Transitioning to Kindergarten:

A Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators

As documented throughout these pages, research clearly shows the importance of early education to student learning. We all want to provide children with strong educational and social experiences well before kindergarten and formal schooling even begin. An early start, after all, gives students the best possible chance to succeed.

The AFT and the National Center for Learning Disabilities have created a toolkit to help educators implement strategies as their students make the transition to kindergarten. Whether you are a school administrator, early childhood professional, paraprofessional, child care provider, or kindergarten teacher, you will find practical, easy-to-use resources to engage students and parents alike.

Highlights of this toolkit include:

- **School Readiness** (**http://go.aft.org/AE214tft1**)
  How do you know if a child is ready for kindergarten? The time that you spend with a child every day can give you lots of information about how he or she is progressing. This section contains a helpful guide on creating an "Early Learning Passport," a kindergarten readiness indicators checklist, an observation and activity guide, and a template for drawing and writing.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES YANG

- **Get Ready to Read!** (**http://go.aft.org/AE214tft2**)
  The *Get Ready to Read!* Screening Tool is intended to provide early childhood professionals and parents with a snapshot of where a child is on the path to developing important early literacy skills, including print knowledge, linguistic awareness, and emergent writing.
- **For Parents** (**http://go.aft.org/AE214tft3**, and **http://go.aft.org/AE214tft4** in Spanish)
  This section guides parents through the process of sharing what they know about their child with the kindergarten teacher, including noting any special services the child is receiving. It gives parents the opportunity to pass along important information about the child's likes and dislikes, the child's strengths and weaknesses, and any early warning signs that may have been observed.

–FROM THE AFT'S EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

RESOURCES

LISTEN CAREFULLY

A website designed to help parents encourage their children to practice safe listening habits when using headphones and iPods also provides resources for teachers looking to educate students about the damaging effects of hearing loss. As part of its "Listen to Your Buds" public education campaign, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has created lesson plans and classroom activities, available at **www.asha.org/Buds/Lesson-Plans**, that remind students to turn down the volume and take listening breaks when using personal audio devices.

As the site makes clear, hearing loss can contribute to academic, language, and social problems in school. To that end, ASHA has compiled several classroom resources on noise-induced hearing loss. These include "How Your Brain Understands What Your Ear Hears," a curriculum supplement for grades 7 and 8 that explains the connections between hearing, language, and communication; "I Love What I Hear!," which features classroom activities for grades 3–6 to help students learn how to protect their hearing and understand the science of sound; and "Dangerous Decibels," a curriculum supplement for grades K–8 with activities for learning the anatomy and physiology of hearing and how to practice healthy behaviors for preventing hearing loss due to unsafe sound.

WHAT'S UP WITH THE WEATHER?

A vast array of information for science teachers looking to supplement lessons at a variety of grade levels has been compiled by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and is available at **www.education.noaa.gov**. The site is filled with free lesson plans and activities on a range of topics, including wildfires, climate science, thunderstorms, blizzards, hurricanes, tornadoes, ocean currents, and environmental issues in the Great Lakes, along with detailed explanations of scientific concepts.

For instance, a resource on "Weather Systems and Patterns" includes a "Toasty Wind Lab" lesson in which elementary and middle school teachers can use a toaster "to show how infrared radiation produces convection currents and wind." Another lesson for middle school students helps them understand air pressure, temperature, dew point, and pressure readings on a weather map, while a lesson for both middle and high school students examines air masses, weather systems, and forecasting.

The site also includes background information on each topic. For example, "pressure systems," "meteorological processes," and "severe weather" are important terms for students to know as they study weather systems and patterns. For students curious about careers in the field, the site provides links to video profiles of tornado chasers and hurricane hunters.