun? Do the children look happy and interested? Parents should check out the entire preschool center." To research state inspection results on childcare centers, parents can visit tdprs.state.tx.us.

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Julian and Catherine learn important technology skills at Primrose School

Parents should also be sure to ask specific questions about curriculum and instruction and to make time to visit the school in person. It's important to ask about each bridge program's curriculum materials and how they are presented to the children, the pace of instruction, and how the program can address any gaps your child has in their learning. Parents may also want to find out how the program is viewed by the school district and elementary school that the student will move on to. A call to the school should give you the feedback about the program you're looking for.

Sharing in Your Cutie's Education

With your child in a bridge program, it is the perfect time to start sharing in his or her education. Kids love it when their parents volunteer as a special classroom helper or lunch mom or dad. "If a school does not want a parent involved or has a policy against parents visiting the classrooms, this should raise a red flag," says Sandweiss. If you don't have the flexibility to be there during the day, make sure you take time to talk to your child every day about what happened at school in the classroom and about their friends.

Bridge programs can teach your child how to respect the teacher, make friends, and resolve conflicts. A good bridge program can easily make your cutie's transition to kindergarten a happy and successful one. KM

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British Private Prep's group learning activities help students prepare for kindergarten

Sydney helps Isabella with a lesson at Kids R Kids



Is Your Cutie Ready for Kindergarten?

Before beginning kindergarten, your student should have these basic skills:

Colors and Shapes

- ✓ They know and can name many colors
- ✓ They know basic shapes

Motor Skills

- ✓ They can follow the leader, walk, run, hop, jump, and march
- ✓ They can jump on two feet
- ✓ They can draw and color beyond scribbling
- ✓ They know how to cut using scissors
- ✓ They can zip, button, and snap

Number Readiness

- ✓ They know their age
- ✓ They can recognize numbers one through five by sight
- ✓ They understand that numbers represent a quantity
- ✓ They can count out loud to 10

Reading Readiness

- ✓ They have been read to often
- ✓ They recognize their first name
- ✓ They look at books

Social Readiness

- ✓ They can be away from their parents without getting upset
- ✓ They listen to, remember, and can follow one- and two-step directions
- ✓ They know their body parts
- ✓ They can dress by themselves

Writing Readiness

- ✓ They can hold crayons or markers like a pencil
- ✓ They are familiar with letters and numbers

Source: familyeducation.com

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