

To: Partners
From: Preschool California
Subject: 10 Transitional Kindergarten FAQs
Date: Oct. 25, 2010

As conversations and questions arise about transitional kindergarten and Senate Bill 1381, we wanted to share our responses to some frequently asked questions. We know that things are in the early stages, but hope this FAQ may be useful in the short term.

1. What does the new law (Senate Bill 1381, the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010) do? What is transitional kindergarten?

- The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 amends the state education code relating to kindergarten to create transitional kindergarten, the first year of a two-year kindergarten experience for students who are born between September and December.
- Transitional kindergarten is a part of the kindergarten experience. It will give 120,000 more children each year an additional year of preparation so that they enter kindergarten more prepared to learn and succeed.
- Transitional kindergarten classes will offer children developmentally appropriate curriculum that is aligned with kindergarten standards, and will be taught by credentialed teachers.
- The new law also changes the kindergarten entry date from 5 years old by Dec. 2 to Sept. 1 so children enter kindergarten at age 5.

2. When does this new law go into effect?

- It will be phased in over three years and will be fully implemented by 2015. In the 2012-13 school year, a child who will have his or her fifth birthday between Nov. 2 and Dec. 2 shall be admitted to a transitional kindergarten program maintained by the school district.
- In 2013-14 school year, a child who will have his or her fifth birthday between Oct. 2 and Dec. 2 shall be admitted to a transitional kindergarten program maintained by the local school district.
- In the 2014-15 school year and each school year thereafter, a child who will have his or her fifth birthday between Sept. 2 and Dec. 2 shall be admitted to a transitional kindergarten program maintained by the school district.

3. If you are delaying the entry date, where does my child go? Are 4 year olds being shut out of kindergarten?

- No. The new law creates a new transitional kindergarten for 4 year olds who have birthdays from September to December.

- Transitional kindergarten gives children an additional year of preparation so they enter kindergarten more prepared to learn and succeed.
- Parents will still have an opportunity to enroll their children born between September and December in kindergarten. The law allows for a child born after Sept. 1 to be admitted to kindergarten on a case-by-case basis, if the parent or guardian applies for early admission and the school district agrees that it would be in the best interest of the child.

4. Is my child being held back?

- No. Transitional kindergarten provides a year of developmentally appropriate early education before kindergarten to 4 year olds with birthdays between September and December, so they begin kindergarten with the academic, social and emotional skills they need for success.
- Transitional kindergarten is the first year of a two-year kindergarten for those children born between September and December.
- Transitional kindergarten will be open to all children.
- Many parents have already acknowledged these benefits and—for those with the resources—have been intentionally giving their children additional time to mature before entering kindergarten, so their children start school ready to excel.

5. If my child has a fall birthday, would I have to put him/her in transitional kindergarten? Is this a mandatory program?

- No. Transitional kindergarten would be voluntary for all children.
- In order to provide flexibility for children with late birthdays who are ready for kindergarten, the bill protects an important provision in existing law that allows for a child born after September 1 to be admitted to kindergarten on a case-by-case basis.

6. How is this being funded? Will this mean increased costs for schools?

- Existing funding for children with fall birthdays will be redirected to transitional kindergarten and will employ existing teachers and classroom facilities.
- Some changes in curriculum may be needed to ensure classes are developmentally appropriate, but curriculum adjustments and new training already happen frequently in every grade.
- Six school districts, including two of the top 10 largest in the state, are implementing transitional kindergarten programs this fall. They have reported little to no start-up costs.

7. What about smaller school districts that may only have a few children in a transitional kindergarten class?

- Some school districts may be able to join with neighboring districts.
- Others may choose to have a combination transitional kindergarten/kindergarten classroom, or a preschool/transitional kindergarten classroom.

- Many of these school districts are already employing these strategies with the other grades, due to the small number of children.

8. What is the difference between transitional kindergarten and preschool?

- In theory, there is no difference between a high-quality transitional kindergarten program and a high-quality preschool program.
- However, in practice, transitional kindergarten is required to be aligned with California's kindergarten standards and offer children developmentally appropriate curriculum. The California State Preschool program must be aligned to California's Preschool Learning Foundations.
- Transitional kindergarten classes will be taught by credentialed teachers from the K-12 system. State preschool requires 24 units in early childhood education.
- Additionally, like kindergarten, districts would receive per pupil funding for children, as in the rest of the public education system.

9. What does the research say?

- Research shows beginning kindergarten at an older age improves children's social and academic development and provides a significant boost to their test scores, especially for children from low-income families. Children are also more likely to attend college and earn higher wages, according to a Public Policy Institute of California review of 14 recent studies.¹
- By ensuring more children are prepared for school, transitional kindergarten will generate savings to our education system through reduced special education and grade retention costs.

10. Are districts already doing this? Which ones?

- School districts across California have already been implementing this reform. Los Angeles Unified School District this fall launched a pilot program at 36 elementary school sites; when adopted district wide, it will serve more than 11,000 children. Sacramento, Fresno, Palo Alto, Torrance and Orange County are also offering similar programs to their youngest learners.

¹ Cannon, J. & Lipscomb, S. (2008). Changing the Kindergarten Cutoff Date: Effects on California Students and Schools. Public Policy Institute of California.