

Does College Prep Begin in Kindergarten?

Many parents think that pre-school and Elementary are times of play and socialization, and that the real learning can be left for Middle and High School. Unfortunately the paths for academic success are set well before Middle School begins, and it's often too difficult for many students to change paths by then. We've witnessed this countless times. In a real sense, the path to academic success, to preparing for a good University or College, begins at least as early as the first day of Kindergarten.

Success is often Self-Fulfilling

Starting out at the top of the class in Kindergarten can have a very lasting effect. Academic success in Kindergarten tends to lead to further academic success through Elementary, which tends to lead to success in Middle School, High School, and so on. I would argue that academic success is somewhat path dependent. This doesn't mean that every child who is at the top of their class in Kindergarten or in Grade 3 will reach the College of their dreams, far from it. There are many distractions along the way. A successful child in Grade 3 may be thrown completely off the rails by parental divorce in early Middle School, or by a bad peer group and drugs in High School. Nonetheless it is more common for a student who is successful in Elementary to be successful in reaching the College of their dreams, than it is for a student who is not successful in Grade 3. All we can do as parents is create the best possible environment for our children to succeed, and encourage them positively. This will require some discipline and effort on our part, but is not that hard to do. We won't always be successful, but we should succeed more often than not.

All Study & No Play?

You may be wondering what I am talking about when I say that preparation for College begins at least as early as the first day of Kindergarten. Frankly the path to a good University or College likely begins even before a child starts Kindergarten. Those children who begin Kindergarten at the top of their class are more likely to remain at the top of their class. So the path to a good University actually begins in preschool. Yet most preschools in the west Los Angeles area are explicitly not academic, preferring play based education and the like. Play is in fact what preschoolers should spend the bulk of their time doing, but there is no reason to exclude them from learning (and

enjoying) the basic ABC's and 123's. Taught well, learning the basics is in fact a form of play. Most of our preschool and Kindergarten students really enjoy learning with us. They often skip into class with big smiles on their faces. Play based learning should not be the only type of learning for preschoolers.

What can parents do for preschoolers?

Parents should prepare their preschoolers for Kindergarten by working on letter sounds, basic blending, numeracy, sight words, writing their numbers and shapes, etc.. The attention span of most preschoolers in this regard will be very limited, but their stamina can and should be built over time so that one can get 15-30 minutes of focus related to the basics. The essence of the approach is to limit it to a short part of the day, but to do it most days of the week (perhaps skipping the weekends). Over the years we've worked with hundreds of children, often starting with students as young as 3 years of age. We've been fortunate to witness for ourselves the many fruits of pushing these young kids ahead - they enjoy learning more, they are more disciplined in doing their work, school is easier, they see themselves as smart, and they are confident academically. Most of these kids will go on to be successful in school.

Changing Paths - Not impossible, but not easy

Why is it so hard to change paths later on? One thing many parents do not realize is that their influence decreases dramatically from Grade 5 onward. You can push your preschooler, your Kindergartener, your Grade 3 student to do a little extra work, and get a little further ahead. You will have much more difficulty pushing your Grade 6 child to do anything extra, and good luck in pushing your Grade 9 child to do anything. By High School, even those kids who realize that they are behind and would like to do some extra work have a great deal of difficulty finding the time to do so. Extracurricular activities eat up an ever larger portion of their time, and students who are behind in school spend so much time just trying to stay on top of things (just trying to pass) that they have little to no time to catch up. Parents of these students often implore us just to work on their school homework (as it is so difficult for them to do at home), but this means that we have little opportunity to work on bringing them up to grade level. Given enough time anything is possible, but these are also the students we usually see the least. Furthermore, these older students most likely have a rather solid psychological picture of themselves that proves very difficult to change. Kids who are "smart"

academically usually see themselves as such, and will refuse to get anything less than a good grade. Kids who see themselves as "not smart" will focus their energies on areas where they can be successful, be it sports or socializing. Your parental influence over the course of their life becomes much more limited when they finish Elementary.

The Learning Path Makes it Easy

The time then to get ahead then is preschool through Elementary. The Learning Path serves children from preschool through to High School, but we focus on different things at different times. From preschool to Grade 8, we've had plenty of success pushing kids ahead in school. Some of these kids continue with us through high school, maintaining their edge all the way to the end. Ideally though, we transition from working on the underlying fundamentals to explicitly working on College Preparation at around the Grade 9 point. Students need to start explicitly preparing for College from Grade 9 onward. The Learning Path is entering the field of Premium College Preparation for individual students in Grades 9 and above. This service will focus on college entrance applications and essays, summer internships, preparing for the SAT and ACT, etc.. The time for mastering the basics is thus more or less over by Grade 8. Don't make the mistake of thinking that preschool and Elementary are for play - they are in fact your only opportunity to get your kids ahead. The beauty of The Learning Path is that we make it very easy for you to do this, and at a very reasonable cost.