



Introduction to Special Education for Kindergarten Families

Webinar Transcript & Resources

How to Use This Guide

This document is a summarized and condensed transcript of the Kindergarten Special Education Webinar. It has been created to support families in revisiting and reflecting on the information shared, in a format that can be read, shared, and returned to over time.

You may choose to use this guide in a way that works best for your family. Some may prefer to read it all at once, while others may return to specific sections to revisit key information or explore an area in more detail.

This guide can also support accessibility by allowing families to review information at their own pace, translate content where needed, or share it with caregivers and family members who were not able to attend.

We hope this resource supports you as you prepare for your child's transition to Kindergarten and throughout the year ahead. Thank you for your continued partnership in supporting student success.

Webinar Transcript

Thank you for taking the time to join us for DSBN's Introduction to Special Education Services for Kindergarten Families webinar.

We know this is an exciting time as your child prepares to begin Kindergarten. This webinar is an opportunity to share an overview of the Kindergarten program, along with some of the special education supports and resources available to help students and families feel supported as they start this journey.

Agenda Overview

The webinar has three main components:

1. Kindergarten Program Overview: Strategies, resources, and supports available to all students in Kindergarten, along with some of the main components of the program.
2. Additional supports available to students in Kindergarten classrooms.
3. DSBN special education resources and additional information.

Kindergarten Program Overview

In Kindergarten, the program is built on the belief that all children are capable learners who are curious and full of potential.

Educators take time to get to know each and every learner and create learning environments that are focused on relationship building and creating a sense of belonging as a community.

We also recognize that families know their children best. Your insights and experiences are important, and educators value opportunities to connect with you through both informal conversations and more structured meetings. Building strong connections with families helps support communication and each child's growth, and schools look for meaningful ways to engage families throughout the year so children can continue to thrive.

Structure of Kindergarten Program

Kindergarten is a two-year play and inquiry-based program for children aged three to five years. Classrooms are supported by a team that includes a teacher and a designated early childhood educator, each bringing complementary expertise. Early childhood educators focus on child development and hands-on learning, while teachers support curriculum and assessment from Kindergarten through Grade 8. Working together, they plan, teach, and support students based on their individual learning goals, while maintaining ongoing communication with families.

Students enter Kindergarten with a wide range of experiences, strengths, interests, and needs. The program is designed to support this diversity by providing time to build relationships, establish routines, and gradually engage children in learning with the support of their educators.

Kindergarten also plays an important role in building a strong foundation for learning in the early years. The first five years of a child's life are a key period for growth and development, and educators create caring, responsive environments that support each child. Learning is often connected to play and social interaction, where students build communication, collaboration, and problem-solving

skills as they engage with others.

The program also supports a positive transition to school. Whether children are coming from home, childcare, or preschool settings, educators focus on building strong relationships and creating environments where children feel safe, valued, and ready to learn.

Approaches to Teaching and Learning

There are three main approaches in Kindergarten:

1. Explicit Learning

Each day includes short whole-group lessons in literacy and math.

Educators use hands-on materials such as:

- Whiteboards
- Letter cards
- Math tools

Children may gather in different areas of the classroom, supported by the educator team.

2. Play-Based Learning

Educators design learning environments and activities with specific goals in mind.

They support children by:

- Observing
- Asking questions
- Extending learning
- Encouraging problem solving

Small group opportunities provide additional support with literacy and math.

3. Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning builds on children's natural curiosity.

Educators support children's questions and interests through:

- Read-alouds
- Experiments
- Investigations
- Hands-on exploration

Four Strands of Learning

Foundations of Language and Mathematics

In language learning, students develop skills in communication by using speech, gestures, and body language. They also begin to read and write by learning letters and sounds, and applying these skills in different ways. Daily read-alouds are an important part of the program and help build vocabulary while supporting comprehension.

In mathematics, students learn about sorting, patterning, shapes, numbers and counting, measurement, and how to organize data. These concepts are explored through hands-on materials and interactive activities that help make learning meaningful and engaging.

Problem Solving and Innovating

Children explore ideas based on their natural curiosity, and learning often connects to nature and outdoor experiences. They are encouraged to ask questions and investigate the world around them.

Students also begin to develop engineering and design skills by building and creating with materials such as cardboard. In addition, they are introduced to early coding concepts by following simple instructions using symbols, words, and images.

Self-Regulation and Well-Being

Students develop social skills and learn about emotions, empathy, and relationships through their daily experiences. Classrooms are designed to support well-being and may include quiet spaces, sensory experiences, and opportunities for children to eat or drink when needed.

Daily movement and outdoor learning also support physical well-being. Self-regulation strategies are introduced and practiced through whole-group learning, small group work, and individual support throughout the day.

Belonging and Contributing

Students build a sense of belonging by learning about their own strengths and interests and by developing a positive sense of self. They also learn about their community and how to respect and care for the environment.

Throughout the day, students have opportunities to explore and express themselves creatively through experiences in music, visual arts, drama, and dance.

Assessment and Reporting

Educators document student learning through ongoing observation and note-taking. In their second year of Kindergarten, students complete an early reading screening, which helps identify strengths and areas where additional support may be needed. Results are shared with families through conversations and included in reporting.

Communication of Learning reports are provided three times per year and offer an overview of each child's learning journey.

Daily Flow and Environment

The Kindergarten day includes:

- Short instructional periods
- Large blocks of uninterrupted play
- Small group learning
- Opportunities for library or gym

Students also have multiple opportunities for snacks, meals, and movement.

The classroom environment is carefully designed to support learning and engagement. Materials are selected intentionally to align with learning goals and encourage exploration.

Educators play an active role in the classroom by modeling play, working with small groups of students, and observing and documenting learning throughout the day.

Special Education Supports

We understand that starting Kindergarten is an exciting time, and we want every child and family to feel supported.

Physical and Environmental Supports

For students with special education needs, careful planning takes place to create an inclusive and welcoming environment.

If your child has physical needs, we work closely with the Niagara Children Center to complete any necessary environmental assessments before school starts, ensuring the classroom and school spaces are accessible and safe for children who may need support with daily living routines.

Our washroom facilities are also equipped to meet a range of needs. Classrooms also have spaces where children can go when they need a quiet moment to relax and feel ready to learn.

Our educators work closely with each child, meeting them where they are and supporting them as they build independence and confidence with these important skills.

Individualized and Team-Based Support

In Kindergarten, children learn in many ways, and we adjust our approach throughout the day to support each child.

Some students may benefit from additional one-to-one support as they learn new skills, participate in play, or develop self-regulation strategies. This support is shared across the classroom team and is responsive to each child's needs as they grow and develop.

Students are supported by a team that may include the classroom teacher, the designated early childhood educator, the learning resource teacher, and, in some cases, an educational assistant. Educational assistants provide support based on student needs, and the level or focus of that support may change over time as students build independence.

Children use a variety of ways to communicate, including speech, gestures, pictures, and communication devices. Educators support both expressive and receptive language using tools such as visuals and communication boards to help children understand others and express their own ideas.

Speech and Language

If a communication concern is identified, a speech screening may be recommended. Families are contacted by the learning resource teacher and consent by a parent or guardian is required before any next steps are taken.

Specialized Equipment

Some children may need specialized equipment to help them move through their day and fully take part in learning.

This might include things like:

- Supportive seating
- Communication devices
- Mobility tools
- And other equipment

We work closely with families in our community and partner with the Niagara Children's Center to make sure each child has what they need. Our goal is for every child to feel included, supported, and able to access learning from the start.

Self-Regulation Supports

Children come to Kindergarten with different levels of self-regulation skills, and a part of the program is helping them develop these skills over time. At first, children may rely on adult support through routines, visuals, and reminders. As they grow, our educators work alongside them, modeling calm and practicing simple strategies together that develop with time. Many children begin to use these strategies on their own. You may see them choosing a quiet space, asking for help, or using visual supports independently.

Some children may need extra support so our educators may use tools to help guide behaviour such as:

- Visual schedules
- Timers
- Sensory tools
- Emotion charts
- Social stories

These supports can be used with the whole class, in small groups, or one-on-one, depending on what works best for each child.

Building Independence

Building independence helps children feel confident and proud of what they can do. Educators meet each child where they are and build on their skills, helping them take the next steps towards independence at their own pace.

In daily routines, this might look like putting on their coat or following simple steps when interacting with others. It could also be taking turns or joining in play.

For self-regulation, it may involve noticing their feelings and using a calming strategy in communication. This might include asking for help or sharing their needs in their own way.

Support is gradually adjusted as children grow and each small step helps children feel more capable and successful.

Collaboration With Families

Families are key partners in supporting children.

By sharing information and maintaining communication, consistent supports can be created between home and school.

Resources and Supports

DSBN Special Education Webpage

The DSBN special education webpage provides access to:

- Parent/Guardian Guide to Special Education
- Event information
- Special Education plans
- Advisory committee information including meeting dates and agendas

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

SEAC advises the board on:

- Programs
- Services
- Supports

This committee includes parent representatives, community members, trustees, and staff. The committee works with the board to review plans, budgets, and other services related to Special Education. They also help ensure family perspectives are heard and considered in decision making.

Who to Contact

There are times when you may need to reach out to the school with questions or concerns, and it's important for families to know that there is always someone at DSBN you can speak with, and we encourage you to reach out if you have a question or concern about your child's education.

If questions or concerns arise, we encourage families to start by connecting with their child's teacher, followed by the school principal, and then the superintendent's office if further support is needed.

At DSBN, we are committed to working together with families and school teams to support all students. Thank you for joining us. We look forward to welcoming our newest Kindergarten students and families in September.