

Getting kids ready for the first day of kindergarten

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KV Style

Charlotte Pierce and her son Tom, 4 ½, have been practicing holding scissors, cutting shapes and drawing pictures to prepare for his first day of school.



Kâté LeBlanc photo
Charlotte Pierce and her kids, Anna (6), Tom (4 1/2), Charlie (two weeks), Bridget (1 1/2) and Henry (3).

“I will draw a picture and he will try and draw something, not even close to it, but we’re working on it,” Pierce said, laughing.

Pierce is the mother of Charlie, two weeks old, Bridget, 1½ , Henry, 3, Tom, 4½ , and Anna, 6.

She is also a member of the District 6 Education Council.

She and her husband Trevor wanted a big family and planned to have their children close together so they could be their own playgroup and experience family events that everyone would enjoy at the same time in their lives.

“People do very often ask us (why we had so many children) and we just laugh and say after three it’s just a few more chicken nuggets for dinner,” Pierce said. “We just like to have a lot of fun and these guys are a lot of fun. They are a lot of work but they are pretty funny and they do and say funny things and sometimes they are way more entertaining then TV.”

On a typical day last week, Pierce stood in her kitchen making a cake while attending to her baby and calming her children as they ran from the living room to her leg to ask for toast and their favourite toys.

Pierce has one daughter attending Fairvale Elementary School and a son who is on his way. After receiving the results of his evaluation from the school district she set to work making sure he practised all the things suggested by his soon-to-be elementary school teacher.

This year, the province added a new element to the Transition to School program. The program strives to make parents more prepared and children more at ease before starting school.

Alyssa MacIsaac, a transition to kindergarten coordinator, said each child entering school this fall met with a teacher at the beginning of the year to take the Early Years Evaluation Direct Assessment.

The test evaluates a child's awareness of self and environment, cognitive skills, language and communication and gross and fine motor development.

Trained teachers met with students individually and asked them to perform a number of tasks such as identifying members of the community such as police officers, hopping on one foot, cutting shapes, drawing pictures, listening to the teacher and reading from the blackboard.

MacIsaac said the results of the evaluation were mailed to each family so they could have an idea of what to do to get their child ready for school.

According to Pierce, that is exactly what the tests have done.

She and other Valley mommys were a little nervous about getting the results in the mail but grabbed the opportunity to help their children prepare for class.

"I think that most of the parents really saw it as a chance to brush up on skills because kindergarten is a little more work than it used to be, that's just my observation," Pierce said. "The test was good; it's nerve-wracking a little bit because it's testing you, too. It's letting you know what your kid is able to do when they're four. It makes you think 'Oh, wow, I need to do a little bit of work before they go to school.'"

Pierce said she doesn't want any of her children to start school behind the other children, but she worries more about how her children will fit in socially.

"Are they going to learn the rules of the classroom? Where to stand in line to go to the bathroom? Are they going to find friends on the playground? Are they going to listen well when the teacher talks to them? Are they going to respect them? That's the stuff I worry about," Pierce said.

The final step of the Transition to Kindergarten Program takes place on May 22.

MacIsaac said parents and their children will be invited to their neighbourhood school that day to experience a typical day in class. She said they will have an opportunity to ride the bus and get to know their classroom before making the sometimes scary transition in September.

Peirce said she and her daughter enjoyed the transition day last year.

"She was very excited and she loved it. Tom's really excited to go too," Pierce said.

MacIsaac said parents can help their children prepare for school by visiting their school several times over the summer to play on the playground. She said parents should set up play dates with

other kids who will be attending school and should talk to their child about what to expect to alleviate anxiety.

She said parents should also practise independent skills such as having children dress themselves, open food containers and pack their book bag.

“Regarding academic readiness, reading to their children regularly cannot be stressed enough,” MacIsaac said. “Talking to them about the story can help develop their listening and understanding skills. Look for numbers and letters in their environment. Talk, talk, talk. This helps to develop vocabulary.”