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Kindergarten stress ...

Continued from Page 1

Kindergarten is not what it used to be. These parents have expressed some of the same fears expressed by others.

Some parents think kindergarten is demanding too much from children. Many professionals associated with child education and care agree.

Kim Townley, director of Ruth Staples Day Care, said she thinks kindergarten is demanding too much from children.

Millicent Savery, associate professor of early childhood education, said she also agrees.

Townley compared kindergarten's current curriculum to that of the first grade, a program too structured for the average 5 year old.

State law says children are eligible to begin school if they are 5 years old by Oct. 15.

Savery said schools have a responsibility to these 5-year-old students.

The issue is not if the child is ready for school. "It's whether the school is ready for the child," Savery said.

In the case of Julie, Townley said, the child is expressing the typical actions of the average 5 year old.

Kindergarten must meet individual needs, Townley said. Children should be able to learn at their own rate even if they start at different levels.

A Montessori school, such as the Children's Circle, 121 Skyway Road, is designed to help the child develop at his own rate and in the right environment.

Maria Schoch, director of Children's Circle, said the opportunities to learn are there, but the children aren't pressured in any way.

Townley said these types of schools teach intellectual development, not social development.

Learning socialization through play is one of the best ways to learn in kindergarten, Savery said.

"Montessori's are too structured for children," Townley said. Through play, children learn to share, to get along in groups, and they learn about the world around them, Townley said.

However, Townley said she thinks kindergartens are straying from their purpose. Misinformed parents, teachers and the public are demanding too much from children, Townley said.

Much of this pressure is caused by "screening tests" which are becoming more involved because of a more difficult kindergarten curriculum.

Harriet Egertson, a consultant in elementary and early childhood education, said most schools in Nebraska conduct some type of screening tests.

The informal tests consist of checking the vision, hearing and speech of the future student.

However, a growing number of districts conduct formal testing consisting of developmental screening. The screenings test the motor and cognitive skills, consisting of balance, classifying objects and knowledge of colors, numbers and the alphabet.

Egertson said many kindergarten teachers approve of this type of testing because of the difficult kindergarten curriculum.

Amy Cunningham, a senior majoring in elementary education, said that in the long run the child benefits from these tests.

"It's better not to start school if the child isn't ready," Cunningham said.

Children should develop various motor skills, from running on the playground to holding a pencil.

There should be a strong literature course in kindergarten where more stories should be read to the children with the opportunity of asking questions and developing creativity, Savery said.

The kindergarten program should pay more attention to the spoken work, not the written word, Savery said.

Savery advises parents and teachers to "hang loose."

"Don't pressure the children," she said, "make their only childhood a happy childhood."

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For Answers see below.

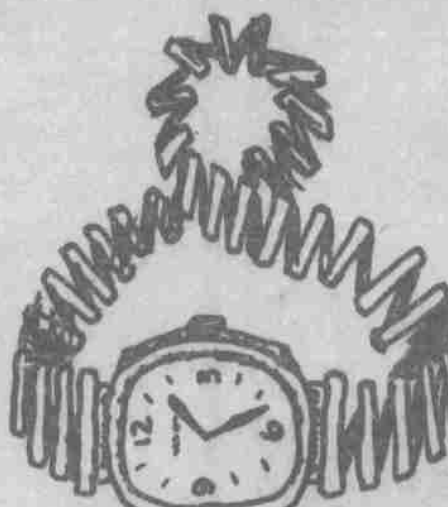
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