



**Please provide a copy of this letter to the psychologist you select to evaluate your child.**

### **Early Entry to Kindergarten**

Dear Parent:

You have asked about early entry to kindergarten. Provided below is general information and procedures.

Which children are eligible to be considered for early entry to kindergarten?

Children who turn 5 years old by midnight on September 1<sup>st</sup> are eligible for regular entry into kindergarten. Children born after this date may be eligible for early entry if they reach the age requirement prior to October 1<sup>st</sup>.

What do I need to do to have my child considered for early entry?

For age-eligible children, the following procedures have been established:

1. Contact the principal at the student's boundary school and request early entry for your child. Requests for early entry to kindergarten *will not* be accepted after July 15. While kindergarten students start one week later than other students, that week allows for the developmental profile process to take place and is still considered a week of school for all students.
2. Parents will need to obtain *at their own expense* an evaluation (criteria and content are listed below) from a *licensed* private psychologist. The evaluator must be licensed by the State of Alaska to practice psychology. A written report (see criteria below) must be submitted to the school for review. It is recommended that the psychologist selected be given a copy of this early entry letter to ensure their evaluation and report conforms to the District's criteria. The psychologist's report is to be submitted to the Office of Teaching and Learning for review and verification prior to August 1<sup>st</sup>.

Private psychologists establish their own fees for evaluation services. Therefore, fees will vary from one psychologist to another. However, it is not unreasonable to expect fees for an early entry to kindergarten evaluation to cost \$600 or more. It is recommended that you review the information presented below and that you contact several psychologists to discuss their fees before scheduling an appointment. You may select a licensed psychologist from those listed under Psychologists in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory.

What if my child does not meet the district age requirement but was enrolled in a kindergarten in another school or district, can he/she be enrolled in the MSBSD?

A child under school age shall be admitted to school in the district of which he/she is a resident if immediately before he/she became a resident of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, the family relocated to Alaska and the child was legally enrolled in the public schools of another district or state. Transfer pupils from public or private schools outside of Alaska who have been regular students entered in accordance with applicable state laws or regulations will be accepted initially within the school year in Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District at the same grade level. Pupils transferring from kindergarten or first grade in private and denominational schools in Alaska which have complied with Alaska Statute 14.03.080 shall be eligible to transfer during the school year to the same grade in the district if the child originally entered at an age in accordance with state statute. That is, if the child becomes five years of age before September 1<sup>st</sup> for kindergarten entrance or six years of age before September 1<sup>st</sup> for first grade entrance.

Subsidized Evaluations:

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District will evaluate at no cost, children who would qualify for free or reduced lunches if they were enrolled in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. The eligibility guidelines are attached for your review.

If you have questions regarding a subsidized evaluation, you may contact the Office of Teaching and Learning at 746-9212

Criteria for Early Entry to Kindergarten:

The child must successfully meet all the following three criteria in order to be eligible for early entry to kindergarten:

1. Full Scale Intelligence quotient (IQ) in the Superior Range (e.g. IQ of 120 or higher) on the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence – 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (WPPSI-IV). The target IQ score falls at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile.
2. Visual motor skills in the above average range as assessed by the Test of Visual Motor Integration- 5<sup>th</sup> Edition-R (Keith E. Beery, 1997).
3. Social/emotional skills commensurate with those of age-appropriate kindergarten peers as determined on the basis of a trial placement in kindergarten that may last up to, but depending upon the child's behavior, may be shorter than four weeks. Only children unequivocally meeting criteria on items 1-2 are eligible for a trial placement in kindergarten.

The purpose of the trial placement is to determine if the child has the social/emotional maturation to adjust to the challenges of the kindergarten/school environment. The trial placement is used because observation of the child's social/emotional behavior in the real-world setting of kindergarten will convey to the teacher the child's ability to meet the social and behavioral demands of the kindergarten/school environment. If the school psychologist and kindergarten teacher, based on

their joint observations and with the concurrence of the building principal, determine that the child is not meeting the social and behavioral demands of the kindergarten/school environment, the child will be considered to have not successfully met all three criteria for early entry to kindergarten and will be withdrawn from school.

Criteria for Psychologist's Assessment Report:

The psychologist's report must contain the WPPSI-IV scaled scores for all subtests administered, including Visual Spatial Index and the Fluid Reasoning Index. The standard scores calculated from the DTVM1 must also be reported. Clinical observations of the child's performance and behavior during the assessment are appropriate. **The basis for considering a child for early entry to kindergarten will be the child's rubric scores, not the psychologist's recommendations.**

What happens during the trial placement?

The kindergarten teacher, principal, and school psychologist will observe your child for adjustment in the following domains: social/emotional interactions, work habits, attitude, organization, motor skills and independent work skills. An under-age child must be rated as high average to excellent in all areas to increase likelihood of long-term success. A meeting will be held with you after two weeks of the trial placement. Progress will be reviewed and a decision made to continue for another two weeks or termination of the trial will be made at that time. A school team decision to terminate early kindergarten placement at the end of the four-week trial will be final.

What factors should I consider in making this decision?

Kindergartens have evolved from programs that emphasized social development and learning through play and exploration to a stronger academic focus. Curriculum today includes reading, math, social studies, science, music, art and physical education. A child who is not developmentally ready for kindergarten can experience stress and failure. Young children internalize difficulties with reactions of "something is wrong with me" rather than "this was not a good decision for me". Honestly judge if your child exhibits the following traits when considering requesting early entry:

My child:

- Finishes simple tasks without frustration and reminders; perseveres
- Has advanced language skills in comparison to others the same age
- Has an advanced vocabulary in comparison to others the same age
- Exhibits advanced intellectual skills (learns quickly)
- Has complete control of pencils and scissors – can copy and cut symbols/shapes accurately
- Knows how to share
- Takes turns, has patience, uses good manners
- Easily delays need for adult attention

- Separates easily from parents
- Initiates friendships, resolves conflicts
- Demonstrates leadership with older playmates
- Counts objects, pointing to each one correctly as counting
- Has learned to read and understands the text not just pictures

#### What does research show about age and school performance?

Research indicates that, in general, children in the upper age limits for a grade are more mature physically, socially and intellectually. Older children are more frequently chosen as playground leaders, class presidents, team captains, and are held in higher esteem by their peers. The youngest in a grade level are more frequently referred for special education services or considered for retention. The less bright but older and developmentally more mature pupils are able to do more with their abilities than the brighter, younger students.

#### What if things don't work out?

Statistically, there is a good chance you will face a recommendation not to continue with a trial placement. **You must have a back-up plan for child care in case your child does not have a successful experience during the trial placement.** Have a plan for how you will introduce not only the trial placement, but how you will discuss with the child the decision to return to daycare or home rather than remain at school. Children's emotional reactions will often mirror that of the parents. If you are calm and express the opinion that the adults decide what is best for children and the adults decided Kindergarten was not the best place, children can accept that easier than tearful or angry explanations. If the kindergarten placement is not continued, it is important to let the child know there is nothing he/she did that caused this decision. Perhaps the conversation can focus on "Those children were just too old for you...Mommy decided the best place for you was at..." Discuss the trial placement as "something the grownups decided to try for a little while. The grownups will decide if they want to keep you with older kids or kids your own age."

#### What about articles I read about detriments to holding children back from school?

Those articles are referring to children whose age matches that of the school guidelines for school entry. Those studies followed children whose parents opted not to enter them in school despite meeting the age criteria or children retained in a grade. Those articles are not addressing children who do not meet the age cut-off and whose parents want them entered ahead of schedule.

#### Who makes the final decision at the end of the trial placement?

The school team will consist of the school principal, the classroom teacher(s), the parent(s), and the school psychologist. This team will determine whether the student should continue with kindergarten.

If consensus cannot be reached with the team, the principal will consider all information and the final decision will rest with the school principal.

Final Caution:

A final word of caution is offered as you consider your decision. New state standards for education have just been implemented in the schools. These standards raise expectations for children at all grade levels. Will your child be ready emotionally and intellectually to meet those expectations or would another year of development weigh more heavily in his/her favor?

If you have questions about early entry to kindergarten, they may be addressed to an Associate Superintendent of Teaching and Learning at 746-9212.