

What is transitional kindergarten?

Recently, a new law changed the kindergarten entry date so that kids must be 5 years old before Sept. of the year they enroll in kindergarten. It also created transitional kindergarten, a bridge between preschool and kindergarten for those kids born in the fall.

Transitional kindergarten gives young learners an opportunity to learn and grow in an environment tailored to meet their academic and social needs, providing them with the smart start they need to be confident learners in kindergarten and beyond.

All across California, school districts are opening transitional kindergarten classrooms this fall.

Transitional kindergarten bridges the path between preschool and kindergarten and gives students a head start that will yield huge payoffs in future academic success. TK provides the gift of time that will help students build a strong foundation for success in elementary school. One out of every four kindergarten students in California will benefit from transitional kindergarten. TK will serve 125,000 students each year.

TK is a win-win-win for children, families and schools.

- Children are better prepared to succeed.
- Families have an additional option to ensure their children enter kindergarten with the maturity, confidence and skills they need to excel.
- Schools benefit because children will be better prepared to succeed academically and less likely to be placed in special education or held back in later grades.



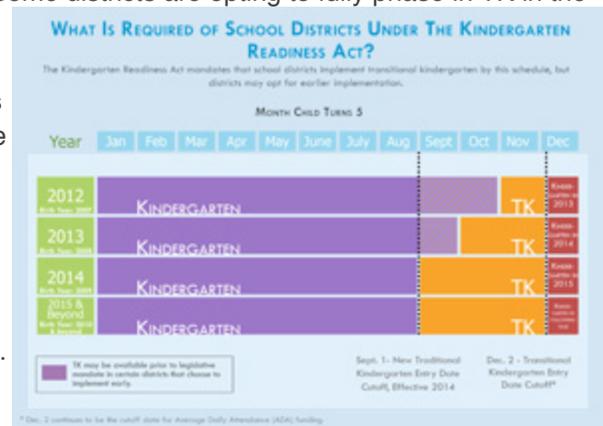
Research shows that the return on early investments in education is substantial. According to Deborah Stipek, professor at the Stanford University School of Education, “the cost is paid back many times over in reduced grade retentions, special education services and in lower expenditures for incarceration. Returns also come in the form of the increased productivity that results from higher levels of academic achievement and high school completion rates.”

Offered across the state, transitional kindergarten (TK) is an exciting, new educational opportunity for children born in the fall. Transitional kindergarten offers children with birthdays between September and December a developmentally appropriate curriculum aligned with kindergarten standards, taught by credentialed teachers from K-12. TK was created by a new California law called the Kindergarten Readiness Act.

The Kindergarten Readiness Act, signed into law by Gov. Schwarzenegger in 2010, changed the kindergarten entry date from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1 so that children enter kindergarten at age 5. The law phases in the new age requirement by moving the cutoff date one month a year for three years, beginning

this fall for children born between Nov. 2 and Dec. 2. Some districts are opting to fully phase in TK in the first year.

The entry date change and the creation of TK address a longstanding need in California, as our children have historically started kindergarten at a younger age than kids in almost any other state – often without the maturity, social skills and early academic skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. At the same time, kindergarten today is far more academic than it once was; similar to what first grade used to be.



The youngest kids in a kindergarten class risk struggling academically, emotionally and/or socially. At their young age, some may have limited experience interacting with peers and teachers, while others may not yet know how to listen or follow a structured class schedule. TK ensures that children have these pivotal skills, which are foundations to successful learning, when they begin kindergarten.

TK Instruction is Integrated

In the early years, children learn through hands-on experience and benefit from many opportunities for practice. They strive to make connections between all the new ideas and information they are learning. The most successful teachers make a deliberate effort to reinforce connections by explicitly relating topics and incorporating rich themes into their lesson plans. Throughout each day, TK teachers integrate math, language and literacy development, social emotional skills and English language development.

For example, teachers plan lessons that allow young children to:

- absorb new vocabulary while they explore math concepts;
- practice turn taking and cooperation while they persist through a sorting activity;
- rhyme and learn alliteration in songs and chants involving science; and
- learn new academic English through meaningful play, explicit instruction and contextualized, personalized learning.

TK Instruction is Individualized and Differentiated



In a successful TK classroom, teachers continually use observation and assessment to determine children's progress along the continuum of skill development, and tailor their instruction to help every child flourish. They use small group, pairs and individual activities to personalize their classroom program and build on whole-group experiences. To maximize learning for English language learners, TK teachers skillfully employ **English language development instructional strategies**. Additionally, this

differentiated approach to instruction facilitates the successful inclusion of children with special needs in the TK classroom.

A vibrant TK classroom is busy with activities and conversations, and filled with the excitement of small groups composed of children building similar skills together. The TK teacher purposefully designs the classroom to include accessible learning centers that cultivate curiosity and reflect the beauty, strength and capacity of all children. The teacher also thoughtfully constructs activities so that each child is challenged at the right level to build success, persist through difficulty with little frustration and get to the next level of skill.

For example, a successful TK teacher might ask all children to find pebbles on the playground. At the same time:

- In carefully composed small groups, he/she supports one group of children to sort by color while another group adds and estimates.
- Meanwhile, she is helping build vocabulary, comprehension and foster cooperation.
- In one group she might ask for children's opinions about how to estimate with open-ended questions, and in another she may ask children to share and describe pebbles.

The TK teacher skillfully integrates children's play into daily learning activities to support healthy cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.

"Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them." -
The American Academy of Pediatrics, 2007

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Children are more successful when teachers develop a two-way relationship with parents and guardians and support family connection with the school. This helps teachers to understand children's home life and culture, communicate children's progress and classroom experiences, share themes and encourage extension activities at home. These relationships can help:

- support volunteerism and family participation;
- represent the children's family and cultures in the class; and
- recognize families as a resource in understanding children's strengths and needs.



Teachers understand that "young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development," according to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. Positive early relationships between the teacher, child and family are vital to the foundation of healthy development and greatly influence a child's ability to achieve success later in life.

Families are key to young children's comprehension of their feelings, thoughts and expectations of others, as well as the importance of cooperation and sharing. However, some children may be in families and communities in crisis and experiencing trauma. Teachers who are sensitive to difficult circumstances can provide a calm, safe, predictable atmosphere where children can relax and be ready to learn.

Because the developing social emotional centers of the brain are directly influenced by children's living and learning environments¹ it is critical for TK programs to develop partnerships with families and communities that foster on-going, caring and goal-oriented relationships.

TK Classrooms are Culturally and Linguistically Responsive

Successful TK classrooms support English Language Learners (ELLs) and are culturally and linguistically responsive to children from many cultures. Students thrive when teachers create a rich environment and support meaningful relationships that honor culture, ability and home language.



Teachers should recognize TK students who speak a language in addition to English and/or who are learning English are contributing positively to their own development and enriching the TK experience for other students. It is important for teachers to understand that ELL children demonstrate their knowledge in the language they are most comfortable in, and might not have developed sufficient English language skills to feel confident to respond or fully participate.

Creating opportunities for children to participate through a variety of modes will help ensure knowledge remains accessible and the curriculum is responsive to all learners.² Children's responses should be valued and respected, regardless of the language they use when responding.

Teachers should work collaboratively with parents to develop specific plans and strategies that value and support the ongoing acquisition of skills and knowledge in English and the child's home language. TK teachers can enhance this practice through systematic **support of their student's use of home language to learn English**. The successful teacher will **build strong relationships** with and between children and provide positive learning experiences that maximize their success, build on their strengths and assets, and minimize the challenges and frustration some may experience during this time. Additionally, when children are provided with multiple opportunities to express opinions and describe their lives, each child feels valued for her/his unique contributions to the classroom community.

<http://www.tkcalifornia.org/>