

PARENT TIPS FOR SCHOOL ENTRY & BEYOND



A RESOURCE BOOKLET FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS
IN WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY WHO HAVE CHILDREN WITH
SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL

DEVELOPED BY



**WINDSOR-ESSEX
FAMILY NETWORK**
Families Helping Families

**Enhancing Family
Support for Education**



FOREWARD



As parents, we know what an exciting time school planning can be. We also know it can be a confusing and anxious time, particularly when your child has special education needs. Good news! There are things you can do to help with the transition.

This booklet was created by parents who have gone through the transition to school process and who wished they had a resource like this to assist them on their journey. Inside this booklet you will find information about locating your neighbourhood school, suggestions for introducing your child to the school, and how to prepare for meetings.

Your child's first day of school is a very big step. We are honoured to be a part of your family's transition to school and we hope that you will find the information in this booklet helpful.

Families from
Windsor-Essex Family Network

"Teachers, early childhood educators, members of the community, and families must work together to provide constructive and consistent learning experiences that will build students' confidence, encourage them to continue to see learning as both enjoyable and useful, and provide a strong foundation for their future intellectual, physical, and social development."

~ Ontario Ministry of Education

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GETTING STARTED

Your child must be at least 4 years of age during the registering year to attend school.

They are not legally required to attend school until age six. You can choose whether or not to send your child to Full Day Kindergarten (FDK). But this is the decision for the FAMILY/GUARDIAN to make, not the school. It is a voluntary program that you get to decide whether your child attends. It is not voluntary on the part of the school. The hope is that your child's team will have a positive but clear discussion and you will make the choice for your family based on the discussion and what you know of your child

Note: FDK was formerly known as Junior Kindergarten (JK) or Senior Kindergarten (SK).

It is important to know that under the Education Act your child, regardless of his/her strengths and needs, can register and attend his/her neighbourhood school once they have met the age criteria (age four by December 31 the year they start). Their age and home address are the only requirements to attend school. If someone suggests your child needs to meet other self-help, social or communication goals before starting school you can remind them that all children have the right to attend school.

Finding your Neighbourhood School ... Time to do your homework

Find out what school your child will be attending by doing any of the following:

- Go to the website called BusKids www.buskids.ca – originally set up to share information about busing for students it is a great resource to find out what area school your child will attend. Scroll down to the "School Finder" tab.
- Call your local school board administrative office
- Connect with other parents in your neighbourhood
- Use the internet and the links provided

Greater Essex County District School Board

Administrative Offices (switchboard): (519) 255-3200
www.publicboard.ca

Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

Administrative Offices: (519) 253-2481
wecdsb.on.ca

Conseil Scolaire Viamonde

Téléphone: (519) 259-4860
csviamonde.ca

Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence

Téléphone: (519) 948-9227
www.cscprovidence.ca



REGISTERING FOR SCHOOL

- Registration for Kindergarten is usually held in January or February prior to the September when your child would be entering school. It will be posted on the board website and social media in advance.
- Each board may have a different process for registration. Check the board website or contact the school directly for information.
- Are you unsure which school or school board you will send your child? Attend the school's open house which will also be on their website and social media. You can get a feel for whether you think the school will be a good fit for your child.
- If you and/or the community partner working with your family believe your child may require any special education supports in school they will ask you in January or February to sign a consent form which allows for information about your child to be forwarded to the school board as part of transition planning. This information would include your child's name, birth date, diagnosis if known, and your child's needs.
- Some families struggle to decide in February whether they will send their child to school in September. Families writing this booklet want to encourage you to register early and take part in the transition process even if you are unsure. This way the school has time to prepare for your child. You can always change your mind before September and delay entry to the following year. Late registrations make it difficult for schools to effectively plan for your child. **Register early!**
- If your child attends childcare or you bring them to an Early On Centre, the school may ask to do an observation of your child and/or speak to childcare/Early On staff. This allows them to see for themselves how your child is in a classroom environment.
- The principal and/or special education coordinator may ask for a meeting about your child with those who know your child well (e.g., child care providers, and therapists, etc.) This meeting is a way to share information yourself, to help the school prepare for your child's entry into school. Be sure to go in with a clear vision for your child. This meeting is usually held at the school. If you don't hear from anyone about a meeting by May the year your child will begin school – you can request one yourself by calling the school or asking your partner agency (e.g., Talk 2 Me; Children First; JMCC; Family Respite).
- At the meeting will be people from the school board like a speech therapist, teacher, principal, or 'learning support services' teacher.
- If School Based Rehabilitation Services (therapy services) are required, a representative from the John McGivney Children's Centre will attend. If nursing services are required, there would be a representative from Ontario Health at Home.
- If your child receives services from a local children's service provider you can ask the service provider to attend and support you at school planning meetings.

It is not necessary to share everything that has happened with your child since birth. As parents, we often forget this. In fact, you are not required to submit any reports or assessments that you feel would not support your child's learning.

(See Ministry of Education, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11 for more information.)

PARENT TIPS

Have you thought about what words you use to describe your child to people at the school? A good way to look at this is to think about how you would want to be introduced when starting a new job. You would want to highlight the positives – the things you can do and all your strengths.

This is a good way for you to think about introducing your child, by their abilities strengths and gifts.

PREPARING FOR A SCHOOL MEETING



- Ask someone who is a support to you to come to the meeting with you. This could be a friend, family member, neighbour and/or a current service provider. Be sure to let the school know that you are bringing someone. Ask the person to take notes for you at the meeting.
- Bring a picture of your child to place on the table during the meeting, as it can help to personalize the meeting and keep everyone focused on your child. We suggest 5x7 or larger so everyone can see it.
- Consider making a One Page Profile about your child (see pg. 14 of this booklet)
- Think about and plan what is the most important information to share at the meeting. For example: allergies; medications; ways your child communicates; strategies being used at home and/or preschool.
- List your child's needs. If your son or daughter attended childcare the Supervisor or ECE could provide a lot of information about what he/she may need in a classroom environment.
- Before you leave the meeting, make sure you understand the plan for September – which day will your child start, are they attending a full day, are they going on the bus – if so which one? Or sometimes the school may want to have another meeting before school starts before setting a date for them to attend. If a Transition Plan was typed by the Special Education Coordinator at the meeting be sure to ask for a copy.
- Many families make it a practice not to sign documents at the school meetings and instead take them home first to look them over and/or discuss with the other parent, partner, family member, support person. A lot of talking and emotions can happen at meetings. Getting into the practice of taking time to reflect before agreeing to anything by signing documents has worked very well for other families.



Parent tip: Remember you know your child best -
you are the expert about your child.

Transition to School: Activity Timeline

December & January	• Early discussions between child's family, child care staff, and support agencies to collect information to prepare for school transition (set goals, speak about the process, etc.). • Identify who the lead contact is for the transition process.
January & February	• Meeting with the family, child care, and supporting agencies to discuss school placement, child's needs, relevant information and coordination. • School boards will hold parent information nights for families. • Community agencies will submit a general list of children planning to attend each School Board (name, date of birth, diagnosis, and/or needs). • Necessary consents will be gathered. • Parents register their children at school and provide relevant information to principal, special education coordinator, etc.
March	• Reports are forwarded to the relevant School Board. • Referrals are made to JMCC (SBRS) or Ontario Health at Home as appropriate.
March - June	• School Board personnel visit/observe the child at child care or in home. • School based meeting is arranged to discuss strengths and needs of the child and a transition plan is prepared with recommended specialized services/required resources identified.
May - September	• JMCC and Ontario Health at Home will complete eligibility assessments for children referred for school-based rehabilitation services or school health support services.
June - September	• Children will receive transportation orientation through the 'First Ride' program. • Any additional and/or final reports are submitted to the school.
September	• Children beginning elementary school will receive short-term transition services from agencies that have been providing support.m Hand-off) • Supporting agencies may arrange a discharge meeting for families when required.

POINTS TO PONDER



In the last few years, more families and parent leaders have shared with us that at some point in the transition process school board personnel have suggested their child have a delayed start and/or a modified day. It is important to know what the Education Act and Human Rights Commission has to say about your child's rights to attend school. Links are included at the back of this booklet.



If you feel that your child would benefit from a shorter day at Kindergarten that is up to you. A modified day is always up to the parent. It should not be done because of lack of resources at the school. This is why you are engaging in the transition process early, so the school can be ready for your child. If a modified day is being suggested by the school, other parents would urge you to find out how long this would continue and how it could be changed (e.g. could you as the parent decide when your child will attend longer and for how long each day?)



Every child has rights under Ontario's Human Rights Code. The Code protects people against discrimination because of their disability. It states that school boards must properly accommodate students with disabilities. Accommodation means that schools must work to remove barriers and ensure that students with disabilities can access their education (Advocacy Toolkit, ARCH Disability law, July 2022)



Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. It all depends on your child's unique strengths and needs and the vision you have for your child. If you know at the meeting that you do not agree with a modified (shortened) day – say so and ask that the transition meeting notes clearly state that parent/guardian is not in agreement with a modified day. If you are unsure, let them know you need time to think about it and that you will get back to them and then be sure to agree to a date that you will give them your decision. Make sure your decision is recorded somewhere (meeting notes, phone call log, email.)

MAKE SURE YOU KNOW THE PLAN BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE TRANSITION MEETING

What day does your child start? Ask for this in writing on the transition plan.

Are they attending all day?

- if they are not - are you in agreement? If not, state it at the meeting and then follow up by giving the school a letter/email
- If they are not attending full day and you are ok with it - is it written into the transition plan how long the modified days will last? (e.g. one week, one month)
- Also, if they are on a modified day - how can that be changed? Can you, the parent/guardian, decide to start sending your child longer or even full day when you want to? Ask for this decision to be put in writing. If the school says they will decide - how do they decide and how often will your child's attendance plan be reviewed?

Safety/Self Help

- if your child requires a change table - does the school have one and if not when will it be installed?
- Does the classroom need certain safety features - when will those be installed?

School Visit

would your child benefit from a quick visit to the school at the end of summer? Who can you arrange this with and when in August should you contact them?

People Who May Be at Your Transition Meeting



Principal &/or Vice Principal



Special Education Coordinator



Learning Support Services Teacher



Classroom Teacher (if known)



Other School Staff as Appropriate



You & person you invite



Staff of Agencies that work with your family



Staff of JMCC if your child is referred for School Health Services

COMMUNICATION WITH THE SCHOOL

Parent Tip:

It is often helpful to keep a record of every conversation, in person or by phone, that you have about your child. include:

When (date/time)
Who (name & position of who you spoke to)
What (what was talked about)
Resolution (what was decided)

Written records make a great reference for later.

It is very important to know who to contact at the school when you have something to share about your child or a concern to discuss. When first registering your child, most of your communication with the school will be with the secretary and/or the principal. The school might then designate someone else to be your contact at the school, possibly the Learning Support Teacher (also known as Learning Support Services Teacher). During your initial conversation with the school, be sure to ask who you should call the next time you have something to discuss/share about your child. Each school board has a Communication Protocol. Ask the school for a copy or look at the board website.

We have included a generic one here but your board might have a more specific one.

STEPS TO THE PARENT CONCERN PROTOCOL

1

CLASSROOM TEACHER

CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS SHOULD FIRST BE ADDRESSED TO YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

UNLESS

IT IS ABOUT SOMETHING RELATED TO THE SCHOOL AS A WHOLE

2

TALK TO THE PRINCIPAL

TAKE THIS STEP IF STEP 1 DOES NOT RESOLVE THE ISSUE OR IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS REGARDING THE SCHOOL AS A WHOLE

3

TALK TO SUPERINTENDENT

TAKE THIS STEP IF AFTER TALKING TO THE PRINCIPAL YOUR CONCERNS ARE NOT RESOLVED OR IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS/ COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE SCHOOL BOARD IN GENERAL.

THERE IS A SUPERINTENDENT OF YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL & A SUPERINTENDENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

4

TALK TO THE TRUSTEE

IF AFTER STEP 3, THE ISSUE IS UNRESOLVED, SPEAK TO YOUR BOARD TRUSTEE

5

IF YOU HAVE NOT RESOLVED THE CONCERNS BY GOING THROUGH STEPS 1 TO 4, EXPLORE OPTIONS WITH WEFN 519-974-1008 info@windsoressexfamnet.ca

COMMUNICATION CONTINUED

AN IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW ABOUT SUPPORT IN THE SCHOOL

Rather than asking for your child to have a 1:1 Educational Assistant (EA) - instead focus on what your child needs to succeed.

Educational assistants are for the classroom and the overall school. Focus your attention on having behaviour plans and safety plans in the younger years that you can follow up with the school about. Does your child need frequent sensory breaks? have that written into the plan and leave the school to sort out HOW to make it happen. Focus on WHAT your child needs NOT WHO is going to fill the need

PARENT TIP

Always follow up conversations (in person, phone and meetings) with an email to the teacher/principal/spec ed summarizing what was talked about.



**If it's not in writing,
it did not happen**



SOME EXAMPLE STATS ON EA SUPPORTS

According to a local school board, in 2023, they had across -the-board:

441 full-time equivalent educational assistant positions

35,684 – Total Students

17.4% of kids in a school have Special Education Needs
(according to 2022-2023 Ministry Stats **)

with 4,660 JK Kids entering school in 2023

this means at least **811 JK Students** had Special Education Needs ($4,660 \times 0.174$)

4.5 Students per classroom had Special Education Needs (26×0.174)

(according to Ministry, JK classes average 26 students)

If every JK student with special education needs was assigned an EA, the school board would need

811 JUST FOR JK - EA's are needed across the board for all grades

****** [/www.ontario.ca/page/2023-24-education-funding-guide-special-education-grantraph-text](http://www.ontario.ca/page/2023-24-education-funding-guide-special-education-grantraph-text)



MORE HELPFUL HINTS

Organize

If you have paper reports and information about your child, keep it all together in a binder, file box or file cabinet. If everything is electronic, you might want to print a copy of key reports to take with you to meetings if the school does not already have them. Keep all copies of medical reports, assessments and so forth together so that you can find them easily. Have a notebook that you take to meetings and record phone calls in.

Be Informed

Know your child's rights within the education system. Some information or resources are listed in this booklet. More are available from Windsor-Essex Family Network.

Be Clear

Be clear when you ask someone for something and/or when you share something about your child. By being clear, others will be better able to understand and/or follow through.

Stay Connected

Make sure you have regular contact with your child's teacher so that you are aware of how your child is doing. You can ask for a communication book in which you and the teacher can communicate about concerns and successes for the day or night. You also may want to consider volunteering at the school or joining the parent council.

Also, consider connecting with other families whose children have special education needs. Advocating for your child can be very tiring work at times and having support from other families walking a similar path to yours can be valuable.

Other Families Want you to Know

Every child's school journey, special education needs or not, will have ups and downs. Some years will feel more challenging than others, miscommunications can happen, a difference in beliefs of what your child can accomplish can happen. There is no way to write a book to step by step help you with all of these stages of your child's education. Instead, we would encourage you to remember about WEFN and contact us should you have questions or concerns. We are all family members who have walked a similar path. If we do not know the answer to your question, we will help you find it.

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR SCHOOL

Read

Read to your child about school. Borrow books from your community library or purchase from a book store. Some suggested titles are:

- *My First Day of School* – by Michelle Medlock Adams
- *Franklin Goes to School* – by Paulette Bourgeois
- *Welcome to Kindergarten* – by Anne Rockwell
- *The Night Before Kindergarten* – Natasha Wing
- *Just Ask; Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* by Sonia Sotomayor

Visit the School

Some schools have scheduled days for registered children to make a visit to the classroom in the spring before they begin attending. Some children benefit from being able to visit the classroom before they start in September. Call your child's school and ask if the teacher could make some time for you and your child to make a short visit to the class before school starts.

Take Pictures

If your child learns from using pictures or a personal story, ask if you can take pictures of the classroom and teacher to use at home over the summer to prepare your child for school. Or you could ask if the school could provide you with pictures.

First Ride

If your child is going to be taking the school bus, the bus companies offer a First Ride program for all children taking the bus. They usually show a short video, review bus safety rules and then the children get to take a quick ride on the bus.

First Ride occurs at the end of summer at various schools in the City and County. You can register on Bus Kids – click on JK First Ride Registration <https://buskids.ca/>

For children who may require an accessible bus or safety features such as a seatbelt or harness you can indicate on the sign up what your child's needs are.

Socializing

Attending EarlyON Child and Family Centres with your child prior to school entry immerses them into the school environment and encourages a smoother transition into the FDK classroom. Children have the opportunity to engage and socialize with other children while establishing healthy relationships. There are also benefits for the parent or caregiver who attends along with the child by connecting to others in the program and building a community for the whole family.

Childcare can have the same effect, as well as increase children's tolerance to separating from their parent and engaging in routines and transitions in a classroom social setting. Overall, socialization is a critical experience for young children that will help develop skills in all areas of development.



ONE PAGE PROFILE

What is a One Page Profile?

A One-Page Profile, originally developed by Helen Sanderson Associates, provides an opportunity to describe your child in a positive way. All on one sheet of paper, it becomes an excellent introduction for those who may or may not have already met your child. It contains information on 'what is important to your child', 'what others appreciate about your child', and 'how best to support your child'.

A One Page Profile enables you to share who your child is through your child's eyes, your eyes, and the eyes of those who know your child best. There are some amazing templates at <https://sheffkids.co.uk/resources/> or you can use Canva!



ONE PAGE PROFILES

GETTING YOUR LITTLE READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

A one page profile is a great tool that we can you help with either in person or over Zoom!
Email the office at info@windsor-essexfamnet.ca to be contacted to attend a small group in person or over Zoom to complete your child's One page profile

REGISTER NOW

MORE INFORMATION :
519-974-1008
info@windsor-essexfamnet.ca

 **WINDSOR-ESSEX FAMILY NETWORK**
Families Helping Families

Parent Tip: This is an excellent way to share information that is different than the professional reports and assessments so often used at meetings. Professionals who have received a One Page Profile have expressed appreciation for how helpful it is to better know the child or person they are supporting.



This booklet, Parent Tips for School Entry and Beyond and more information are available at Windsor-Essex Family Network's website. Go to the School Entry resource page at this link: <https://windsoressexfamnet.ca/school-entry/>

Helpful Websites and Links

- Inclusion Action in Ontario (IAO) – a support for inclusive education providing info, advocacy and strategies for families: <https://inclusionactionontario.ca>
- Inclusion Press – Articles and resources: <https://inclusion.com/inclusive-education/>
- Full Day Kindergarten, A Question and Answer Guide for Parents
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/multi/english/FDKFactSheetEN.pdf>
- ARCH Disability Law Centre - <https://archdisabilitylaw.ca/AdvocacyToolkit-YourRighttoNotBeExcludedFromSchoolinOntario>
- Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Resource Guide, Ministry of Education: <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-special-education-policy-resource-guide-en-2022-05-30.pdf>

ABOUT US

Windsor-Essex Family Network is a network of families and friends who come together to promote the inclusion and well-being of our family members and friends who have disabilities and challenges. Since 1995, 'Family Network' has provided family-to-family linking, mentoring and support, information and offered workshops and learning opportunities. We create innovative and practical resources for families and bring like-minded groups of families and others together to be strengthened about issues of importance to them. We work as a collective autonomous family voice.

The Enhancing Family Support for Education started as a three-year collaborative funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation beginning in 2007. The initiative was aimed at strengthening and supporting families working toward successful education and inclusion. Coordinators from Windsor-Essex Family Network worked to meet the outcomes of the project along with the original partners in the initiative as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Community Living Windsor | • John McGivney Children's Centre |
| • Community Living Essex County | • People First of Windsor |
| • Family Respite Services | • Windsor-Essex Family Network |
| • Children First | • Inclusion Action in Ontario |

Enhancing Family Support for Education OUR 2025 PARTNERS



INCLUSION ACTION IN ONTARIO



THANKS TO



FOR THE PHOTOCOPYING OF THIS BOOKLET

We hope you have found this booklet helpful!

If you would like more information about education, support, resources or to share a tip for a future reprint, please contact:

Windsor-Essex Family Network

7025 Enterprise Way, Windsor, ON N8T 3N6

Phone: 519-974-1008

Email: info@windsoressexfamnet.ca

Website: <https://windsoressexfamnet.ca>

Facebook: @WindsorEssexFamilyNetwork

Families Helping Families Open Doors