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Sesame Family Newsletter

August 28, 2009

## Ready? Set? Kindergarten!

by Jordan D. Brown

**A dad helps his daughter  
prepare for the Big Day.**

### Featuring:

- As Sparkly as Her Shoes
- The Benefits of a Dry Run
- 'Twas the Night Before Bus Time...
- This Week on the Street...



## This Week on the Street...

*Fun games to prepare for school.*

- [Elmo's Classroom](#)  
Click to discover all the fun things to do!
- [Big Bird's Letters](#)  
Press the keys to learn about letters.
- [Big Bird's Shapes](#)  
Press the keys to see shapes appear.

### Ready for School DVD

Find out how Elmo's pals soothe his first-day jitters in this DVD.

[Buy the DVD](#)

### Sesame Street Receives Lifetime Emmy Award

In addition to 15 nominations, *Sesame Street* will receive a Lifetime Achievement Award for 40 years of educational TV.

[Read More](#)

## Lets Get Ready for School!



Videos, games, and activities to help prepare your little one for this milestone!

[Watch, Play, & Explore](#)

## AS SPARKLY AS HER SHOES

On a gorgeous spring morning last May, my 4-year-old daughter Olivia played "hooky" from preschool.

No, she wasn't shirking on her educational responsibilities. In fact, on that sunny day, she was taking an important step toward the future of her school career. She was visiting our local elementary school to take a series of pre-screening tests. The purpose was to assess if she was ready for kindergarten. (Our school district assesses all eligible children who will turn 5 before December. If the results show that a child isn't ready, then the district offers a special summer school to prepare these children for kindergarten.)

My wife Ellen and I had already seen the benefits of this pre-



### ABC

Open up the wide world of words for your child.

### 123

Become a family of

screening process when our son Finian was preparing for kindergarten several years ago. During his pre-screening, Finian demonstrated that he was intellectually ready to handle the challenges of kindergarten. He knew his ABCs, loved to show off his counting ability, and so on. But socially, he wasn't there yet. During the testing, he clung to Ellen, not wanting her to leave the room. The school system's recommendation was for Finian to attend a month-long summer session to get more comfortable with the kindergarten experience, and in particular with saying goodbye, making friends, following directions, and so on.

Become a family of  
mathematicians!

Flash forward four years... Olivia and I headed into the school for her pre-screening. She was bursting with energy and I was relieved that she showed none of her brother's shyness (I, however, had sweaty palms, hoping it would all work out). Olivia dressed up for the occasion, wearing a pink flowery skirt, sparkly "Dorothy shoes," and a purple headband. She insisted on "accessorizing" with a necklace, earrings, and rings. She had been to the school dozens of times before to pick up Finian and to attend concerts and other special events.

The principal and vice principal greeted Olivia upon our arrival at school. When it was Olivia's turn to go into the "testing room", I gave her a "good luck" hug and told her I'd be right there if she needed me. Sure enough, about half an hour into the testing, one of the staff brought her out because she needed to use the bathroom, and wanted a glass of water. After her screening, Olivia wanted to stay at the school for a little while. We looked at the students' vegetable garden in the courtyard, nibbled snacks that one of the clubs was selling, and socialized with any of Finian's friends who happened to wander by in the hallway.

Overall, it was a positive experience and a great day. I was so proud of her! About a month later, we received a letter stating that Olivia was indeed prepared to start school in the fall. Knowing that our principal is sometimes responsive to teacher requests for new students, we wrote a letter to him, asking if Olivia might have Mrs. Wallace, the kindergarten teacher Finian had. We'll see...

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## THE BENEFITS OF A DRY RUN

Over the summer, whenever someone has asked Olivia, "Are you excited about starting kindergarten this fall?" she's said, "Yes," but we know there is more to the story. Recently, Olivia has been having nightmares. Though she rarely remembers details the next morning, Ellen and I have a hunch that some of the anxiety is about beginning school. At these times, we remind Olivia that we love her very much, and we are proud of her. We try to reassure her, "Everyone feels scared about new experiences. Like -- oh, I don't know -- school, for example."

Next week, to ease Olivia's start-of-school jitters, we are going to schedule a time for her to meet her kindergarten teacher in her actual classroom... long before the first day.



### Making Friends

The ability to make friends is a skill that will last a lifetime.

A neighbor suggested another strategy for helping Olivia feel more relaxed about starting school: Encourage her to talk about the activities she enjoyed in preschool--painting, reading books, building with blocks, singing songs, making friends--and then reassure Olivia that she will get to do many of these things again in kindergarten. In other words, kindergarten is not an alien experience for which she is not prepared. Nope! Kindergarten, in many ways, will be more of the same.

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## 'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE BUS TIME

No matter your child's age, the night before the first day of school can be a nail-biting experience for both child and parent. Despite our feelings that we cannot believe our baby is going to school, Ellen and I are confident that our "social butterfly" will have no trouble making friends. However, we are worried that some academics might be extra challenging for her, given her young age. Since Olivia's birthday is in November, she will not be 5 when school begins, while some of her classmates will soon be turning 6.

While browsing at a bookstore, I learned that the word "kindergarten" comes from the German language, and means "children's garden." This made me smile and think of some hokey horticultural metaphors. I marvel at how Olivia has sprouted magnificently since she was a little seedling. If I'm not going "out on a limb" here, I am delighted that the love and nurturing environment that Ellen and I have provided, um, have "taken root." Corny plant puns aside, at such milestones as the start of kindergarten, I have to not lose sight of the past, and the wonderful journey that led up to this point.

## SESAME WORKSHOP: THE WORLD'S LARGEST PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM



Best known for the groundbreaking children's television program *Sesame Street*, the goal of Sesame Workshop is to give all children the chance to dream, discover, and reach their highest potential. Using the power of media and Muppets, the Workshop brings these opportunities to 120 million children -- many who would otherwise have no access to early childhood education -- in over 140 countries worldwide. But we

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