

Expanded Transitional Kindergarten: New Opportunity for Districts

Within the 2015-16 Education Budget enacted this past June is a provision that has received much less attention than it deserves, perhaps eclipsed by the significant investments in one-time funding and the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Nearly unnoticeably, Assembly Bill (AB) 104 (Chapter 13/2015) amended the law pertaining to the early enrollment in a transitional kindergarten (TK) program of four-year-olds who will turn five after December 2 but within the school year. Until now, TK enrollment has been restricted to children with a fifth birthday falling after the September age cutoff for kindergarten enrollment but before December 2. The new authority to enroll four-year-old students in a TK program at the start of the academic school year, even if their fifth birthday falls after the beginning of December, is commonly referred to as “Expanded TK.”

Specifically, Education Code Section 48000(c) allows local educational agencies (LEAs) to enroll four-year-olds at the beginning of the academic year, commencing with the 2015-16 school year, if a governing board determines that early enrollment is in the best interest of the student and his/her parent or guardian is given information about the advantages and disadvantages of the student’s admittance into the TK program. However, the law also specifies that students enrolled under the Expanded TK option will only generate average daily attendance (ADA) for purposes of funding after they attain age five. Moreover, LEAs should note that, as reported in a prior *Fiscal Report* article that TK classes are included in the class size reduction calculations for the LCFF K-3 class-size reduction grade span adjustment (see “[Ask SSC . . . How Is Class Size Compliance for the K-3 Grade Span Adjustment Program Reported to the State?](#)” in the September 4, 2015, *Fiscal Report*).

Because these students will earn only partial ADA credit even though they will be enrolled for the full school year, school districts will need to plan carefully to successfully implement an expanded TK program while managing the fiscal effects of early enrollment. There are a number of reasons why LEAs may wish to take note of and consider the Expanded TK option as they begin the development of their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) for board adoption next spring:

- **Closing the Opportunity and Achievement Gaps.** There is extensive research about the effectiveness of quality early childhood education (ECE) programs, such as preschool and TK, on students’ long-term academic trajectories and achievement. Numerous studies show that ECE programs positively affect social, behavioral, and cognitive skills. Other studies demonstrate that ECE programs minimize achievement disparities in core subject areas of language arts, reading, and math, particularly for low-income students and English learners. Research consistently supports that early learning in quality pre-kindergarten programs helps to close persistent opportunity and achievement gaps.
- **Differentiating Instruction by Reducing “Combo” Classes.** In districts where small TK and kindergarten enrollments have necessitated the establishment of combination TK/kindergarten classes, Expanded TK provides resources to support ending that practice. This better enables teachers to differentiate instruction in a way that is age appropriate for younger children.
- **Reducing Downstream Costs.** In that ECE programs address learning and achievement gaps early in

a student's academic career, expanding TK to younger four-year-olds can serve to reduce an LEA's downstream costs that it might otherwise bear to provide supplemental services and/or academic or behavioral intervention programs. While the cost savings from Expanded TK may be difficult to quantify, like preventative care it can result in overall savings in the long term.

- **Optimizing Resources.** Another reason LEAs may want to consider using the Expanded TK option is to use existing resources that are under optimized. For example, if a district has existing TK classes that are not at full capacity, the district is bearing costs for which it is not being fully compensated. Under these circumstances, while students enrolled through the Expanded TK option generate funding based only on their ADA earned after the time they attain age five, the district will receive some additional revenue for serving more students at little or no additional cost.
- **Mitigating Declining Enrollment.** Finally, Expanded TK may be an attractive option for districts experiencing declining enrollment. To the extent that districts can enroll four-year-olds in a quality TK program at the start of the school year, such choices may mitigate the district's declining enrollment, as well as improve the probability that those students will remain with the district through the duration of their elementary and secondary academic lives, providing both a stable learning environment for new students and more stability for the school district.

Again, these are only a few of the Expanded TK considerations LEAs may wish to ponder as development of the 2016-17 LCAPs begin. School Services of California, Inc., is working to develop tools that can assist LEAs to conduct financial analyses of options for implementation of Expanded TK programs.

For more information about the research on the effects of ECE programs, [click here](#).

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posted 10/12/2015