

# Prep Year for Youngest Kindergartners

The Long Beach Unified School District will offer transitional kindergarten in September at eight or more schools, providing extra support to the youngest kindergartners who don't reach age five until fall.

The free classes are a response to recent state legislation changing the entry date for kindergarten from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1 (over the course of four years) to make certain that kindergartners are at least five years old. As part of the legislation, once the age requirement completely changes, students whose fifth birthday is between September and December must take one year of transitional kindergarten followed by one year of standard kindergarten.

Across the state, the kindergarten entry date will change as follows:

- 2011-12: no change
- 2012-13: Nov. 1
- 2013-14: Oct. 1
- 2014-15: Sept. 1

As fewer and fewer students are eligible to start kindergarten because of the change in age eligibility, transitional kindergarten will be implemented throughout California.

LBUSD, however, is among a statewide group of early implementers of transitional kindergarten and will offer 20-student transitional-K classes at Buffum, Carver, Cleveland, Cubberley, Dooley, Edison, Garfield and McKinley schools this fall.

"We're pleased to provide this important service for parents and students," said Jill Baker, LBUSD's assistant superintendent for elementary, middle and K-8 schools.

"Transitional kindergarten is a gift of time for many students, and it will help to prepare more children for success in kindergarten and beyond," Baker said.

As an early implementer, LBUSD is offering the program ahead of many other school districts where children will only be eligible for transitional kindergarten if their fifth birthday falls between:

- Nov. 2 and Dec. 2 (for 2012–13);
- Oct. 2 and Dec. 2 (for 2013–14);
- Sept. 2 and Dec. 2 (for 2014–15 and each school year thereafter).

LBUSD's transitional-K classes will be funded in part by a \$150,000 grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

California's children begin kindergarten at a younger age than kids in almost any other state, often before they have the maturity and the social, early literacy and pre-math skills needed to meet the challenges of kindergarten.

California is only one of four states that set a cutoff date as late as Dec. 1, yet the Golden State has some of the highest standards for what children are expected to learn. The children with the largest school readiness gaps, 4-year-olds from low-income households, are the least likely to have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten classes. Only 13 percent of disadvantaged children attend high-quality pre-K classes, according to research by the RAND Corporation.

Parents interested in the free transitional-K classes for their children this fall may complete a parent-interest form now available on the district website. Call the Elementary Schools Office at 997-8247 for more information.