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Kindergarten-Bound: Tips for supporting your child during this important transition

by Timea Pap and Anneliese Johnson

For many parents, the prospect of preparing children for kindergarten can be overwhelming. Navigating the enrollment process, fostering children's academic and social-emotional readiness, and adjusting to new schedules are all part of the transition and may seem daunting. This guide for Ohio parents outlines common logistical details – such as how to determine eligibility, enroll, and plan for the year ahead – and provides tips and resources related to academic and social readiness.

When is my child eligible for kindergarten?

Individual school districts determine the age cut-off for kindergarten eligibility. Generally speaking, children in Ohio must be 5 years old to enter kindergarten. (There are limited instances where an accelerated child may be admitted at age 4.) A family may choose to wait until the child turns 6-years-old to enter kindergarten (or first grade) but by age 6, a child must be enrolled in and attend school. The Ohio Department of Education spells out the [various guidelines here](#).

Ohio's public school districts typically choose either August 1 or September 30 as the date by which a child must be 5 to enroll in kindergarten. **Eligibility criteria can be found on each district's website, or a parent/caregiver may contact the district for this information.**

How do I enroll my child?

Check your school district's website for more information about the enrollment process. **In most cases, enrollment can be completed online by filling out an application and signing up through a "parent portal" online.** Usually, an appointment is required at a central enrollment office for form submission as a final step.

Plan to gather and organize the following types of forms:

- Child's birth certificate
- Parent identification card
- Proof of address
- Custody documentation, if applicable
- Vaccination records – the following are required by Ohio law:
 - DTaP/DT Tdap/Td (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis)
 - Polio
 - MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)
 - Hepatitis B
 - Varicella (Chickenpox)

Immunization records can be obtained from a child's doctor or health clinic, the [state's immunization registry](#), or your child's pre-K/child care center. (More details can be found on the Ohio Department of Health website, [here](#).)

When are kindergarten hours?

Some districts offer all-day kindergarten while other programs may only run for 2.5 hours or 4 days out of the week.

Note, that "full-day kindergarten" may refer to hours between 9:00 am and 3:30 pm which is why it is important to plan ahead for child care. Caregivers are advised to check their individual school district's website for program hours.

Individual schools may offer before and after care to accommodate parents' work schedules. **Spots for before and after care fill up quickly so it is important to sign up as soon as applications open.** Applications can usually be found on the school's website.

In other cases, parents rely on private daycare centers to bridge the gap between feasible drop-off/pickup times and school start/end. **Check with the daycare center to ensure that transportation is offered to or from the school your child will be attending.**

How do I know if my child is ready for kindergarten?

Schools are prepared to meet the learning needs of each child upon entry to kindergarten. **Your child will complete a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (or KRA) before or at the start of the school year which will help kindergarten teachers tailor classroom activities to best support each individual child.** The KRA is designed to provide schools with information about a child in the following areas: social foundations, mathematics, physical well-being and motor development, and language and literacy. Read more about the [KRA here](#) or watch a [video here](#).

How can I support my child during the kindergarten transition?

- **Share the excitement with your child!**
 - Visit the school playground.
 - Connect with other parents/families at the school through the PTA, parent groups on social media, and by attending school orientations or events.
 - Talk about the exciting aspects of kindergarten (e.g., new friends, new things to learn, riding the bus, being a “big kid”).
 - Validate feelings your child shares with you.
- Learn about **skills you can practice at home**, in a fun and playful way!

LANGUAGE & LITERACY <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Read with your child every day– Practice recognizing upper and lower case letters, rhyming words, and tracing letters with your child– Search for a list of kindergarten sight words online and help your child familiarize themselves with these words– Practice writing their first name	MATHEMATICS <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Practice identifying numbers 1-20– Practice counting out loud to 100– Practice identifying shapes– Practice matching numbers to the number of objects
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL & SELF-HELP <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Support your child in learning to manage restroom routines independently– Help your child practice asking for help when needed– Encourage your child to use emotion words to describe how they are feeling	MOTOR DEVELOPMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Encourage your child to run, jump, climb, and skip– Practice using child scissors– Stack blocks

Tips from parents who have been through it

Plan ahead for child care. Confirm transportation schedule and sign up for your child for before and/or after care if needed. Talk to your child’s school administrators or check the school website on how to enroll in after care as well as for resources on financial assistance.

Be mindful of teacher development days, school breaks, snow days, and any other times school is not in session and child care may be needed. Check the district calendar for planned “no school” days.

Take virtual or in-person tours of the kindergarten you plan to enroll in. Reach out to school administrators or check school websites to learn more.

Communicate with your child’s preschool teacher. Ask questions about kindergarten readiness and ask for suggestions on how you can best support your child at home in preparation for the transition.

Connect with other parents at your preschool to **find out which children will be transitioning to the same kindergarten and arrange for play dates.**

Additional resources

- [Tips on helping your child prepare for the transition](#)
 - [Supporting family engagement](#)
 - [Overview of kindergarten skills](#)
 - [Picture books to help prepare your child for the transition](#)
- Educational media to support letter and number practice
 - [ABCYA](#)
 - [ABC Mouse](#)
 - [High Five Magazine](#) from Highlights
 - [PBS Kids](#)



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