

Supporting All Children to Attend Kindergarten In Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools

Information and considerations for Child Care Licensees, Schools, School Boards, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs)

Right to Attend School

School boards are required to admit students, without the payment of a fee, who are qualified to be **resident pupils** of the board, as defined in the *Education Act*.

Among other things, a student must live within the jurisdiction of a board in order to be a resident pupil. Various other requirements apply to determine the type of board that a student is entitled to enrol in (i.e. English-language, French-language, public, separate).

A child has the right to attend Junior Kindergarten on September 1 in the calendar year in which the child turns 4 years old. This means that a child can attend at the minimum age of 3 years and 8 months.

A child has the right to attend Kindergarten on September 1 in the calendar year in which the child turns 5 years old. This means that a child can attend at the minimum age of 4 years and 8 months.

A child may begin attending Junior Kindergarten or Kindergarten at any time during the school year with registration and proper documentation.

If at any point during the school year a parent chooses to transition his or her child from part-time to full-time attendance in Kindergarten, the child has the right to attend full-time.

* Children are not required to attend school until the age of 6. Therefore, it is optional for parents to enrol their children before they reach that age. In addition, parents may choose to have their child attend Kindergarten on a part-time basis. School boards will work with the family at the school level to determine the best schedule for that child. If a child turns 6 after the first day of the school year, the child is not required to attend until the following school year. For more information on a child's right to attend school, please consult the [Education Act](#).

Children are competent, capable of complex thinking, curious and rich in potential and experience.

Opportunity for reflection:

If we hold this belief of children, **then** how can we successfully support the right for every child to attend Kindergarten?



Kindergarten

Ontario offers a full-day kindergarten program which is a two-year program designed for four and five year olds. Kindergarten aims to support children in making a smooth transition from home, child care, or other early years environments to school settings, and facilitates a cohesive, coordinated system for early years programs and services across the province.

Ontario elementary schools strive to support high-quality learning while giving every child the opportunity to learn in the way that is best suited to each child's individual strengths and needs. The Kindergarten program is designed to help every child reach his or her full potential through a program of learning that is coherent, relevant, and developmentally appropriate. Once a child has registered in a school, the school board is responsible for determining the specific education programs and services that may be required to support each child while in school.

Families are composed of people who are competent and capable, curious, and rich in experience. Families love their children and want the best for them. Families are experts on their children. They are the first and foremost powerful influence on children's learning, development, health and well-being.

Opportunity for reflection:

If we hold this belief of families, **then** how do we support a family as they make decisions about their child's transition to school?



Transition to School

The start of school is considered a major transition for a child and his/her family. Children may have already experienced multiple transitions prior to their start in Kindergarten, but Kindergarten still marks a major time of change for the child and the family. Transitions like the start of school need to be viewed as a process, and not as a single event.

Boards may consider offering the following to support children as they transition to school:

1. Arranging for early registration – nine to twelve months before the start of school in September.
2. Holding a parent information meeting in early spring.
3. Scheduling school and classroom visits for the parents and child before the start of school in September.
4. Personalizing correspondence sent to parents about the September entry.
5. Developing strategies to address the language and cultural characteristics of the community.
6. Arranging with the transportation department for a school bus orientation session for children and their parents.
7. Preparing and distributing a welcome package to all new students on their first school day in September.

*Ministry of Education
Planning Entry to School: A Resource Guide*

The transition to school may look different for each child depending on his/her previous experiences, and his/her unique development. Schools will partner with the family and community partners involved to develop a plan for a smooth transition to school for each child. As children enter Kindergarten with a diverse range of experiences, abilities, and needs, the rate at which children adapt to the school environment will vary. As system leaders, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs), District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) and school boards are encouraged to develop local transition to Kindergarten processes and approaches that are welcoming, responsive and 'ready for the children'.

Educators are competent and capable, curious and rich in experience. They are knowledgeable, caring, reflective and resourceful professionals. They bring diverse social, cultural and linguistic perspectives. They collaborate with others to create engaging environments and experiences to foster children's learning and development.

Opportunity for reflection:

If we hold this belief of educators, **then** how can we work together to successfully transition all children to Kindergarten?



Transition to School for Children with Special Needs/Special Education Needs

Children enter Kindergarten with various abilities and needs. Principals and educators are responsible for working with parents and caregivers to support children with special education needs in experiencing the smoothest possible transition to school.

Once a child has registered in a school, the school board is responsible for determining whether any special education programs or services may be required for the child to have meaningful access to education. Currently, four and five year olds may receive a variety of programs and services from school board staff and other organizations.

The Ministry of Education provides the funding and the flexibility for school boards to deliver programs and services for children with special education needs as appropriate.

It is the responsibility of the school board to identify and provide the supports required to optimize learning for each child.

Toilet Learning Process

There is no provincial policy that requires children who attend Kindergarten to be toilet trained. It is up to school boards to develop expectations and procedures for assisting children who may need toileting support. Principals work with their staff, parents/caregivers and child care providers to develop an effective and responsive entry to school plan that addresses how to best meet the needs of individual children in a way that honours the dignity of the child.

Some consideration when developing a plan:

- Timing – avoid starting the toilet learning process during major transitions.
- Readiness – give the child 1 to 2 step directions.
- Child oriented techniques – use encouragement, praise and consistency.
- Consistency – home, school and child care share the approach to toilet learning.

“The process of toilet learning has changed significantly over the years and within different cultures. A child-centred approach, where the timing and methodology of toilet learning is individualized as much as possible, is recommended.”¹

The [Canadian Pediatric Society](#) goes on to say that if a child is not engaged in the toilet learning process by four years of age that an appointment with a family physician is recommended to rule out any developmental or health concerns.

¹ Canadian Pediatric Society, *Toilet learning: Anticipatory guidance with a child-oriented approach*, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/toilet-learning>

Optimizing Learning

Children arrive at school with different backgrounds and experiences and at different stages of development. It is important to plan early to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. Whether the child is coming from home or has been in child care, a successful transition depends on the ability of all those involved to communicate effectively and to share information about the child.

If, when a child is registered in the spring for first-time attendance at school in the fall, the parents and board staff agree that the child may benefit from a special education program and/or services, a case conference with the appropriate people can be held. At the conference in the spring, the child's program and service needs can be discussed, so that the agreed-upon program and/or services can be provided to the child when he or she starts school. After the child arrives at school, it may also be determined that an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) meeting is necessary.

Once a child with special education needs has been registered, the school and parents should continue the process of collecting and reviewing information related to the child's needs and should communicate regularly about the child's progress. Early documentation of a child's strengths, needs, and developmental stage will be useful in establishing records.

Teachers, early childhood educators, members of the community, and families must work together to provide constructive and consistent learning experiences that will build children's confidence, encourage them to see learning as both enjoyable and useful, and provide a strong foundation for their future intellectual, physical, and social development.

Special Education in Ontario – Kindergarten to Grade 12

Kindergarten classroom educators create opportunities to differentiate the program and provide a responsive learning experience for all children. The strengths and needs of the individual child are considered when determining classroom placement.

For students whose needs cannot be met entirely in the regular classroom, a range of options are available. These options may include:

- **A regular class with indirect support** *where the student is placed in a regular class for the entire day, and the teacher receives specialized consultative services.*
- **A regular class with resource assistance** *where the student is placed in a regular class for most or all of the day and receives specialized instruction, individually or in a small group, within the regular classroom from a qualified special education teacher.*

- **A regular class with withdrawal assistance** where the student is placed in a regular class and receives instruction outside the classroom, for less than 50 per cent of the school day, from a qualified special education teacher.
- **A special education class with partial integration** where the student is placed by the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) in a special education class in which the student-teacher ratio conforms to [Ontario Regulation 298, section 31](#), for at least 50 per cent of the school day, but is integrated with a regular class for at least one instructional period daily.
- **A full-time special education class** where the student-teacher ratio conforms to [Ontario Regulation 298, section 31](#), for the entire school day.

The Identification, Placement, and Review Committee - Identifying the Needs of Exceptional Pupils

In times of transition or other scenarios in which a child's attendance at school has been impacted, **a plan should be in place for the return of the child to the classroom as quickly as possible**. This plan should be developed in consultation with the family, and any other service providers the family utilizes to support their child.

Where issues arise that may impact a child's attendance at school, please remember:

- Resident pupils of a school board have the **right to attend** Junior Kindergarten on September 1 in the calendar year in which the child turns 4 and the right to attend Kindergarten on September 1 in the calendar year in which the child turns 5 years old.
- **Include the family** and other supports in the conversation during decision-making processes.
- **Honour the dignity of the child** and keep their well-being at the centre of all decisions.
- **CMSMs/DSSABs and Early Years Leads** should be discussing unique situations to find resolutions that meet the child's and family's needs.
- It should not be assumed that families have the supports or resources to have their child in child care during times when the child is not in attendance at school. Since the roll-out of full-day kindergarten, the availability of licensed child care spaces and funding for children older than 3 years and 8 months old has been reduced.