

TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN POLICY

This policy sets the Commission’s expectations regarding Transitional Kindergarten (TK) programs using the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s (OSPI) “Five Pillars of Transitional Kindergarten” as a framework. The Commission will develop a TK-specific application and evaluation criteria for interested schools to apply to offer a TK program. Specifications of that process, including timeline, a rubric and approval process will be provided in the application.

A Note on Educational Equity

The Commission believes that Kindergarten readiness is critical for short and long-term student academic achievement. Additionally, research indicates that students who are cognitively and behaviorally ready to enter Kindergarten have better long-term career and life outcomes.¹ As such, the Commission believes that TK has the potential to support student readiness in ways that could significantly improve student outcomes and narrow the opportunity gaps currently seen in public education.

The Commission has chosen to allow charter public schools to offer TK programs in alignment with its Educational Equity Policy* which states:

The Commission is committed to closing opportunity gaps between the state’s most and least privileged groups of students within the educational system. It has a moral obligation and legal obligation to cultivate charter schools where socio-economic status and protected groups status such as race, gender, language, sexual orientation, national origin, and disability cease to be a predictor of academic and life outcomes. Educational equity benefits all students and our entire community.

Given the importance of Kindergarten readiness and the impact it can have on a student’s long-term life outcomes, the Commission is obligated to only approve proposals from operators who are prepared to offer high-quality TK programs. This includes, but is not limited to, the hiring of highly qualified teachers, the use of developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction, the provision of social-emotional supports, and adherence to the additional requirements and expectations outlined below.

Transitional Kindergarten Expectations

I. TK programs meet the requirements of full-day kindergarten established in RCW 28A.150.315, including administration of the WaKIDS whole-child assessment, within the first ten weeks. In order to participate in TK, students must turn four years old before August 31st of the year (or January following) that they plan to enroll in TK. TK programs may begin at any point prior to January 31st. The Commission encourages TK programs to begin between November 1st and the January 31st deadline.

¹ Magnuson, K., Duncan, G., Lee, K. & Metzger, M. “Early School Adjustment and Educational Attainment.” 2016. Reardon, S. and Portilla, X. “Recent Trends in Income, Racial, and Ethnic School Readiness Gaps at Kindergarten Entry.” 2016.

* This language is found in the Educational Equity Policy adopted on June 27, 2019. Should the language in the Educational Equity Policy be updated, the language will be updated accordingly.

II. Classrooms must be staffed by certificated teachers and paraeducators who provide a curriculum that offers a rich, varied set of experiences in learning environments that are developmentally appropriate and address the whole child. The Commission strongly encourages schools to hire teachers who have Early Childhood and/or Early Childhood Special Education Endorsements or are National Board Certified in Early Childhood. The Commission will evaluate the overall capacity and experience of the school’s leadership team with regards to early childhood education. The Commission expects that all TK staff, particularly those without early childhood education endorsements, receive significant professional development to meet the needs of TK students prior to and throughout the school year. This includes, but is not limited to:

- The prevention of mis/over identification of students in need of special education services;
- The developmental needs of TK-aged students and how they differ from that of Kindergarten students;
- The development and adaptation of curriculum for TK students; and
- Best practices for family engagement and involvement.

III. TK programs are inclusive, socioeconomically diverse and responsive to the needs of children who qualify for participation. While TK programs are designed to serve students who are deemed “to be in need of additional preparation to be successful in kindergarten the following year,” schools may not screen students for eligibility as part of their enrollment process as this violates the Charter School Act. Schools must enroll TK students in the same manner as any other charter public school student. A weighted enrollment preference (weighted lottery) is allowed for TK and schools are encouraged to use one to assist in enrolling students who are eligible for a TK program. The sibling preference for enrollment applies to TK students.

TK students are able to matriculate to Kindergarten from TK, however, the charter public school will not be held to the same recurrent enrollment standards for TK to Kindergarten matriculation. Given the availability and unique offering that TK provides, the Commission does not believe a charter public school should be penalized regarding recurrent enrollment if a family chose to unenroll their student for Kindergarten.

IV. Transitional Kindergarten programs must be fully integrated into school buildings, with access to transportation, specialists, recess, lunch in the school cafeteria and all aspects of the school day available to kindergarten students. Attention must be given to the developmental capabilities and needs specific to young children in these settings. Additionally, schools must provide the same family opportunities to the parents and guardians of TK students.

V. The Commission expects charter public schools to act as good partners to other early learning programs in the community. TK programs must work in collaboration with and not adversely impact enrollment in community-based preschool programs, including Head Start, ECEAP (the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program), tribally-led early learning programs and those operating in licensed childcare centers and licensed family homes. Charter public schools must participate in coordinated outreach with providers, and information sharing with families to ensure best fit and appropriateness of services based on each child and family’s need.

The Commission requires charter public schools to provide evidence of community and provider outreach and collaboration. Due to the boundary-less nature of charter public schools, the Commission expects that this outreach is conducted, at minimum, within the traditional school district bounds where the school is located.

This policy does not represent an exhaustive list of qualifications and requirements for TK providers. The Commission reserves the right to implement other qualifications and requirements, through a Commission-developed application process, for schools that are interested in providing a TK program.