

# TEACHERS' TIPS TO EASE THE TRANSITION TO FIRST GRADE

By Annette Gendler, NPN member since 2008

THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR IS EXCITING AND DAUNTING FOR EVERY CHILD...

"So much about school is being comfortable," commented Akiba-Schechter Kindergarten teacher Mara Katz. Factors include physical surroundings, the teacher, classmates, the daily routine and the expectations of school work. The beginning of the school year is exciting and daunting for every child, especially for children entering first grade: kids worry whether or not they should know how to read or do math, or if there will be time for play. Thankfully, there are ways to ease the transition:

## MAKE THE UNFAMILIAR FAMILIAR

- 1. Set up a playdate.** "The number one issue that first day is: Who do I know?" said Jackie Rapp, Akiba-Schechter first grade teacher. She suggests getting a class list, reviewing it with your child, determining who he knows and inviting that child for a playdate. If your child is new to the school, knowing someone before that first day is even more important.
- 2. Visit the school.** Check out the building and the neighborhood so your child can get his bearings. When you know your child's class, make an appointment with the teacher and visit the classroom.
- 3. Find commonalities.** Ask your child his favorite thing about Kindergarten, then ask the teacher if it happens in first grade. Discuss the daily routine and how it compares to Kindergarten.
- 4. Embrace the butterflies.** It's natural for your child to be a little nervous. Reminisce about your experiences starting first grade. If your child is worried about anything in particular, this will help tease it out of him. Then, assuage his fears. If they are substantial, share them with the teacher.

## FOSTER A LOVE FOR LEARNING

Some parents wonder if their child is ready for the academics of first grade. According to former CPS first grade teacher Scott Salk, "Anything that stimulates the mind is great preparation for first grade. I would hate for kids to be subjected to workbooks and flash cards over the summer." If you're still concerned, ask your Kindergarten teacher if your child should be practicing anything over the summer.



Photo courtesy Annette Gendler.

## Some Ideas:

- 1. Read to your child.** According to Salk, this builds vocabulary and develops an ability to sit still and listen—an important classroom skill. "Seat your child next to you so she can see what you're reading and connect phonetics and letters."
- 2. Get a library card.** Institute one week/day as "library day," and let your child check out books. Find out when the local branch has storytelling and arts/crafts hours.
- 3. Go to museums.** Let your child choose, so he will be more engaged, or have him pick one museum, you pick the next. Anything your child learns experientially will give him knowledge to contribute later.
- 4. Keep a summer journal or scrapbook.** Let your child bring a camera everywhere, take pictures and create her own scrapbook with captions. Or keep a journal to send to Grandma at the end of the summer. If your child is not comfortable writing, have her dictate to you.
- 4. Play games, cook or take your kid shopping.** Counting and measuring ingredients, looking at prices and figuring out what you can buy are great ways to practice math skills.

Last but not least, make that first day special. "Let your child pick out a new backpack or a new pencil case. Or let her get a new haircut," advised Katz, "something that has nothing to do with Kindergarten, something that's just for first grade." Pack a special snack or treat for those first few lunches, or hide a note in your kid's lunchbox; a nice surprise will put your child at ease in the big world of first grade.

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## TRANSITION BOOKS FOR FIRST GRADE

*Let's Get Ready for First Grade*—Stacey Kannenberg  
*The Night Before First Grade*—Natasha Wing  
*Miss Kindergarten Celebrates the Last Day of Kindergarten*—Joseph Slate  
*First Day Jitters*—Julie Dannenberg  
*Amelia Bedelia's First Day of School*—Herman Parish  
*The First Day of School*—Margaret McNamara

