

# Kindergarten Registration: Why Every Child Is Ready

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The start of the New Year will find many parents asking themselves if their child is ready for kindergarten in September. They may contact the school for suggestions, ask other parents with older children or seek the advice from an educational consultant. The final decision, however, is the responsibility of the parent.

The decision process of registering a child for kindergarten can begin with a reflection of the early childhood years. The parent can answer when their child first began to talk, walk and accomplish other different milestones appropriate during the first four to five years of life. The child's pediatrician can verify if these stages were accomplished at a developmentally appropriate age. The assortment of literature provided for the stages of early childhood development can also serve as a useful guide to parents. From these reflections, parents can also determine the types of activities and accomplishments their child has experienced to create a positive and nurturing learning environment. Also, if the child attended a preschool, refer to the preschool frameworks to determine if your child received a curriculum that will spiral into the kindergarten curriculum and state expectations.

The Connecticut public schools accept kindergarten registration for all children who are five years old on or before the first of January of the school year. (C.G.S. Sec.10-15c) If a child is not five years old until after the first of January, but the parent believes the child is ready, it then becomes the local Board of Education's decision to admit the child. (C.G.S. Sec.10-15c) Also, parents have the option of waiting to send their child to school until the age of six or seven; however they must visit the school district office and sign an option form. (C.G.S. Sec.10-184) Many schools have different procedures for registering children for kindergarten. Some schools provide testing or screenings the summer before kindergarten begins. Other schools provide a spring orientation to meet the kindergarten teachers and become acclimated to the school building. There is no state law that requires public schools to test children before entering kindergarten and there is no law that states a school can refuse your child based on any kindergarten test results. All public schools must provide at least a half-day kindergarten program for 180 days with 450 hours of schoolwork. A full-day kindergarten must provide the same amount of days with 900 hours of schoolwork. (C.G.S. Sec.10-15)

After reviewing the kindergarten curriculum, neighborhood school and their child's early childhood years, many parents may decide to postpone kindergarten. One alternative many schools offer is an Early Kindergarten program. The Master's School in West Simsbury offers such a program to children who may not be ready for the traditional kindergarten curriculum and structured environment, but recognize the importance of the gift of experiences...not the gift of time. Parents must reflect if their child's preschool experience for an additional year will be a learning experience filled with an environment open to question, exploration and wonder. The postponement of kindergarten will not benefit the child if the year does not include experiences to continue learning and growth. The Master's School also offers programs to children attending half-day kindergarten programs in the public schools. The programs provide enrichment through music, language arts and science with an emphasis on creativity and self-

expression. Many parents are recognizing the limitations at a half-day kindergarten program and enrolling their children in programs that also develop their child's need for exploration and imagination; all components that are just as necessary to a healthy learning environment, but becoming more limited with a half-day kindergarten program that needs to accomplish certain standards and goals to meet the No Child Left Behind Act.

As an educational consultant, I advise parents on the preschool curriculum and the state mandated standards of all kindergarten programs in the public schools. I also express the importance of sending a child with a possible learning difficulty to kindergarten when he/she is age appropriate; due to the many services the public school can offer. It is of importance to remember your child does not need to be prepared for kindergarten; your school needs to be prepared for your child. The curriculum will reflect the learning style and goals your child needs to accomplish to become a lifelong learner. The emphasis must continue to be on the process of learning, not the importance of passing a test. On February 21, 2001, President Bush was quoted as saying 'You can teach a child to read, and he or her will be able to pass a literacy test.' As a reading teacher, I believe a child becomes a reader when he or she expects to find something worthwhile in a book.

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