



Ready for Success

A School Readiness Guide
for Nebraska Families





Introduction

This booklet is in response to commonly asked questions from parents about preparing for, and entering kindergarten.

Some questions parents ask are about district policy. Nebraska has over 200 individual school districts, each having their own board, superintendent, and policies. The Nebraska Department of Education provides guidance and assistance to these districts. Understanding what is state law (such as the entrance age) and what is district policy (such as the early entry assessment procedure) can be complicated. Parents are encouraged to talk with school teachers and administrators for specific guidance.

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What does school readiness mean?

Children are born with the innate ability to learn. The goal of school readiness efforts is to support ALL children entering kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, health, and attitude to be successful life-long learners. Ready children have families who support their learning, and schools that are prepared to meet their individual needs, the year they are age eligible to attend kindergarten, regardless of their abilities.

When can my child start kindergarten?

Nebraska law entitles children to receive free public education the year that they turn five on or before July 31. This is called a “cutoff date,” therefore, schools cannot test age-eligible children for kindergarten entrance, nor suggest delaying entrance.

What if my child doesn't meet the cutoff date?

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 the district's policy for early entry assessment.

How do I know if my child is ready?

Perhaps this is the most frequently asked question and the one that is the most difficult to answer. There are many opinions and much research about what it means to be ready. School readiness is about more than what your child knows. Children enter kindergarten with a variety of skills and background knowledge.



According to kindergarten teachers children who display success exhibit the following characteristics:

- ★ healthy and rested
- ★ able to pay attention, follow directions and communicate their thoughts and needs without being disruptive
- ★ curious and enthusiastic about new activities/skills
- ★ confident, cooperative and able to practice age-appropriate self control
- ★ be respectful of authority figures
- ★ able to recognize personal space around others

While these characteristics are a good predictor of school readiness, it is the school's responsibility to 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, have the appropriate modifications made to schedules or curriculum, and establish needed supports and services when necessary to make sure kindergarten is ready for your child.

In Nebraska, the only requirement for kindergarten entrance is age-eligibility: your child turns five 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.

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

What will kindergarten be like?

Kindergarten is for ALL five-year-olds. It is typical for children to be at different levels of development, with a wide range of abilities.

Kindergartners quickly gain skills and knowledge. 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. Recognizing that young children are active learners, many kindergarten teachers provide plenty of time for play and exploration.

As kindergarten curricula progresses, some programs become more structured and academic. It is important that parents talk to the teacher or principal about the expectations and daily schedule.

For a child with disabilities, maintain open communication with teachers and staff to ensure your child is receiving the appropriate special education services, accommodations and/or modifications necessary to continue to be successful in the kindergarten classroom as determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP).



Should my child start now or next year?

Once you know the expectations of your child's kindergarten, you may wonder if your child would benefit from "red-shirting" or waiting another year to start. If you are considering delaying kindergarten entrance, there are many things to consider:

- ★ Research shows that when children are delayed in the start of school, they may have more knowledge and skills than their peers; however, by the end of kindergarten, and certainly by third grade, most children catch up to each other.
- ★ When children are delayed in kindergarten entry, 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 your child will not be in kindergarten? Which option will best help your child develop the skills that you are concerned about?
- ★ Public preschool is typically no longer an option once your child is eligible for kindergarten. State law requires that children begin school the year they turn six (known as "compulsory age").

"A parent is a child's first teacher. The advantage of being your child's first teacher is that you know and understand your child better than anyone else."

How can I help my child be ready?

High quality early care and education programs provide children with opportunities to develop the skills related to school readiness through play. There are many things parents can do to help children be successful in school and in life.

You can promote good healthy habits by making sure your child:

- ★ Follows a routine which includes a balanced diet and plenty of activity and rest

Encourage social and emotional well-being by giving your child opportunities to:

- ★ Take care of own needs, such as dressing and toileting
- ★ Play with others, learning to share and cooperate
- ★ Express emotions in safe ways, learning to control his/her own behaviors and reactions
- ★ Pay attention, make choices, follow directions and rules

Support language and learning by giving your child chances to:

- ★ Be read to everyday and talk about the words you see
- ★ Practice drawing, writing, and recognition of numbers shapes, colors, letters, sounds and her/his name
- ★ Work on a task until it's completed, with support as needed
- ★ Play! Children learn best when given the opportunity to explore their environment and take risks through hands-on engagement, rather than flashcards and worksheets



How can I prepare for the first day?

Starting kindergarten is a time of change for both you and your child. The more you know, the better prepared you and your child will be.

To help your child, you can:

- ★ Be enthusiastic and positive when you talk with your child about the changes. If you are excited and confident, your child will be, too.
- ★ Make an appointment with your doctor or clinic for the kindergarten check-up.
- ★ Talk with your childcare provider about adjusting your current routine (such as naptime) to help prepare your child for the new daily schedule.
- ★ Read books about kindergarten and encourage your child to talk about his/her feelings.
- ★ Start a new bedtime and morning routine a few days before school starts. A routine will help your child get the 10-12 hours of sleep needed.
- ★ Participate in school open houses and information meetings. Help your child feel more comfortable and confident by knowing what will happen, where things are, who will be there, and what to look forward to.
- ★ Talk with your child about what will take place on the first day. Consider sending a small visual reminder, such as a family photo to provide comfort.
- ★ Arrive at school early to give your child time to settle in. Remind your child about your plans for the end of the school day. Give a reassuring, cheerful, and short good-bye.

Contact the school you want your child to attend and ask questions about:

- ★ How and when to enroll. You will need your child's original birth certificate.
- ★ Request information about school expectations, rules, and classroom daily routines.
- ★ Meet with your child's teacher, if you feel your child may need individual attention or support.
- ★ Ask about start and release times, which may vary between schools.
- ★ If you will need before or after school care or transportation, be sure to ask what options are available from the school or in your community.



How can I support my child's education?

Now that you have a new school routine, keep it up! With all the changes happening, your child will welcome a regular bedtime and morning routine. Having a successful entry into kindergarten helps children have a positive attitude about school and learning. As your child's partner in education, it is important for you to actively be involved throughout the year.

Here's how:

- ★ Stay enthusiastic about school. Focus on the positives. When you show that school is important to you, your child will learn that, too.
- ★ Help your child be at school, on time, every day.
- ★ Whenever possible, make your child's appointments for after school or towards the end of the school day. Keep reading to, and with, your child daily. This can be a special time in your bedtime routine to see how much your child is learning.
- ★ Ask about your child's day and about the work they bring home, too.
- ★ Talk to your child's teacher early and often. The relationships and communication between the teacher and your family is key to ensuring your child's success.

Books about school to read with your child

★ **Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten** *by Joseph Slate*

It's the first day of kindergarten and Miss Bindergarten is hard at work getting the classroom ready for her 26 new students. Miss Bindergarten puts the finishing touches on the room just in time, and the students arrive. Now the fun can begin!

★ **Kindergarten Kids** *by Ellen Senisi*

This cheerful photo-essay shows 21 kids in a kindergarten class on a typical day. Girls and boys play with everything from computers to blocks; they learn the alphabet and how to follow rules; they dress up, say the pledge of allegiance, listen to stories, and make music and art together. Sometimes they even have a bad day.

★ **Night Before Kindergarten** *by Natasha Wing*

Join the kids as they prepare for kindergarten, packing school supplies, posing for pictures, and the hardest part of all—saying goodbye to mom and dad. But maybe it won't be so hard once they discover just how much fun kindergarten really is.

★ **Kindergarten ABC** *by Jacqueline Rogers*

Each and every day celebrates a letter of the alphabet with a fun-filled classroom scene.

★ **Who Will Go to Kindergarten Today?** *by Karl Ruhmann*

Sam decides to send his toy monkey Timbo to kindergarten in his place, but after telling Timbo about his school friends and what his day is really like, he realizes he wants to go himself.

★ **Froggy Goes to School** *by Jonathan London*

Froggy's mother knows that everyone is nervous on the first day of school. Froggy's exuberant antics, complete with sound effects, will delight his many fans and reassure them that school can be fun.

★ **Otto Goes to School** *by Todd Parr*

Otto goes to school for the first time, where he makes new friends and learns how to wag his tail without knocking things over.

★ **This is the Way We Go to School** *by Edith Baer*

With fun-filled rhymes and colorful illustrations, children will discover just how much fun getting to school can be.

★ **Going to School** *by Sally Hewitt*

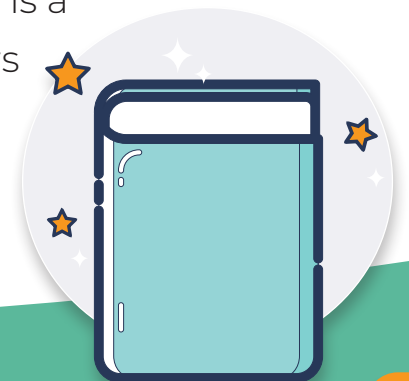
Children learn what it is like to go to school in other countries.

★ **Seven Little Mice Go to School** *by Kazuo Iwamura*

It's time for seven little mice to start school! And it's up to Mother Mouse to get them there.

★ **Chicken Chickens Go to School** *by Valeri Gorbachev*

It's the first day of school for the little chickens and they are a little scared. How a wise teacher helps the chickens overcome their fears and win some wonderful new friends is a heartwarming story that will reassure youngsters experiencing their own first-day jitters.



Learn more about school readiness in Nebraska

The goal of kindergarten is to make the best match between teaching and learning for every child to support a successful school experience. We've put together a web page full of helpful resources to support in the transition into kindergarten.

Learn more by visiting bit.ly/SchoolReadyNE or scanning the QR code below using your phone's camera.



My local school district is:

Place contact label here if being distributed by a school district.

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Nebraska Department of Education
Office of Early Childhood
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