Ready for Success

What Families Want to Know about Starting School in Nebraska

NEBRASKA
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This booklet is in response to commonly asked questions from parents about preparing for, and entering kindergarten.

Some questions parents ask are about district policy. Nebraska has over 200 individual school districts, each having their own board, superintendent, and policies. The Nebraska Department of Education provides guidance and assistance to these districts. Understanding what is state law (such as the entrance age) and what is district policy (such as the early entry assessment procedure) can be confusing. Parents are encouraged to talk with school teachers and administrators for specific guidance.

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What does school readiness mean?

Children are born ready and eager to learn. The goal of school readiness efforts is to support ALL children entering kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, health, and attitude to be successful life-long learners. Ready children have families who support their children's learning, and schools that are prepared to meet the individual needs of ALL children the year they are age-eligible to attend kindergarten.

When can my child start kindergarten?

Nebraska law entitles children to receive free public education the year that they turn five on or before July 31. This is called a "cutoff date." Schools cannot test age-eligible children for kindergarten entrance, nor suggest delaying entrance. It is the responsibility of schools to be ready to meet the individual needs of every age-eligible child, regardless of their abilities.

What if my child doesn't meet the cutoff date?

School districts are allowed to enroll a child who misses the cutoff date, but turns five between August 1 and October 15. Parents who are interested in enrolling their child early should contact their school as soon as possible to ask about the procedure for early entry assessment.

How do I know if my child is ready?

Perhaps this is the most frequently asked question and the one that is the most difficult to answer. There are many opinions and much research about what it means to be ready.

School readiness is about more than what your child knows. Kindergarten teachers say ready children are:

- healthy, rested, and well fed
- able to pay attention, follow directions and communicate their thoughts and needs without being disruptive
- curious and enthusiastic about new activities
- confident, cooperative and able to practice age-appropriate self control.

Children enter kindergarten with a wide variety of skills and knowledge. There is not just one thing, nor a list of skills, that makes a child ready for school. In fact, you should consider all areas of your child's development, not just her/his academic skills. See the resources section at the end of this booklet for ideas on how you can support your child's school readiness.

In Nebraska, the only requirement for kindergarten entrance is age-eligibility: your child turns five on or before July 31. Therefore, it is not a question of whether your age-eligible child is ready for kindergarten. Rather, it is a question of how can you support your child's transition to school, which includes helping the school be ready for your child.

What will kindergarten be like?

Kindergarten is for ALL five-year-olds. It is normal for children to be at different levels of development, with a wide range of abilities. Kindergartners quickly gain skills and knowledge and often catch up with each other by the end of the year.

Nebraska teachers plan their curriculum based on state standards, which are what children should know and be able to do by the **end** of the school year in: language arts (reading, writing, and communicating), mathematics, science, and social studies.

Recognizing that young children are active learners and learn best through play, many kindergarten teachers provide plenty of time for play and exploration. However, kindergarten programs have come under pressure to become more structured and academic. This may cause some parents to be concerned about their child's ability to be successful.

Because each classroom may have different expectations and daily schedules, it is important that parents talk to the teacher or principal if you are unsure about your child's ability to be successful.

Should my child start now or next year?

Once you know the expectations of your child's kindergarten, you may wonder if your child would benefit from waiting another year to start. This practice, called "red-shirting," is a decision based on the individual abilities and needs of your child and family.

If you are considering delaying kindergarten entrance, there are many things to consider:

- **Research shows that when red-shirted children** start school, they may have more knowledge and skills than their peers, but by the end of kindergarten, and certainly by third grade, most children catch up to each other.
- **When children are red-shirted, some may regress** and act out because they are bored and their developmental needs aren't being met.
- **What options are available in your community** if your child will not be in kindergarten? Which option will best help your child develop the skills that you are concerned about?
- **Public preschool is typically no longer an option** once your child is eligible for kindergarten.
- **State law requires that children begin school** the year they turn six (known as "compulsory age").

"Did I make the right choice? I don't know, but I made the best decision for my family that I could have at the time. As a parent, that's the best I can do."

How can I help my child be ready?

High quality early care and education programs provide children with opportunities to develop the skills related to school success through play. But there are many things parents can do to help children be successful in school and in life. You can:

Promote **good healthy habits** by making sure your child:

- Follows a routine which includes a balanced diet and plenty of activity and rest

Encourage **social and emotional well-being** by giving your child chances to:

- Take care of own needs, such as dressing & toileting
- Play with others, learning to share and cooperate
- Express emotions in safe ways, learning to control his/her own behaviors and reactions
- Pay attention, make choices, follow directions & rules

Support **language and learning** by giving your child chances to:

- Be read to every day & talk about words you see
- Practice drawing, writing, and recognizing numbers, shapes, colors, letters, sounds and her/his name
- Work on a task until it’s done, with support as needed
- Play! Children learn best when they’re having fun, so use games, toys, natural events and routines to teach, rather than using flashcards and worksheets.

How can I prepare for the first day?

Starting kindergarten is a time of change for both your child and your family. It is common for parents and children to feel nervous about the new routines and expectations. The more you know, the better prepared you and your child will feel.

To help your child, you can:

- **Be enthusiastic and positive** when you talk with your child about the changes. If you are excited and confident, your child will be, too.
- **Make an appointment** with your doctor or clinic for the kindergarten check up.
- **Contact the school** you want your child to attend:
  - ✓ Ask how and when to enroll. You will need your child's original birth certificate.
  - ✓ Request information about school expectations, rules, and classroom daily routines.
  - ✓ Ask about start and release times, which may vary between schools.
  - ✓ If you will need before or after school care or transportation, be sure to ask what options are available from the school or in your community.

- **Talk with your childcare provider** about adjusting your current routine (such as naptime) to help prepare your child for the new daily schedule.

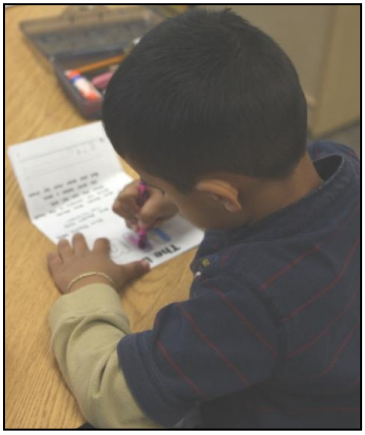
- **Read books about kindergarten** and encourage your child to talk about his/her feelings.
- **Participate in school open houses** and information meetings. Help your child feel more comfortable and confident by knowing what will happen, where things are, whom she knows, and what to look forward to.
- **Meet with your child's teacher**, especially if you feel your child may need individual attention or support.
- **Start a new bed time and morning routine** a few days before school starts. A routine will help your child get the 10-12 hours of sleep needed.
- **Talk with your child** about what you will each do on that first day. Consider sending a small visual reminder, such as a family photo to provide comfort.
- **Arrive at school early** to give your child time to settle in. Remind your child about your plans for the end of the school day. Give a reassuring, cheerful, and short good-bye.

How can I support my child's education?

Now that you have a new school routine, keep it up! With all the changes happening, your child will welcome a regular bedtime and morning routine.

Having a successful entry into kindergarten helps children have a positive attitude about school and learning. As your child's partner in education, it is important for you to get, and stay, involved.

- **Be enthusiastic about school**. Focus on the positives. When you show that school is important to you, your child will learn that, too.
- **Help your child be at school, on time, every day**. Whenever possible, make your child's appointments for after school or towards the end of the school day.
- **Keep reading to, and with, your child daily**. This can be a special time in your bedtime routine to see how much your child is learning.
- **Ask about your child's day** and about the work he brings home, too.



- **Talk to your child's teacher often and early,** especially if you have concerns. The relationships and communication between the teacher and your family is key to ensuring your child's success.

Books about school to read with your child:

- *Sam and Gram and the First Day of School* by D. Blomberg
- *The Berenstain Bears Go to School* by S. & J. Berenstain
- *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* by J.Slate
- *The Night Before Kindergarten* by N. Wing & J. Durell
- *Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!* by N. Carlson
- *Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten?* by A. Vernick
- *If You Take a Mouse to School* by L. Numeroof
- *Countdown to Kindergarten* by A. McGhee
- *Welcome to Kindergarten* by A. Rockwell
- *Froggy Goes To School by* J. London
- *When You Go to Kindergarten* by J. Howe
- *Timothy Goes to School* by R. Wells
- *First Day Jitters* by J. Danneberg
- *The Kissing Hand* by A. Penn
- *Will I have a Friend?* by M. Cohen

Web-based supports for school readiness:

First Connections with Families: Learning Begins at Birth, child development, reading to your child, and child health & safety information http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/fcwf.html

The Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines support any adult working with any child, in any environment, in all areas of development (Birth through 5) and Nebraska Kindergarten Early Learning Guidelines http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/elg.html

Student-Friendly Language Arts Standards (K-12) http://www.education.ne.gov/read/StudentFriendlyStandards/StudentFriendlyStandardsMain.html

Parent Involvement http://www.firstfivenebraska.org/nebraska-is-taking-action/content/engaged-parents/ & http://www.bethere.org/index.php/parents-family/parent-tips

Nebraska's Early Development Network Staying On Track mobile app & local resources for families http://www.answers4families.org

KETV special on Raising Successful Children (Video) http://bit.ly/Ih4tVR

Ages & Stages, What You Can Do http://www.bornlearning.org/default.aspx?id=19

Getting School Ready: How Adults Can Support Children's School Success http://earlylearning.org/resources/publications/getting-school-ready

School Readiness: Preparing Children for Kindergarten & Beyond http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/schoolreadiness.pdf

School Success for Your Children http://1.usa.gov/NVD5Mw

A Parent's Guide to Preparing Your Child for School http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/44013_NEA_W_L8.pdf

Play in the Early Years: Key to School Success, and Play: It's the Way Young Children Learn http://earlychildhoodfunders.org/#mp_play

The Division for Early Childhood Council for Exceptional Children
http://www.dec-sped.org/Families/Resources_for_Families

Starting School Advice from PBS Kids
http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/starting_school.html

Ages & Stages, mobile app & review of mobile apps for kids
http://www.parenting.com

Ready for School, Ready for Life.1 in 8 Kids Isn't Ready. Is Yours? (Video) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-2ZQyVkPbA&feature=related

Redshirting:

What the Research Says… Are They Ready for Kindergarten? The Pros and Cons of Redshirting Young Children.
http://www2.ku.edu/~kskits/ta/Packets/ReadyForKindergartenPDF/3WhatTheResearchSays2009.pdf

60 Minutes Special (video)
http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7400898n&tag=contentBody;storyMediaBox

Social Skills:

How parents and providers can support social skills.
http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html &
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/DHS-Social-Emotional_Health_and_School_Readiness_275234_7.pdf

Making it Happen!: Building Positive Relationships With Children-
http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/hef601/build/hef601.pdf

Developing Self-Regulation in Young Children
http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/developing-self-regulation &
http://www.education.com/reference/article/development-self-regulation & http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/parents/index.html

Executive Function: Skills for Life & Learning (Video)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efCq_vHUMqs

Reading & Literacy:

10 Things You Can Do To Raise A Reader, Signs Your Child Is Ready For Kindergarten & mobile app http://www.readingrockets.org

Reading tips http://www.literacyconnections.com/Parents.php

Center for Early Literacy Learning- Resources for Parents
http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/pgparents.php

20 iPad Apps That Will Help Teach Your Kids to Read
http://tinyurl.com/c4ojznq

Transitioning to School:

Tips on how to avoid some common anxiety and fears
http://www.extension.org/sites/default/files/w/3/3f/JITP59-60mo.pdf

Countdown to Kindergarten Calendar
http://www.unitedwaylincoln.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/KindergartenCalendar.pdf

Transition Tips: Toolkit of Practices and Strategies
http://www.hdi.uky.edu/nectc/NECTC/practicesearch.aspx

Kindergarten Readiness Indicators & Activities; Transition Toolkit
http://www.getreadytoread.org/transition-kindergarten-toolkit

Terrific Transitions http://center.serve.org/TT/fam_par.html

Back to School Time: Tips to Help Children Adjust
http://readyweb.crc.uiuc.edu/virtual-library/1996/bck2schl.html

Transitions from the Children's Perspective (Video)
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/transition & http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ku4jXmiirA

Kindergarten Advice from Kindergartners (Video)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTE4snzX-e0&feature=related & http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMf1mveot3I&feature=related

What children and parents can expect and how to prepare for Kindergarten (Video)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCNsAX1JNQo&feature=related

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