

Getting Ready for Kindergarten: What Early Care & Education Providers Need to Know to Support Nebraska's Children & Their Families

What do children need to be ready for school?

Children are born ready to learn, but when they have good health, and experiences that help build their knowledge, social and physical skills, they are prepared to be successful. Some of the most important skills children *should* have are:

- to be curious and enthusiastic about learning,
- able to control their reactions and not disrupt others,
- able to follow directions and pay attention.



However, the only requirement to go to kindergarten is to be five years old on or before July 31.

What do I need to know about kindergarten to support parents?

- Nebraska law entitles children to receive free public education the year that they turn five on or before July 31.
- 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.
- 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 their procedure for early entry assessment.
- 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.
- 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.
- Families should be encouraged to talk to the teacher or principal if they are unsure about their child's ability to be successful.

How can I support families in deciding if their child is ready?

Children enter kindergarten with a wide variety of skills and knowledge. There is not just one thing, nor a list of skills, which results in a child being ready for school. Parents often seek the opinion of their early care and education provider so it is important to help them understand that school readiness is about more than just what children know.

Kindergarten teachers say successful children are:

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

Parents may ask if you think their 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 the child and family. You have an important role- to help them understand their options and support their decision. There are many things to consider when making the decision:

- **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 their child will not be in kindergarten? Which option will help their child develop in the areas that they are concerned about?
- **Public preschool is typically no longer an option** once their 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.”*

What can I do to help children be ready?

Families, communities, and schools should work together to prepare children for school and to ensure that the school is ready to meet children’s individual needs. Parents and providers can:



- **Promote Good Health & Physical Skills**
 - a balanced diet and plenty of rest
 - regular dental and medical care, including immunizations
 - active play outdoors
 - large muscle activities: climbing, dancing, running, balancing
 - small muscle activities: coloring, painting, drawing, cutting
- **Encourage Attitude & Social Skills**
 - learn confidence: make choices, try new things and hear praise for efforts
 - work alone and with others to finish tasks, including putting away supplies
 - take care of own things and needs: dressing self, using the toilet, and washing hands
 - learn to problem-solve, share and cooperate by playing with others
 - pay attention and follow simple 3-step directions
 - communicate needs, wants, thoughts, and feelings, while not disrupting others
 - express emotions in safe ways and learn to control reactions and behaviors
- **Support Knowledge & Thinking Skills**
 - be read to every day and listen to stories in a group
 - talk about letters and words they see, and connect with the sound they make
 - ask and answer questions, and explore topics of interest together
 - count, sort and classify things, noticing likenesses and differences, such as *more* and *smaller*
 - practice drawing, writing, and recognizing numbers, shapes, colors, and letters in their name
 - learn about the world by seeing and touching objects; hearing new sounds; smelling and tasting foods; and watching and making things move
 - learn through play: children learn best when they’re having fun, so use games, toys, natural events and routines to teach, rather than flashcards and worksheets

How can I help children and families transition to kindergarten?

A successful entry into kindergarten will help children have a positive attitude about school and learning. Parents, providers, and schools can work together to:

- Talk enthusiastically about school, and read books about starting kindergarten, discussing feelings the children may have.
- Learn about school and classroom expectations, routines, and rules that the children should know. Gradually incorporate those kindergarten routines and rules into children's daily lives.
- Arrange to visit the new classroom with the children and help them feel more comfortable and confident by knowing what to expect.
- Assist families in meeting with the kindergarten teacher to discuss any special needs or concerns they may have.
- Provide copies, or encourage families to download the free resource from Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood: Ready for Success- What Families Want to Know about Starting School in Nebraska

When schools, families, and communities work together to support learning, children enjoy school more, do better in school, and stay in school longer.

Web-based supports for school readiness:

- First Connections with Families: Learning Begins at Birth <http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/fcwf.html>
- The Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines (Birth-3 & 3-5 years) and Nebraska Kindergarten Early Learning Guidelines <http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/elg.html>
- Kindergarten Position Statement: A Kindergarten for the 21st Century <http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/kgn.html>
- Student-Friendly Language Arts Standards (K-12) <http://www.education.ne.gov/read/StudentFriendlyStandards/StudentFriendlyStandardsMain.html>
- Ages & Stages, What You Can Do <http://www.bornlearning.org/default.aspx?id=19>
- 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/Professionals>
- 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>
- Families as Primary Partners in their Child's Development & School Readiness www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/families.pdf
- 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>
- Texts for Teachers www.extensiontexts.unl.edu

Redshirting:

- What the Research Says... Are They Ready for Kindergarten? The Pros & Cons of Redshirting <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>

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/index.php>
- Center for Early Literacy Learning- Providers Resources <http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/pgpracts.php>
- Educational Games, Videos, and Activities <http://pbskids.org>

Social Skills:

- The Pyramid Model: Promoting Social/Emotional Competence- Resources for Early Childhood Professionals and for Families <http://liferaydemo.unl.edu/web/child/teachingpyramidresources>
- How parents and providers can support social skills <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html> & [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/DHS-Social-Emotional Health and School Readiness 275234 7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/DHS-Social-Emotional_Health_and_School_Readiness_275234_7.pdf)
- Teaching Tools for Young Children with Challenging Behavior http://www.challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/teaching_tools/ttyc.htm
- Growing Ideas Tipsheets and Resources for Guiding Early Childhood Practices- Social Emotional Development <http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/>
- 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/providers/index.html> & [http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201107/Self-Regulation Florez OnlineJuly2011.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201107/Self-Regulation_Florez_OnlineJuly2011.pdf)
- Executive Function: Skills for Life & Learning (Video) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efCq_vHUMqg
- Second Step: Social-Emotional Skills for Early Learning <http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step/early-learning.aspx> (kit available for free checkout through the Early Childhood Training Center <http://www.education.ne.gov/OEC/mediactr.html> or 402-557-6885 or 800-89-CHILD)

Transitioning to School:

- Enhancing the Transition to Kindergarten: Linking Children, Families & Schools <http://bit.ly/qBxL0F>
- Tips on avoiding common anxieties & fears <http://www.extension.org/sites/default/files/w/3/3f/JITP59-60mo.pdf>
- Countdown to Kindergarten Calendar (Lancaster County United Way) <http://bit.ly/SrqSkZ>
- Transition Tips: Practices & Strategies Toolkit <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/p&kteach.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=DMf1mveot3l&feature=related>
- What children and parents can expect and how to prepare for Kindergarten (Video) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICNsAX1JNQo&feature=related>
- Easing the Transition to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can do to Address Child Readiness <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb6-readiness.pdf>
- Transition Plan Template & Activity Ideas <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/transition/plan.html>
- Starting School Advice from PBS Kids http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/starting_school.html

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