



Parents of Preschoolers: The Year Before Kindergarten

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Parents of preschoolers – your first “back to school” journey has already started! In the months before your child enters kindergarten, you can begin taking important steps toward enrolling your child in school. These steps will help you choose a school and make sure your child is healthy and ready to learn.

When can my child start kindergarten? When your child turns five, s/he will be eligible for kindergarten. Starting in 2012, a child must turn five by November 1st to be eligible for kindergarten. Until then, your child can benefit from chances to play with other children the same age or by going to preschool. Preschool helps children learn letters and numbers, interact and make friends with other children, and learn to follow school rules. Children who go to preschool are better prepared for kindergarten.

Where can my child go to kindergarten? Families are probably familiar with their neighborhood public schools, but it is also possible to choose a school for your child. There are private schools, charter schools, and, in many communities, you can look at public schools outside your immediate neighborhood.

Visiting schools will help you choose – and schools welcome visits from parents of future students. Tour the kindergarten class; talk with teachers and other staff including the school secretary as well as other parents. Consider what you see and hear. Does it seem a good match for your child’s temperament and behaviors? Will your child do well in this setting? Looking at the options will help you choose a school that best fits the needs of your child and family.

How do I register my child for kindergarten? Call the school you have chosen to start the registration process. Most schools are prepared to register students in early spring. If you’ve ever checked your child into a large group activity, or filled out forms at a new doctor’s office, you have an idea of what school registration paperwork will be like. You can expect a minimum of two pages of information. Neighborhood schools might want “proof of residence,” such as a utility bill, so be ready to submit a copy with your kindergarten registration.

What are school health requirements? Like families, schools want children to be healthy. Issues that affect a child’s ability to hear, see, eat, or speak can impact a child’s ability to learn. Taking your child to the doctor for an exam and vaccinations is a good way to identify and address any potential health issues. California law requires children be immunized against preventable diseases before entering kindergarten, unless an exemption applies. This helps reduce the chance that disease will spread.

State law also requires children to have a health exam. Get a health certificate from the school. Your doctor will complete the certificate at your child’s health exam. It must be turned in shortly after your

California’s Kindergarten Readiness Act

Eligibility changes from age 5 by December 2 to:

- age 5 by Nov. 1, 2012
- age 5 by Oct. 1, 2013
- age 5 by Sept. 1, 2014

Transitional Kindergarten

offers new option for some children not 5 by the eligibility date. Ask your school for more information.

child starts first grade. However, the exam can be performed up to eighteen months ahead. Why not take care of the required health exam as part of your kindergarten preparation?

You'll also want to plan a visit to the dentist because California state law requires children have an oral health assessment before May 31st of their first year in school. Untreated tooth decay is the number one chronic disease among children and one of the leading causes of missed days of school. Like the health requirement, an oral health assessment can be completed in advance and the school can provide you with a form for the dentist.

What else can I do to get ready for kindergarten?

- Read! Experts recommend reading with your child at least twenty minutes each day.
- Visit! Tour the school with your child, meet the kindergarten teacher, and spend time in the classroom. Many schools have "Kindergarten Round-Up," a good day for a visit.
- Talk! Find out how your child feels about going to kindergarten and the new school.
- Rest! Your child's brain learns best on ten to eleven hours of sleep each night. In the weeks before kindergarten starts, gradually switch your child to a school bedtime schedule. If school starts at 8:00 a.m., try an 8:00 p.m. bedtime.
- Get supplies! Common kindergarten supplies your child can use are a small backpack (big enough for a folder), a lunchbox, and thermos.

Parents of preschool age children, enjoy these months getting ready for kindergarten with your child. You can get a free "[Countdown to Kindergarten](#)" guide with more tips on enrolling and preparing your child for kindergarten. Use the link to download a copy or call (530) 229-8300. Make the final months before kindergarten an exciting back to school journey for your child and your family.

First 5 Shasta, the Shasta Children and Families First Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs promoting early childhood development for expectant parents and children up to age five. To date, First 5 Shasta has invested over \$15 million in local programs and activities that benefit young children and families.