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Senior kindergarten students sing What A Wonderful World during the Balantrae Public School Rising Stars 2006 rehearsal in May. Expectations of kindergarten students have risen during the past few years.

Kindergarten not just child's play anymore

BY TERESA LATCHFORD
Staff Writer

Blocks, story circles and sing-a-long-songs will have a more defined purpose this fall in kindergarten classes across the region.

Although the classroom will still have bins of toys, containers of crayons and buckets of fingerpaint, the school system's expectations of your child have increased.

The 79-page kindergarten curriculum, which has been revised only once before now, outlines skills your child must learn before tackling Grade 1.

The new curriculum in high schools and standardized testing provides an opportunity to improve literacy and that includes kindergarten.

"Our former curriculum was too vague and it emphasized play," said Lyn Scharratt, York Region school board's superintendent of curriculum and instruction services.

"The new document is more specific and emphasizes purposeful and educational lessons in a playful environment."

The curriculum lays out standards and expectations in personal and social development, language, mathematics, science and technology, health and physical activity and the arts.

"Students going into Grade 1 are expected to be knowledgeable about the context of print, for example," Ms Scharratt said.

Not to say your child should be able to read a full novel but rather understand what a book is, words are read left to right and be able to identify letters of the alphabet, she explained.

Children are developing emotionally, physically and cognitively (common knowledge) in the early years.

Other skills to be acquired include an understanding of numbers, communication and showing a sense of identity.

Kindergarten grads will also be expected to use basic critical thinking skills, explore using appropriate inquiry skills, be aware of their well-being and use problem-solving strategies.

"It will get them ready for the literacy focus in Grade 1," she said.

"It is in that first year their attention and behaviour is set for the rest of their school lives."

Attitude toward participation, using social skills in play, developing an awareness of surroundings and respecting safety for themselves and others also made the expectation list.

This curriculum is similar to the mission of the Ontario Early Years Centre in Newmarket.

It offers a program called Best Start, preparing children from birth to age six for school.

"Children are developing emotionally, physically and cognitively (common knowledge) in the early years," Ontario Early Years York North manager Mary McCormack-Badinski explained.



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