

# KINDERGARTEN, DELAYED

Will an extra year of preschool give your child a competitive edge?

Here's what to consider. Written by Maura Christopher

It takes a leap of faith to send your fresh-faced little scholar off to kindergarten. Dubbed the new first grade, kindergarten is increasingly academic and stressful due to an emphasis on test scores and a push to build early reading skills, says Beth Graue, Ph.D., a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin , in Madison .

No wonder a growing number of parents are delaying the transition from preschool. Today, 9 percent of U.S. kids start kindergarten a year later than they could. (In some competitive districts, upward of 140 percent start late.) Typically, these are the kids who would be the youngest in their grade. By "redshirting" their children, as it's called, parents hope to give their late bloomers a chance to mature emotionally or academically.

Other parents hold their children back even when they're on track developmentally, hoping to give them a leg up for years to come.

For kids in genuine need of an extra year, redshirting is a smart move, says Sara Rimm-Kaufman, Ph.D., an associate professor of education at the University of Virginia , in Charlottesville . But for kids who could handle the challenge, it can be risky. For starters, kids learn best when taught at the upper range of their skills, says Dr. Graue. Being younger offers this chance to "learn up." Overcoming challenges and confronting failure also help kids feel confident and worthy. They build resilience, which can be lacking when achievements come too easily. What's more, the academic advantages of starting late may disappear by the end of third grade, according to Dr. Graue's research. These older kids are often more likely to become bored and disruptive, or feel they don't measure up.

Still, some parents are taking no chances and swear by delayed kindergarten. If you're considering this big decision as school registration begins, here's how to make the best choice for your child:

- \* Tap the experts. Talk to your child's preschool teacher, who's in a good position to determine whether he's ready. Also, ask the principal and kindergarten teacher of your local elementary school about readiness screening procedures (most schools screen potential kindergarteners in late spring) and what kind of work your child would be doing.

- \* Look for signs of readiness. Consider your child's academic, emotional, and social development: She should show an interest in letters, numbers, and books; be able to follow simple directions and sit still for limited periods; have some capacity to persist at

challenging tasks; have a range of ways to soothe herself when angry; and be able to negotiate relationships with other kids without continual problems.

\* If your child lacks academic skills but has solid self-regulatory and social skills, lean toward sending him to kindergarten, says Dr. Rimm Kaufman. And if he shows emotional, social, or general developmental immaturity, you may want to have him assessed for a disability before red-shirting him, which would deny him the benefit of early intervention. \* Ask about Transitional Kindergarten ("TC). if you think your child may not be ready for kindergarten, but you don't want her to get bored with another year of preschool, ask if your district offers "TK," which offers a bridge curriculum more challenging than a regular Pre-K.

For more information, go to [NAEYC.org](http://NAEYC.org), the site for the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and do a search for "school readiness."

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