

# Kindergarten Transition Options for Young Five Year Olds

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Starting elementary school is such a thrilling time for children and their families. It's the beginning of a special and exciting new stage in life. As we know, New York kindergarten standards and programs have changed over the past few years pushing many of the skills children were once taught in first grade, some even second grade, into the kindergarten curriculum. These new expectations can make the transition into kindergarten difficult for some children, and the youngest children entering the kindergarten classroom can struggle to adjust as they may not have the social, emotional, or physical skills needed.

If your child will turn five between August and December you may be considering a transitional kindergarten or another year of preschool. Many parents have conflicting thoughts or are just not quite sure how to make the right decision. More than academic knowledge, consider your child's chronological age, maturity, interests, attention span, small muscle coordination, and abilities. All of these aspects combined help create a full picture of your child.

Transitional kindergarten is a bridge between preschool and kindergarten for children turning 5 years old between summer and December. It gives young learners the gift of time and provides them with an opportunity to learn and grow in a supportive, enriching environment that is tailored to meet their academic and social needs. The transitional kindergarten curriculum is a specialized one that is based on the kindergarten standards and is designed to support young 5 year- old students. It is play/exploration based while moving toward kindergarten standards. It offers an opportunity for children who are smart and capable, but need an extra year to grow and develop confidence to learn in a hands-on, interactive way that supports their development and need to play while still maintaining the challenge and high standards of kindergarten.

In a transitional kindergarten, readiness activities involve a deeper learning and more structured skill building. Children continue building skills they learned in preschool, but they are also gaining the confidence to work more independently and use their skills to complete more in-depth projects with their peers. More advanced work such as conducting science experiments, exploring more challenging math concepts, and experimenting with beginning reading and writing takes on a deeper quality. This is because they are at the beginning stages of abstract thinking. They can find solutions to problems and take leadership roles in the classroom. Not only does a high-quality transitional kindergarten program prepare children academically for later school success, but it offers opportunities to build social-emotional skills and self-esteem. Transitional kindergarten is an important bridge between preschool and kindergarten.

Another option to consider is completing an additional year of preschool or a pre-kindergarten class. In pre-kindergarten, children are introduced to a wide variety of concepts and learning materials. They begin to learn skills, such as working with peers and collaborating on projects. They do focus on school readiness and pre-academic skills, but typically do so in a less structured way like group-time instruction and small group games or teacher-planned activities. Many children will benefit from another year of guided play and more emphasis on social development than formal academics. The multitude of play opportunities in pre-kindergarten are helpful for children that need to develop social skills and the teacher planned activities in preschool will allow for more work on small-muscle control and attention span while giving the child time to grow and mature.

Research shows that children who enter elementary school having strong social and emotional competency are more likely to have success in school and attend college. High quality transitional programs address school readiness while giving children an extra year to mature and build those important skills.