

KINDERGARTEN READINESS: IS EARLY ENTRY TO KINDERGARTEN RIGHT FOR MY CHILD?

When parents call to ask about early entry to kindergarten, I often hear, "I know everyone thinks their child is brilliant, but my child *really is* advanced." ... And they are generally correct! They have noticed their child recognized letters and numbers early, perhaps even started reading some, seems to take in information and retain it, and has a strong curiosity around academic-type learning. If you have noticed these things in your child and are trying to decide whether early entry to kindergarten is right for your child, there are several things to consider.

1. Cognitive (academic) readiness. This is the area most parents first consider, i.e., will my child be able to understand the academic material being covered and keep up with the rest of the students in learning. There are numerous checklists on a variety of websites to help you determine if your child might be cognitively ready. One helpful hint we give parents is to purchase some academic 'activity books' and see how your child does. You might start with a pre-school book and then move on to a kindergarten book. These are available in stores such as Learning Express and large bookstores, and you may also find some at Target or Wal-Mart. If your child breezes through the pre-school activity book and can even do some pages of the kindergarten book that is a good sign.

Ultimately you will need official psychoeducational testing to determine where your child falls cognitively/academically compared to his or her peers, as the school will require this testing to consider your child for early entry. This testing is not provided by the school. It must be done privately by a licensed psychologist, and include test versions approved by your school district. Any psychologist who does such testing should be able to tell you what those tests are. Your child will be given an IQ test and an achievement test and generally must score in the 98th percentile or above on the IQ test and at the 98th percentile or above in math or reading on the achievement test. Parents often ask what the difference is between IQ and achievement testing; the difference can best be summarized as innate abilities versus achievement in learned material. The IQ test assesses for abilities such as verbal and non-verbal abilities and the speed at which the child can process information. Achievement testing assesses math and reading skills relative to others the child's same age.

2. Developmental readiness. Chronological age is not the best predictor of success in kindergarten, hence the focus on kindergarten 'readiness' and not just chronological age. Developmental readiness has three major components: emotional, social, and behavioral.

Is your child emotionally mature for his or her age? Does he or she have good emotion regulation when upset or angry? Can your child be away from mom and dad for several hours at a time without getting upset? Is your child able to share and take turns? Do interactions between your child and other children generally go well? Can your child sit still and pay attention for 15-20 minutes at a time? (FYI, TV and video games don't count.) How self-sufficient is your child? Can he or she tie shoes and get a jacket on and off? How well behaved is your child in general? Does your child still tantrum when not getting his or her way, or can your child generally be redirected and/or motivated by rewards and consequences?

On pediatrics.about.com, the following is reported: "According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, traditional signs of readiness to start kindergarten include being able to: communicate about things he or she needs and wants, share and take turns, be curious and enthusiastic about trying new activities, pay attention and sit still, use a pencil and paint brushes, count as high as 20, and recognize the letters of the alphabet. Other traditional signs of readiness are that a child can follow one to three step instructions, behave well in the classroom, and can get along well with peers. It is important to note that in the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness, teachers reported that the most important signs of school readiness are being able to communicate needs and wants and being curious and enthusiastic about trying new activities. Counting and recognizing letters and even sitting still were reported to be less important signs."

3. Physical readiness. Probably the least recognized area of readiness, there are some physical skills related to success in kindergarten. Research has found motor skills important in a child's early learning, with fine motor skills needed to learn to write, and interestingly, gross motor skills found to

be related to learning to read. Fine motor skills such as holding a pencil properly (pencil grip) to complete school work and cutting with scissors to keep up with class projects are important. Gross motor skills such as balance, coordination with running and jumping, and catching and throwing impact how a child fits in on the playground.

Where do you go from here? This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the cognitive, developmental (emotional/social/behavioral) and physical factors you should consider, but rather to get you thinking in the right direction about questions you should ask yourself about your child. Ultimately parents know their children best; can you picture your child in the kindergarten setting doing well?

If your child has demonstrated above average academic abilities, it is important to nurture those abilities, and to keep your child from boredom. Academically advanced children who are under-stimulated can become bored which can lead to unhappiness, a disinterest in academics, and even behavioral acting out. Thus if your child appears to be a candidate for early entry, we strongly encourage you to have your child tested so he or she can enter kindergarten if ready and enjoy the benefits of being in the environment most appropriate for their abilities.

In North Carolina the public school cutoff date for kindergarten entry is that your child must be five-years-old by August 31st of the current school year. If your child's birthday falls close to this date and/or you believe your child is ready for kindergarten in all domains described above, you should consider kindergarten readiness testing. To allow gifted children to enter kindergarten early, in 1997 the NC General Assembly passed legislation allowing a child who has reached his/her 4th birthday by April 16th of the current school year to enter kindergarten if he/she demonstrates an extraordinary level of academic ability and maturity. Thus kindergarten readiness testing can be done anytime from April 16th forward. The test report becomes the foundation of your child's application package for early entry, to which you will also likely be required to add letters of recommendation and samples of your child's work. You can turn this application package in to the school no later than 30 days after the fall semester starts, however, since that would mean your child has missed the first month+ of kindergarten waiting that long is not recommended. We suggest you try to get your child's application package in by August 1st at the latest, and earlier is better, so turning it in to the school in May, June or July is better than waiting until August.

At Lepage Associates we are a full service testing facility and have extensive experience with kindergarten readiness evaluations. We also are known for our excellent turn-around time and competitive pricing, and we can turn in insurance claim forms for you as some health insurances may reimburse you a portion of the testing cost. Please call us to schedule your child's evaluation, or simply to ask further questions.

I've scheduled testing. How do I prepare my child? What do I tell my child? What will the experience be like for my child? These are all common questions parents ask, so we will address them here.

Over-preparation is not recommended. Drilling your child on reading and math can be stressful to a 4-year-old. What you want is for your child to enter kindergarten early if he or she is naturally ready for the experience, not for your child to be pushed hard toward that as a goal. You can do some general preparation in ways that are fun for your child, such as number and word games, activity books, reading to and with your child, etc. Preparation that is important is to be sure your child is well rested the night before the testing and eats a healthy breakfast. You should also bring snacks in case your child gets hungry during testing. It generally only takes about two hours, still, hunger is distracting so it is best to be prepared. We will schedule your child sometime in the morning; children (and adults) fatigue in the afternoon so that is not an ideal time to achieve the best scores. We provide breaks for children as needed so they can do their best.

Do not tell your child he or she is going to take a very important test to determine getting into school early. That creates pressure which is stressful, and stress can *negatively impact* test scores. Also the standardized instructions given to your child at testing include prompts to motivate them to do their best, so you do not need to worry in advance that you need to provide that prompt. Tell your child he or she will be going to play some fun games for a couple of hours, games such as number games, word games, puzzles and blocks, etc. If asked if it will be hard, the answer is, "No, it will be fun." This

is true; the tests are designed as a series of subtests that children generally experience as short, fun games or activities.

Thus children generally experience the testing as enjoyable. Many children ask at the end when they can come back and 'play' again.

To schedule an appt call 919-572-000 or email officemanager@lepageassociates.com.

You may also go to our Kindergarten Readiness webpage
(<http://www.lepageassociates.com/NCKindergartenReadiness.html>)

for a list of links to:

information on early entry to kindergarten guidelines for [Durham County Schools](#) NC

information on early entry to kindergarten guidelines for [Orange County Schools](#) NC

information on early entry to kindergarten guidelines for [Wake County Schools](#) NC

information on early entry to kindergarten guidelines for [Person County Schools](#) NC

information on early entry to kindergarten guidelines for [Lee County Schools](#) NC

information on early entry to kindergarten guidelines for [Johnston County Schools](#) NC

(We are actively collecting information from other counties as well so if your county is not listed here, try the page anyway to see if your county has been added to the page.)

In addition to kindergarten readiness evaluations we provide a full range of evaluation services to include: learning disability evaluations, AD/HD evaluations, executive functioning evaluations, and giftedness evaluations; psychological evaluations; behavioral evaluations; substance abuse evaluations; and forensic evaluations to include civil, criminal, and family law. You may visit our Evaluations webpage

(<http://www.lepageassociates.com/html/services/evaluations.html>) for in-depth information on our evaluation services.