

# Nebraska Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit and Resource Guide



## Families

## **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.

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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.

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## 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, 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.

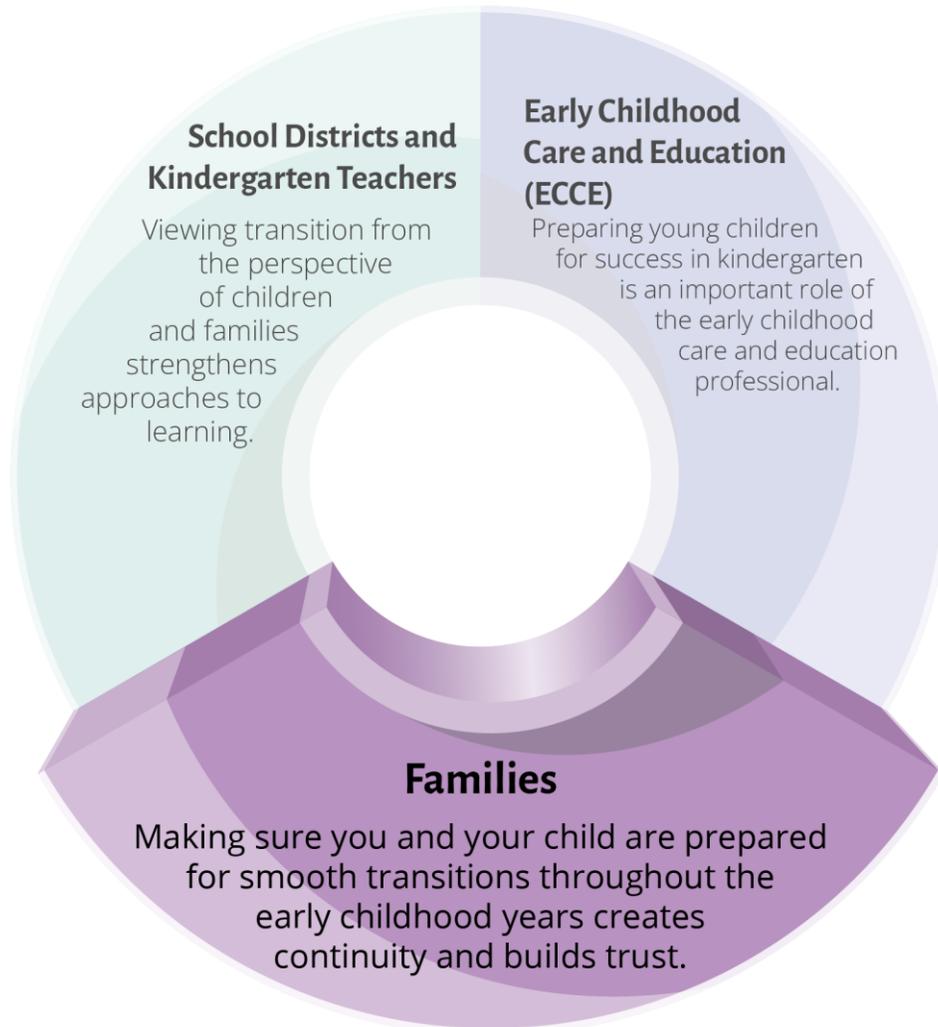
We know preparing schools, families, and early care settings to support transition to kindergarten is a critical step in supporting healthy outcomes for Nebraska’s children and families. Communities in Nebraska are actively supporting young children’s transition into kindergarten, but there are still 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 do I need to know to prepare for the transition to kindergarten?](#)
- [What can I do at home to get my child ready?](#)
- [Who do I reach out to about my child's learning needs?](#)

# Preparing for Transition to Kindergarten



The transition to kindergarten offers several opportunities for growth and new experiences. The goal of kindergarten is to provide a positive learning experience that sets every child on a path for a successful school experience. Preparing for the journey into kindergarten marks a big transition in the life of your child and family. Understanding what is expected in the kindergarten learning setting will help you prepare your child for an enjoyable experience. Explore the following information to learn more about the developmental expectations for kindergarten.

## Expectations in Kindergarten

**Children learn through play and nurturing relationships.** A well-prepared kindergarten program will support staff in understanding and responding to the developmental needs of children entering kindergarten. Whether in an early care setting or at home with family, your child will be entering a new school experience in a different setting. The purpose of the toolkit and resource guide is to help families understand what to expect in kindergarten.

Developmental characteristics that support a child's successful experience in kindergarten include:

- Enthusiasm and curiosity toward learning
- Social skills and self-regulation, including the ability to cooperate with others, wait their turn, and talk with other children
- The ability to listen to instructions, follow three-step directions, and ask questions or seek teacher assistance when needed
- The ability to use a pencil, marker, paintbrush, etc.
- Respectful relationships and interactions with teachers and others responsible for supporting their learning and well-being

Although these skills are predictors of school readiness, it is the responsibility of the school to be ready for your child. School readiness is about more than what your child knows. Children enter kindergarten with a variety of skills and background knowledge.

In Nebraska, the only requirement for kindergarten eligibility is that the child is five years old 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 you can support your child's transition to school, which includes helping the school be ready for your child.

**Kindergarten is an inclusive place for children of all abilities, including those receiving special education services.**

This means kindergarten will have all the necessary equipment or assistive technology available, will have the appropriate modifications made to schedules or curriculum, and will establish needed supports and services when necessary to make sure kindergarten is ready for your child.



For a child with disabilities, being ready for the kindergarten school year often requires additional preparation. Working with your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team helps you plan for your child to receive the appropriate special education services, accommodations, and modifications necessary to be successful in the kindergarten classroom.



***Supporting your child to have a successful transition into kindergarten will provide a positive experience they will take with them throughout their schooling.***

## Learn More About Preparing for Transition to Kindergarten

- [Early Learning Foundations: A Parent’s Companion Piece to the Early Learning Guidelines \(Birth through 5 years old\) \(English\)](#). Learn how your child is growing and developing and get helpful tips on ways you can encourage your child’s growth and development to better prepare them for school. [The Early Learning Foundations are also available in Spanish](#).
- The [Learning Begins at Birth Parent Guide](#) was designed by ECCE professionals and parents to provide information on child development, child care, how children learn, and more. The guide is available in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), and [Vietnamese](#).
- [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](#).
- [Transition Resources for Families](#). Explore this list of practical activities, guides, videos, articles, and websites to support your family with transitions, including kindergarten.
- [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.

## What if I don’t think my child is ready?

**Wondering if your child is ready for kindergarten is a common concern among families.**

Don’t wait until kindergarten—if you have a concern, talk with your child’s doctor and early care provider or 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 be connected to early intervention services for your child and family. It is helpful for families to know what to expect so that they can be active and equal team members in advocating for their child’s learning needs. If you have concerns about your child’s development, several support systems can help you and your child. You can also contact your child’s school directly for an evaluation. 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.





If your child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), you will want to understand what your child's current IEP says. You will want to meet with your child's current and upcoming IEP team to help plan your child's school day. That may include special education services, accommodations, and modifications necessary to be successful in the kindergarten classroom and throughout the school day.

Check out these state resources for more guidance and information:

- [Parental Rights in Special Education NE \(Rule 51\)](#). Review this important state website for information about your rights as a parent of a child with a disability. This section focuses on children ages 3–16. Scroll through topics and links to learn about tips for IEP meetings, accommodations your child's school should consider, and assistive technology ideas.
- The [Family Guide to Special Education in Nebraska](#) booklet provides a brief overview of Nebraska's special education process.
- Find resources and videos in both Spanish and English on early intervention at [Circle of Security International – Early Intervention Program for Parents & Children](#).
- [Parent Training and Information \(PTI\) Nebraska](#) is a statewide resource for families of children with disabilities and special health care needs.
- [The Nebraska Early Development Network](#) provides early intervention services for families with children from birth to age three who have developmental delays and health care needs and connects families to needed services.
- [Helping Children with Special Needs Transition to Kindergarten](#) walks you through important information to consider when working with your child's kindergarten teacher.
- [Early Learning Guidelines: Nebraska's Birth to Five Learning and Development Standards](#). This birth-to-five continuum of development and learning provides research-based recommendations and strategies to support best practices in the years before kindergarten. It supports early childhood providers and kindergarten teachers in meeting the learning needs of all children in their learning environment. This resource is also available in [Spanish](#).
- For information on resources and workshops for families of children with disabilities, including those in underserved communities, visit the [Pyramid Community Parent Resource Center](#).
- Reference the [OSEP Spanish Glossary Project](#) for definitions of common terms related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

## Supporting Children’s Development During COVID-19

Living in a world with COVID-19 has impacted all our lives, including young children’s lives. Some children have lived most of their early years isolated from others or cared for by masked adults. Some children may have had less social contact with groups of children and may need help learning how to play with others. Being part of a structured learning setting, like kindergarten, could be a challenge and something your child may need help getting used to.

If your child did continue attending an early childhood care program, several professionals working with children wore masks that covered their faces and mouths. There is a concern that being unable to watch the lips of the person talking may impact the development of language. Children learn language by hearing letters and words and watching the lips of the speaker as they talk. You may have concerns about the impact on your child’s development.



Some things you can do to help support young children during this time of social distancing include:

- Keep routines and structure in the day.
- Ask for help and seek out social support networks through friends, family, or work.
- Respond to your child when they need extra help to support feelings of safety.

## Learn More About Supporting Your Child During COVID-19

- Find [COVID-19 Resources from the Buffett Early Childhood Institute](#) at the University of Nebraska for childcare providers, parents, teachers, and other professionals. Including information on the academic and emotional impact of the pandemic on children.
- Check out this resource from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [COVID-19 Parental Resources Kit – Early Childhood](#), to find ways to support your child’s social, emotional, and mental well-being.
- Listen or read this article on the [Impact of COVID-19 on Children’s Social Skills](#) and learn what you can do to support your child’s social interactions.
- Explore several topics related to [COVID & Kids’ Mental Health](#) from the Child Mind Institute. Find tips on limiting screen time and helping your child cope with social anxiety and resources for parenting and self-care during COVID.

## Nebraska Examples That Support Transition to Kindergarten

Explore these effective practices shared by families in Nebraska 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](#)

### ***Parent Experience***

A parent with a son entering kindergarten shared how having a therapy dog present helped his son with the transition into the new classroom:

“In my son’s class they had a therapy dog. He transitioned from one elementary school to another, and the dog in his class made it so much better. He talked about it every day. Also, he did really well in the new class. A dog in the class like this engages kids in a little different way. I think it had a calming effect for my son. It made a big difference.”

– John, Kindergarten parent

# Getting My Child Ready

Everything you need to get your child ready for kindergarten is in your home. Review the list of suggested activities to do with your child to enhance the transition experience for both you and your child. Some activities may involve your entire family, such as waking at a regular time each morning, going out on walks, or reading together. Remember that children learn through play. Many of these activities are play-based or can seamlessly be incorporated into play. Take time to engage in meaningful activities with your child that support their skill-building and emotional well-being.



## Routines and Self-Care Habits

Young children respond positively to consistent and predictable routines. Routines help create trust because children then understand what is expected of them throughout the day. Having a regular schedule also supports parents in planning. Routines are a great time for communication, social interaction, and so much more.

**Engaging routines prepare young children for expectations in kindergarten. Here are some things you can do at home to support your child to be ready for kindergarten:**

- Create a regular bedtime and waking time to help get into a routine to wake up for kindergarten.
- Involve your child in the daily routines and communicate what you are doing and why.
- Encourage your child to take care of their own needs such as dressing, brushing teeth, toileting, and washing their hands.
- Practice zipping and unzipping jackets and coats.
- Practice putting shoes on the correct feet and tying the laces.
- Promote healthy habits like a regular bedtime, a balanced diet, and plenty of activity.
- Be sure to have stepping stools near sinks and other areas children may need access to.
- Schedule a kindergarten physical with your primary care doctor or pediatrician.

## Social Skills

**Supporting your child to be able to interact with adults and other children will help them be more comfortable in kindergarten.**

Being able to ask questions and follow simple instructions will benefit your child in having a successful kindergarten experience. Here are some things you can do with your child to support them in building relationships and communicating their needs.



- Listen to your child and talk with them in back-and-forth communication.
- Talk openly about emotions and how to express them safely.
- Offer opportunities for your child to make choices, like which color of socks to wear, whether to eat an apple or a pear, or what book they would like to read with you.
- Clearly state simple rules or limits and have reminder checks with your child when doing an activity or going somewhere with specific rules. You might remind your child at the grocery store that it is important to stay together and safely hold onto or sit inside the shopping cart.
- Build opportunities for your child to follow simple directions by playing a game with them or using a simple recipe to make food or [playdough](#).
- Meet up with other families for play dates or go to a park where your child can play with other children. Be nearby to support your child as they learn how to wait their turn to go down the slide or play on a swing. Help them learn how to make space for others in the sandbox and on play equipment. Talk with your child about how to cooperate with other children in their play. Support children in understanding that they might not always get to do what they want or play with a certain toy and help them wait or find something else to play with.
- Check out this resource, [Building Social and Emotional Skills at Home](#), for more ideas.
- Observe times of the day that might be harder for your child to stay calm (before mealtime, when they are tired, or when they are overstimulated). Try to prepare for these times with responsive supports like having snacks on hand, providing time and space for calm activities, and limiting sound, light, and screens. Explore more in this resource, [Observation: The Key to Understanding Your Child](#).
- To support positive behavior and help your child understand your expectations, speak in a normal tone, bend down to their level, and practice taking deep breaths with your child. When they are calm, talk about family rules or expectations when visiting a specific place. For more ideas, check out [Message in a Backpack™ Guiding Your Child's Behavior](#).

## Physical Activity

### **Movement and activity release stress and support healthy development.**

Children do what you do. When you enjoy being active and find opportunities to exercise, you model to your child that being physically active is fun. Here are some ideas to build more opportunities for movement into your child's day.

- Create opportunities every day for physical activity. Maybe you take a nature hike, dance in your home, or walk around your neighborhood. Find opportunities for your child to practice climbing, dancing, running, and balancing to support large muscle development and coordination.
- Create opportunities to support small muscle control and coordination in their hands through activities you already do with your child. You may have smaller-sized pencils, crayons, markers, or other writing tools for your child to use. When preparing meals, offer your child a small bowl and spoon to practice scooping, serving, and mixing. Allow children to explore measuring cups or spoons to learn about different sizes.
- You may find a local library or community center that offers free craft activities where your child might explore coloring, painting, drawing, writing, cutting, or constructing using different materials.
- Play, play, and play some more. Children learn through active play, taking risks, and hands-on exploration of their environment.



## Reading Together

Building a lifelong learner begins with reading. Children who have early experiences with adults reading aloud tend to learn more easily to read. **Reading together boosts your child’s vocabulary, general knowledge, attention span, and concentration.** When they are read to, children develop strong oral and literacy skills that support them in becoming competent learners. In addition, reading stories about, for example, a new sibling joining the family, toilet habits, and transitioning to kindergarten can help children prepare for such life transitions.



Discover books from [Selected Children’s Books About Kindergarten](#) and [Transition to Kindergarten Multicultural Booklist](#) to read with your child, help them understand the transition into kindergarten, and become more comfortable with their new school and learning setting.

***Explore these multicultural books supporting diversity, inclusion, and transitions to kindergarten.***

- **The King of Kindergarten** by Derrick Barnes
- **All Are Welcome** by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman
- **Lola Goes to School** by Anna McQuinn
- **Jumping into Kindergarten** by Julia Cook and Laura A. Jana
- **The Day You Begin** by Jacqueline Woodson
- **Eyes that Kiss in the Corners** by Joanna Ho
- **Where Are You From?** By Yamile Saied Mendez

Check with your local public library or lending library to see if they have these books for you to borrow. Your child’s early childhood or family child care program may also allow families to check out books.

You may also want to explore the following videos with your child:

- [The Kissing Hand](#) by Audrey Penn, read by Dr. Bergeron – Enjoy this video story with your child and find out how Chester, the raccoon, and his mommy get ready for the first day of kindergarten.
- [First Day Jitters](#) by Julie Danneberg, read by Amanda Bryans – Everyone can have jitters or be nervous on their first day at a new school. Share this video story with your child and help them see how Sara starts her first day at a new school.

***Read with your child and use words and signs in your community to ask questions or point out familiar numbers, letters, shapes, and sounds.***

***Here are some tips to build language and reading skills.***



- Read every day with your child.
- Talk about words you see on signs and in your community to support your child’s language development.
- Ask your child questions about how something works, what they think might happen next, or where they think someone or something has gone. These types of questions promote thinking and invite children to be curious.
- Point to numbers, letters, shapes, and colors as you say what they are. This helps children connect words to things in their environment.
- When you hear a sound that is also in your child’s name, tell them. For example, “Mario, the word *marbles* has the same sound as the beginning of your name. *Mar-bles* and *Mar-io.*”
- Save envelopes, flyers, or other paper to have on hand with pens, markers, crayons, or pencils for the spontaneous practice of writing and drawing for your child. Perhaps you have these items in a basket or somewhere your child can reach them—while you are making dinner, your child can practice their writing and drawing skills.
- Have your child’s name spelled out in large, clear letters at your child’s eye level and practice sounding out and tracing the letters. Having magnetic letters on the fridge for children to organize and play with is another way to support literacy skills in a spontaneous way.

## Activities to Help the Family Prepare

The activities that have been shared so far involve you, your child, and possibly other family members. There are some activities or routines that the adults in the family will want to do to prepare them for the transition to kindergarten. For example, changing the family routines such as bedtimes, waking early, meal times, bath time, and other activities will help your child prepare for school but will also have an impact on the family schedule.

## Learn More About Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten

- [Getting Ready for Kindergarten](#). To find answers to many questions and help you prepare your child for a smooth transition into kindergarten, explore this site for Nebraska families. This resource is available in [Arabic](#), [English](#), [French](#), [Karen](#), [Somali](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#).
- [Ready or Not Kindergarten, Here We Come!](#) Find out more tips like teaching responsibility, acknowledging your child's feelings, and engaging in meaningful literacy activities to help you and other family members prepare your child for kindergarten.



# Connecting with Schools



## Communicating with My Child's Teacher

Communicating with your child's kindergarten teacher and the school principal can be challenging. Knowing what to say and what questions to ask can help ease your concerns. Understanding the parent's or guardian's role in their child's education journey can empower you to advocate for your child and receive the information you need.

Plan to reach out to the school your child will be attending. The resource [Ready for Success: A School Readiness Guide for Nebraska Families](#) provides a helpful list of information to ask for, including:

- How and when to enroll
- Start and release times, which may vary between schools
- Classroom schedule and routines
- How the school will support your child's learning needs
- How the teacher will individualize attention and teaching for each child
- Options available for before- or after-school care or transportation, if needed

## Learn More Connecting with Schools

- [4 Things Kindergarten Teachers Want You to Know](#). Learn what is important in kindergarten and what you can do to support a partnership with your child's kindergarten teacher. Some tips include:
  - Talking with your child's kindergarten teachers about a time your child learned something new
  - Asking the teacher for specific strategies you can use to be involved in your child's learning
  - Sharing the best way for the teacher to communicate with you (email, face to face, text)
  - Telling your child's teacher something about your family
- [12 Teacher Terms Demystified](#). Understand what teachers are talking about in this list of commonly used terms in early childhood and kindergarten learning environments, such as approaches to learning, constructive play, or developmentally appropriate practice.
- [Questions Families May Have](#). Review this list of questions you might want to ask your child's school.
- [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.



## Sharing My Family's Funds of Knowledge

You hold a rich base of knowledge about your family that no one else has. Researchers call this your funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge come from your social experiences, work experiences, and history as a family. When you talk with your child's teachers, consider sharing about:

- Your family experiences you have together
- The language you speak at home
- Values and traditions you celebrate
- How you care for each other
- Family outings you enjoy
- Household chores and routines
- Activities your family does to learn new things
- Favorite TV shows
- The work or occupations of family members
- Other relatives you may be caring for or who live in your home



When you share your family's funds of knowledge with your child's early childhood or kindergarten teacher, they can recognize your family's unique strengths. The teacher can use the ideas you share and build a curriculum unique to your family's experiences, resulting in an inclusive and positive learning environment for your child.

## Principles of Ideal Learning

As a parent, it is important to 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 among 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.



# Action Plan for Transitioning to Kindergarten

## Families

### Expectations in Kindergarten

I will support my child to develop skills in the following area(s):

If I have concerns about my child's development, I can look at the following state resource:

### Getting My Child Ready

I will begin or continue to do the following routines and activities with my child to support our transition to kindergarten:

Routines and self-care habits:

Social activity:

Physical activity:

Reading together:

Other activities to help the family prepare:

### Connecting with Schools

These are questions I will ask my child's kindergarten teacher:

These are things I will share about our family with my child's kindergarten teacher:

# 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).