

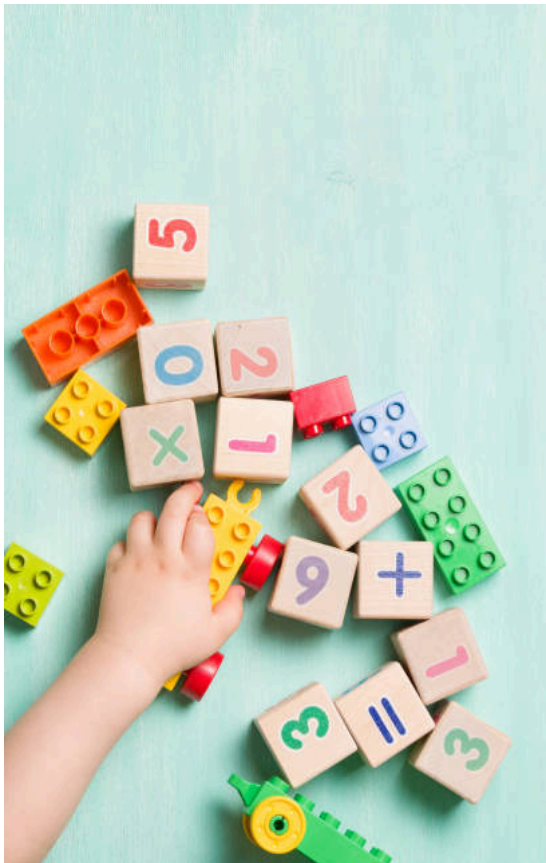
Tipsheet on Transitioning to Kindergarten

Roots of Inclusion (June 2024)

Starting Kindergarten

What Families of Children with Disabilities Need to Know

Transitions are challenging for everyone. They can affect children with disabilities in unexpected and specific ways. If your child has a disability and needs to develop specific skills so they can learn with their peers, or if they need to learn in a way that is different from the standard school curriculum, they may need an individualized education program (IEP) that is tailored to their strengths and barriers to support their learning.



An IEP consists of specially designed instruction, related and supplemental services, and accommodations and modifications that enable each student to make appropriate progress toward their goals and to participate in the general education curriculum and non-academic activities with their peers.

This bundle of instruction, accommodations, modifications, and services is called “special education.”

What if my child does not have an IEP?

If your child has a disability or suspected disability that may require specially designed instruction and related services, you should contact the special education director at your local public school district and request an evaluation. This advice also applies to children who had an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) but were not qualified for an IEP at age 3, as well as children who have never been evaluated for special education services before.

What if my child already has an IEP?

Many children with disabilities receive services from their local public school before they enter kindergarten. If your child had an individualized family services plan (IFSP), they should have been evaluated for and, if qualified for special education services, transitioned to an IEP at age 3. Before enrolling in kindergarten, you may want to request an IEP meeting to discuss your child's goals and program, whether your child is ready to start kindergarten, and how the IEP will transition to kindergarten.

In addition to special education services, Washington State has an inclusive transition process designed to connect early learning and homes to the kindergarten classroom called the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS). Local public school districts and early learning providers collaborate to transition children to kindergarten by coordinating instruction, training for staff, and parent outreach. Before your child is eligible for kindergarten enrollment, you should receive information such as the [Washington State Kindergarten Transition Summary Form](#) from your early learning provider. This is a helpful tool used to assist in the transition from preschool to kindergarten classrooms.

Some age-appropriate skills listed in the WaKIDS transition summary for children entering kindergarten include:

- Counting to 20
- Recognizing their name when written
- Holding a writing implement
- Taking turns
- Following directions
- Recognizing letters
- Identifying basic shapes

- Listening to a story being read
- Balancing during simple exercises

Key Takeaways

Consider reviewing the IEP and thinking about whether the goals in the IEP have been designed to prepare them for kindergarten.

Consider whether any of the skills identified in the kindergarten transition summary should be goals for your child's pre-kindergarten IEP. Discuss these with your child's IEP team. Identify whether there are additional skills they might need to learn before starting kindergarten. Some of these skills can be learned at home. Your team might be able to provide you with some helpful tips and activities to help develop these skills.

If your child has any fine or gross motor disabilities or communication skills needs, be sure to discuss what assistive technology your child might need in kindergarten and what will be available for them.

Disabilities show up in ways that you might not expect. For younger learners, these disabilities can emerge during play and social interactions, for example. Look at the whole picture – not just academic or school-based skills.

When should I enroll my child in kindergarten?

Children are eligible to register for kindergarten if they will be 5 years old by August 31. But this does not mean that they have to enroll in public school as soon as they turn five. In Washington State, children are not required to enroll in public school until they are 8 years old. You can choose to homeschool, or enroll your child in a private school or a public school. If you home school or send your child to private school, your child may receive special education services



from your local school if they are eligible for specially designed instruction.

Most parents assume that they need to start the enrollment process the summer before their child begins kindergarten, but enrollment for fall typically starts in January in many school districts. For parents who are aware of the early registration

processes, most school districts have opportunities for families to meet other families and learn about school activities, events, after-school programs, schedules, and meals. Often but not always, incoming kindergarten students have a chance to meet their teachers and visit the school.

Key Takeaway

You have choices. The earlier you investigate and prepare for school, the better. But it is never too late to enroll in your local public school. Check your local school district website for information on enrollment. To identify your school district, visit the [Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's website](#).



Should we request a reevaluation?

Times of transition are a good time for reevaluations. Schools must reevaluate students for special education services at least once every three years. They may be reevaluated as often as once a year as needed. The purpose of an evaluation is to examine whether a student's needs have changed – whether a student needs additional or new services in areas that were previously not impacting their learning or whether their skills have progressed to a point where they no longer require specially designed instruction or related and supplemental services in areas they previously did. After a reevaluation, some students no longer require any special education services.

Key Takeaway

Reevaluations can be very useful during times of transition to see how a child's needs are changing, celebrate progress, and identify areas where additional support may be required. A reevaluation is very similar to the initial evaluation. It requires time and effort from you, your child, and school staff to collect data, conduct tests, and fill out surveys. However children develop and change significantly between the ages of 3 and 6, so it might be helpful to consider

whether reevaluation makes sense before your child enrolls in kindergarten or if it would be more helpful to reevaluate after they begin kindergarten.

Resources

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI):

- Early childhood special education resources and assistance for special education staff, administrators, and families of preschool children who receive special education services:
<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/special-education/early-childhood-special-education>
- Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) is a transition process that helps to ensure a successful start to the K-12 experience and connect the key adults in a child's life:
<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/testing/state-testing/washington-kindergarten-inventory-developing-skills-wakids>

The Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) is a state agency that supports families navigating the public K-12 school system. <https://www.oeo.wa.gov/en>

- For a toolkit on requesting a special education evaluation, please see:
https://www.oeo.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/GettingStartedDisabilitySupportsOEO.o eo_2017.04.27.pdf

For more information on preschool programs administered by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), please visit:

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-childcare/eceap-headstart>