



K

Kindergarten



Welcome Parents, to *Tools of the Mind!*

Your school district is investing in children by providing the *Tools of the Mind* curriculum. Your child has a wonderful year ahead!

What makes Tools unique?

→ Focus on self-regulation

In order to learn in elementary school and be successful students, children must develop the ability to self-regulate. Self-regulation encompasses not only emotions, physical behavior and social interactions, but includes the ability to monitor and control cognitive processes such as attention. It includes:

- ◆ The ability to stay on task
- ◆ Ignore distractions
- ◆ Remember on purpose
- ◆ Hold two strategies in mind at the same time
- ◆ The development of self-discipline
- ◆ The motivation to succeed

Even though children may know many facts, without self-regulation they will not learn new things efficiently and will have trouble with more-advanced content.

In school, children need to conform to routines, switching from doing something they enjoy to something of lesser interest. They are expected to be able to follow directions with multiple interrelated steps and are required to

control their attention by blocking out distractions. They have to be able to work with other children and focus on the learning task. Self-regulation is what allows children to be successful in meeting these demands.

When children are self-regulated, every activity they engage in is a learning activity and they can follow rules without the teacher's support. Children who are not self-regulated can behave if the teacher is watching them and

learn when the teacher is helping them pay attention, but without the teacher's direction, the child cannot learn. Moreover, when teachers have to spend significant time regulating children in their classrooms, they have less time

and attention to invest in supporting children's learning of academic skills, and challenging and individualizing instruction for all students.

Helping young children improve their self-regulation is critical to closing the achievement gap for many at-risk children, as well as helping all children reach their highest potential.

The good news: Early childhood is a key period for acquiring self-regulation in all its forms. This is why in a Tools of the Mind Kindergarten, teachers work deliberately to help children develop self-regulation.

“ Our philosophy is that teaching should be more than transmitting facts and skills; it should teach children about learning itself, giving them the mental tools that will enable them to learn on their own. ”

How does a focus on self-regulation translate to the kindergarten classroom?

The central focus of Tools of the Mind (Tools) is the development of both cognitive and social-emotional self-regulation *at the same time* that academic skills are taught. In Tools, the focus on self-regulation is not limited to a “stand alone” activity, but is embedded into the Tools curriculum. In a Tools Kindergarten:

- ◆ Practice in self-regulated learning is embedded into all activities.
- ◆ Teachers use mature intentional dramatic play as an activity to help children develop important underlying cognitive skills.
- ◆ Teachers emphasize the application of self-regulation to learning itself, facilitating self-regulation development in specially designed learning tasks.
- ◆ Research-based literacy and math activities are modified to include self-regulatory components.
- ◆ Specific instructional activities are designed to teach self-regulation and reflective thinking.
- ◆ Classroom management techniques maximize productive interactions and task involvement.



What is a typical Tools kindergarten day like?

In Tools, the process of learning is as important as the content that is to be learned. Children in Tools Kindergartens use learning plans, work in “Study Buddy” pairs, engage in learning games and conference weekly with teachers to discuss their learning. The fall Kindergarten classroom activities are different from the spring activities to match both the design and content of activities to children’s developmental needs and goals. Tools instructional interactions are planned to scaffold each child and to help teachers be more effective in identifying specific teachable moments. Tools teachers focus on helping children become intentional and reflective learners, creating a classroom in which instruction in literacy, mathematics and science reflects children’s learning capacity, rather than age-level expectations.

Tools kindergarten teachers:

- ◆ **Target** their interactions to children’s individual zones of proximal development (ZPD).
- ◆ **Assess** children’s learning and development on a daily basis to inform instructional decisions.
- ◆ **Know** the developmental progression of learning tasks and use this knowledge in their decision-making.
- ◆ **Recognize** that the kind of assistance they provide is critical because it affects when and how the child will eventually be able to perform a task independently.
- ◆ **Possess** the ability to provide the right level of scaffolding and maintain it at a level that fits the child’s emergent competencies.
- ◆ **Know** how to use tactics like mediators, private speech, written language and shared activity to support learning.
- ◆ **Facilitate** children’s development of a set of “Mental Tools,” helping children become masters of their own learning.
- ◆ **Create** a classroom where children who are working independently are practicing skills correctly and in appropriate ways.

Examples of Tools K Activities

Graphics Practice

In Graphics Practice, children develop fine motor skills, practice letter formation and develop the penmanship and self-regulation skills needed for writing. They draw on white boards with markers, stopping and starting in response to musical cues. Children use private speech to help them remember how and what to write, learning to inhibit while also remembering the shape they’re representing in writing.

Elkonin Boxes I and II

In Elkonin Boxes I and II, small groups of children jump on carpet squares, use a specific gesture or move symbolic tokens as they separate out the sounds in words looking at specially designed Elkonin Box cards that visually represent phonemes in the names of pictures like “cat.” Children focus attention on specific parts of a word, use mediators and private speech while developing phonemic awareness and practicing the alphabetic principle.

Venger Drawing

In small groups, teachers help children plan and discuss various ways to incorporate a geometric shape into a drawing. Children use geometric terms and positional vocabulary, brainstorming possibilities from multiple perspectives. Children each verbalize a plan for their drawing and create a unique representation incorporating the geometric shape.

Learning Conferences

Children meet 1:1 with their teacher every week to set new learning goals and discuss their work habits, how they learn and any difficulties with concepts and skills. Teachers emphasize learning how to help yourself remember, practice effectively and stay motivated even when things are frustrating.

Venger Word Problems

In a collaborative partnered mathematics activity, children solve word problems that require logical thinking with the aide of a number line and other mediators.



Parent Involvement

How can I support self-regulation development at home?

- Support dramatic play at home; make 'props' available and a space for dramatic play. Invite classmates over who are familiar with the same play themes so they can build on the dramatizations they are doing in school.
- Give your child a 'tool' to stay regulated during 'wait times' – learn songs and fingerplays from the classroom and begin singing or saying these whenever your child is waiting.
- Have your child set a timer with you to ring when TV time is over, or it's time to go to bed. When it goes off, it's ____ time (because the timer says so--not you!)
- Play games like 'Simon Says' which require children to 'inhibit' acting - to think and deliberately *not* do something.
- Play simple 'memory' games to build working memory -- put a few small toys, food items, or coins on the table and encourage your child to say the names of each to 'help you remember.' Then cover the items and take something away, add something or change the order. See if your child can remember and tell you what changed!
- Set aside time to read storybooks together; read favorites many times. Let your child begin to 'tell' what happens next when you turn the page; soon your child can 'read' the story to you!
- Play games together - simple board games with rules, or card games. These games require self-regulation to play; children need to remember the rules, sustain attention, act on purpose, inhibit acting when it's not their turn -- and they're fun!
- Model for your child how you talk to help yourself remember and stay on task, e.g.; "okay, I need my keys, the cooler, you need your back pack, you've got that, the cat has food, what else am I supposed to remember . . .?" or "Next I add the flour. . ."
- Encourage children to 'talk' when they are engaged in challenging tasks - saying aloud the steps in completing tasks, talking about how to find the next puzzle piece. This kind of self-talk supports concentration, sustained effort and success!

National and International Recognition

U N E S C O

In 2001, the International Bureau of Education, an arm of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO), named Tools an exemplary innovative educational program.

O t h e r s

Footage showing Tools classroom activities can be seen in the "Heads-up Reading" television series and the "Growing and Learning in Preschool" video produced by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). Scaffolding Writing, a technique invented by Tools to teach writing, has been named as a model literacy technique by the International Reading Association.

How can I contribute to my child's Tools Kindergarten experience?

- Contribute props for dramatic play related to fairy tale and Magic Tree House Book themes
- Look at your child's Learning Plans and talk with your child about them.
- Keep a file or album of your child's work so that you and your child can look back and review work over time, looking at the exciting growth and development!
- Take your child to the library to get books that relate to the setting for the current Magic Tree House theme (the amazon, pirates, ancient Egypt, etc.)
- Offer to help make games and materials--teachers are so grateful for another set of hands to laminate or cut and assemble learning games.
- Know that your child and your child's teachers are grateful for your participation!

How can I learn more?

To learn more about *Tools of the Mind*, look for the *Tools of the Mind* book



or visit our website at

www.toolsofthemind.org



