

Transitional Kindergarten: Getting Kids Ready for Success in School



California's children begin kindergarten at a younger age than kids in almost any other state, often before they have the maturity and the social, early literacy and pre-math skills they need to meet the challenges of kindergarten. Currently, if children turn age 5 by Dec. 2, they can attend kindergarten. California is only one of four states that allow children as young as 4 years old to attend kindergarten; at the same time, we have some of the highest standards for what we expect our children to learn in our kindergarten classrooms. Furthermore, the children with the largest school readiness gaps, including low-income 4 year olds, are the least likely to have access to high-quality pre-k that prepares them to succeed in kindergarten. Just 13 percent of low-income children attend high-quality pre-k, according to research by the RAND Corporation. Changing the kindergarten entry date in California, so all children enter kindergarten at age 5, would generate savings that could be used to give children an additional year of preparation before kindergarten.

Preparing Our Children for Success in Kindergarten

Giving our children a year of transitional kindergarten would allow them to mature socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically, and help them develop the skills they need to succeed in the year before kindergarten.

- Transitional kindergarten provides 4 year olds who would be turning 5 years old between September and December with a year of early education.
- More than 120,000 4 year olds enter kindergarten each year, including approximately 49,000 English Language Learners and 74,000 who attend Title I schools. Without the maturity and skills a year of transitional kindergarten would allow them to develop, they may be behind from the start.
- Transitional kindergarten also provides a language-rich environment for Dual Language Learners and lays the foundation for learning to read.
- Transitional kindergarten maintains existing levels of education funding and uses existing teachers and classroom facilities.

Building Momentum in California's Communities

California is making important progress in preparing our children for success in school. Transitional kindergarten builds a bridge between early learning and kindergarten.

- Some school districts across California have already been providing their youngest learners with programs like transitional kindergarten for several years, while others are launching this innovative reform in the fall.
- Los Angeles Unified School District's new pilot program starts this fall. When adopted districtwide, it will serve more than 11,000 4 year olds.
- Palo Alto, Torrance, Orange County and other districts all already offer their youngest learners an extra year of preparation before starting kindergarten.

Transitional kindergarten prepares our children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond, setting them on a path to develop the skills they need to build a brighter future for California.

Benefits for Our Children and Communities

High-quality early childhood programs like transitional kindergarten are a critical component of K-12 reform in the early elementary years.

- Without the strong, early start that high-quality early learning provides, children may not develop the skills they need to read proficiently in third grade. This critical milestone predicts whether a student will graduate from high school.¹
- Research shows that moving the kindergarten entry date up increases test scores by as much as 27%, helping to close the achievement gap.²
- Children who attend high-quality early learning programs are less likely to drop out of high school, be held back a grade or placed in special education, and more likely to score better on reading and math achievement tests, studies show.³
- Early childhood programs like transitional kindergarten strengthen our economy and prepare students to become part of a globally competitive workforce.
- Research shows high-quality early education narrows the achievement gap and offers one of the highest returns of any public investment – more than \$7 for every dollar spent.⁴

"... We have three and four year olds entering kindergarten unprepared to be able to read, to be able to socialize in their environment, and so I believe it's absolutely critical for us to get to these kids at an early age and work on these deficiencies."

— Ken McNeely, President of AT&T California

Endnotes

1. KIDS COUNT Special Report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010) Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/123/2010KCSpecReport/AEC_report_color_highres.pdf
2. Cannon, J. & Lipscomb, S. (2008). Changing the Kindergarten Cutoff Date: Effects on California Students and Schools. Public Policy Institute of California.
3. Reynolds, A. (1995). One Year of Preschool Intervention or Two: Does it Matter? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 10.

Reynolds, A. et. al. (2002). Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 24.

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4. Reynolds, A. et. al. (2002). Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 24.

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