

KINDERGARTEN FACTS AND TIPS

The transition to kindergarten will impact your entire family. The anticipation of kindergarten may elicit a variety of thoughts and feelings—excitement for a new adventure, happiness at attending school with an older sibling, sadness at outgrowing preschool, fear of the unknown, and many other emotions. This document is intended to help you, your child, and your family, navigate this exciting next step in your child’s education.

IMPORTANT DATES:

- February 17, 2026 - online registration for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) via [ParentVUE Portal](#) (you must upload all required forms to enroll) begins.
- March 9, 2026 - MCPS Early Entrance testing (for children who will not turn 5 on or before September 2nd) to see if they qualify for early entrance to kindergarten early.
- March 16, 2026 - in person enrollment at MCPS begins.
- Ongoing – Open houses or play dates prior to the first day of school
- Ongoing – Play on your Elementary School playground
- August 24, 2026 – Kindergarten Transition Day
- August 25, 2026 – First Day of School!



If you have not registered your child for the 2026-27 school year, do so as soon as possible. Teacher allocations are dependent on the number of registered children. It is vital each school has an accurate count of incoming kindergarteners to have adequate staffing in place.

- Private school enrollment typically began their registration process in the fall and will be, if they haven’t already, sending out acceptance letters. It’s possible there are still openings in private programs, but you should contact them asap for fall placements.

BUILDING EXCITEMENT FOR KINDERGARTEN

Discussing kindergarten too often or too far in advance may be stressful for your child. We recommend waiting until *at least* after spring break to start talking about kindergarten. Five and six-year-olds are experiential learners. Because they haven’t experienced kindergarten, riding the bus, playing on the new school playground, where the bathrooms are, etc. there is the possibility that the uncertainty of these changes may be scary, or may cause anxiety, for your child. Your child has a comfort level at Bradley Hills where they are known and they know the school. Consider waiting until your child’s kindergarten open house before talking about the transition. The open house will help acquaint your child with their new school and they will have an opportunity to learn:

- The teachers are friendly
- The classrooms are like their preschool rooms, with carpet space, tables and chairs,...
- The “work” is fun

As kindergarten approaches, everyone, everywhere, will start to talk to your child about this big step. While these conversations are meant to be well meaning, they can often elicit feelings of nervousness. You know your child best - you may have to hold back and ask others to hold back discussing kindergarten too soon or too often.

As soon as you feel your child is ready, share your memories of kindergarten, especially things like how nice/kind/funny/happy your teacher was, how much fun you had making new friends and learning new things, what you did at recess, and other similar positive memories. If you have memories or experiences from kindergarten that were challenging, share with your child how you overcame those situations. Being a good problem solver is also another important kindergarten skill.

Read [books about kindergarten](#), but not scary books about kindergarten. You want to set happy expectations not scary ones. Pre-read the books without your child and be ready to adapt the book to your child's unique personality and needs. Some of the books may plant seeds of worry when it's not necessary. For example, if your child hears in a book that someone may not be nice to them, it's possible that will plant a worry the child had never considered (all books will ultimately address the child's concern in a positive way, but why have them worry, if they don't have to).



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “READY” FOR KINDERGARTEN?

Social-emotional, behavioral, and organizational skills are the foundational skills that allow a child to be open and available to learning. If a child can self-advocate, be a good friend, and be a contributing member of their classroom, they will be ready for kindergarten. **Activities to support your child's transition to kindergarten should be fun, playful, and relaxed. Try not to stress about the transition.**

SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

It is important for your child to be able to advocate for their needs.

- Give your child opportunities to advocate for what they need. Instead of asking, “Are you thirsty?”, have your child tell you, a waiter, a grandparent, that they would like something to drink. Create scenarios where you can role play using puppets or other family members, where your child can practice advocating for their needs.
- Become a problem-solver – this is a phrase we use often at school, especially when a child is complaining about something. For example, when a child says, “I can't find my other mitten.” Say, “Oh, I hear you have a problem. You can't find your other mitten. I know you are a good problem solver, what can you do to solve this problem?” Often the child will say look in my bag. Go with them to look in their bag, and voila, the issue is solved and the child was the problem-solver.
- Ask if something is a big problem or a little problem? Help children modify their feelings and reactions appropriately.
- Kindness matters in a classroom setting. Encourage your child to use kind words for self-advocating and asking for help. Polite words, such as please, thank you, and may I, are an important part of vocabulary.

SELF-HELP SKILLS

In elementary school, with larger classroom numbers and only one teacher, children receive less individualized attention than they did in their preschool classroom. Starting now, have your child practice the daily skills they will need.

- **Toileting:** it is important for your child to not only be able to independently use the bathroom but also be able to recognize WHEN they need to go.
 - They will also need to be able to dress/undress themselves. Avoid pants with zippers, belts, buttons, etc. Choose clothes that are easy for your child to pull up and down. Girls should wear bike shorts under their dresses.
 - If your child is struggling to do these tasks with kindergarten right around the corner, practice, practice, practice over the next few months. But try not to pressure your child too much. Just let the kindergarten teacher know it is something your child is still working on. Many kindergarteners aren't quite there yet!
- **Cleaning up messes:** have your child clean up their toys, place their clothing in the hamper, hang up their towel after a bath, clear the table, wash non-breakable dishes in the sink. The objective is to help them become a helper not only of the messes they make but to contribute to the smooth running of the house which in turn will translate into being a good helper/cleaner in the classroom.
- **Eating:** There will not be teachers to help your child open their lunch box or any items in the lunchbox in the lunchroom. Your child will need to be able to open lunch containers including pouches and string cheeses. Have picnics to practice. Keep lunches simple, with foods your child likes, cut into child-friendly pieces, and containers they can manage.
- **Dressing:** Your child will need to be able to tie their shoes, put on jackets, hats, mittens, gloves, zip and unzip coats, and backpacks by themselves. Choose clothing they are comfortable in and can manage independently.
- **Carrying belongings:** Get a backpack BIG enough to hold a lunch box, folder, library books, etc. but SMALL enough that they can comfortably carry. Have your child practice putting things in and pulling things out of their backpack, lunchbox, and folder. Check with your child's teacher about using a backpack on wheels, if that's something you or your child are considering. Wheelie backpacks tend to be more difficult to hang on hooks and can often be a trip hazard for other children.
- **One and two step directions:** Practice remembering and executing multiple tasks.
 - Put your towel and goggles in your pool bag.
 - Please sit at the table and open the Play-Doh.
 - It's time to leave, please get your water bottle and your sunglasses.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LITERACY: Work with your child to recognize emotions in themselves and others, strengthen their self-regulation, and engage in appropriate play with their peers. Just like learning to walk and talk, social-emotional skills are developed through practice and developmental readiness. Talk about your feelings throughout the day, during meals (discuss your highs and lows), when watching a tv show or reading books (talk about how the main character is feeling), etc. Model these discussions for your child and encourage them to share how they are feeling too.

- **Feelings Chart:** Post feeling charts at your child's eye level and in different places throughout your house. These charts provide an easy way for your child to share their emotions or for you and your child to identify their emotions.
 - Chart can be purchased or homemade. Feelings to include are: angry, happy, sad, scared, frustrated, nervous, disappointed, calm and excited

- A homemade chart with photographs of your child making the faces for each emotion is easy to make and often more relevant to your child.
- **Cozy/Safe Space:** Create a space for your child to retreat to after school or whenever feeling overwhelmed. Create the safe space where you can see your child and you can be ready to [co-regulate](#) with them with they are ready.
 - Include fidget toys, special lovies, soft blankets, pillows, etc. that comfort your child. You can have an emotions chart in this space.
- **Feelings Books:** Books are a wonderful resource for children at this age to be able to understand more about their own experiences and feel connection to characters in a story who may be going through things they are going through themselves. Suggested titles include:
 - "When I Feel" series by: Cornelia Spelman
 - The Kissing Hand by: Audrey Denn
 - Goodbye Friend, Hello Friend by: Cori Doerrfeld
 - Worry Monster by: Rosie Greening – this book is great to help your child learn how to write/draw their worries and share them with the worry monster, so the child doesn't have to worry any more.

If you or your child's preschool teacher has any concerns about your child's speech, motor, cognition, social-emotional skills, or the skills listed above, now is a good time to investigate deeper. Working with your child's teacher, their doctor, and possibly outside resources, investigate why your child may not have achieved mastery of their age-appropriate developmental milestones. If necessary, seek support from specialists to help your child strengthen any skills that your child has not mastered. Early intervention can make a big difference setting your child up for success in kindergarten and beyond.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

As much as possible, create consistent routines. Try to adhere to the same tasks each morning and evening.

GOODBYES: Practice, practice, practice, saying goodbye, as much as possible. Keep drop-offs cheerful, brief, and never sneak away. A consistent, quick, and loving goodbye builds security and reduces separation anxiety.

- Prolonged goodbyes increase anxiety. Aim for a short, confident and positive departure.
- Use the same phrase each time to signal your return, "I will see you in a little while."

MORNING: Getting out the door and to school on-time takes practice. You should practice waking up early enough to get dressed, eat a healthy breakfast, brush teeth, pack backpack, and leisurely walk to bus stop or school.

SLEEP: *Getting your child on a consistent sleep routine should begin at least 2 weeks before the start of school.* Kindergarten-aged children (5-6 years old) generally need 10 to 13 hours of sleep per 24-hour period, with studies indicating at least 10 hours should occur consistently at night for optimal school performance and behavior. Sleep improves a child's overall health and behavior, supports a stronger immune system, helps kids perform well in school, improves memory, allows neuro-pathways to strengthen, and

strengthens overall mental well-being. Establish a set a fixed time for lights out. A good bedtime is between 7 and 8 p.m.

- Create space for your kids to share stories about their day and release any emotions.
- Avoid screen time before bedtime to help your kids better fall asleep.
- No electronics in their bedroom.

NAPPING AND QUIET/CALM TIME: If your child is still napping come July/August, try replacing nap time with “quiet time” or “calm time”. Or if your child is exhausted by 5:00 or 6:00 pm, consider working a “quiet time” into their day. These periods of quiet rest are an excellent tool providing a child with time to unwind in their room, relax their minds and body, read books, or engage in quiet play. Some sleep specialists suggest 30 to 60 minutes of quiet time or calm time daily, ideally scheduled around when the child used to nap to be very beneficial for a child’s well-being. That said, most 5-year-olds don’t nap if they’re getting sufficient sleep at night. However, if your child had a long day at school with afternoon extracurricular activities or isn’t feeling well, their body may need extra rest, and they could benefit from a nap. If your child falls asleep after school, be prepared to wake them up a few hours before bedtime. Follow nap time with some gross motor, vigorous activities to help them tire out before going back to bed for the night.

- **Common Sleep Issues for Kindergarteners**

- Kindergarteners may experience an increase in nightmares or night terrors due to the many developmental changes they experience during this stage.
- Bedtime refusal is common in school-age children since they can be overtired from long school days without naps.
- Middle-of-the-night wakings may become more frequent, often caused by overtiredness or nightmares.

THE FIRST DAY OF KINDERGARTEN

Your child’s first day of kindergarten routine should be their everyday routine for the school year. Follow the predictable routine you’ve created during the summer about getting dressed, brushing teeth, having breakfast etc. Serve a hearty breakfast with their favorite breakfast foods. Keep your emotions in check when helping your child. If you cry, they may cry too

TYPICAL SCHEDULE

- Class Meeting
- Math
- Lunch/Recess
- Reading/Language Arts
- Science or Social Studies

Weekly specials – each special meets once a week.

- Music
- Art
- P.E.
- Media Center

BUS: If your child rides a bus, take them to the bus stop each morning and pick them up from the bus stop at the end of the day. The bus driver will not release a child without a known adult present.

- Go to your assigned bus stop. Have your child meet their neighbors who will be on the bus with them. It helps to have a familiar face or two at the bus stop. Do not go to your child's best friend's bus stop unless you are prepared to go to that bus stop for the whole year.
- When the bus arrives go through your good-bye routine and have your child get on the bus themselves. They can climb the stairs.
- Stay on the sidewalk and wave goodbye to the bus.
- The kindergarten students ride at the front of the bus.
- The 5th grade patrols will pay special attention to kindergarteners. They form a special bond with the youngest student and are there to help the children.
- DO NOT drive your child to school on the first, second, third, etc. days. This sets the expectation that you will drive them every day.
- If you must follow the bus to school, you can. Get in your car and follow the bus. If you follow the bus to school, do not let your child see you when they get off the bus.

WALKERS: If your child is a walker, try and find other neighbors who are walkers and walk with them to school. Find the appropriate drop-off area. Say goodbye routine and leave. On the first few days of school, do not linger at the drop-off location where your child can see you.

For both walkers and bus riders it is so important that a caregiver be at the pickup location on time. If you are running late contact a neighbor to collect your child. Check with your child's school. You will probably need to call the school and let them know the pick-up person has been changed.

LUNCH: Pack your child's lunch the first few days/weeks of school. There is so much for them to learn and navigate that simplifying lunch time with a premade lunch is a good idea. Wait until your child has adjusted to school and before starting to "buy" lunch. The cafeteria is a very loud and busy place.

SNACKS: Depending on when lunch is scheduled for the children, there may be a snack break in either the morning or the afternoon. Your child's teacher will share that information with you. In most cases, you will be responsible for providing a snack. It's possible that you may have to modify your child's snack choices based on classroom allergies.

FOOD ALLERGIES: If your child has food allergies they may be separated from their classmates to eat at an allergy-free table. Check with your child's individual school on how allergies are handled in their building.

COMING HOME AFTER SCHOOL: Attending more than 6 plus hours of school each day, riding the bus and/or walking to and from school is exhausting for most new kindergarteners. They've exerted a lot of energy learning, following rules, being in a large group environment with a lot of stimuli, playing, they may not have had enough time to eat their lunch, and more. They may revert to some younger behaviors, like wanting to soothe themselves by sucking their thumb/fingers, holding a lovey again, curling up with you, or if overly tired or frustrated, cry or have a tantrum.

AFTER SCHOOL SNACKS: Your child is likely to come home from school very hungry. Have a stash of their favorite snacks on hand. You can also bring snacks to the bus stop or to the walker pick-up point.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: Limit for the first few weeks/ or couple of months. Slowly add additional activities into your child's schedule once they have adjusted to the longer days of kindergarten.

BEDTIME: For the first few weeks you may want to push your child's bedtime forward by 20 or 30 minutes, especially when they are coming home exhausted.

The first 2 weeks of school are designed for the teacher and children to get to know each other and establish the classroom routines and rules. There may be a lot of busy work which some children will find boring, others will find exciting, and some may be confused by what's being asked of them.

Fall assessments will determine each child's needs. Once the assessments are completed, the teachers will begin to form small groups and start more differential teaching. These groups are fluid and will change according to the content being taught and a child's progress mastering skills.

COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATION

In preschool there are many opportunities to mix and mingle with other parents. That isn't always the case in elementary school. Preschool teachers and administrators also provide you with a lot of information and photos about your child's day, development, friends, likes, dislikes, successes, etc. In kindergarten there will not be as much daily information available to you.

COMMUNITY: It's important to build a community at your child's kindergarten/elementary school, to be and/or stay in the know, to have a support network, to be informed about what your child's talking about, etc.

- Join the PTA.
- Volunteer to support your child's teacher, or the office administrators.
- Talk with neighbors whose children are already in your or other elementary schools.
- Ask your local school if there will be any orientations or discussions for parents of incoming kindergarteners.
- Before school begins play on the new school's playgrounds. Invite neighborhood children who will be attending the same school to come and play with your child on the playground.
- If you have concerns about your child, reach out to the school's administration for a meeting to discuss your child's unique needs. If your child has a 504 plan or an IEP, prior to the start of the school year, plan to meet with the teacher, specialists, counsellor, etc. who will be supporting your child with their accommodations.
- Some schools will organize play dates for the incoming kindergarteners before the first day of school. Try to attend.
- Attend Back to School Night to learn more from your child's teacher about the curriculum and expectations for the school year.

- Attend the parent-teacher conferences and any open-house days.
- Attend any social events, like a spring fling, or International Night, Book Fairs, etc.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CHILD AND PARENT: Communication with your child is very important but may not come easily for them. Your child may not be able to *voluntarily* express in detail the events they experienced in their day. Here are examples of some questions you can ask your child to help them expand on the topic of things that have occurred at school. Try and avoid yes/no questions and one word answer types of questions.

- Who did you play with today?
- What special things did you do today with your friends or teachers?
- What games did you play at school today?
- What made you happiest about the game?
- What specials did you have at school today?
- What was the best part of your special?

COMMUNICATION FROM SCHOOL TO PARENTS: General communication will come via ParentVue, including weekly updates.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS: Be judicious in contacting your child's teacher and patient with responses. It is important to keep your teacher up to date on any changes in a child's home environment as the changes can impact a child's school performance. The loss of a pet, having a grandparent move into the family home, moving homes, etc. all impact a child's ability to concentrate in school. Teachers will keep information confidential and work with you to support your child as needed.

EMERGENCIES

In any emergency situation, call your child's school's front office.

EXTRA CREDIT

These are the things your child has been doing all year at BCPCNS. Please facilitate learning through play all summer long.

READING: Children's academic skills develop at different rates. Children will learn to read anywhere between 4 and 7 years of age. Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade are important years for children to learn to read. 3rd grade and older, children will read to learn

- Read with your child every day.
- Point out words that begin with the same letter as their name or have your child identify words that begin with the same letter as their name, move onto the second letter in their name, or identify words that also start with M like in Mom or D as in Dad, etc.
- Place your finger between words to isolate the words. Explain how words are chunks/groups of letters.
- Show your child how written words track left to right. Encourage your child to sequence and count left to right.
- If you are reading a rhyming story, ask your child to fill in the rhyme before you read it out loud.
- Teach your child how to hold a book and gently turn the pages.
- Ask your child to tell a story back to you.

- Sing the ABC song A LOT!!!!
- Point out STOP and EXIT signs. These are some of the first sight words a child “reads.”
- Focusing on sounds is important too. For example, I spy with my little eye, something that starts with duh. If there’s a dog in the room the child will most likely guess dog. This is a great game to play in the car. You can also spy, colors, shapes, etc.
- Identify sounds that are the same and different.
- Spend time practicing rhyming words and the sounds letters make. For example, ask your child what rhymes with cat when you are out for a walk. Take cues from nature. For example, I see something that begins with L and make the LLL sound. The answer may be leaf, or light, or ladybug. Say what’s a word that starts with, B and make the b sound. Give examples, boy, bat, and can you tell me another word?
- MCPS’ reading curriculum is based on phonics. The more practice a child has with rhyming and matching sounds, the more prepared they will be for learning to read.

WRITING: Practice pre-writing skills, which are the same as fine motor skills. A child needs to have a strong core to have strong shoulders and arms so they can have strong hands to hold a pencil properly and to write in kindergarten. Ways to strengthen hands include:

- tear up junk mail
- use scissors to cut paper, gift wrap, coupons, magazines
- pick up things with tweezers or pick up small objects like coins
- hang from the monkey bars
- play with play dough
- practice squeezing glue bottles and using glue sticks
- play with stickers (it takes fine motor to remove plastic backing)
- string beads on pipe cleaners or make friendship bracelets
- draw and color with crayons, markers, sidewalk chalk
- trace different types of lines (zig zag lines and curved lines)
- Practice tracing and writing their first name on a piece of paper (always working from left to right, begin with an upper-case letter and follow with lower case letters)

NUMBER RECOGNITION, PATTERNING, & SEQUENCING

- Count, count, count, objects everywhere throughout the day
- Use mathematical language throughout the day. Ask questions like:
 - Are there more apples or bananas in the fruit basket?
 - If there are 4 people having dinner and I have 3 spoons, how many more spoons do we need
 - Which pile is bigger? The pile of green shirts or the red shirts?
- Sort objects by color, shape and size
- Use M&M’s or Skittles to make color patterns
- String pony beads on a pipe cleaner following a pattern
- Play board games (Sum Swamp, Hoot Owl Hoot!, Hi-Ho! Cherry-O, Zingo 123) that make numbers fun
- Have a scavenger hunt and find five objects that are red, three objects that are round,...
- Measure children’s height on a measuring stick or door frame
- Measure items around the house

ROLE PLAY: Children don't typically come to adults and say, "I had a hard day, I need to talk", they ask, "Will you play with me?" Utilizing play and art as an expressive modality will allow your child the opportunity to express their stressors, concerns, and feelings. We encourage parents to really engage in this play with their child. Even 10-15 minutes a day can make a big difference in your child's stress level and your relationship.

- Practice greeting old friends and role play how to meet/make a new friend
- Practice sharing, collaborating, game rules, turn-taking, etc.
- Listen and observe what your child is saying and how they are playing. Consider intentionally setting up play scenes that include a town, people, cars and school bus, along with materials for "school" role play.

MCPS KINDERGARTEN READINESS: Document published by MCPS with a list of kindergarten readiness suggestions which can be accessed by [clicking here](#).



MCPS KINDERGARTEN HANDBOOK 2025-2026 can be found [here](#). There will be an updated 2026-2027 handbook available soon.



Possibly the most important piece of advice, I can share, is to let your child know you believe in them, they can go to kindergarten, they will learn lots of new and wonderful things, they will make friends, their teacher and others, nurse, principal, aide, will care for them, and most importantly, you love them and know they've got this!