

## **Transitional Kindergarten (TK)**

How is TK different from regular kindergarten? Students are eligible for kindergarten when and if they are five years of age by August 31. Younger children may be permitted to enter kindergarten if the school and family determine they will be successful. TK programs are intended for children not yet five by August 31 who have been screened and demonstrate the need of additional preparation in order to be successful in kindergarten the following year.

Children who participate in Transitional Kindergarten (TK) simply have more time to learn and grow in a school setting than those who go straight into the typical Kindergarten classroom. This time allows the children to grow the social and emotional skills that are so necessary in the classroom. Children who participate in TK further develop both their confidence and their self-control than they could have if they went straight to Kindergarten.

When children go into Kindergarten confident, they are in turn ready to learn. They are far more likely to engage in class lessons and activities, and they will have an easier time making friends. The added self-control allows these students to have an easier time with daily Kindergarten tasks, such as following rules, controlling impulses, walking in the classroom, using inside voices, and sitting still for story time.

This added chance to grow and develop socially and emotionally is extremely important. When you think of Kindergarten, you probably imagine the beginning of academic learning and an increased focus on subjects like math and literacy. However, students who do not have adequate social and emotional skills will not be able to learn as well as students who are proficient in these areas. If Kindergarten students are focused on how to communicate properly with their classmates or how to behave as part of a group, they will have less mental energy to spend on their academic learning. In order to grow academically, they must be socially and emotionally ready.

Transitional Kindergarten students have more time to learn academic prerequisites than average Kindergarten students as well. A study done in California school systems by the American Institutes for Research found that TK students performed six months ahead of their peers in reading and literacy, and three months ahead of their peers in math and problem-solving at the beginning of the school year. Bringing in this type of knowledge again adds to confidence, and helps students excel throughout their Kindergarten year.

Transitional Kindergarten students also simply have more time to learn the necessary Kindergarten curriculum. For example, if students go into Kindergarten without knowing the majority of their letter sounds, they will need to spend a large part of the year catching up to their peers. They have extra time to learn introductory math and science lessons as well. With TK, students have the entire first year of their two-year Kindergarten program to gain their prerequisite skills.

Even if we set academic lessons and social-emotional growth aside, Transitional Kindergarten's gift of time continues to have benefits. They still have time to learn through play, something that is developmentally appropriate and extremely necessary for this specific age group. They are given opportunities to learn through dramatic play as they did in Preschool, and through group lessons that they will often participate in when they reach their second year of Kindergarten. TK has found the "sweet spot" for 4-5-year olds to balance academic learning and play-based activities.