Before the School Bell Rings

Tips for Parents About Helping Their Child with Special Needs to Enter School

Agencies in Waterloo Region that support young children who have special needs work together with the school boards to help children and families transition to school. To make sure all families have the information they need, there is one procedure, used by everyone. There is a person who takes the lead in helping the family and that person is called the Referral Source.

The Referral Source starts to talk to parents and help with this process the year before the child starts school.

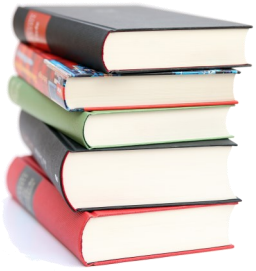
If the child attends licenced child care, the Resource Consultant will be the Referral Source. If the child is not in child care, the Referral Source may be a Family Infant Child Consultant, an Ontario Autism Program staff member, or a KidsAbility therapist.

This is a list of the three major things that happen in the transition process:

1. The Referral Source will ask you to sign an electronic information-sharing consent form that will be securely and electronically shared with the school board your child will attend. This usually happens the beginning of November.

2. A School Board Consultant will gather information about your child by means of Reports and speaking with agencies that you have provided consent for.

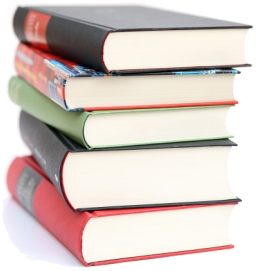
3. If needed, a 'transition to school meeting' may be held to share information and plan for a smooth start in September. Transition meetings usually occur in the Spring and sometimes in Early Fall, and may occur by phone, video conference, or in person.



Planning for School Entry

Timing	Activities	Responsibility
November/December	**Information Consent Form** – The Referral Source asks the parent/legal guardian for consent to share basic information to the school board through a secure, electronic platform, as well as verbal information by phone and written reports between the community agencies involved with your child. Information includes: your child's name, address, your neighbourhood school, the services that your child receives and to whom the form can be sent. With your permission, your child's assessment report , support plan , strengths, and needs will be shared. The information consent form is completed electronically and shared with the school board with which your child is enrolled. Please note: Forms released to the school board may be shared with school staff, special education staff or other appropriate school staff members. You may be contacted by other school staff for further information and consent if deemed necessary. **Therapy Services in the School System** – For those who receive services from KidsAbility, therapy staff review with parents, the referral process and how therapy will differ from how it is currently provided.	**Referral Source** **KidsAbility Therapist**
January - March	**Information Gathering–** School Board Consultants may gather information from a variety of sources including reports and referrals sources. They are part of a family of schools and may speak to you at kindergarten orientation events. In some circumstances, the School Board Consultant may observe your child in their program if modifications are required for your child to attend their community school. School Board Consultants will then speak with the principal of the school your child will be attending to share relevant information.	**School Board Consultant**

Timing	Activities	Responsibility
February	**Registration** – Parents/guardians register their child for Kindergarten. For registration information, call your home school, check the newspaper or go to the website for the Waterloo Region District School Board www.wrdsb.ca or the Waterloo Catholic District School Board www.wcdsb.ca You need to take your child's birth certificate, immunization record or letter of exemption from the Waterloo Region Health Department, proof of address and relevant Catholic Baptismal Certificate tor WCDSB. Read the information your school gives you about the benefits of the kindergarten program and how to prepare your child.	**Parents**
March/ April	For parents whose children will attend both KidsAbility School and their neighbourhood school, it is necessary for the parents to contact each program and inform them that their child will be attending both programs. **Transition to School Meetings** – If available, Parents/ Guardians may be contacted regarding the planning of a 'transition to school meeting'. Meetings may be held by phone or video conference, or in person depending on Public Health protocols. These are arranged by the Meeting Coordinator who is the Referral Source. *Exception: School Personnel will be the Meeting Coordinator when KidsAbility is the Referral Source.* If a meeting is arranged, information about your child's strengths and needs is shared with the school team. (See Tips for Parents) For some children, it may be determined by the School Consultant, Referral Source, and Parent/Guardian that a transition meeting is not necessary. Together you will decide what information needs to be shared with the school and how to share it. Parents may plan for the meeting by completing the 'All About Me' pages.	**Parents** **Meeting Coordinator**
May/ June	When needed, 'Transition to School meetings' take place, involving Parent/Guardians, school personnel, school board personnel, and current service providers. *Please Note: KidsAbility therapists do not typically attend these meetings*. Parents may inquire about arranging a school visit.	**Meeting Coordinator** **Parent**



Transition to School Meeting Information

When will this meeting happen?

- If needed, a Transition to School Meeting will occur in the spring before your child starts school in September.
- Meetings may be offered by phone, video conference, or in-person if safe to do so depending on Public Health protocols at that time.
- In some cases, if your child's Referral Source is a Resource Consultant, Autism Program staff member, or a Family Infant Child Consultant, they will arrange a date and time that both the parent/guardian and school personnel can attend.
- The meeting will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

What is the purpose of this meeting?

- Your school wants to welcome you, and hopes to reassure you that your child will be well-supported in the school setting.
- Everyone, including you, can share information with your school about your child's strengths, needs and interests.
- Planning will begin about ways to help your child have a smooth and successful start in school.

Who will be at this meeting?

- You will be at the meeting.
- Please review with your Meeting Coordinator who you may invite to the meeting.
- Your child care provider, Resource Consultant, Family Infant Child Consultant, or Autism Program staff member, and the School Board staff who will support your child in kindergarten will attend.
- **Please Note**: KidsAbility Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Social Workers, do not arrange or attend these meetings, unless there are exceptional, complex circumstances.
- You can bring a supportive person to the meeting such as a family member or a friend.
- Do not bring your child to the meeting. Since the discussion will be about your child's needs and the meeting will be long, your child would not be comfortable attending. You can ask about another opportunity for your child to meet the people from your school.
- In the spring, teachers are often not assigned to the classes they will teach in September, so your child's kindergarten teacher may not be at this meeting. Other people from the school will be there and will share the information about your child with the kindergarten teacher.

How can you get ready for the meeting?

- Talk with the people who work with your child now. They can help you!
- You will have an opportunity to tell everyone about your child at the meeting. It will not be a long time because everyone needs a chance to talk, but it will be a very important part of the meeting.
- You can take something to the meeting that will help you introduce your child to everyone. For example, you could show everyone a photograph or an 'All About Me' package.

- Plan the main points you want the school to hear about and write them down to take with you so that you don't forget to ask them.
- If you have someone like a family member or friend with you, you could ask that person to take some notes during the meeting on your behalf.

What will happen during the meeting?

- The Meeting Coordinator or School Principal usually guides the meeting and makes sure that minutes are taken and then sent to everyone afterwards.
- Everyone who knows your child, including you, will have a short turn to talk about your child.
- People from the school will listen and ask questions so they can begin to understand your child.
- Try to talk about your child's needs as honestly as possible because this will help the school be better prepared to support your child.
- There will be some next steps planned at this meeting, but many details and the final plans will likely not be decided at this meeting.
- You may be asked to sign some forms, such as referral forms and consent forms.
- Ask questions and give yourself time to think if you are unsure about any ideas, requests, or plans.
- Ask who you can contact if you have any questions in the next few months.

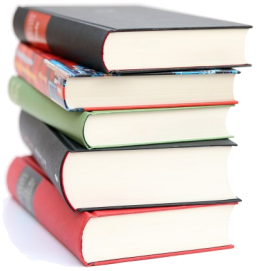
What should I include in an 'All About Me' booklet?

Information could include:

- A photo of your child
- Information about family, siblings, pets
- Words from the child's perspective
- Words people use to describe me (eg. happy, funny, bossy, moody)
- Things I'm really good at (eg. my favourite things, special interests)
- My challenges (eg. things that make me anxious or upset)
- Strategies that work (eg. pictures to warn me about transitions, key works that help me stay calm)
- Things you really need to know (eg. allergies, diet concerns, medications)
- What you and your child are looking forward to this year

When can I visit the school?

- Contact the Principal or the school Secretary to inquire about a visit in June or during the last week of August. The availability of in-person school visits will depend on Public Health guidance at that time.
- On weekends or after school hours, visit the school playground with your child and talk about what to expect at the new school.
- To learn more about what the classroom experience will be like for your child, including play-based learning, visit: http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/Kindergarten/primaryresources/playbasedlearning.html



Acronyms & Definitions

Name	Acronym	Definition
Ontario Health atHome	**OHaH**	These professionals provide assessment and consultation regarding your health and therapy needs
Ontario Health atHome- School Health Support Services	**OHaH - SHSS**	Ontario Health atHome (formerly LHIN) manages programming that supports children's school based needs. These supports may include nursing, nutritional counselling, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech-language therapy or personal support services. A referral for these services must be made by the school principal.
Full-Day Kindergarten	**FDK**	Is a child-centred, developmentally appropriate, integrated, extended day of learning for four and five year old children.
Individual Educational Plan	**IEP**	A written IEP is developed by teachers and parents to help a child succeed in school.
Identification, Placement and Review Committee	**IPRC**	This committee determines whether or not a child will be identified as exceptional in Communication, Intellectual, Physical, Behaviour, Multiple areas and the most appropriate placement.
Ontario Education Number	**OEN**	This is your child's identification number that is assigned by the Ministry Of Education and follows your child through elementary and secondary school.
Ontario Student Record	**OSR**	The OSR is a confidential record of your child's education progress through their school years. Parents, principals and teachers have access to the OSR.
Special Education Advisory Committee	**SEAC**	This committee advises the trustees and school board administration about special education programs and services.
Special Education Resource Teacher	**SERT**	This teacher has additional qualifications in special education and works with the classroom teacher in meeting the needs of your child.
Special Equipment Amount	**SEA**	SEA funding is reserved to purchase equipment recommended by a qualified professional, when the equipment is essential to the student's success in school.

Name	Acronym	Definition
Transition to School	**TTS**	This is the process of information sharing and preparation to help each child successfully enter their new school.
Waterloo Catholic District School Board	**WCDSB**	The WCDSB is committed to providing programs and services to meet the diversity of student needs within the Catholic Schools.
Waterloo Region District School Board	**WRDSB**	The WRDSB's special education program is founded on the philosophy that every student is entitled to an education in the most beneficial learning environment available.

Notes:

SNR SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCING COLLABORATIVE

Ontario Health atHome

KidsAbility™

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Region of Waterloo

Waterloo Catholic District School Board

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Working together to support your child's transition to school!