

Preface

The focus of this book is on providing resources and ideas to help children reach national and state content standards in developmentally appropriate ways. Standards are only part of the picture; there is much more that we wish for our children. The book also offers suggestions for helping children reach beyond the standards to acquire good social skills, a strong sense of self-worth, and positive approaches to learning that will serve as a foundation for future learning. Although written primarily for kindergarten, these ideas can be used in preschool and the primary grades by adjusting the level of challenge.

Standards are a major component of education today. In this era of accountability, standards are often used as benchmarks to assess children's progress. Many teachers have felt the pressure of a "pushed down curriculum" and are concerned that children in kindergarten are inappropriately expected to do things that used to be required of older students. Teachers and administrators are searching for ways they can be accountable and help children reach standards, while still maintaining a developmentally appropriate classroom that allows children to play and still *be children*. They also need to know current research and how to share this information with parents. This book provides concrete research-based ideas and strategies teachers and administrators can use to answer these concerns. It provides background research in reader-friendly, understandable terms. The book brings fresh ideas to the kindergarten field that can provide first-year kindergarten teachers with strategies they need to have a successful year and veteran teachers reassurance about the good practices they are using, as well as suggestions to add to their repertoire. The book is designed for both preservice and inservice teachers, administrators, and all who are interested in working with children in this most important springtime of their lives.

There were many resources used in preparing this book. A key source was *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs*, revised in 2009 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Their book, *K Today: Teaching and Learning in the Kindergarten Year* (Gullo, 2006) was another valuable resource. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) developed by the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning provided additional insight into research-based practices. We reviewed national content standards written by the professional organizations, examined the compendium of standards and benchmarks developed by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, and read through many of the individual state content standards as well. The design of national content standards differs widely. Some are

written very broadly for K–12, such as those written by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. Several are divided into bands such as K–4, 5–8, and 9–12, while still others are broken down for specific grade levels, including mathematics, which also has curriculum focal points for specific grades. States also differ in the way their standards are organized and the areas included. In order to best serve their children, teachers need to be familiar with the state, national, or other standards expected of them. The ideas in this book provide suggestions that will help in this broad range of standards.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the kindergarten year, including the origins of the first kindergarten and its purpose. The chapter deals with the importance and power of play, developing reciprocal relationships with families, and supporting the transition to kindergarten.

Chapter 2 describes how to set up a welcoming environment that facilitates children's learning. It also includes sample schedules for both full-day and half-day kindergartens.

Chapter 3 provides an introduction to engaging studies and projects as one way to help children meet standards in all areas of the curriculum. The chapter introduces ideas for authentically assessing children in developmentally appropriate ways, including observation, checklists, and portfolios.

Chapters 4 through 9 present ideas for helping children reach standards in all areas of the curriculum. The chapters contain suggestions for designing the environment and engaging experiences and studies that will help children meet standards. Each chapter also includes ideas for supporting children who are learning English as a new language and working with children's individual needs, including children with learning challenges, as well as those who have already mastered concepts. This group of chapters concludes in Chapter 9 with suggestions for social and emotional development and approaches to learning. Although most states do not include separate kindergarten standards for social and emotional development or approaches to learning, we know that much of children's learning is dependent on these areas.

Chapter 10 helps to connect the dots by tying concepts together and addressing issues of readiness, length of the kindergarten day, and the transition to first grade. The chapter ends with a list of goals for our children that will help them reach beyond the standards on the road to becoming concerned, active participants of their families, classrooms, and communities.

The chapters include *Try This!* suggestions with new ideas for helping children meet standards. There are also *Opportunities for Authentic Assessment* that offer added insight into using developmentally appropriate ways to track children's progress toward meeting the standards.

The Resource section contains a calendar that can be shared with families each month from August of the kindergarten year through the summer before first grade. The calendar includes daily suggestions for helping children reach standards through simple activities that are also designed to build parent-child relationships.

We hope that this book will provide a resource to advocate for the best possible developmentally appropriate kindergartens and standards for children. Our goal is that the ideas in this book will help support children's learning and development, while also nurturing their sense of wonder and joy in learning for a lifetime.