

Kindergarten: Making the transition

By Janice Esau, Child Care Director, Texas Association of School Boards

Here is a checklist of things parents of prospective kindergarteners should do before school starts:

- Find out in advance what the school expects from entering kindergarten students. Ask the kindergarten teachers to tell you their goals for the children's academic success in kindergarten. Inquire about units of study, homework expectations, grading procedures, and report cards.
- Visit the school with your child. Observe children in the classrooms.
- Visit the library, cafeteria, gymnasium, playground, nurse's office.
- Talk with your child about school. Address any concerns or fears he or she may have.
- Find out about volunteer opportunities at the school. Do you need to complete a criminal history check? Do you need to sign in when you visit the school? How often does the teacher request parent volunteers?
- Ask for a description or handbook of kindergarten policies and procedures.
- Find out about and arrange after-school care and transportation. If your child will ride the bus, find out if you can tour a real bus. Take your child to the bus stop and talk about bus safety.
- Complete all registration forms.
- Find out about food service arrangements. What is the policy about lunch boxes, lunch cards, cost?
- When is open house? New parent orientation?
- Does the school have a kindergarten camp? (An opportunity for children to participate in a day or half day of kindergarten before the school year actually starts.)
- When will you know your child's class and teacher?
- What school supplies are needed? Does the school sell prepackaged supply kits?
- Ask for a sample of the daily schedule for a kindergarten classroom. Share this information with your child. It is important for children to know what to expect. They are accustomed to routines and schedules.

- Find out if your child will take naps at school during the day. Do you need a rest mat or blanket? How long is nap time?
- Ask about snacks. Some teachers prefer students to bring individual snacks from home, but others prefer to have a rotating schedule of students who bring snacks on a given day.
- Ask about discipline and the school's philosophies and policies regarding guidance.
- Meet the principal, assistant principal, office staff, nurse, and teachers.

The first day of school can be very emotional for everyone. Here are some tips to help you through the day:

- Try to be positive and calm. Show enthusiasm and support of this important new adventure.
- Do not express your fears, anxieties, or doubts in front of your child. Your child will react to your feelings and will have a difficult time settling in. Avoid saying things like, "My little baby is all grown up! I can't believe he's already in kindergarten." These statements make children feel that somehow growing up is a bad thing that makes you sad.
- Before you leave, remind your child of how he/she will get home in the afternoon.
- In general, it is best to make your "good-bye" quickly and leave. By the first day of school you should have already visited the classroom and met the teacher. Leave your child at the classroom door with a big hug and a reassuring pat on the back.
- If you stay and prolong the departure, your child will sense your anxiety and will likely cling to you. Further, the classroom teacher needs the opportunity to form a trusting relationship with your child as quickly as possible. This new relationship will be very important throughout the school year.
- Leave and have a great day! Yes, you will cry in the parking lot (if you make it that far!). Often the school will have coffee, doughnuts, and tissues in the cafeteria for all the kindergarten parents who need comforting.
- It is not necessary or reasonable to call the school during the day to check on your child. The teacher is very busy getting to know her new students. The school will call you if there is a problem.