



Washington Local Schools

Early Entrance to Kindergarten Guidance, Procedures and Application

Washington Local Schools

• 3505 West Lincolnshire Blvd. • Toledo, Ohio 43606 • (419) 473-8236

Introduction



This booklet is provided to assist parents and school staff members in determining the appropriateness of having a child enter kindergarten at an earlier age than most students. Early entrance into school is not an easy decision and should be based on the individual needs of each student. Early school experiences can shape self-confidence and influence children for the rest of their lives. Many concerns may be associated with early entrance into kindergarten; however, for some children it is beneficial.

Development of four-year-old children is often uneven. A student with strengths in vocabulary and expressive language may, in contrast, display social skills or motor development that is not as advanced. Further, students may make rapid strides as a pre-school child that soon level out and growth that follows occurs at a more typical rate. An extra year of development may provide a more even skill profile and greater assurance of later school success.

Age and maturity play a significant role in adjustment to school. While early entrance to kindergarten will place your child in learning environments with some children who are only a few months older, other children will be over a year older than your child. Your child may be physically smaller and less mature socially and mentally than other children. This difference may contribute to your child feeling overwhelmed or not able to keep up. This feeling may lead to a sense of inadequacy, erode self-confidence, and possibly diminish academic success. Long-term, students who enter early may experience additional adjustment stress as adolescents, may be at a disadvantage athletically, and often may feel out of step with peers socially.

According to Dr. Sylvia Rimm, a noted developmental psychologist who specializes in gifted children, exceptions exist and some children benefit greatly from early entrance into kindergarten. Dr. Rimm recommends an evaluation by a psychologist to assess your child's thinking and reasoning skills, and to consider your child's social and emotional maturity. For intellectually gifted children who are socially and emotionally mature, early entrance into kindergarten may be beneficial.

Arguably, the least disruptive form of acceleration is early entrance into kindergarten when compared to grade skipping or highly individualized programming. Studies have shown that gifted children tend to have older friends, communicate at a more mature level, and display high levels of social and moral reasoning. Broad individual differences need to be considered for each child individually when making this decision.

Early entrance is not simply a matter of, "Can my child succeed in kindergarten?" The decision supporting early entrance, instead, should be rooted in the strong belief that given the exceptional strengths of my child, the delay of entering kindergarten will actually be detrimental for my child.

Early entrance to kindergarten should only be considered when a child appears to be one-and-a-half years above his or her actual (chronological) age in the following areas of development:

- Intellectual
- Social/emotional
- Gross and fine motor

What seems clear is that early entrance is helpful for some students when selection is careful and admission criteria are stringent. We know that all children learn best when challenged appropriately. The mission for parents and school officials is to utilize a process that helps identify which students will benefit from early entrance and which students will be better served by postponing enrollment for another year.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH REVEAL?

A review of the relevant professional literature reveals that relatively few research studies have been undertaken to examine clear relationships between entering school early and long-term outcomes. Problems arise because some of the research often cited is poorly designed and difficult to apply to a variety of students. Overall, the related research is meager, somewhat contradictory, and differences that do appear tend to be small and transitory.

Experts do agree in the following recommendations for parents and schools when contemplating early entrance for a child:

- Carefully weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks of early entrance.
- Consider a variety of individualized child factors including intelligence, social/ emotional makeup, academic skills, and general development.
- Define clear, high standards for early entrance.

Developmental Skills for Kindergarten Entrance

The expectations and goals for children entering kindergarten have never been higher. Kindergarten is no longer characterized by snack time and daily naps. The current academic rigor requires that by the end of the kindergarten year, students are able to read and write sentences, solve simple problems using basic math skills, and interact with peers on collaborative projects requiring skill and creativity. Some of the attributes seen in children ready for kindergarten are listed here.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The ability to understand spoken language comes before, and is different from, the ability to express one's thoughts in language. In fact, reading difficulties can sometimes be related to difficulties in associations between the spoken word, its sounds, and its printed form. The amount of talking a child does can be misleading. More important than the quantity of talking or speech is the quality of the language and the interaction between the child and/or adults sharing ideas and solving problems together.

Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Using most sounds correctly in expressing a complete thought.
- Using basic sentence components correctly and with appropriate word order.
- Using simple and compound sentences to express ideas.
- Spontaneously self-correcting mistakes in grammar.
- Carrying out a series of two or three simple tasks or directions after being told once.
- Talking spontaneously about a topic of interest.
- Making up a story using a least three events.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The ability to make associations between everyday experiences, answer questions, understand functions of objects, notice similarities and differences, and classify items are indicators of a child's cognitive abilities.

Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Identifying body parts, as well as distinguishing left/right.
- Demonstrating an understanding of concepts of size, weight, money, time, and location.
- Expressing an understanding of similarities and differences for a set of objects and pictures.
- Counting from at least one to ten and demonstrating an understanding of one-to-one correspondence.
- Listening to a story being read and retelling events from the story.
- Responding to questions about previously learned skills, like age and birthday, or personal information.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL MATURITY

The ability to express feelings, work out conflicts, take pride in achievements, and take on challenges independently contribute to a child's self-concept and self-confidence. All of these support a child's ability to handle new and sometimes difficult situations with a sense of competency. Self-motivation, the ability to function in a more competitive setting, and a sense of cooperativeness are all essential for a successful kindergarten experience.

Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Looking forward to entering school.
- Separating easily from family members and making transitions when requested.
- Playing cooperatively with other children in structured and active play.
- Demonstrating a sense of responsibility by doing assigned chores or work at home.
- Attending to and completing tasks without constant adult direction or assistance.
- Displaying interest in school related activities such as completing puzzles, coloring, playing table games, looking at books, being read to, and doing individual activities for extended periods of time.
- Accepting direction and limit-setting without temper tantrums.
- Caring for personal needs independently (dressing, toileting, eating).

MOTOR SKILLS

The importance of large and small muscle control as it relates to learning is critical. This area is important in many of the classroom activities children engage in during structured and informal learning in kindergarten.

Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Using large muscles in a coordinated way to explore and play actively and safely when climbing, running, jumping, and throwing balls.
- Alternating feet when walking up and down stairs.
- Holding pencils or markers in a mature grasp and copying basic shapes accurately (straight lines, circles, triangles, squares), using a model.
- Managing clothing fasteners (buttons, zippers, snaps) independently.

Purpose and Procedures for Early Entrance to Kindergarten



Purpose

Children must turn five (5) years of age on or before September 30th in order to enroll in kindergarten in the Washington Local Schools (ORC 3321.01, WLS Board Policy 5112). **Early entrance** to kindergarten *may* be available for a child whose fifth birthday falls after the September 30th deadline and occurs on or before December 31st of the early entrance school year. Children whose birthdate falls after December 31st may also apply for early entrance, and are required to follow the protocol of the Iowa Acceleration Scale.

To qualify for early entrance, a child must demonstrate marked high ability and maturation in the areas of intellectual ability, social and emotional maturity, language development, and physical development and motor coordination. The purpose of these early entrance

procedures is to determine if a child is *at the 95th percentile or above* in these areas. Thus, a child must be functioning as many as 18 months above his/her chronological age mates with above average to very superior ratings in these areas. Approximately only five percent of children display this level of development.

Washington Local Schools collaborates with parents within a defined process to help ensure that decisions for early entrance are made with consideration of data and in the best interest of each child. The process begins when the parent completes the *Kindergarten Early Entrance Application* form. Then, a screening assessment is conducted by school personnel. For children who appear to have advanced development based on the initial screening assessment, a comprehensive multi-factored evaluation by an evaluation team is conducted. The final decision is made with the parent and the WLS early entrance personnel.

Procedures

1. Parents considering kindergarten early entrance for their child may attend the district's Kindergarten Parent Information Night.
2. Parents interested in early entrance can request the *Early Entrance to Kindergarten Guidance, Procedures and Application* packet, obtained at any elementary building, the WLS Registration Office, or found on the WLS website: https://www.wls4kids.org/Downloads/EE_Guidance_and_Procedures_and_Application_Form_2021.pdf
3. The *Kindergarten Early Entrance Application* form must be submitted to the WLS Gifted Services Department located at 3505 West Lincolnshire Boulevard, Toledo, Ohio 43606 **before May 1st** for consideration of a child for kindergarten early entrance in the fall.
4. WLS residency is verified by the Registration Office. The WLS gifted coordinator arranges for the administration of the Kindergarten Readiness Screener by the gifted specialist. Results are shared with parents by WLS early entrance school personnel.
5. If the child scores 96%-100% on the Kindergarten Readiness Screener, a recommendation is made as to whether or not to continue with the kindergarten early entrance process. The final decision to continue or not continue with the early entrance process is made by the parent(s).

6. If the decision is made to continue the early entrance process, the WLS gifted coordinator schedules an extensive formal evaluation with the WLS kindergarten early entrance evaluation team. The evaluation typically is scheduled in late May.
7. The WLS gifted coordinator contacts the child's parents to schedule the formal evaluation, which includes assessments of the child's reading and math skills, cognitive ability, oral language skill, perceptual-motor functioning, and social-emotional maturity. The kindergarten early entrance evaluation team includes a school psychologist and other relevant district personnel. A written evaluation report is presented to the parents by the WLS gifted coordinator.
8. The parents, the WLS gifted coordinator, the building principal, the school counselor and other relevant school personnel meet to discuss the formal evaluation results and to determine whether the child is eligible for early entrance to kindergarten. The child must perform at or above the 95th percentile on the evaluation assessments to be eligible for early entrance to kindergarten.
9. If the child is determined to be eligible for early entrance to kindergarten and the decision is made for the child to enroll, a Written Acceleration Plan (WAP) is developed. The WAP will document the early entrance decision, and will list strategies to help ensure the child's success in kindergarten.
10. Parents register the child for school. Registration appointments can be scheduled by calling **419-473-8296**. Office hours are Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m.-12 noon and 1:00-4:00 p.m.
11. The child participates in the fall kindergarten screening process with other kindergarten students to help determine the most appropriate classroom assignment, curriculum level, and instructional strategies.
12. By the end of the first grading period of the kindergarten year, parents and school personnel will meet to review the Written Acceleration Plan. This is to discuss the student's progress and to ensure that placement in kindergarten is appropriate.
13. If the child does not meet the criteria for early entrance to kindergarten, the parent(s) may appeal in writing to the WLS Assistant Superintendent, 3505 West Lincolnshire Boulevard, Toledo, Ohio 43606.

What is the screener?

The Kindergarten Readiness Screener is a screening measure used to assess levels of maturity and development in young children. Its primary purpose is to provide additional information to parents and educators to help determine if a child appears developmentally ready to begin kindergarten. The screener takes about 30 minutes to administer.

The screener measures performance in:

- Fine-motor coordination;
- Receptive and expressive language;
- Language comprehension and reasoning;
- Understanding and awareness of one's environment;
- Auditory and visual processing; and
- Pre-kindergarten academic skill acquisition.

Kindergarten Early Entrance Process

Step 1: Application (March-April)

- Parent requests *Early Entrance to Kindergarten Guidance, Procedures and Application* packet from building secretary, Registration, or website.
- Parent completes *Kindergarten Early Entrance Application*, and returns it to building secretary, Registration, or Gifted Coordinator before May 1st.
- Registration verifies residency, and that the child has a fifth birthday October 1st through December 31st of the upcoming school year.

Step 2: Brief Screening (May)

- Gifted coordinator receives *Kindergarten Early Entrance Application*.
- Gifted coordinator contacts parents to schedule Kindergarten Readiness Screener.
- Gifted coordinator or school counselor administers the Kindergarten Readiness Screener.
- Results are shared with parents by early entrance school personnel, and a decision is made to continue pursuing kindergarten early entrance or to postpone kindergarten enrollment until next school year.

Step 3: Formal Assessment May-June

- If the parents and school agree to continue with the process, the WLS gifted coordinator arranges for an extensive formal kindergarten early entrance evaluation that includes language, motor skills, social-emotional functioning, and cognition.
- Evaluation occurs prior to June 1st. Results are shared with parents by the WLS gifted coordinator.
- Decision is made by parents, WLS gifted coordinator, principal, counselor, and other relevant school personnel to enroll child in kindergarten or to postpone enrollment until the next school year. (Child must perform at or above the 95th percentile to meet criteria.)
- When parents and school agree to kindergarten early entrance, the child is enrolled and a Written Acceleration Plan is developed.

Step 4: Registration (August - October)

- Parent calls to make a registration appointment for school.
- Child participates in fall kindergarten screening process with other kindergarten students to help determine the most appropriate classroom assignment.
- By end of the first grading period, a meeting is held with the kindergarten early entrance school personnel and parents to discuss child's progress and placement in kindergarten.

COMMON QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT KINDERGARTEN EARLY ENTRANCE

Q: Why is there an Early Entrance “process”?

A: The process was established to comply with the *Ohio Revised Code* which requires the evaluation for children who are born October 1st through December 31st and are being considered for early admission into kindergarten. The law defines a range of birth dates “wherein children thought to be developing well beyond their age level” (*Ohio Administrative Code* 3301-35-06 Educational Programs and Support) may be evaluated to determine the need for acceleration and, therefore, eligibility for kindergarten early entrance into school. ORC 3321.01 was amended by Am.Sub. HS 59 to include consideration for children born after December 31st.

Q: For whom are these procedures designed?

A: These procedures are designed to assist parents and educators in making the best decisions for children. Entering kindergarten early is a major decision and successful outcomes are more likely when all aspects of a child’s development are considered. Specifically, these procedures are designed to identify those children who will turn five (5) years-old October 1st through December 31st and who are advanced developmentally. Very few children meet the eligibility standards of development one-and-a-half years above age mates. Typically, *five or fewer children out of one hundred screened* are eligible for kindergarten early entrance. Of course, many parents anticipate their child will be eligible. Guidance to parents is to be realistic about the potential outcome of the process and conservative in their predictions so as not to create unreasonable expectations for themselves and for their children.

Q: How do I prepare my child for the day of the brief screening or the formal evaluation?

A: Hopefully, you have given serious and realistic consideration to the criteria for eligibility before registering your child for kindergarten and completing the *Kindergarten Early Entrance Application* form. Parental attempts to “coach” their child prior to the assessment usually only intensify the pressure and anxiety of the situation. Most of the tasks used in the screening and evaluation are developmental in nature and resemble activities typical of preschool and kindergarten. The assessment session should not be referred to as a test or imply that the child will either pass or fail. Instead, the child can be told that he/she will be asked to do some work and other fun things that will show how much he/she has learned so far. The child should be encouraged to do his/her best and enjoy the activities.

Q: What happens the day of the formal evaluation?

A: The kindergarten early entrance evaluation team includes a school psychologist and other appropriate school personnel. Each team member will spend time with your child. The evaluation activities include a parent interview and the completion of a social-emotional rating scale. The assessments measure reading and math skills, cognitive abilities, evaluate expressive and receptive language skills, and assess fine and gross motor skills. The team may also contact the child’s preschool (if appropriate). The evaluation results are summarized in a written report to be reviewed and provided to the parent by the gifted coordinator. The decision for early entrance into kindergarten is made by the parents and relevant Washington Local Schools personnel.

Q: Why do I need to have my child’s cognitive ability assessed using a test?

A: Research shows that assessing a child’s reasoning ability using a standardized cognitive ability test is critical to achieving a match between a child’s school placement and his/her instructional needs. Ability test scores provide one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement and help guide you and your child’s school team in making this important decision.

Q: How will I know whether or not my child has met the criteria?

A: The parent is provided a written copy of the evaluation results and a meeting will be held with the WLS Gifted Coordinator, the building principal, the building counselor, and other relevant school personnel to discuss the evaluation results and to determine whether the child has met the criteria for early entrance into kindergarten. Criteria for early entrance include performance at or above the 95th percentile on the formal evaluation.

Q: How will my child feel if he/she is not among the children who met the criteria for early entrance?

A: A child's reaction usually depends on how the situation has been presented and how the child's parents react to whether the child meets the criteria for kindergarten early entrance. Parents who react strongly to the results may send the message to the child that he/she has failed or done something wrong. The best approach is to present the information positively and stress how much better prepared the child will be for kindergarten after another year in preschool or other learning situations.

Q: What are some reasons children do not meet the criteria?

A: The basic reason is that most children are developing at a typical rate. Many young children display advanced expressive language skills as preschoolers, while other areas of development are typical or slightly above average for their age. Fewer than five out of every one hundred children are good candidates for early entrance into kindergarten. Even for some of this small group of children, the school and parents may decide that the child will benefit from an additional year prior to beginning kindergarten.

Q: Why are the standards for acceptance so demanding?

A: Past experience and research have demonstrated that most children do better when they enter school with their age group. Some children who enter kindergarten early are successful initially, but have greater social and emotional adjustment difficulties at school during adolescence. Beginning school early impacts children's entire school experience from the first day of kindergarten all the way through senior high school. Children who enter kindergarten early are placed in a highly competitive situation with others who may be one year or more older and who have had the advantage of additional life experience and development. Only a few advanced children are ready to compete on this level where emotional stress can become intense. Given such risks, high standards for early entrance into kindergarten are intended to assist parents and school personnel to make decisions in the best interest of each child.

Q: If I begin this process in the spring, should I hold my child's spot at pre-school for the next school year?

A: Yes! As already noted, few children meet the criteria for acceptance for kindergarten early entrance. It is strongly recommended that your child's position for fall preschool be reserved so that you do not lose a "spot" for your child, if needed.

Q: Suppose I change my mind after my child has been accepted for kindergarten early entrance?

A: The child's parent makes the final decision for enrolling the child in kindergarten if the child is eligible for early entrance. An added safeguard is that the first grading period of the kindergarten year is considered an extended evaluation period. The parent and the district's kindergarten early entrance team, including the child's kindergarten teacher, reviews the child's progress during the first grading period to determine whether the child should continue in kindergarten or if alternatives need to be considered.

Q: Who may I call if I have additional questions?

A: Washington Local Schools Gifted Coordinator or the Curriculum Department is available to assist you. Please call (419) 473-8246. Office hours are from 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Washington Local Schools

KINDERGARTEN EARLY ENTRANCE APPLICATION

ABOUT KINDERGARTEN EARLY ENTRANCE

A unique type of whole-grade acceleration is early entrance to school (i.e., kindergarten). For academically talented young children, early entrance to school may be an excellent option. Abundant evidence demonstrates that bright children who are carefully selected for early entrance generally perform very well, both academically and socially.

REFERRAL FOR:

Child's Name _____ Potential School _____

Address _____

Birthdate (mm/dd/yy) _____

Parent's/Guardian's Telephone _____ Email _____

If the child has attended/currently is attending preschool, provide the name of the preschool.

Children who will benefit from early entrance may not exhibit all of the characteristics listed in the categories below; however, strong candidates will exhibit more of these characteristics than other children.

What to look for in the areas of *ability/achievement/aptitude/behavior*

My child seems advanced beyond other children his/her age in these ways:

- _____ Understands the meanings and use of words better than other children his/her age;
- _____ Is curious about many things and asks questions often;
- _____ Is very good at working puzzles or solving problems;
- _____ Has a great sense of humor and understands jokes more than other children his/her age;
- _____ Has a good memory and remembers details of conversations or stories;
- _____ Is interested in difficult concepts such as time and space;
- _____ Concentrates on certain activities much longer than other children his/her age;
- _____ Reads (and understands text) in picture books or chapter books;
- _____ Figures out math-related problems better than other children his/her age.

Some important *school and academic factors*

My child:

- _____ Enjoys learning new information or skills;
 - _____ Participates in activities outside of the home (e.g., sports, dance, gymnastics, library, museum);
 - _____ Believes he/she is capable of succeeding at new tasks.
-

Some important *developmental factors*

My child has the following developmental characteristics:

- He/She has at least average fine and large motor coordination (e.g., holding a pencil, skipping);
- He/She is able to play games and/or find information on a computer.

Some important *interpersonal skills* for entering school

My child:

- Thoughtfully considers feedback and criticism and modifies behavior appropriately;
- Often behaves in a way that is positive and effective;
- Has good interpersonal skills with age-mates, as well as with both older and younger children and with adults;
- Has excellent interpersonal relationships with adults in a teaching role.

Some important *attitudes and supports* necessary for success in school

My child:

- Is enthusiastic about going to kindergarten.

As a parent:

- I understand that my child's success in school depends on support provided at home;
- I am able to give my child additional support to help in his/her transition to a new setting with much higher academic demands than he/she may have encountered previously.

Some important *considerations* that may make kindergarten early entrance *inadvisable*

My child:

- Has one or more older siblings in the grade in which he/she will be placed;
- May cause social/emotional issues in the family;
- Often did not want to attend preschool or chronically missed preschool (if enrolled in preschool).

I believe that my child exhibits most of the characteristics listed that indicate he/she may benefit by entering kindergarten. I request evaluation of my child for possible early entrance to kindergarten.

Parent/Guardian _____ **Date** _____

The referral request will be processed and parent(s)/guardian(s) will receive the final determination for early entrance to kindergarten prior to the beginning of the school year.

Receiving School Representative: _____

School _____ **Date** _____

[Receiving School Representative: Please forward the completed Kindergarten Early Entrance Application form to the WLS Gifted Coordinator.]