

Transition to Kindergarten & Kindergarten Administrator Walk-Through Tool

What are the characteristics of high-quality Transition to Kindergarten (TK) and kindergarten classrooms?

This tool includes nine categories that research and standards have identified as essential to a TK and kindergarten classroom. The furthest left-side column contains general items to look for when observing. The middle columns contain specific items or examples of what an observer might see in a high-quality classroom, with space for notes. The right-side column indicates alignment with statute or guidance.

When using this tool, keep in mind that communication between practitioners and administrators is vital in the observation process, as the practitioner acts and teaches using a mixed approach of professional judgment and response to the unique needs and developmental appropriateness of their students, the time of year, and evidence-based practices that best suit their specific situation. For example, during the beginning of a school year, a TK or kindergarten classroom may look more like a preschool classroom. Toward the end of a school year, TK and kindergarten classrooms may look closer to a kindergarten or first-grade classroom, respectively.

The Washington State Transition to Kindergarten and Kindergarten Guide is in development and will be linked as soon as it is available.



General Learning Environment

General Look Fors	Examples	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for a safe and inclusive learning environment that considers the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual well-being of students, making sure furniture and storage are age appropriate. Look for evidence of the teaching topic, student work, and learning. Look for confirmation that the classroom is developmentally appropriate for four-and five-year-old students.	Free of hazards, clean, and orderly. Evidence of individual student work is displayed at child eye level, writing samples, artwork, and photographs of activities. Evidence of group work and discussion is displayed at child eye level, brainstorming charts, T charts, graphic organizers, classroom agreements, or rules. Big books, charts showing words to songs, chants, poetry are displayed. Students are engaged in meaningful, playful learning and are not expected to sit for extended periods of time, ample time for talking, resting, and movement.		TPEP Criteria 5: Learning Environment WA TK/K Guide Ch 2: Classroom Environment- Parts One and Two



Center Organization

General Look Fors	Examples	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for a room arranged into centers defined by shelves, rugs, or low dividers with room for 4–6 students to work without crowding. Look for centers to have a variety and quantity of materials for several students to work together. Look for materials in centers to be labeled and easily accessible on low shelves. Look for tables or desks to be incorporated into centers rather than arranged in rows. Look for pathways between areas that allow students to move about the room without crowding.	Book Center: at least one book per child is displayed, fiction and factual books, of different reading levels, alphabet books, books that call attention to rhyme and alliteration, and books representing the languages and cultural backgrounds of students. Listening Center: books on tape, headphones for more than one child, stories representing the languages and cultural backgrounds of students. Writing Area: papers, writing instruments, alphabet strip or chart, alphabet books, whiteboards, chalkboard, stencils, magnetic letters, picture-word cards. Math/Manipulative Area: manipulatives, geometric shapes, materials to support recognizing numerals, number strip or chart, items for seriating, patterning, measuring, counting, sorting, puzzles.		RCW 28A.150.315 Establish learning environments WA TK/K Guide Ch 2: Classroom Environment Part Two: Physical Space



General Look Fors	Examples	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
	Art Area: easels, paints, paper, drawing instruments, stencils, scissors, tape, glue, clay/playdough. Science Area: collections of natural materials, living things, magnifying glasses, paper for drawing/recording, scale for weighing, sand or water table with props, science books. Block Area: wood and cardboard blocks, other building materials, props such as cars, train set, play people, signs (and this space can double as the Whole Group Area). Computer Area: more than one monitor, multiple chairs to encourage cooperative work, and software to support literacy and math. Whole Group Area: carpet area or carpet squares, easel, active board, projector/document camera, calendar, pocket charts, big books, jobs chart, space for music and movement activities.		



General Look Fors	Examples	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
	Small Groups Area: tables for small groups of 4–6 students to work together. Individual Areas: nooks or corners for 1–2 students, soft furnishings, and quiet activities. Cubbies: an area for students to store coats, personal items, journal, labeled with students’ names and photos.		

Daily Schedule

General Look Fors	Examples	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for a routine that includes a balance of activities to keep students engaged with their learning in different ways throughout the day.	A chart of the daily schedule or routine with picture cues is displayed. Transitions between activities are quick and effective.		WA TK/K Guide Ch 4: Classroom Structures
Look for ample free choice/play time.	The schedule includes a balance of: Sedentary activities—active or outside time.		RCW 28A.150.315 support and development of the whole child
Look for at least 20 min at lunchtime for eating.	Teacher-directed activities, student-initiated activities.		



General Look Fors	Examples	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for physical activity integrated into curricular activities.	Large group activities (limited to 10–20 (TK) 15–25 minutes (k)). Teachers can increase the whole group instruction time as the year progresses. Small group activities: 45–60 minutes (or time in centers). Individual activities. 20–30 min of rest time.		HSPPS §1302.31(e)(1)

Social Emotional Environment

General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for a social-emotional climate that is positive, mutually respectful, an atmosphere of camaraderie, an absence of negative feelings or behaviors. Look for positive relationships between students, working together, and helping one another. Look for positive relationships between students and teachers,	Students: - Do daily routines that are meaningful, such as helpers, passing out supplies, washing hands, or clean-up - Purposefully engage with materials (rather than wandering or random activity) - Positively engage with other students in pairs or small groups (without bullying, teasing, name-calling, or excluding)		WA TK/K Guide Ch 2: Classroom Environment Part 1: Classroom Community and Child Guidance Social Emotional Learning



General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
enjoying each other's company, and having conversations. Look for students who take responsibilities, engage with materials, and act in positive and productive ways.	• Spend most time doing (rather than being talked to or at) • Ask for help from adults or peers when they need assistance Teachers: • Greet students warmly individually or as a group at the start of the day or activity • Show enthusiasm and positive affect by smiling, laughing • Use respectful language, a calm, warm tone of voice • State directions in the positive (rather than saying, "Don't...") • Give reasons for every behavioral expectation or rule • Interact with students in positive, respectful, meaningful, back and forth exchanges or discussion • Lower their bodies to eye-level of students by bending, sitting, or kneeling • Work side by side with students by doing similar activities during parts of the day • Circulate and interact with each child at some point during the activity or lesson		Standards, Benchmarks and Indicators TPEP Criteria 5: Learning Environment RCW 28A.150.315 Provide a curriculum acquiring social emotional skills



Instructional Strategies: *Used in large or small groups, or with individual students.*

General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for teachers to use content area knowledge to organize curricula and instruction.	Organize lessons into thematic units or projects of study with identifiable targets, goals, and cognitive content.		TPEP Criteria 4: Content knowledge
Look for teachers to be organized.	Have materials organized and prepared in advance.		RCW 28A.150.315 Provide a curriculum - initial skills in academic areas
Look for teachers to help students make connections between existing and new knowledge and skills.	State the goal, target or learning purpose of the lesson or activity.		TPEP Criteria 2: Instruction
Look for teachers to demonstrate effective teaching practices.	Help students make meaningful connections to what they already know.		TPEP Criteria 1: High Expectations
Look for teachers to communicate high expectations.	Help students make meaningful connections across content areas (rather than teaching each area of content in isolation from each other).		TPEP Criteria 3: Differentiation
Look for teachers to differentiate instruction by using specific knowledge about students' backgrounds.	Relate new information to the real world lives and cultures of students.		TPEP Criteria 6: Assessment
Look for the teacher to gather assessment data.	Give clear directions so that students can follow them without confusion.		



General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
	Break down complex activities into steps. Model or demonstrate new skills for students. Ask thoughtful open-ended questions (rather than mostly give directions). Provide prompts to focus attention. Add challenge or extend tasks so they are just beyond what students have mastered, but achievable, to help students get to the next step or level. Scaffold instruction to support students to master new skills and to attain a higher level of performance. Give specific feedback, hints, clues, facts, new vocabulary or other specific assistance to draw students' attention to academic concepts, new learnings, or new relationships.		RCW 28A.150.315 Administer WaKIDS WA TK/K Guide Ch 1: DAP and Ch 3: Instructional Practices



General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
	Encourage effort and persistence by giving feedback (rather than only praise). Provide support when students struggle or ask for help. Differentiate support for individual students, highly capable, special education, and ELL students. Elicit and incorporate child ideas, perspectives, interests and feedback on activities. Use a checklist, clipboard, sticky notes, take photos/video, and collect samples of student work. Ask students to talk about their work, ask open-ended questions, or explain their thinking.		



Child Learning Opportunities

General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for opportunities for students to plan and be intentional when choosing activities that support their learning.	Students have opportunities to make plans—articulate ideas, intentions, decisions on what they will do, how they will spend their time, and communicate their plan with others in some way.		RCW 28A.150.315 Provide a curriculum – learning through hands-on
Look for students to take an active role in their learning.	Students have opportunities to work on their plans, have an authentic, open-ended choice of materials, partners, activities to explore, practice, and extend knowledge and skills.		RCW 28A.150.315 Provide a curriculum – developing communication skills
	Students have opportunities to reflect on their work—talk about what they are doing, share their thinking, recall, analyze, and evaluate what went well or differently in their activities than they planned.		WA TK/K Guide Ch 3: Instructional Practices
	Students participate in group discussions, contribute ideas, restate ideas, add onto ideas.		
	Students work with other students as partners or a team, take a role, work toward a common goal.		



Behavior Management

General Look Fors	What it Might Look Like	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
Look for teachers to manage behavior efficiently. Look for how adults acknowledge conflict as a part of daily life and use disruption as a learning opportunity to help students manage their behavior.	Offer clear choices between a limited number of acceptable options. Redirect minor misbehaviors into what the students should be doing. Manage disruptions so they don't take time away from learning, for example, by anticipating and preventing misbehavior, responding quickly. Stop the dangerous behavior before there is harm to others or materials. Follow through after misbehaviors to see that students behave successfully. Approach conflict situations calmly. Acknowledge feelings, that students may be angry, frustrated, or tired. Have students state the problem, possible solutions, and choose a solution.		WA TK/K Guide Ch 2b: Learning Environment- Classroom Community Ch 3: Instructional Practices TPEP Criteria 7: Communicating and Collaborating with Parents and the School Community



Additional Elements of Practice: *may not always be observable in the classroom. A conversation with the teacher may provide evidence of these elements.*

Evidence of Family & Community Connections	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
The teacher communicates and collaborates with students, families, and all educational stakeholders in an ethical and professional manner to promote student learning.		TPEP Criteria 7: Communicating and Collaborating with Parents and the School Community WA TK/K Guide Ch 7: Intentional Family Engagement
Professional Practice	Evidence/Notes	Alignment
The teacher participates collaboratively in the educational community to improve instruction, advance the knowledge and practice of teaching as a profession, and ultimately impact student learning.		TPEP Criteria 8: Collaborative and Collegial Practice WA TK/K Guide Addressed throughout chapters