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## Local Schools Transition Kindergarten Entry-Age

By Andrea A. Firth

Kindergarten teacher Bess Inzeo describes the move to raise the entry-age for kindergarten in California's public schools to five years old by September 1st as "the gift of time."

"Students need to be socially and developmentally ready for the academic rigors of today's kindergarten classroom," says Inzeo, who has taught kindergarten at Moraga's Donald Rheem Elementary School for twelve years.

Until recently, children entering kindergarten in California could turn five as late as December 2nd, more than three months into the school year. But starting with the 2012-13 school year, Lamorinda's schools, like schools across the state, will phase-in the new age requirement over three years. (See Table page A9)

While parents are not required to send their children to kindergarten, attendance in Lamorinda is the norm. And locally, holding back students with fall birthdays is not uncommon and happens even more often with boys. Inzeo has had a limited number of students with fall birthdays who turn five in her classroom. She has found that many families opt for an additional year of pre-school. In fact Inzeo, whose

son has a November birthday, chose this option.

California was one of just a few states remaining that had not already adopted a September 1st birthday cut-off for kindergarten. In addition to the entry age change, the California Legislature's Kindergarten Readiness Act provides the youngest, fall-birthday students-those born after 9/1 and on or before 12/2-with a transitional kindergarten, an extra year of kindergarten that uses a modified curriculum. Like traditional kindergarten, enrollment is optional.

"Exactly how the transitional kindergarten program will be structured is still to be determined," says Lafayette School District Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill. "Looking at the current kindergarten class [in the Lafayette School District], there were only eight students across the four grade schools who had November birthdays and turned five." The current kindergarten population in the Lafayette School District is 357.

How to structure the transitional program and where to house the class(es) will be driven by enrollment and the district is exploring options, says Brill. One option would be combination classes at each school with younger, transitional kindergarten students and "regular" kindergarteners in the same class. The teachers, all well versed in differentiation teaching methods, says Brill, would work with a modified curriculum for the transitional students. A second option would be to have a single transitional kindergarten class housed at a single school site. "We have to look at the enrollment numbers before we can make any decisions," explains Brill.

"This is new for all schools in California," say Courtney Guinn, the Director of Educational Services and Instructional Technology for the Moraga School District, "Right now we don't know how many students in the district will qualify for transitional kindergarten." But as Inzeo's experience attests, parents have already been holding kids back. In the current school year, there are 18 kindergarten-students district wide in Moraga who had November birthdays-15 entered the school year as five-year olds and turned six in November, and three students started at age four years and turned five.

Enrollment numbers will determine how and where the transitional kindergarten program will be held in the Orinda Union School District as well, says Kathy Marshall, the Director of Curriculum and Development. While the district is looking at a single transitional kindergarten class, Marshall says everything is dependent on enrollment.

Brill believes the addition of the transitional kindergarten program will be essentially cost neutral to his district, but he sees other benefits. "Developmentally I think it will be beneficial for students to be older when they start kindergarten," he says adding, "Our kindergartens are not just developmental, these are academic programs. We do much, much more."

### Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010

School Year	Kindergarten Entry Age	Transitional Kindergarten Eligible
2011-12	Five by December 2	Not required
2012-13	Five by November 1	Five between 11/2 and 12/2
2013-14	Five by October 1	Five between 10/2 and 12/2
2014-15	Five by September 1	Five between 9/2 and 12/2

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