

Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide



**Early Childhood Care and Education
Providers and Administrators**

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Educational Service Units

- (1, 10, 13, 16, 19)

Buffett Early Childhood Institute
Central Elementary Schools
Central Valley Public Schools
Chadron State College
DC West Community Schools
Gateway Elementary School
Kearney Public Schools
Lincoln Littles
Millard Public Schools
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Nebraska Department of Education
Nebraska Head Start Association
Omaha Public Schools
Papillion La Vista Community Schools
Parent Training and Information Nebraska
Splash of Color Child Care
Saint Paul Public Schools
Trucks and Tiaras Family Child Care
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Extension Educators:

- Adams County
- Cedar County
- Lancaster County
- Madison County
- McCook
- Panhandle

PTI Nebraska
Somali Community Center, Inc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide is a collaborative effort among a diverse, multifaceted group of families, community leaders and agencies, school districts, and early childhood care and education providers with the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska.

We are especially grateful to WestEd, including Catherine Goins and Julie Law, and the Buffett Early Childhood Team, including Lisa Roy, Kimberly Norman-Collins, Ashia Aubrey, Chantel Asselin Dunn, Rebecca Elder, and Duane Retzlaff.

Special thanks to:

Abdi Mohamed, Alexandra Dillon, Alyssa Anson, Amy Bornemeier, Amy Sandoz, Amy Schmidtke, Anne Brandt, Ashley Schmit, Bridget Burns, Cheris Kite, Cheryl Roche, Connie Shockley, Erika Fink, Erin Kampbell, Ginny Howard, Heather Ottoson, Holly Perrott, Ivan Young, Jackie Guzman, Jackie Steffen, Ka Moo, Kanyon Chism, Kim Madsen, Kimberlee Telford, Krista Meyer, Krystie Hohnstein, Lynn DeVries, Mariah Stowe, Mary Bridget Burns, Megan Schmidt, Melody Hobson, Mohamed Jimale, Molly Colling, Monica Wells, Nora Robinson, Raegan Brown, Rebecca Pray, Sara Paider, Sarah Roberts, Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal, Stacy Scholten, Stephanie Knust, Tierra Stennis, Tonya Jolley, and Tressa Curtis

April 2022

Facilitation of the Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska is part of a broad collaborative effort of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and a number of other organizations.

This project is supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0040-01-00, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service.



Supporting a successful transition into kindergarten is the responsibility of those most involved in the lives of young children, including families, caregivers/preschool teachers, school district leadership, and kindergarten teachers.

Purpose of This Toolkit and Resource Guide

The *Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide* is for families, school district leadership and kindergarten teachers, and early childhood care and education (ECCE) providers and administrators. This toolkit presents a common understanding of developmentally appropriate expectations and practices that support continuity in transitions for young children. Research-based activities, strategies, and resources specific to families, schools, and ECCE providers are outlined to support transition into kindergarten for young children.

Why is transition to kindergarten important in Nebraska?

Young children learn through relationships that nurture them. Learning is a social experience for young children. As children explore their world and what they can do, they are moving around, taking risks, handling materials, engaging in concentrated thought, talking with others about their discoveries, and learning to problem-solve with peers. Creating learning environments rich in social interactions that nurture a child's interests and abilities is foundational to later learning and development.

Understanding how young children develop and learn informs the activities, practices, routines, and expectations that you have. Thinking about transition from the perspective of the child will impact how you interact with the child, what you say, the activities you plan, and the experiences you choose to share with them.



Throughout this toolkit, you will find developmentally informed practices and activities to support families, kindergarten teachers and administrators, and ECCE providers in creating optimal environments and interactions that nurture a child’s sense of self and create continuity for the variety of transitions young children experience from birth to third grade.

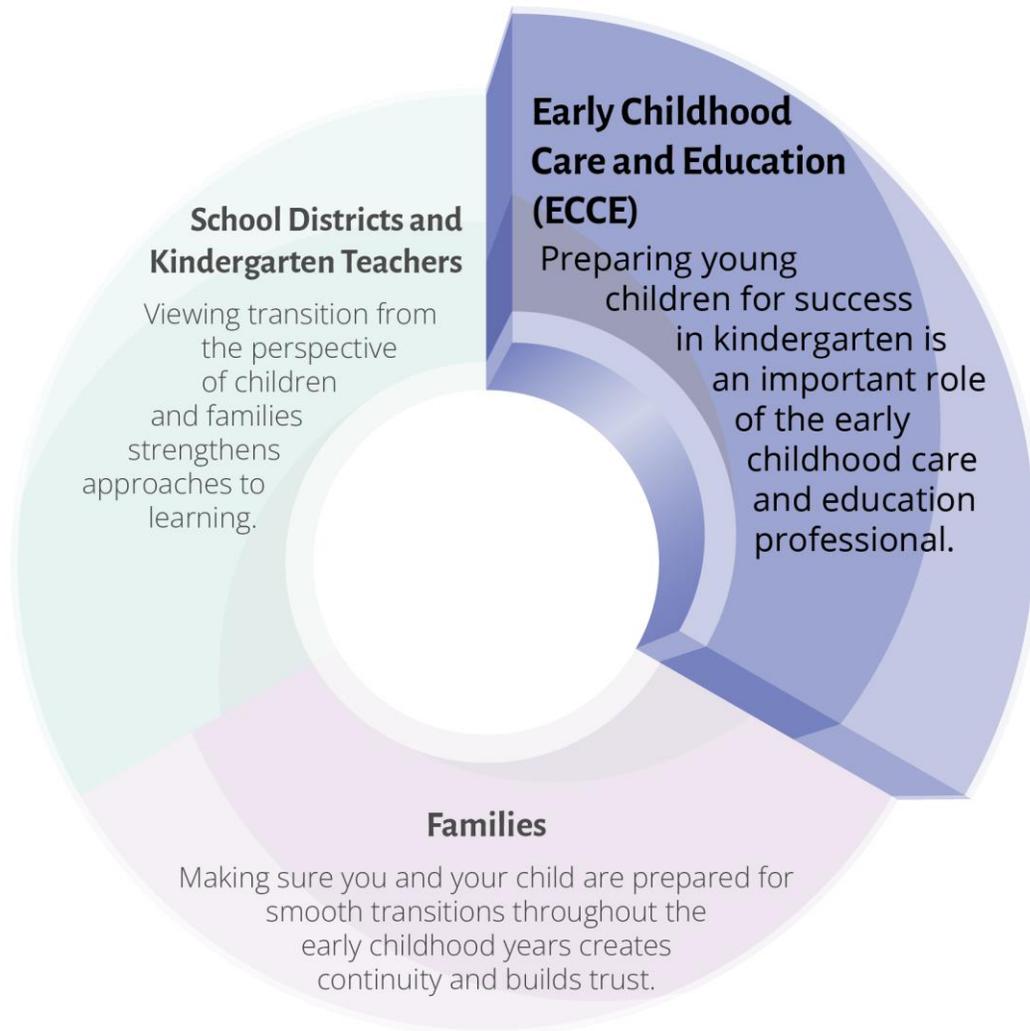
We know preparing schools, families, and early care settings to support transition to kindergarten is a critical step in supporting healthy outcomes for Nebraska’s children and families. Communities in Nebraska are actively supporting young children’s transition into kindergarten, but there are still opportunities to engage even more children, families, educators, and ECCE providers. This toolkit provides guidance for a common understanding of developmental expectations and practices to support the transitional needs of all children from birth to third grade in Nebraska. This transition to kindergarten toolkit also provides information on working with diverse children and families, including those with disabilities.

How to Use This Toolkit

The *Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide* is designed for multiple users. Resources and practices have been organized into three groups: families, school district leadership and kindergarten teachers, and ECCE providers and administrators. You can scroll through the pages to explore practices, tips, and resources on transition to kindergarten. Download activities to practice or select a resource to learn more. To access a glossary of commonly used terminology in the toolkit, select the [Glossary](#).



Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide



Click on a question below or scroll through this toolkit to explore the information provided.

- [What strategies can I use to partner with families and schools?](#)
- [What do I need to know about expectations in kindergarten to help prepare children and families?](#)
- [How can I foster a responsive learning environment?](#)

Strategies to Partner with Families and Schools

Shared Responsibility and Partnerships

As the Program Administrator of your ECCE program, you have a critical role in supporting the transition to kindergarten. As program administrator, you can contact local schools to build partnerships and work to ensure that children and families understand what is expected in kindergarten. ECCE professionals know the families they work with and are in a good position to provide a shared partnership with families as they transition to kindergarten. ECCE programs are a bridge connecting families and schools to support successful transitions to kindergarten.



When school and ECCE providers come together to help families and their children transition to kindergarten, they form a shared partnership.

Partnering with Schools

When an ECCE program and elementary school come together to help families transition to kindergarten, they form a shared partnership. As partners, they cooperate and engage in efforts that support all children, families, and educators to have the tools and resources they need for a successful transition to kindergarten.

Two common practices to prepare children for the transition to kindergarten are visiting a kindergarten classroom and holding a spring orientation about kindergarten for preschool families. However, research shows these approaches, by themselves, are not enough. This toolkit and resource guide is designed to give you specific strategies to increase opportunities for successful transition to kindergarten in Nebraska.

ECCE programs can establish a shared partnership with schools in the following ways:

- Create resources that clearly communicate the process and requirements for enrolling in kindergarten.
- Develop an FAQ to answer common questions about kindergarten, such as drop-off and pick-up location and process, lunch and snack procedure, after-school care options, volunteer opportunities in the classroom, etc.
- Coordinate a visit for children to the kindergarten classroom and play yard.
- Arrange child care for families during the spring kindergarten orientation events.
- Plan a parent meeting to discuss what to expect in kindergarten with families.
- Share individual developmental information, portfolios, and learning plans with the child's kindergarten teacher.



ECCE programs can connect families to schools in the following ways:

- Coordinate home visits with the kindergarten teacher and the ECCE provider.
- Pay special attention to children who are not attending regularly and connect with families to support regular attendance now and through the years ahead.
- Invite families to a meeting about expectations in kindergarten.
- Provide a process for families to communicate concerns or ask school administrators and kindergarten teachers questions directly.

Learn more about strategies administrators use to connect with families in this video, [Transitions Practices in the State of Nebraska](#). As an ECCE program, how can you partner with schools to create more continuity in the transition to kindergarten process?

Engaging Families in the Transition to Kindergarten

Families are critical partners and need your support as their child transitions into kindergarten. Find helpful information and strategies in the resource [Family Engagement in Transitions: Transition to Kindergarten](#). This resource from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement also provides guidance on page 5 for ECCE programs that includes:

- Forming a transition team
- Training staff to work with families through transitions
- Assembling a kindergarten transition panel and hosting a panel discussion session with families
- Helping families learn how to advocate for their children and access appropriate resources within schools



- Developing systems for sharing information with schools
- Developing community partnerships to address children’s needs for transitions

There is a clear connection between regular attendance in preschool and a higher rate of attendance in kindergarten. We also know that consistent attendance leads to better learning outcomes and a positive school experience for children. Note how you can support families in the three-minute video [Boosting Attendance in Preschool Can Start with a Knock on the Door](#). Consider the following questions:

- How can your program support home visits at the beginning of the school year to help create a relationship and open lines of communication between the school and family?
- What do you need to begin the process?

Learn the skills to support effective home visits in [Exploring the Relationship-Based Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals Who Make Home Visits](#).

20 Tips for Developing Positive Relationships with Parents

Building strong positive relationships with families provides support for a variety of transitions from infancy through the transition to kindergarten.

In [20 Tips for Developing Positive Relationships with Parents](#), explore these ways to improve your connections with parents and families:



1. Smile when you greet families.
2. Learn their names and how they like to be addressed.
3. Tell families you appreciate their support and look forward to working together.
4. Communicate often using various forms (share observations of their child, ask questions, share about class curriculum projects).
5. Make a positive phone call home within the first couple of weeks.
6. Lead with good news.
7. Find a translator if needed.
8. Communicate your awareness that there are different kinds of families.
9. Ask questions about the child.
10. Listen to family members.
11. Smile at the child.
12. Invite parents to share their funds of knowledge.
13. Let families know how they can help.
14. Provide ways families can support their child at home—be specific.
15. Have resources and information ready to share.
16. Explain how you facilitate learning with their child—help them understand what you are doing and why.
17. Invite families to participate and share their input.
18. Thank families.
19. Share every success of their child.
20. Invite parents to a potluck or other gathering at the start of the year.

Providing resources for families from underserved populations is another way ECCE professionals can help bridge the transition to kindergarten. Look into your local social services agencies for resources to support basic needs such as food insecurity, housing needs, and help to pay utilities. Have information available on family clinics and mental health services in the area. Explore the [Nebraska Children and Families Foundation website](#) for connections to several non-profits, churches, and community social service agencies that support children, young adults, and families so they can thrive.

Principles of Ideal Learning

As an ECCE administrator, you can help families understand what good-quality education for young children looks like. An ideal learning approach is a holistic high-quality early learning model that supports young children’s growth and development from birth through eight years old. Such an approach is equitable, relational, play-based, and interactive. Although the format may vary across programs, they all share eight core principles that unify curriculum, educator training, and professional development. The following eight principles support every child to thrive and reach their potential within the ideal learning approach:



1. Commitment to provide experiences that support the diverse needs of every family
2. Instruction supported by an intentional, personalized, and developmentally appropriate curriculum that ensures each child’s needs are met
3. Holistic view of children that supports all domains of development, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development, among other areas
4. Recognition that a warm, loving, and safe environment is important for children to be able to thrive and learn
5. An approach informed by research based on children’s academic, social, and emotional development
6. Value for educators’ well-being with appropriate training, compensation, and benefits
7. Efforts to expand educational services to more children, especially those in underserved communities
8. Advocacy for improved education for all children

Check out Trust for Learning’s [What is an Ideal Learning Approach?](#) to learn more about this holistic, equitable, relational, and play-based approach to educating young children.

Nebraska Example That Supports Transition to Kindergarten

Review these effective practices shared by a parent and a former Nebraska ECCE provider and this resource to support transition to kindergarten.

Parent Experience

A parent shared how their children’s preschool teachers supported the family for the transition to kindergarten:



“All three of our boys were fortunate to qualify for public preschool program in Lincoln, Nebraska. Their preschool teacher and resource teachers were fantastic with home visits and provided hands-on activities and ideas of what we could do at home to help our boys prepare for kindergarten. We would have been lost without their guidance. The public preschool program in Lincoln set us up well for kindergarten.”

– Krista, Parent Advisor, [Nebraska Children and Families Foundation](#)

“One area in kindergarten transition that is almost non-existent is the relationship between the ECCE professionals and the kindergarten teachers. Our ECCE [providers] have a great deal of knowledge and information about their students that would be beneficial for the kindergarten teachers, especially if they are trying to create a culturally responsive classroom.”

– Kimberlee, Former ECCE provider

“It is a good practice for [ECCE providers] to build ongoing relationships with the kindergarten programs of these schools. This is beneficial for the ECCE professional and their families as they can keep abreast of the individual expectations of each school as well as the programs they offer and how to obtain various services. This relationship is also a great source of knowledge for any kindergarten teacher that is trying to create a culturally responsive classroom and meet the individual needs of each child. A trusting relationship takes time and many interactions to form.”

– Kimberlee, Former ECCE provider

Learn more about these practices and a step-by-step approach to building, implementing, and evaluating a kindergarten transition plan in [Transition to Kindergarten Collaborations, Connections, and Six Steps to Success](#).

Learn More About Strategies to Partner with Families and Schools

- [Ready for Success: A School Readiness Guide for Nebraska Families](#) (English). Explore this booklet for commonly asked questions from parents about preparing for and entering kindergarten. You can also get the Ready for Success booklet in several languages, including [Arabic](#), [French](#), [Karen](#), [Somali](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#).
- [Supporting Transitions: Early Educators Partnering with Families](#). ECCE providers support families through transitions from home to the ECCE program or from one early care setting to another. Transition presents families with opportunities and challenges. Read through this comprehensive resource and follow the Sanchez family as they enter a new Head Start program, experience a home visit, receive support to transition, engage in conversations, and build a partnership with their child's new teacher.
- [Supporting Transitions: Working with Early Education Partners](#). This comprehensive guide offers school and program leaders strategies to build continuity between ECCE programs, schools, and community organizations. These strategies support children and families through the many transitions in their lives, including transitioning to kindergarten. Learn how to form partnerships, how programs and schools can align their systems to enhance transition services, and how community organizations and agencies can support transition efforts.
- [Supporting Transitions: Program Policies and Practices](#). Explore this comprehensive guide to see how program policies and practices can facilitate smooth transitions and a sense of continuity for children and families across settings. Strategies include understanding what kinds of policies and practices foster a collaborative approach to transition, continuing to strengthen transition services, and ensuring all staff are prepared to support transitions for children and families effectively.
- [Parent Teacher Home Visits](#). This website provides comprehensive information and training opportunities on how to plan and prepare for home visits to build relationships and engage families.
- [Families Engaging in the Transition to Kindergarten](#) (video, 8 minutes). Learn about Head Start parents' hopes for their children as they prepare for the move to kindergarten. Explore research-based strategies on using information, relationships, and alignment to build stability and consistency for children and families.
- [5 Strategies for Building Strong Relationships with Preschool Families](#). Having good relationships with families helps you be an important advocate for families facing adversity. This short article explores the importance of equitable communication skills, positive relationships, responsive communication, and more.

Expectations in Kindergarten

The goal of kindergarten is to meet the learning needs of each child and consequently provide a successful school experience. Understanding what is expected of children in kindergarten and how to support the development of children getting ready for kindergarten is a shared responsibility of the ECCE professional, schools, and families.

As an ECCE professional, you understand the importance of child development as you plan and support young children in their thinking and learning. Children five to seven years old experience an amazing shift in their cognitive development, including in skill areas such as attention, memory, reasoning, language, and ability to understand others' perspectives. These shifts relate to school readiness skills such as focused attention, planning, and self-control. How a child approaches learning can tell us how they are able to express and manage their emotions. Language and communication skills tell us how children understand the information shared with them and how they are able to express their needs.



Knowledge of child development helps early educators and families gain a deeper understanding of how children's development influences their responses to transition. Through this understanding, providers can help children manage transitions by:

- Responding in predictable and consistent ways that meet the needs of children
- Providing engaging, warm, and supportive interactions
- Modeling positive social behavior
- Arranging a well-organized environment with clearly defined areas
- Encouraging and facilitating exploration of the environment
- Using visual aids and prompts to prepare for what is coming next
- Using language that describes past, present, and future events that relate to each other

Explore more information and guidance on supporting children and families to feel comfortable and secure through transitions in the resource [Supporting Transitions: Using Child Development as a Guide](#).

Getting Ready for Kindergarten

As an ECCE professional, you have the role of supporting children and families on their journey of getting ready for kindergarten. You need to know how to best support young children and families during this important transition.

Below are some tips adapted from [Getting Ready for Kindergarten: What Early Care & Education Providers Need to Know to Support Nebraska's Children & Their Families](#). Make a note of those tips you already use and consider incorporating a few more into your practice.

Important skills children should have for success in kindergarten:

- Curiosity and enthusiasm about learning
- Ability to control their actions to contribute to a respectful learning environment
- Ability to follow directions and pay attention



Parents and providers of young children can help prepare children for school by promoting good health and physical skills, encouraging positive attitudes and social skills, and supporting knowledge and thinking skills. Share the following ideas for skill development with families in your program.

Promoting good health and 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



Encouraging positive attitudes and social skills:

- Learning confidence: making choices, trying new things, and hearing recognition of efforts
- Working alone and with others to finish tasks, including putting away supplies
- Taking care of own things and needs: dressing self, using the toilet, and washing hands
- Learning to problem-solve, share, and cooperate by playing with others
- Paying attention and following simple three-step directions
- Communicating needs, wants, thoughts, and feelings while not disrupting others
- Expressing emotions in safe ways and learning to control reactions and behaviors



Supporting knowledge and thinking skills:

- Being read to every day and listening to stories in a group
- Talking about letters and words and connecting with the sound they make
- Exploring topics of interest by asking and answering questions together
- Practicing counting, sorting, and classifying things; noticing similarities and differences, such as more and smaller
- Being allowed to experiment with and practice drawing, writing, and recognizing numbers, shapes, colors, and the letters in their name
- Learning about the world by seeing and touching objects, hearing new sounds, smelling and tasting foods, and watching and making things move
- Learning through play: children learn best when having fun—use games, toys, natural events, and routines to teach rather than flashcards and worksheets



The resource [Getting Ready for Kindergarten](#) also offers important information about kindergarten enrollment and how to support families in deciding if their child is ready for kindergarten. Take time to review and build awareness of how to get children and families ready for kindergarten. Share this resource with other staff at your early care program.

Check out this information from [Reading Rockets](#), created for preschool teachers and child care providers to promote literacy, prevent reading difficulties, and prepare young children for kindergarten. Learn strategies like promoting print awareness by using your finger to underline words as you read them, using rhyming games for phonological awareness, building children’s vocabulary, and exploring alphabet letters and sounds through alphabet matching.

Supporting Children and Families

As an ECCE professional, children and families look to you for support and guidance. Helping families bridge the transition to kindergarten by sharing information about what to expect, being available to answer questions, and providing activities that families can do at home to prepare their child shows your support for a smooth transition.

- Read with children as an excellent way to support transitions in their life. You may have several books in your program that can support children and families on their journey to kindergarten. Check out the [Transition to Kindergarten Booklist](#) to read or share with families. Here is a [Transition to Kindergarten Multicultural Booklist](#). Here are additional multicultural books to consider:
 - **The King of Kindergarten** by Derrick Barnes
 - **All Are Welcome** by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman
 - **Jumping into Kindergarten** by Julia Cook and Laura A. Jana
 - **Lola Goes to School** by Anna McQuinn
 - **The Day You Begin** by Jacqueline Woodson
 - **Eyes that Kiss in the Corners** by Joanna Ho
 - **Where Are You From?** By Yamile Saied Mendez
- Offer to meet with the child’s kindergarten teacher to share information about the child’s preschool experiences, interests, and learning needs.
- Provide families with opportunities to meet with you outside of program time to discuss their questions and concerns about kindergarten.
- Offer to host an open house for kindergarten teachers to visit with the children’s families in the early care setting.
- Provide information about current expectations in kindergarten.

Activities to Share with Families

Providing families with ideas and activities of what they can do to support their child's transition to kindergarten is always appreciated by families. Explore the following strategies to help families prepare their children for kindergarten adapted from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) article [Ready or Not Kindergarten, Here We Come!](#)

- Support developing independence at home.
- Focus on self-help skills.
- Teach responsibility.
- Develop and follow routines.
- Read aloud to your child.
- Engage your child in reading by showing the pictures, pointing to text, and asking questions about what they think will happen next or why something happened.
- Acknowledge children's feelings.



Encourage families to do fun activities like the following to prepare their children for kindergarten experiences.

Writing and Art Activities



- Provide opportunities to write and do art activities at home.
- Encourage activities where children use their hands like drawing, cutting, gluing, painting, using clay or playdough, or engaging in sand play.
- Practice writing numbers, letters, and names of family members with your child.

Outside and Indoor Activities



- Go outside and discover new things on a nature walk or lie down to explore cloud shapes and bird sounds.
- Take photos and look up things in books at the library or on the computer when you go back indoors.
- Plan picnics in the backyard or campouts in the living room.
- Play and interact with your child to build on interests and discoveries but keep it fun and engaging.
- Have children help with chores and other home routines.
- Include children in social events that expose them to other cultures, ages, settings, music, etc.
- Play music and make music—enjoy dancing and moving with your child.

Reading and Literacy

- Look through magazines or online to find images and pictures of familiar items. Print online images and cut them out. Create labels by writing the name of the image. Place the labeled images around your house near related objects.
- Have books available throughout your home. You can borrow some from the public or local lending library. Some communities set up free libraries outside homes, parks, or businesses where you are welcome to whatever books are available.
- Read books to your child using your finger to follow the text, talk about the pictures, and ask questions about the story.
- Read text or signs in the environment aloud and explain what they mean.



- Involve children in food preparation—organize and categorize vegetables or have your child help make the grocery list using letters, symbols, or drawings.
- Offer tips for families to encourage and support their children to read. Check out [11 Ways Parents Can Help Their Children Read](#), including having simple conversations, telling stories, listening to your child read, and asking questions.
- Here’s [A Selection of Children’s Literature with Diverse Representations](#), including video read-aloud and teacher activity guides. Each book listed also has a brief synopsis, and some have recorded interviews with the author.

Learn More About Expectations in Kindergarten

- [Educators Supporting Successful Transitions to Kindergarten](#) (video, 7 minutes). Learn about the key components of successful kindergarten transitions like sharing information, building relationships, and program alignment. Explore several practical strategies that educators can implement during the transition process, including:
 - Preparing children for what to expect
 - Hosting parent information sessions where they can receive information and ask questions about kindergarten
 - Sharing assessment and other developmental information with the receiving kindergarten (the school the family will be going to)
- [Tips and Suggestions to Support Child to School Transitions](#). Review these tips and ideas for families, schools, and early care programs to assist in the transition process. ECCE programs are the “sending programs” in this handout. The handout includes tips like having children practice lining up, shortening nap time as the new school year approaches, and scheduling meetings with the kindergarten teachers at the “receiving program” (where the child will be attending kindergarten).
- [Transitioning to Kindergarten: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Educators](#). This toolkit includes materials that will help you implement strategies to facilitate this process and enhance children’s transition to kindergarten. Included is a video to learn how to use the transition to kindergarten tools provided in this resource. Choose from topics including kindergarten readiness, getting ready to read, and, for ECCE administrators in particular, training guidelines to conduct workshops with your staff.
- [Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years: Foundational Skills That Support Emergent Readers](#). Read this article to learn how to actively engage children in the reading process and learn about opportunities to provide preschool children with purposeful, meaningful language and early print activities. You will find strategies for supporting print concepts in preschool and techniques for reading aloud, for example, modeling writing, using materials to promote identification of letters of the alphabet, and providing materials in languages other than English whenever possible.

Fostering a Responsive Learning Environment

Understanding Children’s Development and Learning

An important part of your job as an ECCE professional is understanding and assessing a child’s development and learning over time. Assessment during early childhood helps providers communicate important milestones in children’s development to families and offers opportunities for providers and parents to work together to support children as they grow.

Use the [Early Learning Guidelines: Nebraska’s Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards in English](#) and [Spanish](#) to understand the trajectory of growth from birth to five across domains of development and explore best practices that support learning and development. The guidelines are also supportive of best practices of kindergarten teachers in meeting the learning needs of all children in their learning environment.

ECCE providers need to observe, record, and understand individual children’s development and learning.

ECCE professionals are expected to have core knowledge and skills in the areas of observation, documentation, and assessment. A provider just starting to observe children may explore using a variety of methods to observe children. A provider who has experience with documentation and assessment can explain a learning experience using children’s words along with photos they gathered in their observation. Review pages 33–35 of [Nebraska’s Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals](#) to learn more about what ECCE professionals need to know and be able to do in observation, documentation, and assessment.

In addition to observation methods, several tools can help you as you gather data and support young children’s development and learning. When you use formal assessments to track a child’s development and learning, you are building a story of the unique individualized characteristics of the child. Reflecting on the unique development and learning needs of a child from your assessment will help you understand their learning needs and plan intentional learning experiences with individualized practices. This



approach, in turn, supports the child based on their ability and interest. Explore this resource on [child screening and assessment](#) to learn more about how ongoing assessment for children ages birth to five helps ECCE professionals identify each child’s unique strengths and needs, inform planning, and gather information to improve child outcomes. For more information about individualizing care and being responsive to each child and family’s interests, abilities, and needs, check out these [teaching practices](#) from Head Start.

Consider the types of tools used in your program. Here are some assessment and screening tools to consider:

- [Ages and Stages Questionnaires](#). Explore [the benefits of implementing the ASQ in a child care program](#) in this short video. Some benefits are that the tool is easy to use, parent-completed, and culturally sensitive.
- [HighScope COR \(Child Observation Record\)](#). Educators follow COR’s three-step process: (1) observe and record, (2) score using the OnlineCOR, and (3) report findings to share.
- [Teaching Strategies GOLD](#). This strategy bases its assessment on 38 objectives that are important to early childhood education.
- [Pearson’s Work Sampling System](#). A combination of student portfolios, guidelines, and checklists are utilized as assessments.

Early identification of developmental concerns is key to connecting families to early intervention services. If you have a concern, consult your program administrator, follow the appropriate policy and procedure for your program, and reach out to have a screening done by a developmental specialist. Review [Learn the Signs. Act Early](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to learn how early intervention for a young child or infant with a developmental delay can significantly increase their success in school and life. Don’t wait until kindergarten—if you or a family member have a concern, you can call [your state or territory’s early intervention program](#) to find services and help. You may also reach out to the [Nebraska Early Development Network](#) to help families get connected to services they need for children from birth to age three.

ECCE administrators can support the observation and assessment of staff through professional development opportunities. Seek out education and training available in your area through a local ECCE agency, college coursework, or state or national training. You may find technical assistance support through state quality improvement efforts. Check out [Nebraska’s Step Up to Quality](#) website for training and other professional learning opportunities.

Learn More About Fostering a Responsive Learning Environment

- [Supporting Transitions: Using Child Development as a Guide](#). Discover how you can use your knowledge of child development to support the many transitions that happen throughout a child’s life. Families move, siblings are born, the child starts a new school—transitions are a part of life. Knowing how a child self-regulates, communicates, manages and expresses emotion, builds relationships, and explores their environment can help you better understand how a child may respond to transition. Talking with families will help you learn how individual children experience change. You can use this information to provide security and comfort to a child during a transition.
- [Measuring the Quality of Early Learning Environments](#). Explore this guide on evaluating ideal learning environments for young children to learn how you can create high-quality and accessible learning opportunities to support equitable outcomes for all children and families.
- [Race, Equity, and Inclusion Center](#). Discover tips and tools to deepen your understanding and practice with diverse children’s literature and learn how the power of books can have a positive impact on change.
- [Quick and Easy Notes: Practical Strategies for Busy Teachers](#). This short article offers useful tips for recording observation-based assessment notes for each child. Some ideas include writing brief notes with concrete descriptions of what the child did, describing the learning area or subject, and constructing your own abbreviations to capture detailed observations in an efficient way.
- [How Teachers Can Ease the Transition to Kindergarten](#). Learn how a preschool special education teacher prepares her students for kindergarten. Some strategies include talking with children about their new teacher and school, asking questions to promote higher-level thinking, and encouraging children to stay with a task that is new or difficult.
- [Developmentally Appropriate Practice \(DAP\): Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children’s Development and Learning](#). Identify practices for observation, documentation, and assessment that are developmentally appropriate for children from birth through the primary grades. Some practices include embedding assessment-related activities in the curriculum and daily routines, having tools nearby for you to take advantage of unplanned moments to record observations, and helping children build reflection and documentation skills.
- [Creating Environments That Include Children’s Home Languages and Cultures](#). Use this tip sheet to assess your physical environment. Is it inclusive of all the children’s home languages and cultures, including posting clear labels using photos, pictures, or graphics to support words in English and other languages? Some practices include asking families about familiar food items, materials, or objects to integrate into the environment and setting schedules or developing learning documentation supported by pictures and words.

Supporting Responsive Learning Environments

Funds of Knowledge

Being responsive to the whole child opens you up to a conversation with the family about their unique strengths and experiences. As an ECCE professional, you can be a bridge to help families discover and value their own funds of knowledge. Talking with a family about their experience as a family, the way they spend their time, the languages they speak, what they value, and how they celebrate traditions is a way to utilize the family's funds of knowledge. Learning from families will help you plan meaningful curriculum experiences that are responsive to a child's experiences at home and tie into concepts, activities, and ideas that the child is learning with their family. Learn more through this two-minute [Funds of Knowledge video](#) from Head Start. Prepare for an enriching conversation with a family to draw on their funds of knowledge with the handout [Exploring Cultural Concepts: Funds of Knowledge](#).

Learning from families will help you plan meaningful curriculum experiences that are responsive to a child's experiences at home and tie into concepts, activities, and ideas that the child is learning with their family.



Responsive and Inclusive Learning Environments

Responsive learning environments are welcoming and engaging. They are designed to meet the individual needs and interests of all children. The learning environment may be indoors or outdoors, and it may be a classroom setting, a home-based setting, or any area a child spends time during their day. Responsive adults are the most important part of the learning environment. Responsive learning environments say “yes” to children and have well-defined safe areas with materials at children’s level. They also include contributions from family members like leading an art activity or gardening project or telling a story during group time. Learn about the importance of responsive learning environments, what they look like, and what you can do in this resource, [Responsive Learning Environments](#).

Prepare children in early childhood with identified disabilities for a smooth transition to kindergarten.

Early childhood care and education focuses on supporting the whole child in all of their diverse and unique assets, strengths, abilities, and needs. When a child joins an early care program, it is important to understand how you can best support their development and learning. Talking with the family and the professionals supporting them is key in gathering the information you will need to provide an inviting responsive learning environment. Learn more in this article from NAEYC about [Fostering Engagement Within Inclusive Settings](#).

Review the information on inclusive learning environments on pages 9–13 in the [Early Learning Guidelines: Nebraska’s Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards](#) to support you in creating an equitable space where all children and families feel welcome and supported.

Explore ideas specific to supporting the transition to kindergarten in this resource, [Helping Children with Special Needs Transition to Kindergarten](#). Prepare children in early childhood special education for a smooth transition to kindergarten. Learn how to decrease young children’s anxiety by sharing stories about what will happen in the transition to kindergarten, how they may feel, what skills they will work on, and how their teacher will respond.



Learn More About Supporting Families and Inclusion

- [Tapping Into Children’s Funds of Knowledge](#). This video from the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska’s Professional Development for All Series explores funds of knowledge and how using this approach guides educators to bring children’s backgrounds to the foreground in their learning. Practical strategies are shared to draw on the strengths and resources that families bring to learning experiences in and out of school.
- [Tips for Talking with Parents About Developmental Concerns](#). Review this helpful resource from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support you in discussions with families about their child’s development.
- [Preschool Special Education Guidance Document](#). This resource provides guidance and technical assistance for local school districts and educational service units to implement high-quality and effective services for preschoolers with disabilities and their families.
- [Developmental Milestones Resources for Early Childhood Educators – “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” Can Help!](#) Get free research-based, parent-friendly resources on child development to share with families and support your own professional development.
- [Early Childhood Special Education Services](#). This state website offers resources on state and federal regulations and services to support special education services.



Action Plan for Transitioning to Kindergarten

Early Childhood Care and Education Providers and Administrators

Strategies to Partner with Families and Schools

One thing I will do to connect with local schools is:

I will do the following three things to support positive relationships with families:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Expectations in Kindergarten

I help children manage transitions by:

Name one way you will support the following developmental areas:

Physical skills:

Reading and literacy skills:

Social skills:

Thinking skills:

One activity that I will share with families that they can do to support their child's transition to kindergarten is:

Fostering a Responsive Learning Environment

I will provide the following communication opportunities for families to support a smooth transition to kindergarten:

I will partner with local early childhood programs in the following ways:

Glossary

Here are some acronyms, words, and phrases used in this toolkit.

ECCE

Early childhood care and education

ECCE providers

Refers to professionals caring for and teaching children from birth to five years old in Nebraska, including preschool teachers or pre-K teachers

Educators

Refers to all educators of young children, including ECCE providers and kindergarten teachers

Funds of knowledge

The essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge that are embedded in the daily practices and routines of families

IEP

Individualized Education Plan, a written plan developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability who is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services

IFSP

Individualized Family Service Plan, a written plan developed by a team that outlines the early intervention services that will be provided to an infant or toddler and their family

Kindergarten teacher

Teacher leading the kindergarten class; aides or other support staff may also be in the classroom

School readiness

The goal of school readiness efforts is to support **all** children entering kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, health, and attitude to be successful lifelong learners ([Ready for Success: A School Readiness Guide for Nebraska Families](#), NDE).