



Bulletin

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Getting Ready for Kindergarten: What families can do

All children have a right to attend Kindergarten in Massachusetts.

School districts in Massachusetts must provide kindergarten for all five year old children whose families want to send them. A child does **not** have to already possess specific developmental, behavioral, social or academic skills to be enrolled in kindergarten. Children with physical, mental or any other kind of disability, hospitalized children, and children who are learning English for the first time cannot be denied enrollment based on those conditions.

Kindergarten is the first year of formal school for most children in the United States. In kindergarten, hands-on learning activities help prepare youngsters for the challenges that lie ahead. This *Bulletin* suggests ways parents can prepare themselves and their children for a smooth and positive transition to kindergarten.

How can I help my child prepare?

Babies are born ready to learn. Parents and families can help children make the most of these important early learning years. Up to age 5, children's brains are growing at a dazzling pace! Contributions made to learning in those years will last a lifetime. The most important things families can do are to talk and read to their children from the day they are born. When reading or talking to your child, ask questions and explain things. Conversations and books can teach more than just how to recognize words. They can build important critical thinking skills.

Establish routines. At least a month before school starts, begin to set firm mealtime and bedtime schedules. Schedule daytime activities as well, like watching TV, playing, and doing chores. Get your child used to being on time and things happening on schedule. A good night's sleep (10 - 12 hours) and a nutritious breakfast will help keep your child focused and learning. Place is also important. Set up a place where your child reads, paints, colors, and makes things. Put the backpack and school supplies in the same place to have them ready to go in the morning.

Talk about kindergarten. Weeks before school starts, talk about kindergarten with your child. Listen to how he or she

is feeling. Be reassuring and upbeat. Your enthusiasm and excitement about learning will set a powerful and positive tone.

Encourage independence and responsibility. Create opportunities for your child to make choices. Let him or her choose what to wear, where to play, or what friends or relatives to call. Encourage your child to take a bigger role in dressing him or herself. Support good health habits, such as washing hands, and covering nose and mouth to sneeze or cough.

Make school familiar. Take a field trip to the school, visit a classroom, and introduce your child to the teachers. Walk by the school during recess and watch the children play. Take your child to play on the playground when school is not in session.

How can I prepare?

Get an early start. Before your child turns 4, you should contact your local school to learn how and when to register, and what documents are required. A year may seem like a long time, but it will go by fast, and there will be a lot to learn and do. You will want to have plenty of time to learn about all the options and make the choice that's best for your child.

Choose a kindergarten. Usually children go to kindergarten at a school in their home school district. If you live in a large district, there could be many choices. Not everyone gets their first choice, so it is important to learn how the selection process works. Massachusetts also has a "school choice" program that parents may wish to use to enroll their children in a different district's kindergarten. To find a kindergarten in your area, call the superintendent of schools for your town.

Plan your schedule. Kindergarten can be half-day or full-day. Half-day kindergarten usually has both morning and afternoon sessions. Some districts only offer the required half-day of kindergarten. Some cities and towns offer a free full-day of kindergarten. Others offer an optional full-day program, but charge a fee for half of the day.

Gather the necessary documents. The list below shows some commonly required documents. Different districts have different requirements, so be sure to contact your local district to learn exactly which documents you must bring to registration. If your family lacks these documents because of homelessness or recent immigration, the school is legally required to enroll your child without them.

- **Proof of your child’s age.** Most districts require a child’s birth certificate or a passport showing that he or she will be turning 5 before the school district’s cut off date.

- **Proof of guardianship if the responsible adult is not the child’s parent.**
- **Proof of residency (where you actually live).** Some possible examples are a copy of a deed or lease, a utility bill in your name, a valid photo ID card, recent W-2 form, payroll stub, and/or a bank or credit card statement.
- **Your child’s immunization record.** Contact your child’s doctor for a copy of this record.
- **Proof of physical examination.** If your child does not have a doctor, the school district will help you meet this requirement.

Preparing for Kindergarten

Kindergarten is an important learning opportunity — the beginning of REAL SCHOOL! The learning that happens in kindergarten is the foundation for all the learning that comes after it. This **Bulletin** lay out ways families can prepare themselves — and their youngsters — for a successful kindergarten experience.

For links to supporting documentation for these rights and to learn more, please contact Mass PIRC by phone, toll-free at 1-877-471-0980, or check out our Web site at www.masspirc.org. Telephone and online help is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, with a number of documents available in additional languages. We look forward to hearing from you!



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