Preparing for your Child’s Transition to Kindergarten

Preparing for a child’s transition to kindergarten is an exciting but sometimes anxiety-producing time for many parents. When your child has been or is being treated for cancer, there can be unique medical, learning, or social/emotional needs to consider prior to the start of kindergarten.

Why is kindergarten important?

Early childhood is a time of rapidly developing skills. Enrolling in and attending kindergarten when your child meets age requirements is important and has been shown to:

- Promote language and cognitive skill development
- Promote social and emotional development
- Provide children with opportunities to learn independence
- Promote problem-solving skills
- Promote early literacy skills such as reading and math
- Encourage a child’s curiosity
- Adjust to the routines of school such as sitting for learning, focusing on a specific task, and turn-taking

What are some of the things I should be thinking about?

Diagnosis and treatment for cancer at a young age can impact your child’s developmental trajectory. Some areas that may be affected include your child’s social, emotional, neurocognitive, and academic development. In addition, your child may have sensory needs (for example, vision, hearing, or motor) as a result of his/her cancer experience and associated treatment at a young age.

What should I do if I have concerns? How do I have my child evaluated?

By law, U.S. public schools MUST provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all children, regardless of their disability or special needs. Formalized school-based support is provided either by a Section 504 Accommodation Plan or by an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In order to receive formalized school supports children must first be evaluated by the school-based team to determine eligibility. You, as your child’s caregiver, can request a school-based evaluation if you have identified concerns or if you anticipate that your child may need supports in school.

Evaluation requests should be made in writing to the special education/student services department in your child’s school district. Sample evaluation request letters can be found at www.dfci.org/schoolliaisonprogram.
School districts can evaluate students in a variety of areas including but not limited to: cognitive ability, academic achievement, speech/language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, assistive technology, vision/orientation mobility, hearing/educational audiology.

By law, public school districts in the US have up to 60 school days to complete an evaluation and hold a meeting to review results with you and determine if your child is eligible to receive formalized school-based supports. Because the evaluation process can be lengthy, it is recommended that you request evaluations during the school year prior to your child’s transition to kindergarten.

What if my child has healthcare needs?

Children with special healthcare needs in school may require an Individualized Healthcare Plan (IHCP). An IHCP helps ensure that your child receives the health services he or she needs during the school day. If you believe your child needs an IHCP, contact the nurse at your child’s school. He/she will help coordinate the process, including getting medical information and specific orders from your child’s oncologist or pediatrician. Together, you, your child’s physician, and the school nurse will develop an IHCP that addresses your child’s medical needs during the school day.

What do I do if I have more questions or want more information?

- Visit Dana-Farber’s School Liaison Program website at www.dfcio.org/schoolliaisonprogram
- Contact your child’s medical team and/or psychosocial provider
- Contact your child’s school Principal and/or school district’s special education/student services office