

Kindergarten Writing and the Common Core: Joyful Pathways to Accelerated Literacy (September Guidelines)

For the first month of school, our focus is to build a joyful community of learners and friends. We **develop consistent rituals and routines** so children feel secure and motivated to do their best. We want all children to internalize the *ABC Phonics: Sing, Sign, and Read!* song early on and to begin applying their phonics skills to the writing process. They learn high-frequency "heart words." Explicit whole-group and small-group instruction is used to **model how to draw, how to shape letters and words**, and to practice the beginning skills needed for writing. Multisensory engagement, meaning-centered learning, and high expectations guide our planning. Explicitly teach and expect daily improvement in kindergarten-friendly handwriting.

Expect all children to master *ABC Phonics: Sing, Sign, and Read!* Begin to sing, sign, and read a, b, c, d the first day of school. Add e, f, g several days later. Involve parents in nightly review. Fingerspell names and "heart words." Provide extra support for harder-to-accelerate learners: use flash cards and send home the *ABC Phonics* book. Integrate ABC and Phonics Immersion throughout the day and provide several quick reviews of portions of the song. (See *Kindergarten Writing and the Common Core*, Chapter 2.)

Establish a consistent morning ritual of Name Ticket writing, expecting daily handwriting improvement. Teach tripod grip. Involve Parents as Partners (see Chapter 3), and use children's Name Tickets in meaningful ways.

Provide shared musical literacy experiences with Read and Sing Big Books™: *I Can Read Colors, The More We Get Together, I Love the Mountains, I Have a Cat, The Opposite Song, Mary Wore Her Red Dress, Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear* and favorite songs and poems. Highlight words children know. Create an "I Can Read" classroom.

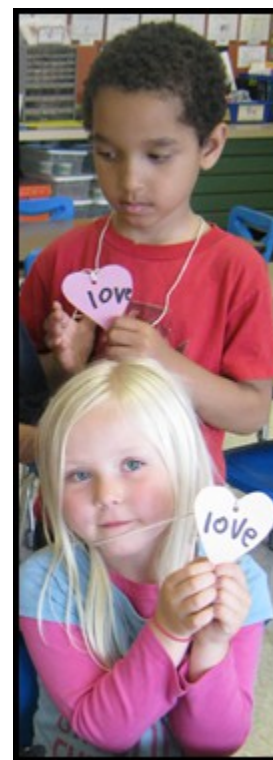
Make several class books featuring the lives of your children. (See Chapter 1.) Have guided reading texts of the same predictable Big Books available for "Read-to-Self" time. (Study the Daily 5™.)

Model, step-by-step, how to draw simple pictures and write a label, demonstrating how to make the voice-to-print match by stretching out sounds to write unknown words, and writing known "heart words" (i.e. cat, dog, bee, me, face, my house, the sun, a sunflower, a tree). Add two-word titles, phrases, and then sentences: A cat, The dog, My house, I love you, I see the cat. You may choose to provide explicit whole-group instruction to guide the writing and drawing process and delay starting your writing workshop model with student choice of topics until October, depending on your children's readiness and your professional judgment. **There is no "one right way" to begin** writers' workshop except to keep writing meaningful and build on success. All children love to write, draw, tell stories, make lists, messages, and books! Expect kid writing. Treat children as writers!

If you have students copying your writing from a distance onto their own paper, be sensitive to the special-needs students who may need a written model close at hand and extra support.

Welcome parents into the classroom; have a clear plan for how to use their volunteer time effectively. Provide training. (See Chapter 11.)

Provide a "Welcome to Kindergarten" and parent literacy event or conference individually with parents to discuss where their child is as a writer and how they can support literacy at home. Encourage families to create a drawing/writing tote for home use. Send home the ABC Phonics Family Chart and a book of Name Tickets.



If handwriting skills are not fluent, it interferes with the whole writing process.

Save a beginning-of-the-year sample of each child's drawing and writing.

Take a photo of each child with their family—perhaps with a sign that says “My first day of kindergarten.” (See Chapter 11.)

Send home the child's daily drawing and writing pages or the first drawing and writing book (8-10 blank, white, stapled pages) for families to enjoy! (After first studying them and copying a few pages for assessment purposes.) Note: Your writing workshop program will evolve to fit the needs of each new diverse group of learners.

Adorn the walls of your classroom with drawings and photos of your children.

Teach pink “heart words.” Sing, sign, spell, and read! Practice handwriting drills on wipe-off boards. Twenty-second reviews are powerful (See Chapter 4.) Refer to “heart word” charts and collections in the classroom.

Send sets of 14-16 “pink heart words” home in a special learning gift box after most children know several of them. Point out large pink and purple heart words on wall posters; challenge learners to quickly master these words; readers love to look for words they know! (Reread Chapter 4.)

Begin teaching children to independently use writing totes: introduce Write a List, Write the Room, Make a Message, and Rubber Band Books as they fit into your curriculum framework.

Provide small closely-guided lessons in making Stamp and Read Skinny Books using “I see the _____.” (Reread Chapter 6.) This center initially requires the most supervision but is perfect for building beginning literacy instruction, teaching the concept of words and sentences.

Integrate art, science, music, poetry and story: chanting nursery rhymes begins and extends throughout the year. Poetry “I Can Read” notebooks begin. Study sunflowers and artist Monet. Do self-portraits. Explore shapes and designs. Give children Read and Sing Big Books™ for English language and fluency.

Science: Take “writerly-scientific walks” (quote from Lucy Calkins) with clipboards. Draw and label signs of fall. Teach a love of trees and leaves; notice colors everywhere, and build voracious vocabulary habits: amber, silver, turquoise, gold, maroon, coral, teal, fuchsia...

Math: Count everything; look for patterns; explore and draw shapes; introduce the calendar.

Literacy Play Center begins as a home center with phone and notepads, clipboards and pens (for making lists) and board books to read to babies. **Block-building** creations are labeled with photos taken!

Begin teaching The Pledge of Allegiance in American Sign Language, using *The American Patriot* CD with Lee Greenwood. Build focus, self-regulation and vocabulary with symbols of our country.

Introduce “Read-to-Self” from The Daily 5™. (Some teachers wait until October to give children individual book boxes and teach how to select “just-right” I Can Read books.)

Expose children to sophisticated vocabulary: nurture voracious vocabulary learners daily!

Practice deliberate and purposeful behaviors to build self-regulation and develop positive habits of mind for success in school—and in life!

Optimal Writing Instruction — Diverse Needs — Our Reality

Whether teaching full day or half day, in a high socioeconomic community or a high-needs school (with a confident fulltime assistant, special needs support and helpful volunteers—or independently carrying the full teaching load), every year my colleagues and I raise our expectations, refine our instruction, and see even more powerful writing gains. There is no ceiling on success using these high-impact writing strategies; however, our administrators and policy makers need to realize we compromise the individual conferencing and coaching time necessary to build the foundation for rigorous Common Core Writing Standards when kindergartens are larger than 18-20 students. Those one-on-one critical teaching moments which we long to give to each young writer are greatly diminished. Yet, we all continue to do what we can for our children. N.E.