

## Should my child enter Kindergarten early?

The state of Arizona has established that children who are 5 years old by September 1<sup>st</sup>, can be enrolled into Kindergarten programs. The state also allows schools, at their discretion, to enroll students who will turn 5 in the months of September, October, November, and December. However, to discourage parents from using Kindergarten as a free Pre-Kindergarten program or free daycare, the state does not pay for the retention of an Early K student who is not ready to advance to 1<sup>st</sup> grade. To avoid this financial burden on parents, schools are tasked to determine if a 4-year-old student is really ready for Kindergarten.

### How can parents determine if their child is ready?

Parents might think their child is ready for Kindergarten based on their child's size or his/her verbal acuity. Some children express an eagerness to learn and love the idea of going to "big kids' school." Parents also sometimes feel pressure when their child's peers are moving on to Kindergarten while their child is just a little too young. Instead of relying on these factors, parents can objectively evaluate K readiness by honestly answering the following questions about their 4-year-old in three areas: academic readiness, social emotional readiness, and physical development.

#### **Academic Readiness**

- Is her vocabulary adequate for her age?
- Does she speak correctly most of the time?
- Is she ready to interact with other classmates (such as start a conversation or maintain a short conversation)?
- Can she ask for help?
- Can she count to 10?
- Can she write her name?
- Can she say the alphabet?
- Can she recognize individual letters?
- Does she know some of the sounds that letters make?
- Does she demonstrate an interest in learning new things?

Academic demands on students in the form of state education standards have increased year after year in the United States. (Check out Arizona standards at <https://www.azed.gov/standards-practices/> to see our state standards.) Studies show that students who start out academically behind often stay behind for their entire academic

career. Unfortunately, this can lead to a negative self-esteem and a risk for dropping out of school.

### **Social Emotional Readiness**

- Can he sit still and stay focused on a task for 15 minutes?
- Can he follow 2-step directions?
- Can he sit and actively listen?
- Can he get along with peers?
- Can he transition easily to different tasks?
- Can he handle separation from parents?
- Can he cooperate and take turns?
- Can he communicate how he is feeling?
- Can he control impulses and limit disruptive behaviors?

For school success, social emotional development of a child is just as important as academic readiness. Students who are not socially and emotionally ready for Kindergarten often have more negative interactions and behavior corrections from the adults in the classroom, again affecting self-esteem. Research also shows that younger students are more often misdiagnosed for behavior problems.

Parents should keep in mind that social emotional issues may not show up in Kindergarten, but later appear during pre-adolescence when students are becoming interested in relationships and starting puberty. Students younger than their peers often are not ready for this developmental change in their friends, and they can develop anxiety and depression.

### **Physical Development**

- Can my child use fine motor skills to button pants, zip coats, and tie shoes?
- Can my child draw and color?
- Can my child calm himself through controlled breathing?
- Can my child use the restroom independently?
- Can my child go all day without a nap?
- Can my child go a few hours without eating?
- Can my child use alternative feet on the stairs, skip, and hop on one foot?
- Can my child mimic movement of others?

Fine motor and gross motor skills are important factors for school success. Handwriting is a complicated task and fine motor skill development is crucial to writing acquisition. Movement among peers and in the school environment is structured and varied, so gross

motor skill development is also a factor in school success. In athletics and physical education, inadequate physical development can be a disadvantage.

### **Future unintended consequences**

Parents should also think down the line regarding future impacts to their child. Do you want your child starting college under the age of 18? What if your child does not meet the age requirements to participate in camps, activities, and programs that his or her peers are able to do? As a teen, your child may be interacting with and be pressured by older and more mature peers. Your early K child will not be able to drive or vote at the same time as his/her peers. What effect will that have?

### **Advantages of the older child**

Older children in the class are often more adept at handling life situations and solving conflict. Research shows that older students in a classroom tend to be the academic, physical, and social leaders. In fact, many parents, knowing this advantage, hold their child back from Kindergarten until they are 6 years old to gain these benefits.

### **I still think my child is ready for Early Kindergarten**

Of course, a few young students do very well as an early Kindergarten entrant. They are able to keep up with their peers and enjoy a successful school career. If parents feel their child is ready, they should ask the school of their choosing to help determine readiness. Parents should be wary of schools who accept early K entrants without determining readiness. Some schools only want the funding that comes with your student rather than looking out for what is best for your child. This is especially important remembering that the state does not pay for a second year of Kindergarten for early K entrants as well as the many possible disadvantages of entering too early,

In Prescott Unified School District (PUSD), our schools conduct an early childhood screening of students entering Kindergarten. This screening is then evaluated along with evidence from the teacher who screened the child, preschool records, and parent supplemental information. The parent will then be contacted to discuss the results of the evaluation and the potential readiness of the child. Our goal is to set students up for success in Kindergarten and beyond!

If you have questions, please feel free to contact our elementary school principals or Mardi Read, PUSD Assistant Superintendent. [www.prescottschools.com](http://www.prescottschools.com)