

Kindergarten Transition: A Guide for Families

The transition to Kindergarten marks the beginning of a new era of parenting and childhood that includes longer school days, new relationships, and new family routines. To support families in navigating this transition successfully, Trying Together developed the Kindergarten Transition Guide for Families. Readers will learn why Kindergarten transition matters, about common steps to prepare for, and strategies that can help.

What is Kindergarten Transition?

Kindergarten Transition describes the critical period in which children shift from primarily learning at home or in an early learning program to entering a Kindergarten classroom. It can include the series of months leading up to and after a child's first day.

Why does it matter?

A successful transition to Kindergarten leads to better long-term outcomes, including:

- higher ratings of social-emotional competence, reduced stress at the beginning of the school year, and an increased likelihood of forming new relationships;
- improved academic growth in Kindergarten, including an increased likelihood of reading on grade-level by third grade and higher high school graduation rates; and
- an increase in family involvement over the year.

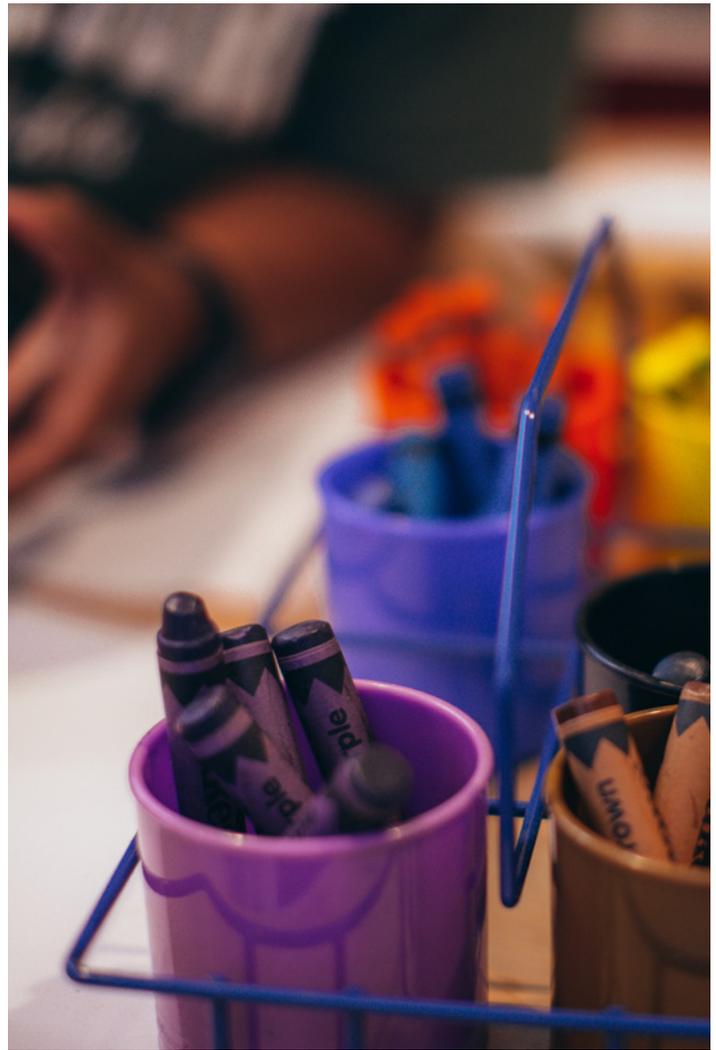
At what age do children start Kindergarten?

If you live in Pennsylvania and your child is five, or will be five by the start of the school year, it is time to register them for Kindergarten! School year start dates vary from mid-August to September depending on the school district.



How to Register

1. Identify which school your child will attend for Kindergarten.
 - Use Google to search for “Kindergarten registration” followed by your town, city, or borough name. Visit each school’s website to view their student outcomes, calendars, enrollment data, and more.
 - If you live in Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette, Greene, or Westmoreland counties, visit Trying Together’s Kindergarten Transition page to access a list of school districts, websites, and deadlines: bit.ly/swpa-kindergarten
 - If you live in the Pittsburgh Public School District, you can use their online tool to search for schools by grade range or your address: discoverpps.org
2. Register your child for Kindergarten.
 - Complete the enrollment form. Depending on the school, this could be completed through a paper form, online form, or over the phone.
 - You must provide proof of your child’s age (birth certificate), two current proof of residency documents (lease, deed, utility bills, etc.), and a copy of your child’s immunization records. Prepare these documents before enrolling.
 - Some school districts open Kindergarten registration as early as February and offer family events in March or April. The earlier you register your child, the better. Make sure your child has plenty of time to adjust to the new setting.



What supports a successful transition to Kindergarten?

Although the transition to Kindergarten will look different for each school, family, and child, there are three key elements that support a successful transition:

1. Children who know what to expect, have practiced school-day routines, can express their worries and feelings openly, and have access to individualized support as needed,
2. Families who build relationships with school staff, participate in family engagement events, and proactively prepare their child for the transition to Kindergarten, and
3. School staff who welcome students and families through multiple methods (events, emails, phone calls, etc.), communicate regularly with families, and work to ensure families are prepared for the transition to Kindergarten.



What can families do?

As a parent or caregiver, there is a lot you can do to help your child prepare for Kindergarten.

- Set up a day for your child to visit the school, their classroom, and the playground before the first day. This will help them feel prepared.
 - If you register for Kindergarten early, many school districts hold community events for incoming Kindergarten students and their families in the spring (such as literacy or math nights) and summer (orientation or Kindergarten camp) prior to the new school year.
- Practice school routines at home (morning and nighttime routines, songs, using a lunch tray, walking in line, following a schedule, bathroom breaks, etc.). Start these routines early! Do not wait until one week before school starts.
- Practice skills such as dressing, undressing, tying shoes, and hand-washing to help them feel more confident using these skills at school.
- Teach conversation starters that your child can use to introduce themselves, make friends, ask questions, or assert a need.
 - "Hi, my name is ____." "I like _____. What do you like?" "Do you want to play?"
- Read books about Kindergarten together before and after school begins.
- Ask your child what they are most excited about, if they are worried about anything, and if they have any questions.
 - Let your child know that Kindergarten is a place to have fun and make new friends and that you are excited to hear stories about their day at pickup.
 - Relate this transition to a familiar experience they had such as child care, pre-kindergarten, or the first time they stayed at someone else's house.
 - If your child is anxious, validate their emotions and ask about their worries. Share a story about a time you were anxious and how you got through it.
- Send a list of your child's allergies and medications to your school's nurse and your child's teacher before school starts.
- Label all of your child's school items (backpack, pencil case, lunch boxes, etc.) with their name and your phone number.
- Create a pickup and dropoff plan and practice it, including who is and who is not allowed to pick them up at school. Choose a safe adult password.
- If the school allows, send your child to school with a comfort object. They may only get to see it at rest time but having it can help make them feel more comfortable.
- At dropoff, reassure your child that you will pick them up at a specific time and share your goodbyes. Lingering for too long can make it more difficult. Try to be positive.



What might schools offer?

- An Open House event that includes a tour of the school, a meet-and-greet with the teachers, an overview of school expectations, and the curriculum.
- A Kindergarten Orientation Packet with information on school procedures, classroom rules, parent expectations, daily schedules, needed supplies, contact information, the curriculum, preparation tips, and more.
- An opportunity for new students to ride the bus before the first day of school.
- Discussions on services your child will receive through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) if they require one. If your child has an IEP prior to Kindergarten, these conversations must begin in February before the school year begins.
- Regular communication (email, phone, text) to provide updates, discuss your child's interests and needs, and share resources or opportunities.
- If you speak a language other than English, you have the right to an interpreter and materials written in your home language (registration information, report cards, policies and procedures, parent handbooks, special education services, etc.).
- School-wide activities that provide opportunities for children and families to socialize.
 - If the school is hosting an in-person event for families, ask them if child care and/or transportation services are being offered (if you need them).
- For more examples, view this handout from the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC): bit.ly/eclkc-handout

Additional Resources

The Hi5! Partnership

The Hi5! Partnership shares Kindergarten registration deadlines, Kindergarten transition information, and more with families in Southwestern Pennsylvania: bit.ly/kindergarten-swpa

Family Engagement Toolkit

To reinforce parents and early learning professionals in their work to create strong partnerships, Trying Together created a Family Engagement Toolkit. View the toolkit to access relationship-building strategies, resources, and more: bit.ly/family-engagement-tools

Individual Education Plans (IEP)

For information on Individual Education Plans and the transition from early intervention services in pre-Kindergarten programs to Kindergarten, view these resources:

- A Family Guide to Inclusive Early Learning in Pennsylvania: bit.ly/iep-family-guide
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions: bit.ly/ei-faqs
- Early Intervention Transition: bit.ly/ei-transition

Support for Limited English Proficient Families

The United States Department of Justice and Department of Education created a fact sheet that answers common questions about the rights of families with limited English proficiency. The document is available in Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Cambodian, Hmong, Korean, Laotian, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and English: bit.ly/lep-families

National Association for the Education of Young Children

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website features articles on Kindergarten transition, school readiness, and more: bit.ly/school-readiness-naeyc

To learn more, visit: tryingtogether.org/parenting-resources

