

Linking the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines to School Readiness
vi. A Developmental Approach to Promoting School Readiness

Children build competencies as they progress along their individual developmental pathways.

When implementing the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines, it is important to keep in mind that children master new knowledge and skills through a series of developmental processes that evolve over time. While effective teachers plan lessons and structure their classrooms with an awareness of the ultimate goals they want children to achieve, they also recognize that children at different developmental levels have different capabilities, and expectations need to be adjusted accordingly.

Prekindergarten children mature over time in parallel areas such as length of attention span, expressive vocabulary, behavioral self-control, problem-solving skills, fine-motor coordination, and working memory skills. These diverse aspects of development impact—directly and indirectly—children’s ability to understand particular concepts and carry out specific activities successfully. For example, a three year old may be learning to sort and classify objects by color or size, while a four year old can learn to sort objects based on their beginning sound (such as /pig/, /pot/, /puzzle/). A three year old may be working on motor skills such as jumping, standing on one foot, and throwing a ball, whereas a four year old can learn to follow directions such as “hop two times” or “walk quickly,” and is learning to throw a ball with aim. In the social-emotional domain, younger prekindergarten children are still practicing basic skills such as taking turns and sharing toys without hitting or grabbing. Older prekindergarten children are more able to resolve conflicts verbally (though they often still need teacher support to do so) and engage in cooperative play. Thus, what may be appropriate for four and five year olds may not be appropriate for three year olds. This attention to children’s varying developmental needs and self-regulation skills is critically important. Also, as many early childhood classrooms have children of mixed ages (three- to four-year-olds) flexibility in learning and play activities within a classroom will often be necessary to optimally support each child.

Teachers individualize instruction to facilitate children’s developmental progress.

Teachers are encouraged to take a developmental perspective in implementing the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines. Teachers should meet children where they are and provide information and activities at a level that children can readily understand and engage with. This means building children’s skills over time and working toward the school readiness outcomes step by step as children demonstrate mastery of beginning-level skills. Teachers should have the outcome skills in mind but need to prepare children to meet those goals through scaffolding experiences and activities that are appropriate for each individual child’s current developmental levels and capabilities.

Effective teachers know that each child is unique and can be appreciated as an individual with a unique style, temperament, set of interests, and aptitude for learning. Teachers should have high, positive expectations for all children, but this does not mean that all children should be expected to learn at the same rate or in the same way. There may be some advanced three-year-olds who are ready to meet some of the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines outcomes right now, while there are four-year-olds who seem far from attaining these outcomes. Teachers should make use of available assessments and daily observations to determine where each child is in terms of mastering skills in the various domains. They can then use this information to plan lessons and provide activities that can be individualized to the needs of children who are at varying skill levels.