



MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Early Education and Care



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Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

Ready
Families

Welcome to Kindergarten!

A Planning Toolkit for Massachusetts' Schools, Families, and Communities



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Ready Families Guide Introduction

The **Ready Families Guide** is for families with a child starting kindergarten. Kindergarten is a special time in your child's life. This guide explains what you can expect in kindergarten and how a strong family-school partnership can help get your child ready for success in kindergarten. It also explains how schools, families, and community partners can work together on the transition from pre-K to kindergarten.

This guide provides information on:

- what you can expect in kindergarten;
- ways to get children ready for success in kindergarten; and
- tips for being involved and communicating with school staff.

The word "**families**" includes parents, older siblings, extended family members, guardians, in-home caregivers, relatives, and other important people in a child's life.

This guide was made to support families and offers culturally sustaining practices, or ways of doing things, that respect many different cultures.

What Part Does My Family Play in the Transition to Kindergarten?

Families have an important voice and unique points of view. You have a lot to offer, as partners with the school and community, when it comes to your child's needs during the transition to kindergarten. You have the experiences and expertise to help schools learn how to support you and others in the community.

As partners, families can:

- help community partners understand how important it is to connect with families;
- communicate with educators about what their child enjoys doing and who they like to spend time with; and
- share with school leaders any concerns they have about kindergarten.

Families help plan for the transition to kindergarten in important ways. You can work with your child's school and community partners by joining the local transition to kindergarten planning team. Ask school leaders and educators for information about the local planning team and how you can join.

Often, schools partner with community organizations that serve families, children, and youth. This collaboration can benefit you by connecting your family to services that support your child's success as they begin school.

Families can be involved in their child's school experience in even more ways:

- Explore the school website or contact the local school district main office to find out about events and activities for families.
- Participate in kindergarten orientation and other school meetings about getting ready for kindergarten.
- Think of questions ahead of time to ask school administrators or educators.
- Share information with other families.
- Ask to visit your child's kindergarten classroom and meet the kindergarten team.
- Look for community events that help children and families get ready for kindergarten.



Families can make a big difference for the better when they collaborate with schools and community partners. When you participate, you can make changes that reflect the priorities of the local community.

What Should I Know About Kindergarten?

Massachusetts values each child as a unique learner and believes every child deserves a safe and supportive learning environment. The goal of kindergarten is to give all children a positive learning experience that helps them reach their full potential.

Starting kindergarten is a big step for children and families. Getting used to a new setting and routine, meeting your child's kindergarten educator, learning new rules, and making new friends can be fun and a bit stressful. Knowing what to expect in kindergarten can ease worries and help prepare you and your child for the transition.

What Will My Child Learn in Kindergarten?

Children will learn a lot during kindergarten. At this age, play is an important way that children learn. Kindergarten programs should include lots of opportunities for growth through play and fun activities. Play supports all areas of children's learning by helping them practice real-life skills, handle stress, build self-confidence, and develop social, language, and physical abilities while fostering imagination, curiosity, and deeper exploration of content. At home, your new kindergartner will probably need plenty of time for rest as they get used to life at school.



All children can learn and thrive, but they start kindergarten with differences in what they know and can do. Educators and families can support **all** children to build skills for kindergarten. Some skills that will be learned and used in kindergarten include:

- naming, managing, handling, and talking about strong emotions;
- asking adults for help when needed;
- working with peers cooperatively, like taking turns and solving problems;
- building language in order to communicate with other children and adults about their needs and ideas;
- listening to instructions and following directions;
- using a pencil, paintbrush, marker, or other utensils;
- recognizing letters, shapes, and numbers;
- knowing their full name; and
- helping take care of personal needs like using the toilet by themselves, washing their hands, and putting their jacket on.

Children are naturally curious and enthusiastic about learning. The adult's job is to support a child's enthusiasm and curiosity in real and meaningful ways.

Explore the informative resource [Welcome to Kindergarten!](#) to find out about the expectations, or standards, for what **every** child will know and be able to do in school and how they will show you what they are learning. Find out about the many ways your child will show you what they are learning. Use this information to work with kindergarten educators to support your child's learning during kindergarten.

Review [Guidelines for Preschool and Kindergarten Learning Experiences](#) to learn about how educators plan lessons and activities for children that support specific pre-K and kindergarten learning standards.

What If I Have Concerns About My Child?

Kindergarten supports the learning and development of **all** children, no matter their abilities, past school experiences, or needs. All children—including children who may have developmental difficulties, learning difficulties, or both—will have the support they need for a positive kindergarten experience.

If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), you should meet with your child's current educator and IEP team to help plan your child's kindergarten experience.

Explore these Massachusetts resources for guidance:

- **Individualized Education Program**

This resource on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website contains state and federal guidance including an IEP Process Guide, IEP forms and notices, a transition planning form, and translated materials for families.

- **A Parent's Guide to Special Education in Massachusetts**

This guide contains the most up-to-date information available regarding the special education system in Massachusetts. It is available in several different formats and three languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

What Can I Do at Home to Support My Child's Kindergarten Experience?

You can use daily routines and schedules that stay the same to get your child prepared for kindergarten. Routines make children feel safe and help them understand what is expected of them. To learn how to use daily routines and interactions to support your child's learning, refer to **How Families Can Support Children's Learning and Development**.

Find information about child development services and resources from the **Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) Network**. The CFCE Network is supported by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and can help you with:

- child development information;
- transition information and support;
- family assistance;
- timely support in periods of family crisis;
- high-quality, specific, and up-to-date information on pre-K programs and referrals;
- family literacy and school readiness;
- family and community events;
- family leadership opportunities; and
- information about community resources that support you as your child's first and best advocate.

Look for a CFCE coordinator at kindergarten events in your community or find a **CFCE program near you**.

What Can I Do to Help My Child Get Ready for Their First Day of Kindergarten?

Going to kindergarten is a big event. While some children may be eager to start kindergarten, other children may have worries or fears about it. Knowing what to expect can help all children.

Beginning 3-4 Months Before the First Day

Here are some ways to support your child's excitement for school and calm their fears:

- Show excitement and talk positively about what your child will do in kindergarten.
- Check your local library for books to read to your child about starting kindergarten.
- Plan for your child to visit their new school.

As the School Year Approaches

Families are essential to the transition to kindergarten. There is a lot to know and keep organized during the kindergarten transition. As you begin to gather information and think through what you need to do, use these resources to support you:

- Ask your child's school for a resource folder or website with information to support families in a successful transition to kindergarten.
- Seek out events about kindergarten at your community library, recreation center, or other organization.



- Talk with other families to learn about their experiences with the kindergarten transition.
- Check with your child’s school about summer programs that help children adjust to kindergarten routines and provide families with resources to support the transition to kindergarten.
- Keep information you want to share, dates you need to remember, and questions you want to ask in **Our Family’s Plan for Beginning Kindergarten**. Families can use this tool to make their own plan for supporting their child’s success in kindergarten.

Find ideas in this Massachusetts resource, [Continuing the Journey—Best Practices in Early Childhood Transition: A Guide for Families](#), about how change affects children and how you can help your child get ready for transitions.

In the Month Before School Starts

Families play an important part in getting their child ready for kindergarten. You are your children’s first and best advocate. From the moment of birth, children begin learning. With support from their families, children learn new skills and what is expected of them.

You can support your child prepare for kindergarten by:

- visiting your child’s school, meet the school staff, and help them see what the new environment is going to look and feel like;
- reaching out to your child’s kindergarten educator to share information about your child, your family, and your hopes for learning, growth, and development over the kindergarten year;
- communicating with your child’s kindergarten team to get the answers you need; and
- exploring resources included in this toolkit.

To get the answers you need, reach out to your child’s school or the school district main office for the following information:

- How do I register my child for kindergarten?
- Where do I find information about kindergarten registration?
- What is the purpose of the developmental screening?
- What is the process for scheduling the screening?
- When does kindergarten enrollment begin?
- When can I find out which educator my child will have?
- Is there a school website where I can find directions for enrolling my child?
- What events can I attend to go to where I can learn more about my child’s transition to kindergarten?
- What resources can help me support my child as they start kindergarten?
- Is there before-school or after-school care?

- Is there transportation?
- What support is there for family members who speak a language other than English?

Ask your child's kindergarten team:

- What time does school start and end?
- What is parent and/or bus drop-off and pick-up like?
- What can I expect on the first day of kindergarten?
- What is the routine for the day?
- How are snacks and lunch handled?
- When can I meet with you in person? Do you do home visits?
- When can I visit the kindergarten classroom?
- How will the school support my child's learning needs?
- How do you share information about my child's progress and experiences?
- How can I volunteer in my child's class?
- What happens if my child gets sick or hurt?

Having information is powerful and helps you make decisions for your family. Ask to visit the classroom with your child. Your child can get used to the setting, and you can talk with the kindergarten team. In this way you can learn about the transition to kindergarten together.

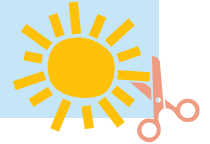


What Is Kindergarten Registration Like?

In Massachusetts, your child's school or school district handles kindergarten registration and enrollment, including screening. Each district has its own process for registering and screening children before kindergarten entry.

Here are some examples of the items that Massachusetts schools may require. Check with your local school district for the exact process and requirements, including kindergarten entry age and deadlines for registration and enrollment.

- Your child's birth certificate (an I-94 form or passport may be acceptable).
- Your child's up-to-date immunization record.
- Parent or guardian's photo identification.
- Residency documents (may include utility bill, deed, mortgage payment, bank statement, W-2 form, letter from an approved government agency).
- Other documents as required by the school district.



If you are experiencing homelessness and have a child starting kindergarten, you can find guidance at Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's **Office of Student and Family Support**. This program works with other state agencies and community partners to make sure children and youth experiencing homelessness can go to school.

Some communities may provide information about summer programs for families with children starting kindergarten. At these programs, children can get used to routines like going to the cafeteria and handling a tray, center time, and dismissal. Families may get support and resources like fun activities they can do to support their child in the transition to kindergarten. Ask your child's school if it has events or programs to support children as they start school.

Developmental Screening

Developmental screening is required for all children before they start kindergarten. Currently, each school district in Massachusetts is required to screen children entering kindergarten who have not already been screened in a public preschool.

Screening is a short assessment that covers several areas of your child's development. It helps identify children who may need additional support in their development and learning. Screening ensures your child receives the support they may need to be successful in kindergarten. To learn more about the screening process and requirements, contact your local school district before kindergarten begins.

Learn about the requirements for Massachusetts' local education agencies (LEAs, or your child's school) to support the needs of children with disabilities in the **Child Find Fact Sheet**. This fact sheet has been translated into 16 languages and is on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Special Education website.

Home Language Survey

As part of kindergarten registration and state and federal requirements, schools must ask families if their child speaks or understands a language in addition to English. If so, the school or district will contact you to schedule an English language proficiency assessment appointment. After the assessment, you will be informed if your child is an English learner and qualifies for English learner education services.

All incoming kindergartners whose home language is not English will be tested using the **WIDA Screener for Kindergarten**, even if they were already assessed in pre-K. Contact your child's school or the local school district to find out more.

Your child is about to start an exciting new part of their life. As always, you will keep supporting your child's learning and development in important ways. With your support, kindergarten will be just the start of a successful school experience for your child.

You are not on this journey alone! Your community and school educators are here to support you. For additional information and/or resources on the transition to kindergarten, please reach out to the Early Learning Team at achievement@mass.gov.

For access to the complete set of guides and tools, go to <https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/>.





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