



Introduction



Entry to school represents a major threshold in a child's life. It marks an important transition into the formal education system at a critical age in early child development. Whether the child has remained at home until starting school or has participated in preschool programs, planning for entry to school can support his or her long-term success. It can have a positive influence on a child's lifelong attitude towards school and on the child's development of literacy and numeracy skills.

This resource guide represents an effort to identify and build on existing effective practices and to translate evidence-based research into practical ideas and processes. This information will help school boards to work with parents and community partners as they plan students' entry to school.

The guide is designed to facilitate the planning process for children entering school in September; however, many of the suggestions could be modified to assist with the entry process at any time during the school year.

"A person has the right, without payment of fee, to attend a school in a school section, separate school zone or secondary school district, as the case may be, in which the person is qualified to be a resident pupil." [Education Act S32 (1)]

All Ontario children have a right to an English-language education. Parents with rights under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are also guaranteed the right to a French-language education for their children.

Why Develop a Resource Guide for Planning Entry to School?

When children arrive at school, they come with different backgrounds and experiences and at different stages of development. Young children begin to develop their skills, knowledge, and attitudes in a variety of environments – in their homes, in child care, and in community settings. Children bring different cultural experiences, first languages, and family customs to the school setting. Some children may be recent immigrants with little or no knowledge of the English language. Others may be entering French-language schools with a limited ability to speak French. In some cases, parents' own memories of school may cause apprehension about sending their child to school.

Studies show that familiarity with the expectations of the school setting helps children adjust more easily to school and reduces anxiety about starting school for both parents and children. Entry-to-school planning that includes parents in the process ensures such familiarity by building bridges between the home and the education system.



For children with special needs, entry to school is more complex and requires careful planning and coordination. An entry-to-school plan should provide adequate time for children and parents to learn and practise the skills and routines that will facilitate a smooth move from preschool to school.

The goal of planning for entry to school is to help children adjust quickly to the school setting, enjoy learning, and develop a positive attitude towards education. A good start to school improves a child's chances of success from school entry to graduation.

Who Is the Intended Audience of This Resource Guide?

This resource guide is intended as a resource for school boards to use with their professional staff, parents,* and community partners. It will enable boards to:

- explore different ways to facilitate successful entry to school for all children, including children with special needs; and
- enhance their own entry-to-school process.

The planning of entry to school may involve many partners. The school should work closely with parents to arrange for a smooth beginning to the school year for their child. Parents will require a great deal of information from the school about how to acquaint their child with school routines and build the skills that will permit a smooth entry. Parents may also be receiving support from other com-

“Starting school is not just an experience for the individual child – it is a significant ‘family milestone’ for parents and other family members, as well as children. School entry has a major impact on family routines and relationships.” (Rosenkoetter and Rosenkoetter, 1993, p. 13)

The general rule under the Education Act is that *all children* must attend school from the age of six. [See S21(1)a and b.] (Certain exceptions to the rule are specified in the act.)

The Education Act also indicates that any child who is “otherwise qualified” (see S33 of the act) may become a resident pupil of a school at the age of four, to attend Junior Kindergarten (where offered), or at the age of five, to attend Kindergarten. [See S34(1) and (2).]

These requirements and rights apply to all children, including children with special education needs.



munity resources – including preschool service providers, health care providers, social services, or community organizations – that may play a significant role in the entry process. At the school level, planning may involve a school board's consultant or coordinator, the school principal, teachers, and other education professionals.

* Throughout this guide, the word *parents* is used to refer to both parent(s) and guardian(s).





Under Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11, the Consortium régional de l'Est de l'Ontario has developed an early-screening tool that includes a teacher's guide; forms for interviews and data collection; formal and informal case studies; forms for creating class profiles and individual student profiles (for students with special needs); and transition forms that accompany students from one grade to the next, from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3.

How the Resource Guide Was Developed

This guide was developed from research into entry-to-school planning in Ontario and a variety of other jurisdictions. This research involved:

1. **a review of current research and literature.** A wide range of current, evidence-based literature on entry-to-school practices in Ontario, other provinces, the United States, Europe, and Australia was examined. Key points from this research are summarized in Appendix C;
2. **a review of existing practices in Ontario school boards.** Ontario school boards have considerable experience in planning and implementing effective entry-to-school processes for all children, including children with special needs. This resource guide draws and builds upon that expertise.

How to Use the Resource Guide

This resource guide is intended to assist school boards as they review the processes that they may already have in place to plan for the entry of children to the school setting. Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11: Early Identification of Children's Learning Needs requires school boards to develop procedures for the early identification of learning needs for students already attending school. The resource guide will complement these procedures, as well as those emerging from the Best Start initiative of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS).

The appendices provide a range of information that school boards may find helpful in developing their entry-to-school plans. Appendix A provides quick and easy access to a number of effective school board practices, protocols, links, ideas, and templates for many of the key elements in the planning process. Appendix B outlines the current environment in Ontario as it relates to children entering school, and Appendix C summarizes key research findings from the interjurisdictional literature review. This research provides the rationale and context for the guidelines and best practices presented in the guide.

Finally, the guide also includes a short reference list of selected books, articles, and websites to assist those interested in conducting further research into particular aspects of entry-to-school planning and implementation.

