

Parent Tips for School Entry and Beyond

A resource booklet for parents
who have children with
special education needs
in their younger years





Developed by
Windsor-Essex Family Network

and the

Enhancing Family Support
for Education Initiative



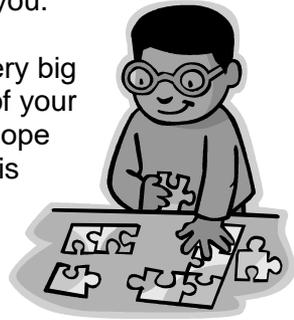
Foreword

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 make your child's entry to school a smooth and successful transition.

Inside this booklet you will find information about how to locate and contact your child's school, suggestions for introducing your child to the school, and how to prepare for meetings. It includes tips from other parents who have been where you are right now, and who wanted this information shared with parents like you.

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, 1998)

This resource booklet was written by families with Windsor-Essex Family Network and the Enhancing Family Support for Education Initiative. Input was also received from other volunteers with the project including retired educators, service providers and early childhood professionals. It has been written from a parent perspective.

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Getting Started

Children may start school in September of the year they turn four by December 31 of that year. They are not legally required to attend school until age six. However, you can choose whether or not to send your child to Full Day Kindergarten (FDK). *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).

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

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



- Call your local school board administrative office (see next page)
- Connect with other parents in your neighbourhood
- Use the internet and the links provided

Information on 'What School' & Bussing

Go to: www.buskids.ca

Click on the tab/link called **BusPlanner Web** in the top right corner of the webpage. This will take you to another page where you can click on the link you need: **Which School do I Attend? Or Can I Ride a Bus?**
Enter the information requested.

Area School Board Links

Greater Essex County District School Board

Administrative Offices (switchboard): (519) 255-3200

<http://www.publicboard.ca/SchoolInfo/School-List/Pages/default.aspx>

- *Select your school*

Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

Administrative Offices: (519) 253-2481

<https://www.wecdsb.on.ca/schools>

- *Click on the school you are interested in*

Conseil Scolaire Viamonde

Téléphone: (519) 259-4860

<https://csviamonde.ca/nos-ecoles/trouver-une-ecole/>

- *Enter the school name or click on the desired city*

Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence

Téléphone: (519) 948-9227

https://www.cscprovidence.ca/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1109666&type=d&pREC_ID=1368336

- *Enter your address*



Registering for School

Due to the ongoing pandemic, changes to current registration processes can be expected. Open houses will likely be cancelled or replaced with a virtual process. For the most up-to-date information, go to your school board website.

- Registration for Kindergarten is usually held in January or February prior to the September when your child would be entering school. Call the school to be sure.
- To find the date for Kindergarten registration:
 - Listen to the radio and watch for advertisements in the local newspapers and parent magazines.
 - Call the school directly, or
 - Attend the open house (if one) and make an appointment to register your child.

- Early in the year (January or February) you may be asked by your service provider 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 where known, and your child's needs.

- Schools finalize their plan in the spring for the upcoming school year. Last minute registrations in May or June make it difficult for schools to effectively plan for your child. Register early!

- At the time you make the appointment, find out what documents you need to bring with you (e.g. your child's birth certificate, immunization record.) For some school boards you will need additional documents.

Parent Tip: 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
<https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-11>

- 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, pre-school teachers, therapists, etc.) This meeting is a way to share information to help the school prepare for your child's entry into school. Be sure to go in with a clear vision for your child. If you don't hear from anyone about a meeting – you can request one yourself.
- Also, at that meeting will be people from the school board like a speech therapist, teacher, principal, or 'learning support services' teacher. A representative with regard to therapy services and/or nursing support may also attend.
- If School Based Rehabilitation Services (therapy services) are required, there will be a representative from the John McGivney Children's Centre who attends. If nursing services are required, there would be a representative from the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).
- If your child receives services from a local children's service provider such as Children First, John McGivney Children's Centre, Connections Early Years Family Centre, Thames Valley Children's Centre, Family Respite Services, etc., you can ask that service provider to attend and support you in school planning meetings.

Parent Tip: 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 knows your child and is supportive 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.



- Ask your family, friends and others who know your child to help you make a list of your child's main strengths so that you share them every time you tell someone about your child.

- 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.

Parent Tip:

Remember you know your child best –

You are the expert about your child.

- 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 preschool/childcare that school could provide a lot of information about what he/she may need in a classroom environment.
- Gather reports - There may be some reports or portions of reports that would be helpful to the school in developing some strategies and accommodations.

Points to Ponder

When sharing transition stories with us, parent leaders have suggested that you might want to think in advance about how you would respond if the school suggested an alternate plan for your child. One parent in particular shared *“Before we went to the transition meeting, we had already decided we wanted our son to be on the same bus as his older brother. We did not feel he needed to be on a “special bus”. When the Principal told us at the meeting that arrangements for the “special needs bus” had already been made, we were able to talk more about our reasons for wanting him on the bus with his older brother and make a plan that worked for everyone.”*

Think about what you might say if one or more of the following is discussed at your child’s transition meeting:

- A late entry (e.g. a week later, October, January)
- A modified/shorter day (e.g. one hour per day, or a half day instead of full day)
- Staying at preschool or a child care centre one more year (delaying entry for a year)
- Taking a different bus in order to have a seat belt or for other safety concerns (often referred to as the “special needs bus”)
- You picking up your child for lunch although his/her classmates stay at school for lunch

Remember, there are no right and wrong answers. It all depends on your child’s unique strengths and needs and the vision you have for your child. Having information about your child’s rights and building a good working relationship with the school will make the transition smoother for you and your child. Conversations are often held with the coordinator/consultant of your child’s support agency prior to the transition meeting to help you prepare. You can go home and think more about things after the meeting before making final decisions.



Preparing Your Child for School

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



Going to School - by Anne Civardi

Off to School, Baby Duck! - by Amy Hest

Franklin Goes to School - by Paulette Bourgeois

Welcome to Kindergarten - by Anne Rockwell

On My Very First School Day I Met - by Norman Stiles

Visit the School - 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.

Talk to the Class - You may want to offer to come in and talk to the children in the classroom to help them understand your child and to talk about how each of us has things we are good at (strengths/gifts), and that we all need help with some things (needs).

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



Communication with the School

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, or Resource 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.

Once your child starts attending school:

- Speak directly with the *teacher* regarding classroom matters. If your child has support in the classroom (e.g. Educational Assistant) make sure that your communication (written, in person, phone calls) are with the *teacher* as they are the one responsible for your child's education. If a concern or conflict occurs that you and the *teacher* are unable to resolve, you would then speak with the *principal*.
- You would talk directly to the *principal* in regards to matters pertaining to school operations, school policies and procedures.
- Involve the *superintendent* only if you have already talked to the Teacher, Principal, and Special Education Coordinator and there is still no solution or you feel your concern has not been adequately addressed at the school level. Be ready to explain to the *superintendent* about the ways in which you have tried to resolve the issue at the school level.

Parent Tip: It is often helpful to record 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.

A Brief Note about IEP's and IPRC's

Typically, children would attend school for awhile before an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P) would be developed or an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.) meeting is held. It can be a confusing process with a lot of new information to learn. Information about these processes is included here for reference later because of their importance.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

The Individual Education Plan, commonly known as an IEP, is the school's written plan of action for students with special education needs. The IEP describes what the school will do to help your child. This plan would be developed with input and ideas from parents/guardians.

An education plan may be developed to accommodate or support the student's learning before an IPRC is held. The IEP may identify any accommodations and special education services that are needed to help a student achieve his or her learning expectations. The IEP identifies learning expectations that are different from the expectation for each grade, subject or class as outlined in the standard curriculum. Educational programming does not have to be put on hold awaiting a formal assessment or identification for a student with special needs. It is also important to know that having an IEP does not necessarily mean that your child will attend a special education class. The majority of children who have an IEP are in regular classes in their schools.

Parent Tip: Each school board is mandated by the Education Act to have a Parent Guide that will explain the IEP and/or IPRC process. Ask your school for a copy of the parent guide from the board.

Identification, Placement and Review Committee

(IPRC) - The decision to identify a student as "exceptional" is made by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPR Committee or IPRC). An IPRC is a committee made up of school and school board personnel that make decisions about the identification of your child as having special education needs or "an exceptionality", the category of the exceptionality, and the appropriate placement of your child.

The rules of this Committee are set out in *Ontario Regulation 181/98* of the *Education Act*. The *Education Act* defines an exceptional pupil as “a pupil who’s behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program.

The purpose of the IPRC Committee is to decide if your child will be identified as exceptional, identify your child’s strengths and needs, and to decide on appropriate placement. A ‘Review’ of the identification and placement usually occurs once a year.



As a parent, you can ask for an IPRC meeting by putting your request in writing and giving it to the principal of your child’s school. Within 15 days of receiving a written request the principal would respond in writing to acknowledge your request and let you know approximately when the IPRC will occur. Alternatively, the principal could send you a written notice that he/she (or your child’s teacher) believes your child would benefit from a special education program and suggest an IPRC. Each School Board has their own *Parent Guide to Special Education* which is provided prior to an IPRC. You can also ask your school about this resource.

Parent Tip:

If you are given a document to sign at a meeting, keep in mind that you do not have to sign it right then. You can let the school know you would like to take it home to review before signing. Parents often tell us that knowing this has helped them when signing feels stressful in the moment.

This information on IEP’s and IPRC’s was adapted from Ministry of Education – Highlights of Regulation 181/98 at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/hilites.html>

More Helpful Hints

Organize

Build a file at home for your child. This could be a binder, a file box or a file cabinet. 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 resources are listed in this booklet and more are available at 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.

Take Care of Yourself

To be an effective advocate for your child you will need to be at your best. Finding a little time for yourself can be hard but is very important. Some ways you can do this is by inviting a friend to meet for coffee, going to a movie or out to dinner, visiting the local library or simply going out for a walk.

Resources

More information is available through Windsor-Essex Family Network's website <https://windsoressesxfamnet.ca/>. Choose the tab *Resources & More*; then from the drop-down menu go to the *School Entry* tab to check out the resources. There is also a lending library of books, videos and DVD's, and Ministry of Education documents at 'Family Network'. Email info@windsoressesxfamnet.ca to arrange a time to pick up materials as the offices are currently closed due to the pandemic.

Websites

All area school boards have joined together to make one school transportation website: <http://www.buskids.ca>

Education Act – the laws governing education in Ontario
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90e02>

Ministry of Education – this link will take you to the Special Education page which has many helpful links
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/speced.html>

Inclusion Press – Articles and resources on inclusion
<https://inclusion.com/inclusive-education/>

School Advocacy Hamilton
<http://www.schooladvocacy.ca>

Learning Events

Windsor-Essex Family Network and the 'Enhancing Family Support Group' hold a learning event called *IEPs & More* each year. Families attend the event to get more in-depth information about Individual Education Plans and ask questions of the educators/superintendents who come out to do the presenting.

A Glossary of Commonly Used Words and Phrases in Special Education

Inclusion: Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. (Inclusive Education/Canadian Association for Community Living)

Learning Support Teacher or Learning Support Services Teacher (known as the LST/LSST). This is a teacher with special education training in the school who assists students with exceptional needs with their learning.

Placement: This is an educational setting that meets the child's needs. The Ministry of Education recognizes the regular classroom in the neighbourhood school as the preferred placement for all children. Educational supports including what is outlined in the IEP are provided.

Special Education: This is a term used to describe a wide range of supports and programs for students who need different teaching methods or special equipment to help them to be successful in school.

Strengths and Gifts: This Refers to the unique talents and abilities we each have. These abilities, our strengths, are our best tools for accomplishment and satisfaction. The same idea can be applied to students in school – building on strengths encourages learning.

Support Needs: These are the areas that are most challenging for your child, where he/she requires effective supports to reach full potential.



About Us

Windsor-Essex Family Network

Windsor-Essex Family Network is a network of families and friends: parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and others who come together to promote the inclusion and well being of our family members and friends who have different abilities (disabilities) and challenges. 'Family Network':

- Provides family to family linking, mentoring and support
- Provides information
- Offers workshops and learning opportunities
- Resource Lending Library with over 500 items
- Creates innovative and practical resources for families
- Brings like minded groups of families together to empower each other on issues of importance to them
- Participates on various committees and working groups
- Works as a collective autonomous family voice



Enhancing Family Support for Education

Enhancing Family Support for Education started out as a three-year collaborative and partnership funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. It began in 2007 and officially ended by March 2010. This initiative was aimed at strengthening and supporting families working toward successful education and inclusion. It provided learning opportunities, partnered with school boards and others, offered mentoring and family support, held small groups for families of younger children and developed resources for families. Coordinators from Windsor-Essex Family Network worked to meet the outcomes of the project along with the partners and advisors in the initiative:

Children First
Community Living Windsor
Community Living Essex County
Family Respite Services
Inclusion Action in Ontario (formerly Integration Action for Inclusion)
John McGivney Children's Centre School Authority
People First of Windsor
Windsor-Essex Family Network

Note: The initiative continued after the project ended. Partners work together creating opportunities to increase family knowledge and understanding about their child's educational experience - through information sharing and learning events.



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

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Families helping families open doors.