

Planning for Your Child's Transition to Kindergarten: A timeline

When your child moves from Early Childhood Special Education services into kindergarten in an elementary school, it can be both exciting and challenging. Kindergarten is a big step in any child's life. For a child with disabilities, being ready for that step often requires some intentional preparation. By working with your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, you can plan for your child's success and make that first elementary school experience a good one.

One year before

Planning for your child's entrance into kindergarten can begin as early as a year ahead of time. You can start the process by talking with the IEP team regarding your child's strengths and weaknesses in various situations. It is important to understand that your child does not need to "be ready for kindergarten." Rather, by sharing your child's strengths and weaknesses with the kindergarten, they can be ready to serve your child. You may want to discuss your child's skills in the following areas:

- Social development
 - Ability to trust other adults and children
 - Ability to play with other children
 - Ability to learn and play in a group

- Emotional development
 - Level of independence and self-direction
 - Level of self-control or ability to wait for things
 - Level of confidence, especially in new situation
 - Interest in learning new things

- Language development
 - Ability to understand directions
 - Ability to express thoughts, needs, and wants
 - Level of vocabulary
 - Ability to be understood by adults and other children

- Motor development
 - Can run and jump
 - Has self-help skills: dressing, eating, toileting
 - Can copy simple symbols, numbers, and letters
 - Can hold a pencil appropriately for writing

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- Intellectual and academic development
 - Ability to focus and attend to an activity for 10-15 minutes
 - Understanding of letters and letter-sound correlation
 - Ability to follow simple directions and remember simple routines
 - Ability to stick with and solve simple problems

Remember that there is no level that your child needs to have reached to be able to enter kindergarten. However, discussing these areas will help you and the team think of goals that you might need to include in the IEP so your child will be prepared for kindergarten.

The spring before

The spring before your child starts kindergarten, you can begin to consider specific school choices. Your IEP team can tell you about options for your child. Many districts assign children to a kindergarten in a specific school based on geographic location. Most schools have “kindergarten roundup/registration” events so families can learn about the kindergarten program. Plan to attend school information nights and open houses. You may wish to visit and observe possible schools and classrooms to see if the school is a good fit for your child. If you look at a school in the spring, remember that the children you observe are at the end of their school year, and their skills will be more advanced than those of a child just beginning kindergarten.

After you have completed any visits, plan to meet with your child's IEP team to discuss which school your child will attend in the fall. Once you've made that decision, ask to schedule a “transition meeting” to meet a kindergarten teacher from that school to review your child's IEP. During this meeting you and the rest of the IEP team can do the following:

- Write or review IEP goals and objectives
- Discuss how these goals will be implemented in the kindergarten environment
- Discuss any needed accommodations and modifications (e.g., instructional, building/safety, behavior, transportation)
- Discuss your concerns regarding the transition

The summer before

Once the team has met and the IEP is revised as needed, it is time to think of ways to help prepare your child for this big step. Prior to the start of school, visit the classroom if you can, and explore the new school building including:

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- Lunch room
- Bathrooms
- School office (principal)
- Playground
- Place where your child will be dropped off and picked up

Other ways to help your child be ready for school include:

- Making sure immunizations are up-to-date
- Taking pictures of the new school and classroom, and using these pictures to talk about the transition over the summer
- Arranging summer playtimes with other students who may be in your child's class
- Reading books with your child about kindergarten
- Practice walking to the bus stop or school

You may also want to work on skills such as:

- Stating first and last name
- Writing name, if appropriate
- Standing and walking in a line
- Waiting for a turn
- Following directions
- Following the rules of a game
- Building independence (using the bathroom, putting on a coat, tying shoes, etc.)

Before school begins

Before school starts in the fall, you may wish to:

- Check with the team to make sure that all necessary equipment and accommodations listed in your child's IEP are available in the classroom
- Request a lunchroom menu and plan accordingly if your child has food allergies or sensitivities. Food allergies should also be discussed as part of a health plan with the school nurse.
- Make sure you know your child's bus stop
- Consider preparing a "snap shot" or short description of your child to share with the classroom teacher.



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A time for growth

Your child's transition to kindergarten can be a positive experience by presenting both you and your child with new opportunities for growth and development. Transition is a process that happens over time and involves all the "stakeholders" including children, parents, preschool and Early Childhood Special Education teachers, childcare providers, kindergarten teachers, and maybe other family members as well. During this process, you will meet many people who will care about you and your child, and you will continue to have input into your child's education. Remember that your input is extremely important because you are the expert on your child. Your opinions matter, so share them freely with the rest of the team. Being an active member of the IEP team is the best way to help your child be successful.

For more information on any concerns you have regarding the transition process, contact MSPTI and ask to speak with an early childhood advocate.