

TRANSITIONING TO KINDERGARTEN



Just like the transition to preschool, the transition to kindergarten is an important milestone for all children. At the PlayGarden, this transition can be especially meaningful because so many of our students have been with us for two or three years. They have grown up at the PlayGarden, and their families have become an essential part of our community. So celebrating this milestone and transition is always at the forefront of our minds as spring rolls around.

Thinking about this transition for our oldest students begins in January, when we teachers begin assisting the parents in their process of preparing for kindergarten. This means answering questions like:

“Do you think my child is ready for kindergarten?”

“Should we consider another year of preschool?”

“What school would be a good fit for my child?”

As a team, we pull from our collective knowledge of child development, our relationships with elementary schools in our area, and the PlayGarden community, and spend as much time as we need to answering questions and support to families.

In about December, we begin filling out evaluations, forms, and paperwork for the private elementary schools that our students may attend in the fall or Individualized Education Plans (IEP) for children with disabilities going on to public schools. Answering questions about temperament, strengths and challenges, social skills, type of disabilities, and academic skills are all part of this process. As a teacher it feels good to share our knowledge, our insight, and pass the torch to the next team of educators.

As the end of the school year approaches, we also think about the types of conversation and reflection we want to share with our preschoolers around how we’ve all grown up in our time together at school, and what is next. Sharing baby photos (teachers included), or first day of preschool photos, is a great jumping off point for reflection. I love to share my baby photos with my students because it is



such an unexpected revelation that teachers were also once babies, too!

A great circle time conversation starter after sharing our photos is asking the kids questions like:

What could you do when you were a baby? What couldn't you do yet?

What did you do when you were sad? Who comforted you? What do you do now when a friend is sad?

What did you like to eat when you were a baby, and what about now? Do you like different foods than when you were little?

Could you help when you were a baby? What about now- what do you do now to be a helper at school?

How did you feel on the first day of school? What was hard at preschool? How did we make it better? What was fun?

How did we make friends?

What is your favorite game or activity at school?

It's helpful for the kids to hear from their teachers too on all these questions, so I always try to offer a few of my own milestones or observations about my own growth.

Ultimately, the goal of these questions is to get the children to reflect on their own growth. As our kids get ready to transition to new schools, we want to offer back an image of themselves as people who can grow and change, who are

resilient, empathetic, capable, and have the tools to do new things, like kindergarten!

As an inclusive program, we know that it's important to structure these conversations around sharing and highlighting our own personal bests, and not operating on the assumption that all preschoolers will share the same milestones. It's fine that some preschoolers may still be working on skills that other kids have already mastered. The goal is to highlight that all our kids are similar in that they are learners who can grow and change, not making direct comparisons or asserting like, "All preschoolers know how to..."

Last Day of School Traditions

We have a couple of simple but meaningful traditions for our graduating students on the last day of school. Every child who is moving on to kindergarten gets a new picture book that the teachers have specifically chosen for them. The entire staff writes messages on the inside, and we wrap it up to be given on the last day of school. We also have a big end of the year sing-a-long in the garden, where we gather with all the children, staff, parents, and extended family to have a treat and sing all of our favorite preschool songs, or songs that our kids sing at home with their families. As we say our good-byes, we offer the reassurance that you will always be a part of our community, and reinforce the message with our children and families that they are forever welcome to visit, join summer camp, volunteer, or just play in our park.

Once a PlayGardener always a PlayGardener!