

Early Entrance to Kindergarten Frequently Asked Questions

To be sure children are ready for the demands of school, students must turn five by August 1 to enroll in Kindergarten. This date is appropriate for most children, but there are times when a younger child is academically and socially advanced. In accordance with state law, the district has established a process for children to be considered for early entrance to Kindergarten. Here are common questions about the process. If you have additional questions, please contact Colleen Boyle, Gifted Coordinator, at the Licking County Educational Service Center at 740-349-6094.

1. *What school programs may a child enter early?*

Children may be considered for early entrance into the regular Kindergarten program if they will be 5 after the August 1 date or 1st grade if they turn 6 after the August 1 date. The district does not make early entrance placements into the Primary Kindergarten program.

2. *Who can request a child be considered for early entrance?*

Referrals may come from parents, family members, educators, or health professionals, such as a psychologist or pediatrician, if the child will be 5 years by December 31. The referral must come from an educator, pediatrician, or psychologist if the child turns 5 on January 1 or later. All parents must sign a consent form for assessment. Forms are available from the county gifted coordinator or the school and district offices.

3. *When does someone request assessment for early entrance?*

Assessment requests for the following school year should be made between April 1 and to April 30 to ensure time for assessment and any necessary placement prior to the start of the school year. Referrals may not be accepted after May 29.

4. *How does the process work?*

There are multiple phases to the process, and students must meet criteria for the previous phase in order to move forward with the remainder of the evaluation. The basic steps are:

- The referral is made and parents grant permission to test. The county gifted coordinator will follow-up to schedule the screening appointment.
- The initial appointment is a cognitive ability screener, which takes about 30 minutes. The test is scored immediately and shared with the parents to determine next steps.
- If the child meets the initial screening criteria, parents bring their child in for a second appointment for more complete cognitive ability and academic achievement testing. This session lasts approximately 3 hours and includes regular breaks. Parents should bring a snack for their child. Again, the tests are scored and shared on the spot.
- If the child meets the criteria to continue with the evaluation, the county gifted coordinator contacts the child's preschool teacher or other individual with a working knowledge of the child to learn more about how the child interacts in a group.
- Once all data is collected, the gifted coordinator will arrange a placement meeting.

5. *When does assessment take place?*

Students referred before April 30 will be assessed during the month of May or June. Students referred after May 1 will be assessed prior to the school year as scheduling allows.

6. *Who conducts the assessment?*

The gifted coordinator conducts most of the assessments. In some cases, the school psychologist or other trained staff may administer the assessments.

7. *What information is used to determine if a child may enter Kindergarten early?*

Assessment for early entrance to Kindergarten uses information from a cognitive ability test that measures a child's ability to think, problem solve, and understand new ideas. The assessment also includes a test of academic skills and an evaluation of the child's social, emotional, and physical maturity.

8. *How long does the assessment take?*

The assessment process varies in length. Students who are eligible to go through the entire evaluation will go through about 3 ½ hours of actual testing. The remainder of the process could take up to two weeks to collect all other necessary information.

9. *What is on the test?*

The cognitive ability test looks at a child's ability to follow directions, communicate through speaking, problem solve, understand how shapes and space go together, and recognize patterns and relationships among ideas and objects. The achievement testing measures a child's basic reading and writing skills, understanding of math concepts, and general knowledge of the world around him or her. The tests are designed to allow the child to go as far as possible in order to gauge how the child compares to other children the same age as well as the average Kindergartener.

10. *What are the criteria for early entrance placement?*

Southwest Licking Local Schools uses the *Iowa Acceleration Scale (IAS)* for making placement decisions. This instrument makes recommendations based on points assigned to certain test scores and certain behaviors. Along the way are required minimum scores in order to continue with the process. Based on the guide established in the *IAS*, students must have a cognitive ability score of at least 115 to continue through the process. To put that into perspective, 100 is considered average, 130 is considered gifted, and 115 is considered to be above average/bright. Also, students must have enough advanced academic skills to earn the required rating points to continue the process. Typically, students need to score at or above the 90th percentile in most subject areas when compared to students of the same age to get enough points to continue with the assessment. These base scores do not guarantee early entrance placement. That decision is based on the total profile of the child. These scores simply serve as a guide for continued consideration. *Students considered for early entrance are expected to score much higher than an average child entering Kindergarten.* This is based on research on child development and acceleration practices and in accordance with state guidelines.

11. *Who makes the decision to place or not place a child in Kindergarten early?*

A placement team, which typically includes the parents, county gifted coordinator, building principal, and a Kindergarten teacher, will make decisions about placement for any child who completes the *entire* assessment process. The decision is a result of group consensus based on the data gathered during the assessment process.

12. *How common is early entrance placement?*

Early entrance is typically reserved for the *exceptional* child. Although students do not need to be gifted for early entrance placement, students who are ultimately eligible often fall in the gifted range of ability. The goal of all placement decisions is to ensure that students entering Kindergarten are ready for what this big year has in store academically and socially. Because the August 1 date is appropriate for most children, there often are very few students, if any, who demonstrate eligibility for early entrance.