

K is for Kindergarten

...How to Help Your Child Be Ready



MINNESOTA PARENT CENTER | MN PIRC

MN Parental Information and Resource Center, a project of PACER

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Kindergarten is a big step in your child's life. It begins education in school! As your child's first teacher, you have been doing a lot to make starting school a positive adventure. This booklet offers ideas on how to help your child prepare for school.

You can learn about the different skills that help children succeed in school. You or a family member can try the activities offered here with your child. In addition to being fun, these skill builders can make a big difference for your child.

Along with easy tips, you'll find specific information on state guidelines. You'll also discover helpful suggestions for choosing a school.

By using the information in this booklet, you can help make sure that your child's first step into kindergarten is a positive one.

LEARNING

This section looks at the three skill areas your child is developing now and will continue to work on in kindergarten: academic, motor, and social or emotional. As you do the suggested activities with your child, take notes on the last two pages of this booklet of his or her learning. Praise your child's successes and encourage effort and progress. Help your child find joy in the journey of learning.



1. ACADEMIC SKILLS



LITERACY

Children entering kindergarten are building reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Schools call these *literacy skills*. Pre-kindergartners work on these skills by using the sounds of language, learning new words, and listening to stories read aloud. They also use drawings, pretend writing, letters, and words to express their thinking.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- **Listen to and understand stories, directions, and conversations.**

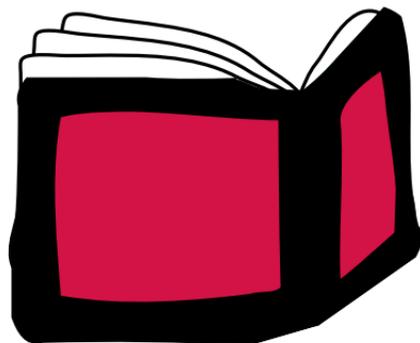
Build the skill: Read to your child every day. Have your child tell you about the story and the pictures. What is a favorite character or part? Why? What does he or she see in the picture? Can your child point out a character in the story?

- **Learn new words.**

Build the skill: Talk about new words and their meanings during everyday activities such as bathing, dressing, going to the store, or visiting family and friends. Talk with your child about what he or she is doing and thinking during these times.

- **Retell stories he or she has heard by talking or drawing about them.**

Build the skill: Have your child “read” or tell you about a favorite picture book.



- **Know different sounds in rhymes and familiar words.**

Build the skill: Play with rhymes and sing songs with your child. Point out words that rhyme, such as play and day, or start with the same sound, such as day and dog.

- **Use scribbles, shapes, and pictures to show ideas.**

Build the skill: Encourage your child's efforts with scribbles, pretend writing, and drawing. Provide writing materials such as paper, pencils, markers, and crayons.

Build the skill: Ask your child to tell you about the pictures or writings he or she creates. Find a special place in your home, such as the refrigerator or a bulletin board, to show them off.

- **Name some letters of the alphabet.**

Build the skill: Point out the letters of your child's name everywhere. Encourage him or her to look for those special letters, too. Begin to show your child how to write or copy his or her name.





MATH

In math, pre-kindergarten children work on counting, grouping, and organizing objects. They also make patterns and know common shapes. Children learn simple measures of length, time, weight, and size.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- **Count in order to 20.**

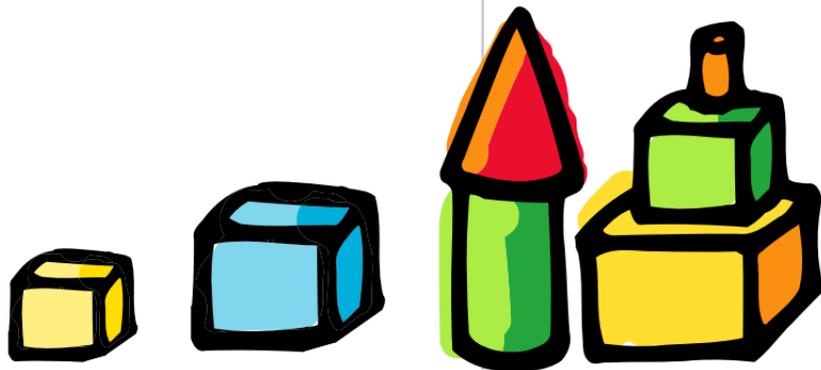
Build the skill: Count things such as cereal, windows, or chairs aloud together. Use words such as how many, more, and fewer. Talk about what these words mean.

- **Organize objects into similar groups.**

Build the skill: Encourage collections of different types of objects: toys, leaves, or rocks. Have your child group by color, shape, or size. Talk about same and different.

- **Find, make, and copy simple patterns.**

Build the skill: Ask your child to make a simple pattern with blocks.



- **Find and name common shapes.**

Build the skill: Find and name shapes such as circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles in your home and the community.



- **Know that objects can be measured by length, time, weight, and size.**

Build the skill:

- Measure your child's height with string. Compare the string with other things around your home. Talk about words such as tall, short, and long and what they mean.

- Have your child put two different sized vegetables on the produce scale in the grocery store. Talk about words such as heavy and light and what they mean.
- Have your child walk from one point to another while you count out loud. Have your child run the same route while you count out loud. Talk about the difference in the time it took to cover the same ground.





SCIENCE

Children entering kindergarten explore the world using the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. They show interest in and ask questions about the natural world. Pre-kindergarteners like to use simple tools to help them explore.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- **Use his or her senses to learn about materials and the environment.**

Build the skill: Take walks in your neighborhood and talk about whatever interests your child. Take time to use one or more sense to add to your child's learning.

Build the skill: Plant a seed in a pot or garden. Talk about what the seed needs in order to grow. Have your child talk about when or how much it will grow.

- **Show interest in and ask questions about the natural world in everyday activities.**

Build the skill: Visit a park, nature center, museum, or zoo. Talk about the things your child notices.

Build the skill: Go to the library and find books on subjects that interest your child, such as animals, insects, or weather. Read them together, and encourage your child to ask questions.

- **Use simple tools such as a magnifying glass, bucket, shovel, and measuring cup.**

Build the skill: Encourage play with water, sand, and clay or playdough.



2. MOTOR SKILLS



FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Schools call children's ability to do jobs with their fingers and hands *fine motor skills*. Children going into kindergarten are still building their fine motor skills.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- **Handle and begin to cut with child-sized scissors.**

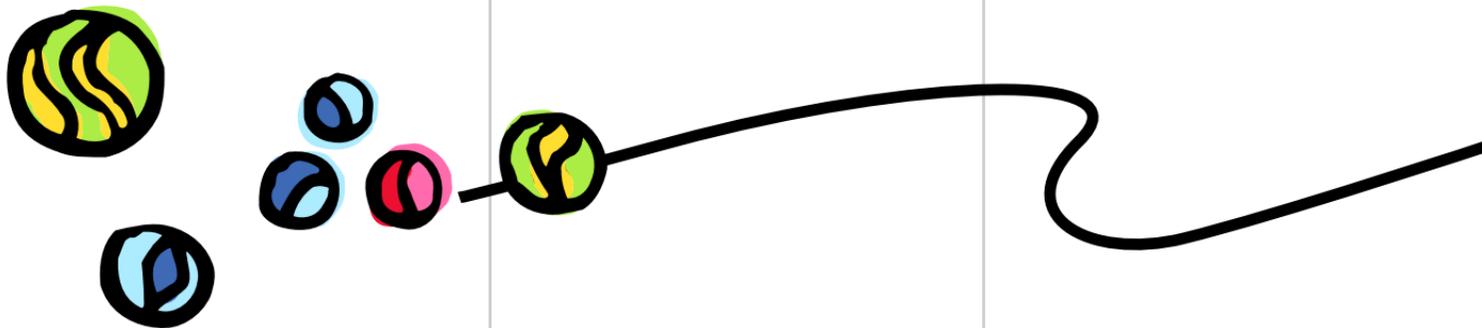
Build the skill: Help your child learn to cut with scissors by providing coupons or pictures from the newspaper to cut out.

- **String large beads and build with blocks.**

Build the skill: Give your child dried noodles, large beads, or big buttons to string. Offer things to stack, such as blocks or small boxes.

- **Use pencils, crayons, or markers.**

Build the skill: Help your child learn to pick up, hold, and use pencils, crayons, markers, and paintbrushes. Let him or her decorate a box for storing these materials.



- **Begin to write some or all the letters in his or her name.**

Build the skill: Write your child's name on a special card. Let him or her use the card to copy the letters.

- **Copy and draw a line, a circle, an X, and a plus sign.**

Build the skill: Take turns being the "leader" who chooses the shape and the "follower" who draws the shape.







LARGE MOTOR SKILLS

Schools call children's ability to make controlled movements with their arms, legs, and bodies *large motor skills*. Children going into kindergarten are working on strengthening their large motor skills.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- **Hop several times on each foot.**

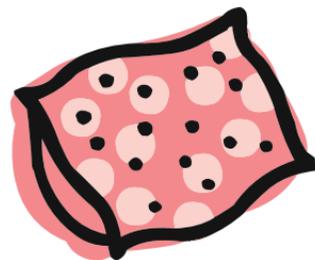
Build the skill: Encourage your child to hop in time to a favorite song.

- **Hop over a low object, such as a line.**

Build the skill: Set up a line inside or outside for your child.

- **Throw a ball in a direction and catch a large ball or soft object.**

Build the skill: Play catch with your child using a large ball, stuffed animal, or small pillow.



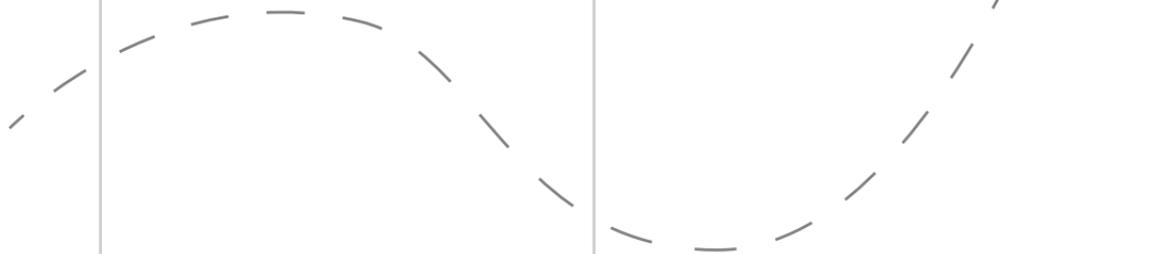
- **Bounce a ball several times and kick a ball that isn't moving.**

Build the skill: Pass a ball back and forth between you and your child by bouncing or kicking it.



More to Try:

- Encourage your child to run, jump, climb, skip, and move to music.
- Give your child time each day to play safely outdoors.
- Give your child time to use large muscles daily, either indoors or out.
- Join your child in active play.





MOTOR SKILLS - LARGE

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS



SOCIAL SKILLS

Schools call the way children interact with others *social skills*.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- Say his or her first and last name, phone number, and address.

Build the skill: Help your child practice saying his or her name, address, and phone number in English and whatever language you speak at home.

- Use the bathroom, wash his or her hands, and get dressed alone.

Build the skill: Help your child practice going to the bathroom and washing his or her hands.

Build the skill: Help your child practice getting dressed, buttoning and zipping, and tying shoes.

- Know basic safety rules, such as watching for cars, crossing the street, and not talking to strangers.

Build the skill: Teach your child these basic safety rules. Practice them while on a walk.



- **Interact easily with one or more children.**

Build the skill: Help your child learn how to share with others, stand in line, and wait for his or her turn. Let your child practice in places where there are other children, such as at a playground.

- **Interact easily with familiar adults.**

Build the skill: Encourage your child to tell a special adult about something he or she is excited about, such as a new book.







EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Schools call the way children show their needs and share their ideas and feelings *emotional skills*.

A child entering kindergarten typically can:

- **Show confidence in the things he or she is learning to do.**

Build the skill: Pay attention to your child and to his or her ideas. Notice the things your child can do.

Build the skill: Watch for things in which your child shows interest. Suggest activities that include those interests.

Build the skill: Be patient and let your child develop at his or her own pace.

- **Follow rules.**

Build the skill: Play simple board or card games with your child.

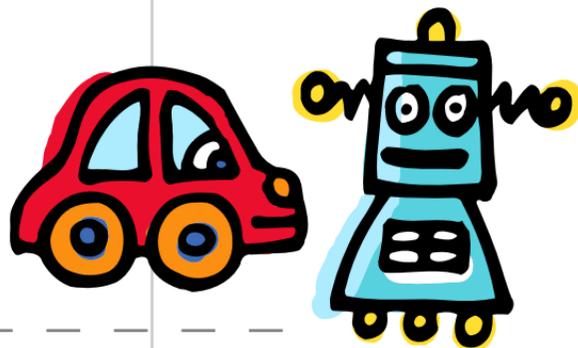
- **Begin to handle his or her emotions appropriately.**

Build the skill: Teach your child it's okay to have feelings, but not all actions are okay. For example, it's okay to feel angry, but it's not okay to hit someone in anger.



- **Tell if he or she is a boy or a girl and say his or her age.**

Build the skill: Create an “All about Me” book with your child. Have your child give personal information such as name, age, family members, likes, and dislikes.





SEEK OTHER PERSPECTIVES

You know your child best, so trust your observations about your child's learning.

If you have questions about your child, speak with other people who know your child well. Their opinions and observations may tell you more about your child's kindergarten readiness.

Speaking with your child's preschool teacher is a good place to start. Early childhood

teachers know about child development—including your child's. The teacher watches what your child does in new situations and knows how he or she learns new skills. The teacher can also give you an idea of which pre-kindergarten skills your child has mastered and which need strengthening.

Your child-care provider may be another helpful resource. He or she can tell you about things

such as your child's behavior, how your child shares with other children, and how your child handles being away from you.

If your child doesn't go to preschool or child care and you'd like information from other adults, **talk to family members and friends or to your child's health-care provider.** Family members or friends may have helpful observations about your child.

Doctors and nurse practitioners are a good source for information about your child's development, too.

Finally, you can **visit the kindergarten your child will attend**. Look at things such as the students' behavior, how they play, and the things they're doing. Can you see your child behaving and playing the same way? Is your child able to do most of the same things? This added information may give you a clearer picture of your child's kindergarten readiness.



LEARN ABOUT MINNESOTA'S REQUIREMENTS

Early Childhood Screening

An early childhood screening checks children's physical development and their ability to learn. Every Minnesota school district must offer a free screening for its children. Ideally, it should take place when children are between 3 and 4 years old. The screening is necessary for your child to go to kindergarten. Many children

receive the same screening though private or public health care or from their doctor. This screening can be used instead of the school district's screening.

If your child shows delays on the screening, he or she may be referred for an early childhood special education evaluation. It requires your permission. The evaluation

looks further at possible delays. Your school district will offer free early childhood special education services to help your child if this evaluation shows that your child qualifies.

Concerns

Many parents wonder if their young children are developing, growing, and learning typically. If your wondering has turned to worrying, talk with your child's health-care provider and have your child screened. Your child may qualify for early childhood special education services and supports.

Call your local school district office and ask to speak to the person in charge of early childhood special education. You may need to ask for an interpreter. Explain that you have concerns about your child. Ask how to find out if your child is eligible for early childhood services. You can also call PACER Center at 952-838-9000 or 800-537-2237 (toll free) to speak with a parent advocate about your concerns or to ask questions.

Age

Under Minnesota law, all children who are age 5 by Sept. 1 are eligible for kindergarten. The mandatory school attendance age is 7.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations are also called shots or immunizations.

All children need to have certain vaccinations before beginning school. Your health-care provider may suggest additional vaccinations for your child. Minnesota requires children entering kindergarten to have these vaccinations:

- Hep B / Hepatitis B:
3 doses by 4 years
- DTaP / Diphtheria,
Tetanus, Pertussis: 3 doses
by 18 months; 4th dose by
6 years

- Polio: 3 doses by 18 months;
4th dose by 6 years
- MMR / Measles, Mumps,
Rubella: 1 dose on or after
1st birthday; 2nd dose by 6
years
- Varicella / Chickenpox:
2 doses by 6 years if child
has not had chickenpox

You are responsible for keeping track of your child's important records, such as screenings, evaluations, and vaccinations. The school does not keep this information but may need it from you.

Some parents don't have their children vaccinated or screened because doing so conflicts with their beliefs. If this is true for you, call your school district for more information.



LEARN ABOUT MINNESOTA'S REQUIREMENTS -
VACCINATIONS

CHOOSE A SCHOOL

Public School Choices

Minnesota has many choices for public education. The state offers the open enrollment program, as well as magnet and charter schools. You may choose one of these options for your child, including your neighborhood public school.

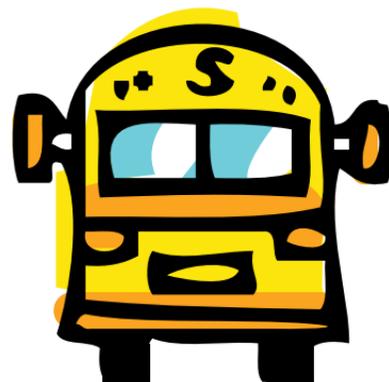
Open enrollment means children can apply to attend a public school within or outside their own school district. All Minnesota students may use this program. Schools will accept students until their classes are filled. Open enrollment lets students access classes and programs that are different from those at their

neighborhood schools. There is no cost to participate in open enrollment. Families that participate in open enrollment must transport their children themselves. For most Minnesota districts, you must apply by Jan. 15 to take part in open enrollment for the new school year in the fall.

A magnet school is a public school that offers a special focus or theme. For example, a school may focus on science, fine arts, language immersion, or the Montessori method. Montessori schools take a child-centered, hands-on approach to learning. Magnet schools accept students living outside district boundaries. Students apply to a school based on their interests, and some schools may have admission requirements.

A charter school is an independent public school that is not part of a traditional school district. Charter schools employ licensed teachers, offer services to students with special needs, and require students to take state and national tests to assure academic accountability. They do not charge tuition or have admission requirements. You may contact charter schools directly to find out about their programs and enrollment processes.

Families with computer access may want to consider finding more information about specific schools. Go to <http://app.education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/index.do> in order to learn about the academic performance of a school or district.



Questions to Consider

Choosing the right school is a way to give your child an education that best fits his or her needs.

Use the answers to the following questions as well as your own knowledge about your child to help you make the best school decision for your child.

- **What kind of environment does your child need?**
 - Special or adapted class and course work?
 - An atmosphere that fosters creative or challenging work?
 - A more- or less-structured environment?
 - Full- or half-day kindergarten?
- **How does your child learn best?**
 - Listening to a teacher or having hands-on experiences?
 - Seeing how things work or being told about them?
 - Working alone or in groups?

- **Where does the school need to be?**

- Close to home or your place of work?
- On a public transportation route?

- **What academic features do you want?**

- Is the program preparing students for math, reading, writing, and science in the primary grades?
- Are students read to every day?
- Is there time for creative learning and physical play?

- **What does the school feel like when you visit?**

- Does the school appear to be friendly and welcoming?
- Is students' work on display?

- **How do the school and staff encourage children to be courteous, happy, and disciplined?**

- Do the school and staff have a good reputation with other parents? Other schools? The community?
- Do the school's policies support its culture?

- **Do you have the feeling parent involvement is supported? Ask the principal or teacher to talk about things such as:**

- Is staff available to talk to parents, and in what ways does the school communicate with families?
- How is volunteering encouraged?
- How are parents supported with learning-at-home activities?
- What kinds of parent events are held at school?
- Is there a strong and active parent-teacher organization?
- How do parents participate in developing the school's policies and plans?

Congratulations on all you have done to reach this point with your child. Your involvement—and taking the time to learn about the things covered here—will help make your child's first school experience a positive one.

Children take pride when their parents are involved. They also perform better in school when parents and schools work together to help them succeed. By staying involved with your

child's learning, you will help your child gain the best education possible in kindergarten and beyond!



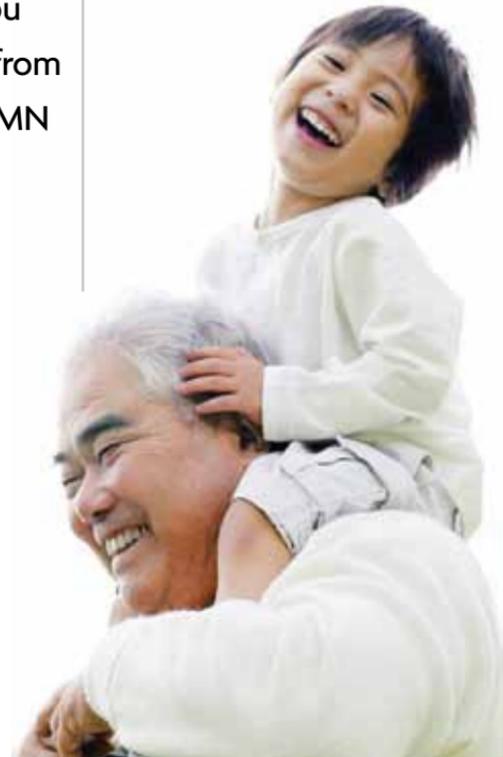
CALL MINNESOTA PARENT CENTER

If you still have questions about making sure your child is ready for kindergarten, or would like more ideas on how to be involved,

call **Minnesota Parent Center, MN PIRC**, a project of PACER Center:
952-838-9000
or **800-537-2237 (toll free)**.

You can ask to speak with a parent involvement specialist.

The specialist will listen to your concerns and help you explore options. Services from Minnesota Parent Center, MN PIRC are free.



NOTES

WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA PARENT CENTER?

The Minnesota Parent Center is a unique statewide project that helps families and schools build stronger ties to benefit students. It provides free training, individual assistance, and information to families and schools.

The center's multicultural staff can answer questions about learning and school-related issues, as well as provide resources and workshops on topics such as the No Child Left Behind Act, parent involvement, and more.

Minnesota Parent Center is your place for parent involvement information, training, and support!

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