



## Effective Planning for All Children

Some school boards provide a process for their schools to follow. Even so, much of the planning for school entry takes place at the school level. Listed below are strategies identified by school principals that can assist children to have a smooth entry to school – usually at Junior Kindergarten. The list is not exhaustive, nor are all of the strategies used in all schools.

1. **Arranging for early registration – nine to twelve months before the start of school in September.** Early registration allows the principal to meet the parents and child and to determine if there are special needs or issues (e.g., health) that need to be addressed. It also allows parents to develop a positive rapport with the school, discuss any concerns or apprehensions they may have, and inform the school about the needs of their child. The Notice for Registration explains what documentation the parents will be required to provide to the school (e.g., birth registration or birth certificate for proof of age; immunization records).



Appendix A.1, “Let’s Learn: Kindergarten Registration”, is a sample parent information brochure developed by the Bluewater District School Board, the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board, and community agencies. It outlines the various steps for parents, beginning one year before entry to school.

Appendix A.2, “All About Me”, is an introduction package, developed by the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board, for parents to complete with their child before the child’s entry to Kindergarten.





2. **Holding a parent information meeting in early spring.** The parent information meeting is a good opportunity for the school staff to walk parents through a typical day, explain school programs, and help parents to understand what skills and knowledge their child will need to make the entry successful. In some circumstances, the meeting is also an opportunity to make parents aware of various non-school services (e.g., child-care services, community supports, Public Health services, parenting courses available in the community). In addition, it may be an appropriate time to explain school procedures and policies (e.g., procedures related to inclement weather, safe arrival, transportation, snacks, recess; policies on parent volunteers, assessment, report cards, parent-teacher interviews). There is a risk that parents may feel overwhelmed by information, so meetings should be carefully designed to build their confidence.

Appendix A.3 lists the topics covered at a spring information meeting for parents of incoming Kindergarten children at Holy Family Separate School in Alliston.

In school communities where several languages are spoken and diverse cultures are represented, Kindergarten information is made available in different languages. For example, the document “Getting Ready for Kindergarten” (Appendix A.4) is available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu, and Vietnamese. This document is available from the Toronto District School Board, and is posted on the board’s website. The Toronto District School Board also posts a series of “Frequently Asked Questions” for parents. For both items, go to <http://www.tdsb.on.ca> and click on the “Parents” tab, then select “Kindergarten”.



3. **Scheduling school and classroom visits for the parents and child before the start of school in September.** This may be done in a number of ways:

- The child and parent visit during a regular day in the spring to see the class in action.
- The child and parent have an appointment at the end of summer or in early September to meet with the teacher in the classroom before the start of school.
- The school arranges for staggered entry to school. Children come in small groups and build up to the full class numbers.



Appendix A.5 describes the philosophy and practices of the Thames Valley Neighbourhood Early Learning Program, developed to give three-year-olds and their parents opportunities to make four visits to their neighbourhood school before they enter Junior Kindergarten.

4. **Personalizing correspondence sent to parents about the September entry.** Printed information about the school (e.g., schedule for alternate-day attendance, staggered-entry schedule, what to bring on the first day, information about snacks) can be addressed *to the child* in care of the parents and presented in a personalized, informal manner. It is recommended that all interaction from the school be personalized and designed to develop a cooperative relationship between the school and the parents. Often, parents are apprehensive about their child, especially a first child, starting school. By using a friendly, reassuring format to present information, schools can set the stage for a positive relationship with both the parents and the child.



Appendix A.6 is a sample of a personalized note sent to a four-year-old child two weeks before entry to Junior Kindergarten at St. Matthew School in Waterloo. The child's family also received a booklet, *Entering Elementary School: An Information Guide for Parents and Students*, which can be viewed at and/or downloaded from <http://www.wcdsb.edu.on.ca/schools/entering-elem/wel.html>.





**5. Developing strategies to address the language and cultural needs of the community.** These could include:

- school information and registration forms translated into the languages of the community (see Appendix A.3);
- interpreters to talk with parents.

As well, principals could identify staff who are proficient in the first languages of the community. Principals should also take steps to ensure staff awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences.

**6. Arranging with the transportation department for a school bus orientation session for children and their parents.** This could include instruction in getting on and off the bus safely and crossing the road with the safety patroller, as well as a short ride.

**7. Preparing and distributing a welcome package to all new students on their first school day in September.** The package could include items for home use, such as a welcome letter signed by the director of education, books for the parent to read to the child, scissors, glue, construction paper, and a scrapbook.

Appendix A.7 is a sample letter signed by the Director of Education for the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. The director's letter accompanies a "Welcome to School" tote bag that is given to each child entering Kindergarten. The letter lists the items contained in the tote bag. The Learning Partnership has begun a Welcome to Kindergarten initiative that also involves providing families with a "Kindergarten Welcome Bag". The Welcome Bag contains early learning resources that help parents prepare their children for school and learning. For details, go to <http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca/>, and click on "Programs".

