
READY for SCHOOL Parent News:
School Readiness Myths

It is not unusual to hear school readiness “myths” in the broader culture. These typically are not based on sound educational theory. Here are a few common school readiness myths and the accompanying correct information:

Myth #1: ***Learning the ABCs/alphabet is crucial to school readiness.*** The Truth: Learning the ABCs/alphabet is a memorization skill. While it is important, and will help children understand the idea of alphabetical order in the future, learning to recognize and name letters and identify their sounds is even more important.

Myth #2: ***Children need to know how to count to 50 before going to first grade/primary school.*** The Truth: Similar to learning the ABCs/alphabet, counting to 10, 50, or 100 is a rote memorization skill. Again, while it helps children understand that there is an order to numbers, far more important is understanding the idea of 1-to-1 correspondence (that each number you count has a corresponding object, person, year, etc. to go with it) and understanding quantity (i.e., that “three” means “three objects”).

Myth #3: ***The more “teacher-directed” the learning, the better. In other words, if a teacher is directly telling children something, that will increase their learning.*** The Truth: Actually, we know that children internalize concepts more fully when they are doing things – when they are digging, building, balancing, jumping, writing, counting, etc. vs. being told by someone else.

Myth #4: ***The more a program looks like the “school” we remember as children (desks, teacher up in front of the classroom, etc.), the more the children will learn.*** The Truth: Young children learn best in an environment that allows them to make choices (builds decision-making skills and independence); to select their own learning materials for at least part of the day (children are inherently motivated to learn); and empowers them to try new things with a teacher who guides the learning (children learn through active engagement with the people and materials in their environment).

Myth #5: ***Children need quiet to learn.*** The Truth: Actually, children need a language-rich environment where caring adults provide responsive language interactions (your child makes a sound; you respond); where children’s language is expanded (your child points to a cat and says “cat”; you say – “Yes, that striped cat is getting ready to climb the tree”); and where new vocabulary is regularly introduced.

Myth #6: ***Learning to write is all about letter formation.*** The Truth: While letter formation is one part of learning to write, equally, or even more important, is understanding the idea of recording one’s ideas on paper. When a child makes some scribbles and says “This is my daddy,” write your child’s words on the picture and she will begin to make the connection between the spoken and written word. Regularly record what your child says. Longer dictated stories can become illustrated “books” which can be laminated to read again and again.

Learning some “school skills” like lining up and raising hands before transitioning to school will certainly make the transition to formal schooling easier. However, what is most important is giving children the chance to fully explore and experiment in an environment with caring adults who guide, support, and extend their learning.