

EARLY ENTRANCE EVALUATION FOR FIRST GRADE

This booklet is intended to help parents determine the appropriateness of having their child evaluated for entrance into school ahead of schedule. Contact the lead psychologist in the Department of Student Services at the Education Center located at 2651 Burnet Ave. Cincinnati, OH 45219 with any questions regarding early evaluation (phone number 513-363-0293).



SHOULD I HAVE MY CHILD EVALUATED?

Parents are beginning to give this question serious thought before registering their child for evaluation. School entrance is an anxiety-provoking situation for the child and should not be taken lightly. Early school experiences shape self-confidence and influence children for the rest of their lives.

Child development at ages five and six can be very uneven. Thus, a five year old may appear advanced because of excellent vocabulary and language development while social skills may be typical of the child's age. However, the child may not maintain the language spurt into school as other skills begin to emerge. Thus, an extra year of development may provide a more even skill profile and more assurance of early school success.

Registration for Early Entrance should be considered only if the child appears to be ten to twelve months above his/her actual age in the following areas of development: social, emotional, intellectual, and pre-academic skills. Early entrance should not be reduced to the question, "Can my child succeed in first grade?" The real issue may be the cost of success. Should young children be pushed into stressful situations as part of skill development early in their school career? Or should they be given time to develop the skills and confidence which are the foundations of learning? These are serious issues parents must confront in making decisions that will have significant impact on the lives of their children.

Developmental Skills for First Grade

The early maturing child who is ready for first grade quickly shows a broadening of interests, searches for stimulating relationships outside of the family structure, and displays increasingly independent qualities. By contrast, the child who may need a kindergarten experience shows evidence of: poor knowledge of pre-academic skills, especially in reading, limited expressive ability, inappropriate emotional or social responses, and over-dependence on adults to provide support or assistance. *Most children fall between these two extremes.* A few general skills seen in children ready for first grade are listed below.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The ability to understand spoken language comes before, and is different from, the ability to express one's thoughts in language. In fact, reading difficulties can sometimes be related to difficulties in associations between the spoken word, its sounds, and its printed form. The amount of talking a child does can also be misleading. More important than the quantity of talking or speech, is the quality of the language and the interaction between the children and/or adults sharing ideas and solving problems together. Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Using most sounds correctly in expressing complete thoughts
- Using sentence components correctly with appropriate word order
- Using increasingly complex sentences to express ideas
- Spontaneously correcting mistakes in grammar and clarifying ideas
- Carrying out at least three simple tasks or directions after being told once
- Talking spontaneously about an experience or topic of interest and taking turns in simple conversations

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL MATURITY

The ability to express feelings, work out conflicts, take pride in achievements and take on challenges independently contribute to a child's self-concept and self-confidence. All of these contribute to a child's ability to handle new and sometimes difficult situations with a sense of competency. Self-motivation, the ability to function in a more competitive setting, and a sense of cooperativeness are all essential for a successful school experience for a child entering first grade. Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Making transitions between activities when requested
- Playing cooperatively with other children in structured and active play
- Demonstrating a sense of responsibility by doing assigned chores or work independently
- Attending to and completing tasks without constant adult direction or assistance
- Accepting direction or limit setting without temper tantrums
- Caring for personal needs independently (dressing, toileting, eating)
- Expressing frustration appropriately and asking for help
- Working with peers in small groups to accomplish a task

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The ability to make associations between everyday experiences, answer questions, understand functions of objects, notice similarities and differences, and classify items are indicators of a child's cognitive abilities. Characteristics of maturity in this area include:

- Demonstrating understanding of concepts of size, weight, money, time and location
- Expressing understanding of similarities and differences
- Counting from at least one to a hundred and demonstrating understanding of one to one correspondence
- Listening to a story when read and retelling three to four events from the story using the correct sequence
- Responding to questions about previously learned skills and personal information (like name, address, phone number)

PREPARING FOR EVALUATION

Once parents have become informed about Early Entrance into first grade and make the decision to proceed with assessment, the child should be given every opportunity to perform well. Prepare the child physically by getting the child to bed early the night before, providing breakfast, and comfortable clothes. Parents should maintain a positive, relaxed attitude rather than emphasizing pieces of information for the child to memorize in order to "pass." Trying to study or "cram" in order to help your child prepare for the assessment often produces confusion and anxiety in children rather than confidence.

The best approach is usually a straight-forward one. Tell your child that he or she will be working with someone who helps the teachers at school and that there may or may not be other children waiting to do the same activities. Bring things for your child to work on quietly if they have to wait a few minutes for their appointment.

Remember, the focus is on gathering information to help adults make decisions about your child's readiness to enter first grade early and have a successful and positive school experience. Many children who participate in the assessment are developing normally, but may not be accepted for Early Entrance to first grade. Be supportive of your child, and help him or her have a good experience.

Early Entrance Examined From Various Perspectives

A Teacher's Viewpoint...

Many experienced teachers express concerns about Early Entrance into first grade based on their experience and research on instruction. Even the most well-rounded, mature children encounter frustration when exposed to the rigors of daily school routine, competition with older children, and the challenges of learning. Younger children may also experience social difficulties in a predominantly older group.

Early Entrance into first grade is further complicated by the pressure children feel to excel in school. Sometimes, because children are bright, parents expect them to do well and may fail to recognize what the child has accomplished just by starting school early. Some children react by withdrawing from such pressure. They may try to blend in with the group and become average learners.

Teacher experience is used in extending the assessment process into the first six weeks of school for those children who actually start early. Progress and social adjustment are carefully monitored to insure that the child can cope with the demands over a prolonged period. Parents are encouraged to keep in close contact with the teacher and to provide input.

A School Psychologist's Viewpoint...

Most school psychologist's have strong opinions about the topic of Early Entrance into first grade. As child advocates and professionals who spend considerable time with children who have learning problems, they are very concerned about early learning experiences and their impact on school success. Thus, school psychologists tend to be conservative in making a recommendation in favor of Early Entrance in an effort to minimize the likelihood of unpleasant or unsuccessful school experiences.

The function of the school psychologist during the assessment process is to gather information regarding the child's independence and readiness, responses to standardized assessment of cognitive functioning, and in some cases, adaptive behavior.

The importance of early school success and self-image are stressed by the school psychologist. Parents are encouraged to minimize pressure to "pass" and to present the experience more like a visit for an annual physical where measurements are taken to document growth.

A Parent's Viewpoint...

Parents naturally want the best for their child and sometimes assume that an early start in school is an advantage. They are then disappointed and may believe their child is being deprived somehow if not allowed to begin school early. In fact, research indicates that children who start early enjoy NO long lasting advantage over those of equal ability who start later. Likewise, in their efforts to help their child get ahead, parents may not consider all dimensions of development, or may overlook the importance of early success in building confidence for the future.

Experience has shown that parents are grateful for the type of information provided in this publication. Some opt not to go through with the evaluation. Those who do are more accepting of results based on an understanding that the vast majority of children are not recommended, but still have normal development. Even those who are accepted are being increasingly held out by parents who recognize the implications of starting early and want their child to have a positive school experience.

CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Purpose and Procedures for Early Entrance Evaluation to First Grade

Purpose

Early Entrance to first grade may be available for a child whose sixth birthday falls on or between October 1st and December 31st of the Early Entrance year. It may also be considered for a six year old who has not had a kindergarten experience by a request to the district pupil personnel services committee consisting of a school principal, school psychologist, and grade level teacher. In order to qualify for Early Entrance into first grade, children must demonstrate marked high ability and maturation in the areas of intellectual ability, social and emotional maturity, language development and knowledge of pre-academic skills. The purpose of First Grade Early Entrance Evaluation is to determine if a child stands *at the 75th percentile or above* in these areas. Thus, a child must be functioning 10 to 12 months above his or her chronological age with superior ratings in these areas.

Procedures

1. Parents may pick up the application packet at their local elementary building, from the lead psychologist at the Education Center, or download it from the CPS website. The registration form (CPS-FG-1) must be filled out and returned to the lead psychologist. This registration must be checked, signed, and should include why parents feel their child should be considered for First Grade Early Entrance. Proof of birth and proof of address must also be provided by the parents at the time of application.
2. A packet of information regarding the purpose and requirements for First Grade Early Entrance Admission will be given to parents with the registration form. A rationale related to the district's requirements is presented in the "Common Questions" section. Requests submitted between August 15 and April 15 will be completed and a written summary of the outcome of the evaluation will be issued within forty-five (45) calendar days of the completed registration. Requests for evaluations submitted between April 16 and August 14 will ordinarily be completed and a written report issued within forty-five (45) calendar days of the start of the school year. For families who have applied to an alternative to their neighborhood school, a magnet slot will be held until results from Early Entrance assessments are completed and the child has been accepted or not. A written acceleration plan will be developed for any child accepted for Early Entrance into first grade. Requests for deviation to the established guidelines will be determined by the director of Early Childhood Education.
3. If after reading the attached requirements, parents still want their child to be assessed they should complete the registration and return it to the lead psychologist housed at the Education Center, Department of Student Services at 2651 Burnet Avenue. They may return it to the lead psychologist directly or through the principal of the school. The principal and the school psychologist of the local elementary building or magnet program will be notified of the request by email once the lead psychologist has received all documents. Building personnel will be responsible for making the appointments to complete the screening and Early Entrance assessments.
4. The school psychologist will complete screening activities consisting of a pre-academic assessment and a norm referenced measure of adaptive behavior. If a child meets the required criteria, norm referenced measure of cognitive functioning will be administered to determine eligibility for Early Entrance to first grade or a waiver of the kindergarten experience.
5. In order to be recommended for First Grade Early Entrance, the child must score *at or above* the benchmark score for the end of kindergarten performance standards on the pre-academic assessment, and achieve scores *at the 75th percentile on the measure of adaptive behavior* **before** being recommended for cognitive assessment. Upon completion of all assessments, there will be a determination based on scores to determine if the child is accepted for Early Entrance to First Grade.
6. Materials from the assessment will be sent to the lead psychologist for review, and a written summary of the outcome of the evaluation stating that the child did or did not meet the criteria for Early Entrance will be sent to the parent by the lead psychologist. Accepted children will be assigned to first grade. The first grading period of the school is considered a trial period for all children entering first grade through this process. At the end of the first grading period, if there are concerns about the child's performance, a meeting will be requested to determine whether termination or continuation is appropriate. The principal is responsible for convening a meeting to develop a written acceleration plan for those children who are continuing in first grade.
7. If a child does not meet the criteria for Early Entrance, the parent(s) may appeal in writing to the Director of Early Childhood Education within thirty (30) days of receiving the notification from the lead psychologist. The review committee will respond in writing with a decision within thirty (30) days of the parent request. The decision of the appeals committee will be final.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT EARLY ENTRANCE TO FIRST GRADE

1. Why is there an Early Entrance to First Grade program?

The program was established to comply with the Ohio Revised Code which requires evaluation for:

- a child turning six between October 1 and December 31 of the admittance year who is being considered for Early Entrance into first grade

It also specifies that parents may request a waiver for a child to enter first grade without a kindergarten experience *if*:

- the child is six by September 30 of the year of admittance and has not had a kindergarten experience as defined by the Ohio Revised Code, *and*
- can demonstrate possession of the social, emotional and cognitive skills necessary for first grade in which case the waiver can be approved.

2. For whom is this program designed?

The program is designed to identify those children who will turn 6 between October 1 and December 31 with developmental levels in all areas more than 10 to 12 months above their chronological age, or to determine if a six year old child who is being considered for a waiver to a successful kindergarten experience will be recommended. In a typical year, *twenty-five or less children out of one hundred* screened are recommended for Early Entrance into first grade. Of course, many parents expect their child to be recommended, but the statistic speaks for itself. Given this information, parents should be realistic about the potential outcome and conservative in their predictions so as not to create unreasonable expectations in children.

3. How do I prepare my child for the day of evaluation?

Hopefully, you have given serious and realistic consideration to the criteria for acceptance before registering your child. Parental attempts to “coach” the child usually only intensify the pressure and anxiety of the situation. Most of the tasks used in the evaluation are developmental in nature and resemble activities typical of kindergarten. Do not refer to the session as a “test” or imply that the child will either “pass” or “fail”. You may want to tell your child that he or she will be asked to do some work and other things that will show how much they have learned so far. Try to emphasize that they should do their best and enjoy themselves.

4. What happens the day of the evaluation?

A school psychologist will interview parents, and screen each child individually. The measure of pre-academic readiness will be administered first (the child must score at or above the benchmark for kindergarteners at the end of the year). Then, a norm referenced adaptive behavior measure will be administered. The child must score at or above the 75th percentile overall before proceeding. If the child is successful at this level, a norm referenced measure of cognitive functioning will then be administered. When an individual cognitive assessment is completed, the resulting full scale or composite score must be in the 75th percentile for a child to be recommended for Early Entrance to first grade.

5. How will I know whether or not my child has met the criteria?

You will be notified by letter that will include whether or not your child has met the criteria for Early Entrance to first grade, or has been granted a waiver for kindergarten. Included in this letter will be a contact number for questions and concerns.

6. How will my child feel if he/she is not among the children who met the criteria for acceptance?

A child's reaction usually depends on how the situation has been presented and how parents react to whether the child has met the criteria for acceptance. Parents who react strongly to the results may send the message to the child that he/she has failed or done something wrong. The child will maintain self-esteem if parents present the information positively and stress how much better prepared the child will be after a kindergarten experience.

7. What are some reasons children do not meet the criteria?

The basic reason is that most children are developing normally or at a rate that is only slightly above average, or that they may *not* have the skills to demonstrate that they have met the equivalent of a successful kindergarten experience. Occasionally, results indicate that a child may be delayed in some area of development included in the screening. In such cases, parents are advised of the specific findings the day of the evaluation or by a phone call soon afterward.

8. Why are the standards for acceptance so demanding?

Past experience and research have shown that most children do better when they enter school with their age group. Children who enter early are placed in a highly competitive situation with others who may be a year or older who have had the advantage of additional life experience and development. Only a few advanced children are ready to compete on this level where emotional stress can be intense. Given such risks, high standards are intended to protect children who may appear ready based on advanced skills in one area of development.

9. Suppose I change my mind after my child has been accepted?

YOU, as the child's parent, make the final decision to enter your child if Early Entrance acceptance criteria have been met. An added precaution is that the first grading period of the first grade year is considered an extended evaluation period. You, or the school, may decide to withdraw the child during this period if concerns arise. If this should occur, a planning process for alternatives will be carried out by the principal and members of the building support team including the child's teacher.