



The First Back-to-School Journey

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It's August and back-to-school reminders are everywhere. Parents of preschoolers, this means your first back-to-school journey is about to begin. In the year before kindergarten, there are important steps you can take toward enrolling your child in school. So why wait? Start early! The answers to the following questions 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 5 years old, he will be eligible for kindergarten. Starting in 2012, a child must turn 5 by November 1. Right now, your child can benefit from 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 did you know you can choose any school for your child? There are private schools, charter schools and, in many communities, you can look at public schools outside your immediate neighborhood. You can choose a school that best fits the needs of your child and family. Visit the kindergarten; 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 classroom? Including a school visit will help you in your selection process – and schools welcome visits from parents of future students.

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. Plan on filling out 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?

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 is a good way to identify and address any potential health problems. 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.

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 a new option for some children not age 5 by the eligibility date (starts in 2012). Ask your school.

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 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 31 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 20 minutes per 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 10 to 11 hours of sleep each night. Gradually switch your child from a summer bedtime schedule 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 preschoolers, now that you know "back to school" is for you, why wait? You can get a free Countdown to Kindergarten guide with more tips on enrolling and preparing your child for kindergarten. Download a copy at www.first5shasta.org or call (530) 229-8300. Make the final months before kindergarten an exciting back-to-school journey for your child and your family.

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