

# The best time to talk about kindergarten is now

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By *Kate Irish and Kate MacDonell*

As the tinsel-topped whimsy of the season fades into memory, we invite parents with young children to put kindergarten on their minds now. It may seem a bit premature to begin thinking about school supplies, bus schedules and lunch boxes, but Durham's Partnership for Children and Durham Public Schools are already planning for August, when young students across Durham County will embark on their journey into the public classroom as they become kindergartners.

The Partnership and DPS believe that starting kindergarten is more than just a special day; it's a process. In fact, it is one of the most important transitions a young child will experience.

So much development has occurred in the brains and bodies of our kindergartners leading up to their big day. These young children have spent the first five astonishing years of their lives learning how to ... well, learn. Their brains have been hard at work, putting together the pieces of an extraordinary puzzle that will determine all future learning.

High-quality early education experiences, proper nutrition and exercise, and healthy, nurturing home environments are the ingredients for building successful students. A strong foundation in the early years will prepare our children for the long academic road ahead. Research shows that a child's future success is dependent on being ready to learn and participate productively in the kindergarten experience.

"Kindergarten readiness for both children and families is essential to the long-range health of our community," said Durham Public Schools Superintendent Eric J. Becoats.

But also critical to that academic success is the transition children face as they enter kindergarten. Smooth and successful transitions are enabled by strong partnerships between early childhood professionals, parents and the public schools.

Through our Transition to Kindergarten (TTK) Initiative, the Partnership and DPS work together to promote a seamless conversion for our newest students. We know that as preschoolers in Durham County approach their first day of kindergarten, many parents have doubts, fears and unanswered questions.

When does kindergarten enrollment begin? When do year-round schools begin? What is expected of our 5-year-olds as they walk into their kindergarten classrooms? What can I do to prepare my child for this overwhelming experience?

These are just some of the many questions that parents have in the months leading up to the start of school. The TTK Initiative aims to address such concerns through a series of transition activities open to all Durham County residents. These activities begin as soon as Jan. 10 and are outlined below.

DPS and the Partnership recognize that it is a shared responsibility to ensure that children are welcomed into an academic environment that meets their intellectual, social, emotional and physical potential. That is a tremendous responsibility – one that cannot wait until the first day of school.

### **Resources and upcoming transition activities**

#### *Kindergarten Welcome Sessions*

The Kindergarten Welcome Sessions are an opportunity for parents to learn about kindergarten in Durham Public Schools. At the sessions we will discuss how to register your child for kindergarten, briefly share the opportunities for magnet and year-round programs in DPS, provide information about our before and afterschool care, hear from experienced kindergarten teachers, and provide answers to any questions they may have.

Jan. 10 and 12, and March 6, 2012, from 6 to 7:30 p.m.  
Location: DPS Staff Development Center, 2107 Hillandale Road  
Call 560-9403 to reserve a seat.

#### *Choice Fair*

Did you know that every parent has three options for elementary school? Learn about your assigned neighborhood school, year-round schools and magnet schools in Durham and how to apply at the Choice Fair.

Jan. 21, 2012, from 9 a.m. - noon at Hillside High School  
Please call 560-9403 with any questions or visit the Schools of Choice page on the DPS website.

#### *Steps to School Parent Nights*

Parents of incoming kindergarten families are invited to evening workshops to learn strategies and gain information on how to support their children's academic, social and physical transition and success in kindergarten. These parent nights are facilitated in both English and Spanish and may be focused to include topics such as early literacy, health, wellness, math or science.

Feb. 21 and March 20, 2012, from 6 to 7:30 p.m.  
Location: DPS Staff Development Center, 2107 Hillandale Road  
Call 560-9403 to reserve a seat.

#### *DPFC Transition to Kindergarten website*

<http://www.dpfc.net/TransitiontoKindergartenInitiative.aspx>

#### *DPS kindergarten website*

<http://kindergarten.dpsnc.net/>

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