



DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION

A parent or guardian's

# Guide to School

For families new to the country



Fall 2022

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## Enrolling Your Child in School

### Parent and Guardian Rights and the Law

Federal law guarantees your child’s right to a free public education in the United States. Minnesota state law also provides you specific rights. For more information on your rights as parents or guardians, please visit the Minnesota Department of Education’s [“Parental Rights Topics: Prekindergarten through grade 12”](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/back/MDE060000) website (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/back/MDE060000).

There are also federal laws that protect your child from discrimination in schools. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance. If you feel that your child’s or your civil rights have been violated, you must file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) within 180 days of the alleged discrimination (unless the time for filing is extended by the Regional Civil Rights Director). You would file a complaint online with the [OCR Office](https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html) (https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html).

Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.22, subdivision 5(a) states, “Every child between 7 and 17 years of age must receive instruction unless the child has graduated.” Children under 7 may attend an early childhood program, kindergarten, or school before the age of 7.

Students are eligible to attend public school and receive a free public education through age 21. For qualifying information, please visit [MDE’s General Education Topics webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/caqa/gen/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/caqa/gen/) and select the Question and Answer (Q and A) document, “School Attendance Age Limitations.”

## The Enrollment Process

You can enroll your child in school by contacting your local public district, school, or charter school office. Staff working at the district or school will tell you how to register your child for school and what information and documents you need to complete the enrollment process. This enrollment process may take several hours. Let enrollment staff know if you want an interpreter, who can explain everything in your home language, to help with the enrollment process.

### Documentation

Schools will ask you for certain information about your child. Documents you may be required to bring include:

- A document showing your current address such as a utility bill or lease.
- An official document showing your child’s date of birth, such as a birth certificate or passport.
- School records or transcripts from the place your child went to school before enrolling in a Minnesota school.
- The school may need to copy your child’s records. You will keep the original documents.

Schools may ask you for a Social Security number or evidence of your immigration/legal status in the United States. **You are not required to provide this information. A school will not need a Social Security number or immigration information to enroll a child in school. You have the right to inform the school that you wish to enroll your child without providing that information.**

## Home Language Survey and English Language Proficiency Assessment

You will be asked to complete a Home Language Survey (HLS). The HLS is a legal document that informs the school district about the language or languages that are spoken by or with your child. The HLS asks you questions about the languages used by you and your child. If the HLS indicates that your child speaks a language other than English or a language other than English is spoken with your child, your child will take an English language proficiency assessment.

The English language proficiency assessment is used to assess your child’s abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. The results of the assessment will determine whether your child is fully proficient in English or qualifies for English language support at school. If your child has recently taken an English language assessment at a previous school, the new school may use the results from that assessment to determine if your child needs English language support.

The school will inform you of the results of the English language proficiency test. Your child will be legally entitled to receive English language services if your child is not fully proficient in English. You have the right under federal law to choose not to have your child placed in an English language support class or program. You can also choose to have your child receive English language support services even if you have refused English language support services in the past. In this case, you should contact your child’s school for assistance and to discuss your options.

## Immunizations

The school will require a health record for your child that shows your child’s medical history and vaccines. You may need to ask your doctor or clinic to give you a document showing your child’s immunization record or you may have the doctor or clinic send the document directly to the school. For more information, please visit the [Minnesota Department of Health’s vaccine webpage](https://health.mn.gov/people/immunize/index.html) (<https://health.mn.gov/people/immunize/index.html>).

## Free and Reduced-Price Meal Forms

During registration, the school will ask you to fill out a form called an “Application for Educational Benefits” to see if your child qualifies for free or reduced-price school meals. Schools may offer breakfast and lunch to students. You will need to share your household income and the names of people in your household to complete this form. The form may ask for your Social Security number. You are not required to share that information. You can tell the school that you do not wish to share that information, and they will process your child’s lunch form without that number.

### Summer Meals

Many schools offer meals during the summer months. Ask your school for details on participating in a summer meals program.

This form is called the “Application for Educational Benefits” and can be found on [MDE’s Student Meal Applications webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/proc/App/) (<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/proc/App/>).

## School Policies and Practices

### Attendance and Absences

Attending school is a legal requirement in the United States. Students are expected to come to school on time every day. If your child is absent or comes to school late, you need to inform the school why your child was absent or late. Your school should explain its attendance policy to you. If your child is sick, the child should stay home from school. Being sick is considered an “excused absence” if a parent or guardian informs the school that their child is sick. Many schools have an attendance telephone voicemail and parents or guardians can leave a message to tell the school that their child is sick.



Parents and guardians should call that telephone number and leave a message that their child is sick in the morning so the school knows right away that the child will be absent. An absence that is not excused is called an “unexcused absence.” Having many unexcused absences can have serious consequences for the family and the student because attending school is a legal requirement.

For more information on laws regarding absences in Minnesota schools, please visit [MDE’s Due Process Rights, Data Privacy and Other Student Rights webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/caqa/ue/index.htm) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/caqa/ue/index.htm) and select Q and A (Questions and Answers): Student Absences.

Your school should inform you about the time your child can be dropped off for school in the morning and what time your child should be picked up in the afternoon. Many schools offer before and after school childcare at the school building. This childcare is sometimes free and sometimes it costs money. Your school should inform you about the availability of before- and after-school care possibilities for your child if you need it.

Every district and school will have policies on attendance and absences, and those policies are different at each district or school around Minnesota. If you have questions about your district or school policy on attendance and absences, please see the district or school’s policy handbook.

## Digital Inclusion

Your child will need access to digital technology to fully participate as a student. Your child will use digital technology to participate in learning, access important resources, and be involved in the school community. Digital technology includes having a computer or similar electronic device, reliable access to the internet, and a way to keep the electronic device charged using electricity. Your child needs to understand how to use the technology and how to safely navigate the internet for learning. Technology for students as well as their families, is important. Many schools give parents an option to use a parent portal account for communication purposes and parent involvement. You should create an email account if you do not have one already and provide this information to your child’s school. You may have the option of using a personal email account instead of the school’s parent portal account. It is important to identify your preference with the school because they will often send important communication such as newsletters and announcements to your email account. Parents often communicate with teachers and other school personnel using this process, too. Parents often check on their child’s attendance, class grades and assignments, and even pay fees for lunches or field trips using an electronic device and the internet. More information on this topic can be found on [MDE’s Internet and Device Access page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/access/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/access/).

Your child’s school may offer workshops or opportunities to learn more about using the internet and how to use the electronic devices they provide to your child. You can ask the school about what they may offer for assistance. There are also several local organizations that offer digital navigation services, devices at reduced costs, and information and help to parents and members of the community take advantage of school’s digital learning options. Support is generally available in languages other than English. Be sure to request for an interpreter if needed. For a list of connections to community partners, please visit the list at the bottom of [MDE’s Digital Inclusion page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/whatis/index.htm) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/whatis/index.htm).

You may have questions and concerns about your child using the internet safely. This is a common concern for parents. More information and guidance on this topic can be found on [MDE’s Digital Literacy and Internet Safety page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/safe/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/safe/).

## School Policies and the School Policy Handbook

Most schools have policies such as attendance, appropriate student clothing, and internet use. The school should provide you with a district or school policy document or handbook. The school may also have policy forms for you to sign stating that you understand the policy or policies. The school has an obligation to be sure you can understand the form before signing. The form may be translated or may be explained to you verbally, so be sure to tell the school if you want an interpreter to explain anything in your home language.

## English Language Support Programs

Your child's English proficiency level, grade level, previous education, and language background will be considered by school staff when determining the program of instruction that is best for your child. You can ask questions about any program or class that the school recommends for your child. You should communicate your concerns to the school if you disagree with the school's placement recommendation.

### English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Learner (EL) Programs

The goal of the English as a second language (ESL) or English learner (EL) program is for children to learn English in order to fully participate and learn in school and to be prepared to have a career or go to college using the English language. Children have the right to English language support if they qualify for services based on the results of the English language proficiency assessment. If your child is placed in an ESL or EL program, the school will explain the program to you. You can choose to have your child participate in EL services even if you have refused services in the past.

### Bilingual and dual language programs

Some districts offer bilingual or dual language education programs. The design and languages of these programs may be different from school to school. Bilingual or dual language programs may offer your child instruction in your child's home language and in English. A goal of a dual language program is for students to maintain their home language and be academically proficient in two languages, usually their home language and English. A goal of a transitional bilingual program is for students to use their home language to transition to an all-English program. Ask your school or district if they offer bilingual or dual-language programs in English and in your child's home language and if your child is eligible for the program. If there is a dual language program offered that is not in your child's home language, you can still participate in the program. You should ask your district or school for details to determine if the program is something you want for your child.

### Students with limited or interrupted formal education

Your child may be identified as a student with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). SLIFE are a specific group of EL students. SLIFE must be identified each year, as required by the Minnesota Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act. (Minn. Stat. § 124D.59, Subd. 2a). A student who is considered SLIFE is identified as an English learner and has two years less schooling than peers. You can ask your school if your child qualifies as SLIFE.

Districts identify SLIFE on an annual basis. The Commissioner of Education is required, under the LEAPS Act, to report the academic and linguistic growth of SLIFE. Your child could receive additional, special language and instructional services if your child is SLIFE.

## Continuing or Exiting Language Support Services Each School Year

Your child will be given an annual English language assessment each year if your child received English language support services or if you refused services. The assessment will determine the progress your child is making in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. You will receive an assessment report of your child's progress a few months after the assessment was taken by your child.

Your child can participate in the annual English language assessment if you have refused language support services for your child. This will keep you informed of the progress your child is making without receiving English language services. You will need to notify the school if you do not want your child to participate in the annual English language assessment.

Based on your child's score on the English language assessment, the school will determine if your child will continue to receive English language support or if your child will no longer need language support and be exited from the services. The school will notify you of this decision. You should contact the school if you have questions about the assessment results. You should contact your school if you have questions about the program for your child based on the assessment results.

## Other School Programs

### Special Education

Special education is a program for students with a learning challenge or difference. If the school requests that your child be evaluated for special education or if your child is already in special education, you should talk to the school staff and also visit the [MDE Special Education webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/sped/) for more information and to know your rights as a parent or guardian of a special needs student (<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/sped/>).

To be eligible to receive special education services, a comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team from the school. Once a student is identified as eligible for special instruction, the team develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP outlines the specific needs of the student and the goals and objectives that will help the student make educational progress.

Schools are required to notify parents about special education meetings and parents must give permission for evaluation, identification, and placement of their child in special education services. The school must ensure that assessments and other evaluation materials used to evaluate a child for special education are in a language that is most likely to provide accurate information. This may be your child's native language. A child cannot be determined to have a disability only because a child is not yet proficient in English.

If your child is eligible for special education services, your child will receive services from specialized teachers who work individually or in small groups with students in a variety of settings to support his or her learning. The team that decides the type of services that your child receives must include professionals who have training or expertise in understanding instruction needed for learning a second language and for a learning disability. If your child is an English learner and eligible for special education, your child has a right to receive both services.

### Gifted Education Programs

School districts provide programs for students who have certain talents and abilities. This is called Gifted Education. Students in this program take specific classes to nurture their talents and abilities. Students are assessed to determine if they have exceptional intellectual ability in academic subjects, visual or performing arts, and creativity or leadership.

Your school should inform you, or you may contact your school, about gifted education programs for your child. You can also find more information on [MDE's Gifted Education webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/gifted/index.htm) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/gifted/index.htm).

## Early Childhood Screening

Early Childhood Screening is an assessment given to your child. The results of the assessment will tell you how your child is growing and preparing for the beginning of school. Screening can be done starting when your child is 3 years old. Screening can also be done until your child starts kindergarten. Screening is free. Completing the screening can help your family connect with free pre-kindergarten learning programs available for your child and some learning programs also include classes for parents or caregivers. You can connect with your district to learn what is available to your family.

## Early Learning Programs

Minnesota districts and Head Start locations offer early childhood education programs and services for children birth to five years old and their families. There are several programs that may be available for you and/or your child, including home-based programs. For more information on early learning programs, visit [MDE's Early Learning Programs webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/elsprog/).

## Title I and Intervention Services

Children who need extra help learning to read or do math are eligible for additional support through a special federal program called Title I. Title I is different in each district and school. Students in Title I may receive extra reading or math help from a specialized teacher who comes into or pulls children out of the regular classroom. If your child is eligible for Title I services, the school will send home a document called a "Parent Compact." Children who receive English support services are also eligible for Title I services if they meet qualifications for each type of service.

## Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Program

A popular program in many schools is called Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). STEM education is a specially designed program that teaches students to develop and apply scientific understanding. For more information on STEM, visit [MDE's STEM webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/stem/index.htm) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/stem/index.htm).

## Homeless Education Assistance

If your family is living in a transitional housing situation, your child may qualify for something called McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance. McKinney-Vento is a law that requires schools to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success for students experiencing homelessness. To qualify for the homeless program, your child needs to lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Some examples of someone qualifying for this service are:

- Children and youth who are living in a home with another family due to loss of housing, and economic hardship; are living in a hotel, motel, or camping grounds; and are living in emergency or transitional shelter;
- Children and youth who have a nighttime residence that is a public or private place not ordinarily used by humans to sleep, such as a car;
- Migratory children, because they are living in circumstances described above.

For more information on Homeless McKinney-Vento, visit [MDE's Homeless McKinney-Vento webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/ESEA/home/index.htm) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/ESEA/home/index.htm).



## Types of Schools

For a complete list of schools and districts, please visit [MDE's Organization Reference Glossary webpage](https://public.education.mn.gov/MdeOrgView/tag/list) (https://public.education.mn.gov/MdeOrgView/tag/list). The webpage will show the MDE Organization Reference Glossary which allows you to find schools by their type. When you see the Specialty Tagged Collections list, you will choose what type of school you are searching for from the list, such as elementary schools or secondary or Senior High Schools.

### Public Schools

Public schools in Minnesota make up the majority of all schools in the state. Public schools and districts are generally governed by a local school board made up of elected members. Public schools do not charge tuition and do not have admission requirements for enrolling students. Public school students have to take state and national assessments unless parents or guardians refuse, often referred to as “opt-out,” for their children to participate. Public schools are required to follow federal and state laws.

### Charter Schools

Charter schools are independent public schools of choice and are an alternative to traditional public schools. There are many charter schools in Minnesota serving thousands of Kindergarten to 12th grade students. There are also many early learning programs in Minnesota charter schools. Charter schools do not charge tuition and do not have admission requirements to enroll students. Charter school students have to take the same state and national assessments as public school students. Parents or guardians can refuse participation in standardized testing for their child at a charter school, just like in a traditional public school. For more information about Charter school enrollment, please visit MDE's Charter Schools webpage (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/fam/cs/>).

### Nonpublic Schools

Nonpublic schools are schools that are operated and funded by non-public entities such as private, religious or other specialized institutions. Visit [MDE's Organization Reference Glossary for a full list of Nonpublic schools](https://public.education.mn.gov/MdeOrgView/search/tagged/NonPublicSchool,MDE_ACTIVE) (https://public.education.mn.gov/MdeOrgView/search/tagged/NonPublicSchool,MDE\_ACTIVE). You can also contact your local public school district, or look online to find the names of nonpublic schools in your area. Private school students do not take the same state assessments as their peers in public schools. Private school students may or may not take national assessments, depending on the school. Neither MDE nor local school districts certify or validate any nonpublic diploma or transcript. For more information about nonpublic schools, visit [MDE's Nonpublic and Homeschools webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/nphs/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/nphs/).

### Home Schools

Some Minnesota families choose to create a school in their own homes. This is called a home school. State standards set for public schools do not apply to nonpublic schools or home schools. Therefore, neither MDE nor local school districts certify or validate any home school diploma or transcript. For more information on home schools, visit [MDE's Home School Education webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/nphs/home/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/nphs/home/).

### Online Learning

Online learning provides a unique way for public school students to continue, expand, or enhance their education. Some online learning combines traditional classroom courses with online courses at the student's local school. Other online

learning programs allow students to attend classes from home. Minnesota public school students may enroll in a full-time online program or they may choose to take supplemental courses as part of their regular school day. For more information about online schools, visit [MDE's Online Learning webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/oll/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/oll/).

## Alternative Learning

The mission of the MDE alternative education program is to provide viable educational options for students who are experiencing difficulty in the traditional system. Alternative education is designed for students who are at-risk of educational failure. State-Approved Alternative Programs (SAAPs) include Area Learning Centers (ALC), Alternative Learning Programs (ALP), Contracted Alternatives, and Targeted Services for students in Kindergarten through grade 8. For more information on alternative learning programs, visit [MDE's Alternative Learning webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/al/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/al/).

## Learning Models

Learning models is a term used by schools to describe how and where your child will attend school. Some schools offer learning online so that your child can attend school by using computer and the internet and learn at home. Most schools offer learning inside a school building where your child would be there in-person for the entire day. Some schools may offer a combination of online and in-person learning for your child. Usually a school or district will choose a learning model that is decided to be the safest for your child and the community where the school is located. The learning model the school uses for your child may change. The school will communicate the reason for the learning model change with you, if that happens.

School districts and charter schools may have choices of different learning models that your child can participate in, depending on what is best for the schools at the time your child is enrolling or attending. Listed below are the most common models available. You should communicate with your child's school to find out what choices are available and what choice will work best for your child and family. If your child's learning model involves the use of the internet and a computer or electronic device, it is important for you to ask about the school's policy for online safety and care needed when using these resources.

**In-Person Learning:** Students attending school in-person inside a school building all day, each day for their learning. Students may be asked to follow guidelines such as wearing masks or keeping a safe distance from other people for safety, depending on health and safety guidelines given by health officials.

**Hybrid Learning:** Students attending a hybrid model will spend some whole days or a part of the day in the school building and some whole days or part of the day learning online, usually from home, each week. Talk to the school about your child's schedule because each school and district will have a different hybrid learning model schedule. Some schools are able to provide a computer for the online portion of school. The computer or electronic device must be returned to the school at the end of the school year or when your child leaves the school. An internet connection is needed in your home, and may be available and provided by the school. Talk to someone at the school if you need help getting internet access or affording an internet service fee for internet access at your home. For more information on distance learning, please visit [MDE's Supporting Distance Learners page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/support/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/support/).

**Online or Distance Learning:** Students attending an online or distance model will spend each day at home or in another setting outside of the school building, and participate in learning using the computer and the internet or maybe using papers and books that the school provides. Talk to the school about the daily schedule because some schools have specific class schedules and some schools allow their students to work at their own pace. Some schools are able to provide a

computer for the online portion of school. If the school gives your child a computer or electronic device, it must be returned to the school at the end of the school year or when your child leaves the school. An internet connection is required and may also be provided by the school. Talk to someone at the school if you need help getting internet access or affording an internet service fee. For more information on distance learning, please visit [MDE's Supporting Distance Learners page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/support/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/support/).

## Schools by Grade Levels

### Kindergarten

Kindergartens are often in elementary schools. Children are eligible to attend Kindergarten when they turn five-years-old on or before September 1 of the calendar year that schools start.

Minnesota has learning standards for Kindergarten. You can find the standards on [MDE's Academic Standards webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/) and select the "Minnesota Academic Standards: Kindergarten" document.

Before your child enters Kindergarten, your child should participate in an early childhood screening program. This screening program is often available at a local public school district building. You can contact the main office of your local public school district for more information. If your child is unable to participate in the screening program, screening can be done in a comparable health and developmental screening program provided by Head Start, Child and Teen Checkups or your health care provider.

Your child does not need to participate in the state-screening program if you object to the screening program. More information can be found at [MDE's Kindergarten webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/k/index.htm) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/k/index.htm).

### Elementary Schools

Elementary schools usually serve students in Kindergarten through grades five or six. Some elementary schools include grades seven and eight. In most elementary schools, there are about 25 children assigned to a classroom with one teacher. Students generally spend most of their day with the same students and teacher. In elementary school, the time in school is often spent on the following subjects: language arts, reading and writing, math, science, art, music, social studies, physical education and health, media and technology. However, some elementary schools offer other subjects such as STEM or world languages, for example. Elementary schools also schedule a portion of the day on recess where children can go outdoors each day, weather permitting.

Minnesota has academic standards for students in elementary schools in many subject areas. You can find the standards on [MDE's Academic Standards webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/).

### Secondary Schools

Secondary schools include junior high or middle schools and senior high schools. Generally, secondary schools serve students in grades six through twelve.

Students move from class to class taught by different teachers in secondary schools. Classes may include English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health, music, physical education, and art. Secondary schools may also offer world languages, computers, computer coding, and business and technology. Some classes are required and some classes are offered as choices for elective classes. The schedules for students who qualify for ESL or EL and Special Education services include ESL or EL and Special Education classes.

Minnesota has academic standards for students in secondary schools in many subject areas. You can find the standards on [MDE's Academic Standards webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/).

## High School Transcripts and Graduation

If your child has a transcript from a school in the United States or another country, it is important to share that document with the school. At the high school level, students can get credit for classes taken at schools inside and outside the United States. Schools and districts can use the transcripts to place students in age-appropriate grade levels so that they can access grade appropriate curricula and have an equal opportunity to graduate.

In order to graduate from high school, students must meet academic standards and successfully complete courses required by the state of Minnesota. Your school should assist your child with a plan for graduation so your child knows what requirements need to be met in order to receive a diploma. Some students graduate after four years of high school while others take more time. Depending on a student's age, students may transition from the high school setting to other age-appropriate school sites, programs, or community colleges.

For more information on graduation requirements in Minnesota, visit [MDE's Graduation Requirements webpage](https://education.mn.gov/mde/dse/gradreq/) (https://education.mn.gov/mde/dse/gradreq/).

## Partnering with your child's school

### Your Role

You, as parents or guardians, are very important in your child's education. You are your child's first teachers, and you teach your child many things before your child attends school.

MDE has information to help parents or guardians prepare for going back to school each fall. For more information, visit [MDE's "Back-to-School Toolkit" webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/back/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/back/)

### Helping Your Child at Home

Schools and teachers want you to be involved in your child's education. There are many ways that you can help your child succeed in school. Your local school and district will provide more information about how to help your child throughout the school year.

Here is a list of some ways you can support your child:

- Talk and read to your child in your native language or in English, whichever is more comfortable for you.
- For young children, show and talk about the pictures you see in books you read together.
- Find a quiet place and time for your child to do homework. Some schools provide homework help for students before or after the school day. Do not hesitate to ask your child's teacher for assistance if your child has homework that your child is unable to do.
- Ask your child questions about the school day.
- For young children, play games, count, and practice telling time.

#### Note:

It is important that you and your family members continue use your native language at home and to encourage your child to maintain your language while learning English, too. Your child will learn English more easily if he or she knows and maintains his or her home language and culture.

- Participate in class field trips.
- Offer to volunteer in your child’s classroom or school.
- Bring your child to the local public library.  
For more information on libraries, please visit [MDE’s Libraries webpage](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/lib/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/lib/).
- Make sure your child knows your name, telephone number, and home address. If you have a young child, it is recommended that the child keeps your name and contact information in a school bag until your child knows the information in English. For the safety of your child, make sure your child understands that this personal information should only be shared with people your family trusts.

If you have questions about other ways you can help your child at home, contact your child’s teacher(s). Schools and teachers want and expect parents or guardians to ask questions about school and to learn how to help their child succeed in school.

## Communication between Home and School

There are many opportunities during the school year for you to communicate with staff in your child’s school. Schools usually communicate important information using school or class newsletters, emails, or telephone calls. The school sends many types of information to parents or guardians such as:

- Report cards about your child’s progress
- Notices about special events and field trips
- Descriptions of educational and extracurricular programs

School communication may be sent home in your child’s school bag, backpack, or school planner. The school may also have a website with information. Ask your school if you need information about how to access the school website.

Ask your school for translation or interpretation help if you need it. You have the right based on federal law to be provided with information in a language you understand.

At times, you may be asked to sign a form to give permission for your child to do something at school. If the school asks you to sign something you do not understand, contact the school for assistance. It is important that you fully understand any document before you give your approval to the document with a signature.

## Parent/Guardian-Teacher Conferences

Most schools have “parent-teacher conferences” during the school year. The conference should be conducted in a language you understand, so tell the school if you want an interpreter. At the conferences, the teacher will talk to you about how your child is doing in school. The teacher will explain the things your child does well. The teacher will also tell you if your child is having any challenges. This is an opportunity to share information your child’s teacher may need to know about your child. This is a time that you can ask the teacher questions.

Each school will have a different way of communicating with you about scheduling parent-teacher conferences. Tell the school if you will need an interpreter at the conference. Also, let the school know if you need transportation to the conference. Some schools may be able to help with transportation.

Parent-Teacher conferences are not the only time to connect with the school or teacher. At the beginning of the school year you should receive the name of your child’s teacher and a way to contact the teacher by phone or email. You should



contact your child’s school whenever you have something of importance to share about your child or when you have a question about your child’s schooling.

## Visiting Your Child’s School

Many schools have an “Open House” or a “Back-to-School Night” at the beginning of the school year. This is a time for the families to visit their children’s school, see their classrooms, and meet their teachers. Teachers share with parents the instructional program, schedules, and what children need to bring to school. The school should inform you about this opportunity in a language you are able to understand.

School staff also encourage families to visit the school at other times, for example, to see presentations and performances and participate in festivals and celebrations.

If you want to visit your child’s school at any time, contact your child’s teacher in person, by phone or by email to make an appointment.

## Parent Teacher Organizations

Parents are involved in the decision-making process of the school through organizations such as Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). These groups do things such as earn extra money for school activities and equipment, develop school plans, and help make school policies.

You should be invited to attend meetings of these organizations. You should tell the school you want an interpreter to participate. You may also choose to contact the school for more information about getting involved in these organizations.

## Testing

There are several types of tests, or assessments, that your child will be required to complete while in a Minnesota school. Tests can include class tests given by a teacher or state assessments required in all Minnesota public schools.

Tests given in a classroom by the teacher may be used as part of determining a student’s course grade and understanding of the class content. State and federally required tests are used for school and district accountability purposes as required by federal and state laws. The results of each specific test have a purpose in your child’s school, or even for your child individually. You have a right to receive your child’s test results and can choose to contact the school if you need help understanding the impact of any given test on your child’s performance.

The type of test will depend on your child’s grade, type of school (public or nonpublic), and what programs your child may participate in at school. You also have a right to refuse a state assessment for your child. This may be an important consideration if you have health or safety concerns about your child participating in testing. If you want to refuse a test for your child, it is important to contact the school directly because there are forms that you may need to sign. You should also contact your school to find out when your child is taking state assessments because the date and time can be different each school year. Sometimes a school will send a letter to you about when your child will take a test for the class or even for the state assessment, so you will want to be sure to read that information carefully.

If your child is identified as an English learner, your child will need to take the ACCESS or Alt ACCESS assessment each year. This assessment is required by federal law but there is a process that parents must complete in order to refuse the assessment for their child. Reaching a proficient score on the ACCESS assessment is the only way your child can “exit” from the English language development program at school and no longer be identified as an English learner. This may not

affect your child’s participation in bilingual or immersion programs. For more information about this process, please contact your child’s school.

For more information on testing, please visit [MDE’s Statewide Testing page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/tests/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/tests/).

## Other Helpful Information

### Transportation or Getting Your Child to and From School

In some school districts, you may be responsible for taking your child to and from school. In other school districts, your child may take a school bus to and from school each day. Your school should inform you if your child will take a bus and where the bus will pick up and drop off your child each day. You may need to sign a form and have it on file at the school in order for your child to ride the bus. If your child takes a bus, the pick-up and drop-off location will be within a short distance of your home. For more specific information about transportation, please talk to your child’s school.

Your child may be able to take a school bus to school if your child qualifies for McKinney-Vento or has an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This may be the case even if you live close to the school or if other children living near you do not take buses to school.

### Weather

If the weather is extremely cold, or if there’s a significant snowstorm, it is possible your child’s school will close or the school may open one or two hours late. School busses will not come to pick up your child if the school is closed and will come late if the school will start later that day. School closings are usually announced on the school district website and the local radio and TV stations early in the morning or the night before the school closing. Some schools use a recorded telephone message, text message, or email message that will notify you of school closings or late starts.

### Moving to a New School

If you plan to move to a new location served by a school in which your child is not currently enrolled, notify staff in your child’s school of the date your child will be withdrawn and provide the name of your child’s new school. The school will be responsible for sending your child’s school records to the new school.

### School Supplies

Many schools ask students to begin school with some school supplies such as pencils and notebooks. Let school staff know if your family is unable to supply these materials. The school may be able to help families get school supplies.

### Assistance for Other Supports for Your Child

If your family needs assistance with getting winter clothing, food, or other resources, ask staff at the school for assistance. Guidance counselors or social workers at the school should be able to connect your family with community support services.

### Bullying

Bullying is an intentional behavior that hurts, harms, or humiliates a student, either physically or emotionally, and can happen to children while at school, in the community, or online. Students who bully often have more social or physical

“power,” while students who are the victims of bullying have difficulty stopping the behavior. The behavior is typically repeated, though it can be a one-time incident. It is important to report to the teacher, principal, counselor or parent liaison at the school if you believe your child is being bullied. Ask the school for a plan to help your child be safe.

For more information on how to work with the school to address your concerns, visit the [MDE webpage on Safe and Supportive Schools](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/).

## Extracurricular Activities

Your child will have opportunities to participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities. These activities take place before or after school or in the summer. These activities are voluntary.

Most secondary schools and some elementary schools offer sports for students such as soccer, football, baseball, basketball, dance, tennis, and swimming. Sometimes the sports teams for school-age students are organized by the community education program or a local youth sports league. Your child’s school can tell you about which sports are available and how to participate.

Academic support such as tutoring for reading, math, language and homework help may be offered. Schools also have clubs that give students an opportunity to develop special interests. Activities may include chess, theater, music, school newspaper, and much more.

You and the school staff may encourage your child to get involved in extra-curricular activities. These activities are a good opportunity for your child to practice English and make new friends.

Most activities will be free but some may cost money to participate. No child can be excluded from participation in school activities if the family cannot afford the money for them to participate. Contact the school or talk to the leader of the activity if your child needs financial support to participate. This information will be confidential. Schools should have a way to get or raise money for students who cannot afford to pay.

## Adult Education

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is available free to adult learners through the Minnesota Department of Education. Each year, hundreds of locations serve thousands of adult students. The ABE services include Adult Diploma, general education development (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL or EL), Career Pathways, Family Literacy, Basic Skills Enhancement, Workplace Literacy, and U.S. Citizenship or Civics.

You must be at least 17 years old, not enrolled in K-12 public or private school, and need to develop basic academic skills in reading, writing, speaking and/or mathematics in order to be eligible for ABE services.

For more information on ABE and GED, visit [MDE’s Adult Basic Education and GED website](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/abe/) (https://education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/abe/).

## School Employees/Personnel/Staff

Below are some of the common titles of the adults that work in a school.

- **Principal:** Every school has a principal who is the leader of the school. The principal is the lead administrator and is responsible for all of the things that happen in the school.
- **Assistant Principal:** Large schools often have one or more assistant principals who help the principal in directing the activities of the school.
- **Dean of Students:** The dean often works with managing the behavior of students. Deans may also take the role of an administrator in a school building.
- **Classroom teacher:** Each class of students has a teacher who is responsible for teaching a certain subject or several subjects each day with the students in class.
- **Specialist Teachers:** These teachers work in special areas of the curriculum such as music, art and physical education.
- **Reading intervention teacher, Title I teacher, or Math intervention teacher:** These teachers work specifically with students needing extra help in the area of reading or math.
- **Special Education Teacher:** These teachers work with students who have an individual education plan (IEP). The special education teacher may work with students in almost any subject, depending on the needs of the student.
- **English as a second language (ESL) or English Learner (EL) Teacher:** These teachers help students who qualify for ESL or EL services. They help students to learn the academic English language that is needed to be successful in school.
- **Bilingual Education Teacher:** These teachers teach subjects in English and in a partner language, often the home language of students in the class. Students may take bilingual classes to maintain their home language and learn English or to learn academic content in a language they understand while they transition to learning more academic English.
- **Teaching Assistant/Paraprofessionals or Para educators (Paras):** Paras assist teachers in providing instruction to individual or small groups of students. Some school paras are also bilingual and can assist your child or family in your home language.
- **Parent Liaison:** Some parent liaisons speak English and frequently-used languages of the students in the school. Liaisons work with families, interpret at meetings, or translate documents for the school.
- **Guidance Counselor:** Many schools have guidance counselors. At the elementary level, guidance counselors teach students the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need future success. At the secondary level, counselors help students choose and schedule their classes. Counselors also help students make decisions about the future - where to go to college, how to get a job, or what kind of jobs are available.
- **School Psychologist:** Some schools have a school psychologist who sees students on the recommendation of a staff member or parent. The psychologist is responsible for psychological testing of students and may provide counseling for students.
- **Social Worker:** A school social worker helps students and their families to make sure that their social-emotional needs are met. This person also works with social service agencies in the community get what is needed for families who may need resources such as shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and other needs.
- **Librarian/Media Specialist:** Schools have libraries or media centers where students can go to do research, read books and study. The people who work in the libraries or media centers help students find independent reading material and do research.
- **Nurse:** When students feel sick or get hurt while at school, they can go the school nurse who will help them. The nurse has an office where children can lie down until they feel better. The school nurse will contact you if your

child is hurt or sick and needs to be picked up from school. The nurse may also give medication to students during the school day if those medications are prescribed by a doctor and the parent brings a note from the doctor.

- **Administrative assistants:** Administrative assistants work in the main office at a school. They answer the telephone, help visitors, and do record keeping for the school.
- **Custodian/Building Engineer:** These individuals keep the school building clean and safe. In the winter they make sure that the school is warm. They usually take care of the routine maintenance of the building.
- **Food Service workers:** These workers prepare the food for the students each day and serve it to the students, usually breakfast and lunch.
- **Clerk:** Clerks take care of printing, labeling, photocopying and distributing documents for the school. They also may take care of the attendance for the school.
- **Security Officer:** A school may have a security officer to help keep the school safe.



## Sample forms and Letters

This section includes sample letters that you can use to communicate with your child's school. You can fill in information in the blanks.

### Your child is absent from school

Dear Teacher,

Please excuse my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) from school on \_\_\_\_\_  
(date of absence). My child was absent because \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent Signature)

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Your child comes late to school

*If your child arrives at school late/is tardy, you may use this form to communicate with your child's school:*

Dear Teacher,

Please excuse my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) late arrival to school today.

My child was late to school today because \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent Signature)

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Your child needs to leave school early**

*If your child needs to leave school early (early dismissal), you may use this form to communicate with your child's school.*

Dear Teacher,

Please excuse my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) from school at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

My child has a (choose one):

\_\_\_\_\_ Doctor's appointment

\_\_\_\_\_ Dentist's appointment

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent Signature)

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**You and your child are moving out of the school boundary (in district, in state, or out of state)**

Dear Teacher:

We will be moving to a new home on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). My child, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) will not attend this school as of \_\_\_\_\_ (date of withdrawal from school).

Our new address is \_\_\_\_\_ and the new school is \_\_\_\_\_ (name of new school and address).

I understand that my child's school records will be transferred to his or her new school. Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent signature)

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**You would like to meet with your child’s teacher or another school staff person**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (name of school staff person),

I would like to make an appointment to talk with you about my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child).

I can be available on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time).

Please contact me to confirm by (choose one),

\_\_\_\_\_ written note                      \_\_\_\_\_ email                      \_\_\_\_\_ phone

so we can arrange a convenient time to meet. Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent signature)

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**You need to notify the school that your child will not take the bus from or back home.**

Dear Principal:

This note is to inform you that my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) will not take the regular bus home or to school on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).

My child will (choose one):

\_\_\_\_\_ go home with a friend: \_\_\_\_\_ (friend’s name)

\_\_\_\_\_ will be dropped off or picked up at school by \_\_\_\_\_ (name).

\_\_\_\_\_ will stay after school and go home on the late bus or \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent signature)

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Colorin Colorado

- [Twenty ways you can help your children succeed at school](http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/twenty-ways-you-can-help-your-children-succeed-school) (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/twenty-ways-you-can-help-your-children-succeed-school>)
- [Your rights as the parent of a public school student](http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/your-rights-parent-public-school-student) (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/your-rights-parent-public-school-student>)
- [Homework Tips for Parents of ELLs](http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/homework-tips-parents-ells) (<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/homework-tips-parents-ells>)

### MN Literacy Council

- [Parenting Program: Engaging parents in advocating for children's education](https://www.literacymn.org/parenting-program) (<https://www.literacymn.org/parenting-program>)

### U.S Department of Education

- [Resources on a variety of topics for parents on the education of their children in the U.S.](https://www2.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml) (<https://www2.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml>)
- Publication: [I have a question: what parents and caregivers can do to help children thrive a school](https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf) (<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf>)
- [A Guide to the Individualized Education Program](https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf) (<https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf>)

### Civil Rights Laws

- [Information for Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf) (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>)
- [Schools' Civil Rights Obligations to English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html) (in multiple languages) (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html>)
- [Department of Justice and Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents \(January, 2015\)](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf) (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>)
  - Rights of English learner students and limited English proficient parents based on federal civil rights requirements.
- [Office for Civil Rights: Lau v. Nichols](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/lau.html) (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/lau.html>)
  - 1974 court case that mandates supplemental language instruction for students not proficient in English
- [Civil Rights Act of 1964](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43e4.html) (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq43e4.html>)
  - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance