

Should I Send My Child to Transitional Kindergarten?

by

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It's that time of year again. Parents of Transitional Kindergarten-age children in California, that's children who turn five between September 2 and December 2, are wondering what to do. For those of us who have children born in the late summer or fall, we are faced with this dilemma:

Do we give our child another year of preschool?

Do we send them to [Transitional Kindergarten](#) or Kindergarten at the elementary school?

We had no idea how complicated this choice was. Judy's child, who was born in late August, is too old to attend a public school Transitional Kindergarten, but makes the cut-off date to start Kindergarten. Alexandra's child, who has an early September birthday, misses the Kindergarten cut-off date but would make it into a Transitional Kindergarten.

We understand that these are complicated questions for many families. While preschools have lower ratios and more individualized attention, Transitional Kindergarten programs are free (though aftercare is not) and many parents wonder if attending Transitional Kindergarten at an elementary school might give their child an academic advantage. This choice will affect your child's life throughout school -- no pressure!

What does it mean for your child to always be the [youngest](#)? Is your child ready for the academic emphasis in a public school Transitional Kindergarten (TK), or would he benefit more from another year of play-based education? How will your child handle the higher child:teacher ratio of an elementary school setting? Essentially, is she ready for the size and scope of elementary school, or does she still need the personal touch that she gets in preschool?

The facts are that elementary school is much more academic than it ever has been. With most Kindergartens and TKs having a 3-4 hour long day, teachers are expected to do much more with their lessons and curriculum, in a shorter amount of time. Free play is a luxury. Most Kindergartens and TKs have only a 10 or 15 minute long recess, the only time that children are getting to direct their own activities and play. What this means for our summer and fall-born children is that they are not always developmentally ready for the amount of focus, sitting, and directed attention that is required in TK or Kindergarten. [Cognitively](#), many children are ready, but if they are struggling to sit for longer than 15 minutes, handle a conflict with a friend, or are not able to get dressed or unpack their lunch boxes independently, Kindergarten may be a bit of a shock.

What does an extra year of preschool look like?

Old Firehouse School offers a final year of preschool that is the kind of Developmental Kindergarten (DK, our version of TK) that is truly a bridge between preschool and elementary school. It's a place where the curriculum continues to be child-directed but is also much more cognitively and socially sophisticated than 3-5 year old preschool. This is useful because young children need to continue to attune and synchronize their nervous systems in a play-based context in order to be able to sit still and pay attention to elementary school lessons later on. Many (most) 4-5 year olds are not really ready or able to thrive in an elementary school setting.

TK in the public schools is also meant to be a bridge to elementary school, but it's done in a context that is very academic and is less play-based than preschool-centered DK/TKs. In the public school TKs, there is a stronger emphasis on letters and numbers and worksheets; there is a higher teacher:child ratio (which means the children must do much more for themselves in terms of self-care and routines of the day); and in many districts there is not a specific, age-appropriate curriculum (often they take the existing KG curriculum and adapt it slightly).

There are many Kindergarten and TK teachers out there who believe in a developmentally appropriate curriculum, and they are the ones who still have block and dress up areas in their classrooms. But for too many years, we have heard from these same teachers that it is becoming harder and harder to incorporate play with new required curriculum standards.

As educators ourselves, we hear from elementary school teachers and from parents alike that no one has ever regretted giving their child another year of preschool, but there have been regrets about pushing children into Kindergarten too soon. As parents, we want the best for our children. We are inclined to err on the side of caution -- to give our children another year to mature before we expect them to cope with the realities of elementary school. And for this reason we choose to give them the gift of time and extra year in a Developmental Kindergarten.

Other useful links:

- [Early Academic Training Produces Long-Term Harm](#)
- <http://www.heyquitpushing.com/why-sooner-inst-better.html>
- [Thrive in 2025: Holding Kids Back for Success](#)