

## F: School Years The Kindergarten Program and Students with Special Needs

Ontario provides a full day kindergarten program and the complete Curriculum document is available on the Ministry of Education website at [www.edu.on.ca](http://www.edu.on.ca).

The two year Kindergarten program is delivered by a teacher and an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) working together in the classroom.

The key areas of the Kindergarten Program are:

- Language – talking, learning to read and write
- Mathematics – number recognition, counting, sorting
- Science and Technology – nature, telling time, water and sand activities
- Personal and Social Development – safety rules, gym, sharing and helping others
- The Arts – painting, drawing, cutting and gluing

The Ministry of Education recognizes the regular classroom in the neighbourhood school as the preferred placement for all children. Some school boards may offer special classes which may be an option for children with very significant needs, and you will need to discuss this as you plan your child's transition to Kindergarten.

The majority of children with special needs will be integrated into the regular classroom. Your child may receive in-class assistance or specialized equipment for health or safety-related needs.

The Kindergarten Program covers both JK and SK. There are no pre-requisites to entering Kindergarten, children develop at different rates and learn differently and some will need more time than others to develop skills and/or achieve learning expectations. Some examples of activities that support Kindergarten children with special needs are:

- language rich programs that enable children to develop oral language skills
- play based learning
- crafts that provide opportunities to practice fine motor skills
- structured activity times which enable children to learn how to interact with peers and adults

Teachers plan programs that allow children to achieve the learning expectations through play based activities. Teachers design programs that highlight links within and among areas of learning and that enable children to connect what they learn in school with their own experiences and the activities of everyday life.

Many children with special needs participate in the kindergarten classroom with minimal assistance, while other students may require special equipment or assistance. Classroom teachers use modifications and/or accommodations along with strategies or interventions to support these children's needs.

Early Screening and monitoring in JK/SK is done by the classroom teacher who continuously observes each child. Most school boards have teacher checklists and other screening tools while other school

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boards have more formal screening programs at school entry or in Kindergarten to identify children at risk or in need of extra help.

School Team staff, in partnership with parents and community agencies, determine the strengths and needs of students with special needs and provide strategies and assistance to support these students. If further interventions are required, a referral to Board Support Staff for involvement with professionals and specialized services can be made in consultation with the child and parents. Some examples of support services that may be available in a school Board include hearing services, vision services, speech and language services, emotional/behavioural support and/or psychological services.

Frequently the teacher can provide the necessary changes in program and strategies to achieve the required result, and additional support and intervention is provided either directly or indirectly for the child. Monitoring is an ongoing process and should the teacher feel that early intervention is required a referral for school based assessments is initiated with parent support and consent. Sometimes a case conference is organized to that parents, educators and support staff can meet to share information and goals. If warranted, an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meeting may be held to ensure programs, specialized placements and supports are in place.

Parental involvement is very important in ensuring a successful transition into school. The following are a list of School Readiness activities to help you prepare your child for kindergarten:

1. There are many things that you can do at home to get your child ready for kindergarten:

- The most important preschool skill is language: talk, listen, sing and read with your child
- Take your child places and talk about what you see. Visit the museum, library and zoo.
- Point out sounds around you. Imitate the sound of windshield wipers, animals, appliances and musical instruments. This builds awareness of sounds and prepares children to make the link between sounds and letters.
- Read with your child every day!
- Encourage your child to read or look at books just before bedtime, or during a quiet time. Handling books, turning pages and looking at pictures all help towards learning to read.
- Point out familiar streets and store signs (“STOP”, “Loblaws”, “MacDonald’s”). Often the first words that children “read” are these common signs.
- Encourage your child to draw and write. Have markers and crayons available and spend time regularly drawing and writing. Write your child’s name on their pictures and hang them in the house.
- Help your child put toys away before getting out new ones. Put toys away neatly and stack them in sets, or put back in the box. This helps build organizational skills and encourages neatness, etc.
- Encourage your child to finish chores before playing or taking breaks. This helps him/her learn to follow through with tasks and to “work first and play later.”

2. The more your child knows about kindergarten, the less scary it will seem. Find out when the Kindergarten Information session will be held (usually it is in April or May) where you and your child can meet their teacher and classmates, and get a feel for the classroom before school actually starts.

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3. Prior to the beginning of school, call to see if you and your child can visit the classroom. Introduce your child to the teacher. Let the child become familiar with classroom activity areas and the playground while you get to know the teacher. Good communication is essential; ask questions.

4. In Kindergarten your child will be getting to know new adults and making friends with other children. Provide your child opportunities to develop social skills at a childcare program, or through enrollment in a summer program, such as swimming or crafts. Interaction during these sessions will foster sharing, learning a routine, and following rules.

5. Talk about kindergarten. Prepare your child for this new adventure:

- If your child is already going to child care or preschool, talk about what will be the same and what will be different.
- Look at maps or pictures of the new school (the principal, teacher, custodian). For children who have difficulty with change you can make a book about the new school including photographs you can take on your visit to school.
- Act out or role play games about making new friends, asking for help. "Let's play school"...highlighting what might be different (taking the bus, having lunch at school, doing seat work, hearing announcements over the intercom, gym and art class, recess, calling teachers by Miss/Mrs./Ms./Mr.)
- Take field trips to the new school. Have a picnic in the schoolyard during the summer break.

6. Read books that are about starting kindergarten. Here are a few recommendations:

- ***David Goes to School*** by David Shannon (Scholastic). For ages 3 to 7. A funny book about the trials of an active child that just can't seem to follow the rules.
- ***Off to School, Baby Duck*** by Amy Hest (Candlewick Press). For ages 3 to 5. The plot involves Baby Duck's first day of school. A simple and comforting story.
- ***Vera's First Day of School*** by Vera Rosenberry (Henry Holt). For ages 3 to 6. The story of a little girl who has waited for years to be old enough for school like her big sisters. When the day finally comes, her excitement quickly turns to fear. There is, of course, a happy ending.
- ***Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come*** by Nancy Carlson (Viking). For ages 3 to 6. Similar to the book above, this is the story of Henry, which is true to life. On the first day of school, Henry decides he wants to go home.
- ***Day Care Days*** by Mary Brigid Barrett (Little, Brown). For ages 3 to 7. This book is in lighthearted rhyme and depicts a weekday in the life of a family as seen through the eyes of a young boy. Families with young children will recognize themselves in the morning rush and the sometimes-difficult task of saying goodbye at the day-care center.
- ***My School is Worse Than Yours*** by Tom Toles (Puffin). For ages 7 to 10. This book is a funny fantasy about a school where the teacher is a robot.

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- ***Welcome to School, Helping Friends with Autism*** by Melanie Barrette (Pyramid). For children with Autism or communication disabilities who use picture systems. This book uses photographs and drawings to help other children understand how the child communicates and how they can do the same classroom activities, with some minor changes.