

## **Beyond the A, B, C's What Kindergarteners Need**

By Cathie Brooks

With the start of Kindergarten parents focus on their student knowing the alphabet, reading simple texts and counting to 100. Teachers, however, use the first weeks of school to focus on very different, but vital skill sets. In addition to getting to know each child's academic abilities, teachers work to establish daily routines and procedures that will govern each school day. These provide the security children find in the 'expected' elements of a school day. What children need, across all academic disciplines are:

**Emotional self-regulation:** The choices children make each day in class impact their learning. Working to quell tears when the unexpected occurs, remembering to ask to go to the restroom before it becomes an emergency and transitioning from the fun of recess to the quiet of Circle Time are huge learning choices. *Walking* down the hall, in a line or with a partner, can be challenge but is a daily requirement for all. Learning classmates' names strengthens a child's comfort level and sets the stage for the start of friendships. Muscles used for smiling will enhance those used for thinking and analyzing. The ability for children to manage their emotions has a higher correlation to sustained school success than does early reading skills.

**Behavioral self-regulation:** Each child's actions affect not only him but the classroom community. Learning to control a youthful impulse, wait a turn, share supplies and use words before 'limbs' are vital to classroom harmony. While mastery of these behavioral dimensions may be a yearlong goal, teachers work to outline these expectations at the start of the year. Whether it is procedures related to physical safety (traversing the monkey bars in a single direction, going up the steps and down the slide) or considering the feelings of others (peers, resource staff and/or classroom volunteers), the less time a teacher spends on discipline issues, the more she can devote to teaching. Course content and academic pace both benefit from an early understanding of what is acceptable behavior by all.

**The three I's: Initiative, Inquiry and Independence:** Some students enter a classroom ready for exploration while others need reassurance, modeling and partnership to venture into the land of learning. Kindergarten is the best grade for a child to grasp that learning is his/her job. Ownership comes before mastership for true learners! Most young children do not enjoy making mistakes. Some fear adult disappointment while others carry a personal weight of perfection. Early feelings of accomplishment and success fuel the attitudes needed to accept future challenges. Equally important, children need to embrace mistakes as pathways for progress. Just as the alphabet serves as the building block for words so becoming comfortable with mistakes provides a foundation for deeper learning.

**Encouraging a child's P' and Q's:** Beyond a, b, c's and 1, 2, 3's, young students need to approach learning challenges with a spirit of perseverance and questioning. What can I learn from this mistake? What did I observe/fail to observe? What does doing *my* best mean? The operative noun is "I". The responsibility for learning belongs to the student, not the parent. Learning is an adventure that can last a lifetime. Send a little one to school ready to sing the A, B C's as well packing a "I'm ready to learn!" attitude.