



Ready, Set, Go! - Making sure that kids get the best start

Experts say that no single factor determines if a child is ready for kindergarten. What they do agree on is that getting a good start in school is very important to later academic success.



Program coordinator, Maria Perdomo, works with children to identify and develop motor, language and self care skills.

In the Ready, Set, Go program offered by Metropolitan Family Service, children attend classes with their parent or family member twice a week. They are tested when they enter the program, and again when they complete it. The tests look at a variety of skills including his or her ability to think logically, speak clearly, and interact well with other children and adults. Physical development is also considered.

The tests provide the instructor with information about which areas the child needs assistance in developing for school. On several occasions, we have been able

to identify learning disabilities at an early age, and are able to refer those children for extra assistance through county education services. Ninety percent of children enrolled in Ready, Set, Go are ready for kindergarten at the end of the program.

Children attending Ready, Set, Go learn new skills from the moment they walk in the door. All of the children are given a journal with their photo on the cover. They practice writing their name in the journal every time they arrive at class. Next they join a larger social group for circle time. The children will read a book together and answer questions about what they heard.

After the group session, children are able to choose from a variety of activities. Having parents involved can minimize the child's anxiety about participating in activities, and gives parents a better understanding of how their child interacts with others. Parents also learn techniques that they can practice with their child to help them prepare at home.

Maria Perdomo has been coordinating the program for the past three years. She has become familiar with the needs of families through their participation and through home visits. "Many of the families are unfamiliar with the public library system, so I now schedule classes at the local library once a month," says Maria. "The families are able to apply for a library card, and have much greater access to children's books at the library. The books are available in a variety of languages."

Some of the families are struggling financially, and home visits are an opportunity for instructors to see what the needs are in the home. Other families benefit from nutrition counseling or recommendations on how to provide a child friendly learning environment at home.

Unlike the federal program Head Start, this kindergarten readiness program is open to all children. Families learn about the program through councilors at schools, through English as a Second Language programs and through the Clackamas Family Support Center where the program is located. Parents are encouraged to attend parenting classes also provided by Metropolitan Family Service.

The program's success has generated increased interest from the community. Metropolitan Family Service plans to expand the program to other areas in the community as funding becomes available. For more information about the program, call 503-232-0007, ext. 170.

By Pat Kaczmarek