

Kindergarten Readiness

Kindergarten is a major childhood milestone, and it is common for parents to wonder whether their children are prepared, and if a school's program is appropriate to their children's needs. Parents who live in Silicon Valley tend to be highly educated, motivated and engaged; we value the role of education, which can compound the magnitude of the kindergarten decision. If you feel anxious about what's best for your daughter or son, take heart in knowing that you're not alone!

Traditionally, chronological age is used as the primary measure for placement in kindergarten, although a body of research highlights the vast span of developmental readiness among kindergarten-aged children within the same chronological year.

What are the meaningful variables in determining a child's kindergarten readiness?

Academic demands of the modern kindergarten

The skills and expectations present in the modern kindergarten curriculum have advanced considerably compared to the kindergarten experiences today's parents had years ago. In fact, many of the academic goals traditionally held for first graders now appear in the kindergarten classroom.

Letting children blossom

At Almaden Country School, we view kindergarten in the context of a developmental continuum. In our experience, we find that many children benefit from an additional year to prepare for kindergarten, whether they were born after our Sept. 1 deadline or just need time to blossom. This explains the increasing prevalence of junior kindergarten, or "Junior K" as we call it, as an option for parents. Junior K has been a developmental fixture at ACS since our founding in 1982.

Developmental needs come first

At ACS we believe Junior K is not a matter of being "held back" — to the contrary, we see it as a gift of time. It's noteworthy to point out that although Junior K students make up a small percentage of our graduating class each year, about half of our valedictorians attended our school's junior kindergarten program. For them, Junior K was clearly a gift of time.

Academics is just one consideration

Often parents focus on academic traits, such as familiarity with the alphabet, counting skills or early reading aptitude, as the measure of their children's kindergarten readiness (or even "giftedness").

However, number facts and early reading ability are not exclusive indicators of whole-child kindergarten readiness — which is our focus at ACS. Indeed, academic precocity is among the least important indicators of kindergarten readiness from the perspective of veteran early childhood educators. Traits such as self-control over behavior and

emotions, enthusiasm, the ability to keep attention focused, verbal communication skills, and overall physical health are major factors in a child's success in kindergarten, none of which rest on academic ability.

Whole child readiness is our focus

Just as we would not advance a child to an older grade because he is physically large, advanced placement based on one developmental trait (including academic ability) is inappropriate and unwise. For example, it is absolutely possible to teach three-year-old children to read, but doing so shortcuts important steps in the learning process and, research indicates, may impact other cognitive processes in ways that don't manifest until later in that child's life.

At ACS when we assess children for kindergarten placement, our trained early childhood education specialist takes into account whole child readiness — social maturity, sensory-motor skills, behavioral aptitude, overall physical health and academic ability — with the recognition that children at this age undergo huge developmental swings in just a matter of months. It is our position that there is little justification for accelerating children into kindergarten beyond their developmental readiness.

A healthy beginning

We know that the kindergarten decision is among the first of many critical educational decisions parents make. Integral to our educational philosophy is a commitment to celebrate childhood; this is implicit in our approach to kindergarten readiness, and is supported by studies establishing the many advantages of a developmental approach to learning and teaching. Our curriculum from kindergarten through eighth grade commencement is designed to deepen learning, not accelerate it. This continuum begins with a healthy beginning honoring whole-child development.

At ACS we are partners with parents in looking at a comprehensive evaluation of a child's kindergarten readiness, using a developmental model that has helped us shape three decades of confident, competent, caring and academically accomplished graduates.