TK: A Winning Solution for California

TK is a smart early investment and pivotal first step towards college and career readiness. Research shows that children who participate in school readiness programs like TK are more likely to do well in school, attend college, and earn higher wages.

- **Children** gain the skills and confidence they need to thrive in school, preparing them for success.

- **Families** now have an additional option to ensure their children enter kindergarten with the maturity, confidence, and skills they need to excel.

- **Schools** can start to narrow the achievement gap before kindergarten, and children will be less likely to be placed in special education or held back in later grades. TK is also an opportune time to engage more families early in the education of their children.

- **California’s economy** will be strengthened by a well-educated, globally competitive workforce. TK also does not cost the state any immediate additional dollars because it is a redirection of funds to a more appropriate experience for kids.

Transitional kindergarten (TK) is a grade offered statewide to children born in the fall, providing them with a strong foundation for success in school and in life. TK was created by the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 (Senate Bill 1381), which required children starting kindergarten to turn 5 by September 1. The law had previously required children starting kindergarten to turn 5 by Dec. 2. The goal of this shift was to ensure all children start kindergarten developmentally, socially, and academically ready.

To ensure the younger children with fall birthdays were not displaced and had an education option that is more developmentally appropriate, the Legislature established TK. School districts across California now offer TK. After TK, children enter a year of kindergarten.

**BENEFITS OF TK**

Children who attended TK made significant gains in early literacy skills, math skills, and executive functioning compared to their peers who did not attend TK – amounting to as much as a five-month advantage in kindergarten – according to a recent report by the American Institutes for Research.

Transitional Kindergarten Improves Literacy and Math Skills

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Mean scores for students at kindergarten entry:

Source: *Impact of California’s Transitional Kindergarten Program (2015)*

American Institutes for Research | www.air.org
THE HISTORY OF TK

The Legislature established TK with the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010. It was first offered in 2012, and fully phased in over a three-year period. TK is now serving 83,000 children at no immediate additional cost to the state because funding that would have been used to support young 5 year olds in kindergarten is being redirected to support them in TK.

Before TK, California children 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 the later grades. Kindergarten standards and curriculum have changed over the years, and many of the skills children were once taught in 1st grade are now expected in kindergarten. In TK, children learn from a curriculum designed to meet their needs that is aligned the Preschool Learning Foundations and taught by credentialed teachers from K-12.

In the 2015-16 state budget, the Legislature and Governor Brown clarified that school districts can expand TK by enrolling children in TK if their fifth birthday occurs any time in the school year. Expanding TK allows districts to use a combination of local dollars and state Average Daily Attendance dollars as soon as children turn 5, to offer school readiness opportunities to more children who might not otherwise benefit from a quality preschool program.

A LOOK INTO TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN

In TK, children get a head start so they can do better in school. Language in the 2014-15 state budget also stated the Legislature’s intent that TK be aligned with California’s Preschool Learning Foundations, and required newly assigned TK teachers to secure 24 units of early childhood education, comparable professional experience, or a child development permit, over a five-year period. TK students learn through hands-on experience, nurturing new skills that will stay with them throughout their academic careers.

What is unique about TK:

- TK blends social and emotional experience with academic learning.
- In TK, students learn essential pre-literacy and pre-math skills through creative, play-based learning and shorter lessons for younger children’s attention spans.
- Students develop social and self-regulation skills needed to succeed in school, such as interacting with teachers and peers in positive ways, solving problems with increasing independence, and focusing attention.
- A typical TK classroom might include a dress-up area, puppet theater, play kitchen, and sand table — age-appropriate activities no longer in kindergarten classrooms that enhance all cognitive, social, and motor skills.
- Teachers tailor lessons to help every child thrive, thoughtfully constructing activities so each child is challenged at right level to succeed, persist through difficulty with little frustration and get to next skill level.