Expanded transitional kindergarten (ETK) is a flexible, cost-effective local option for school districts and charter schools to offer school readiness opportunities to children and expand options for families who might not have access to preschool programs in their community. Statutory changes made in the 2015-16 state budget clarify that school districts and charter schools can collect Average Daily Attendance (ADA) dollars to support TK programs for any child as soon as he or she turns 5. This allows districts to expand TK beyond the original eligible cohort of children with fall birthdays to provide a kindergarten readiness experience to more children.

PREPARING MORE CHILDREN FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Helps Narrow Opportunity and Achievement Gaps. The early years before kindergarten are a unique window of opportunity to increase a child’s future success and close achievement gaps between low- and high-income students. Extensive research supports the effectiveness of quality early childhood education programs on students’ long-term academic trajectories and achievement.

- During the first three years of life, a child experiences the most rapid period of brain development and forms 700 neural connections per second.
- By age 2, lower income children are six months behind their higher income peers in critical language development skills.
- By age 5, the average low-income child faces significant barriers and is two or more years behind more affluent peers.

Improves Success Rates in Kindergarten. A 2015 study from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) found transitional kindergarten has a significant impact on children’s success in kindergarten.

- **TK improves pre-literacy and literacy skills.** Children who attended TK were substantially better able to identify letters and words in kindergarten, equating to a five-month learning advantage over their peers who did not attend TK.
- **TK improves students’ mathematical knowledge and problem-solving skills.** TK students had stronger knowledge of basic mathematical concepts and symbols in kindergarten than their peers who did not attend TK, giving them a three-month lead in kindergarten.
- **TK supports children’s behavioral self-regulation.** TK gave children a relative advantage on executive function, meaning that TK graduates outperformed their peers on their ability to regulate their behavior, remember rules, and think flexibly—skills that support a solid foundation for success in school and the 21st century workforce.

Strengthening Alignment Between Pre-K and K-12. TK helps create a smooth transition from home, childcare, or preschool to kindergarten and elementary systems, increasing a child’s potential to succeed.
FISCAL ADVANTAGES WORTH CONSIDERING

Creates Long-term ADA Loyalty. ETK engages families early on, when they are most likely to partner with schools. This early commitment to a district creates a competitive enrollment advantage over other districts and charters, increasing revenue potential over time.

Differentiating Instruction by Reducing “Combo” Classes. In districts where small TK and kindergarten enrollments have necessitated the establishment of combination TK/kindergarten classes, ETK provides resources to support ending that practice. This better enables teachers to differentiate instruction in a way that is age appropriate for younger children.

Reduces Downstream Costs. As early education programs address learning and achievement gaps early in a student’s academic career, ETK can serve to reduce potential downstream costs of providing supplemental services and/or academic or behavioral intervention programs.

Optimizes Resources. ETK provides an opportunity to optimize underutilized resources. If a district has existing TK classes that are not at full capacity, the district is bearing costs for which it is not being fully compensated. Under these circumstances, while students enrolled through ETK generate funding based only on their ADA earned after the time they reach age 5, the district will receive some additional revenue for serving more students at little or no additional cost.

Mitigates Declining Enrollment. To the extent that districts can enroll 4 year olds in a quality TK program at the start of the school year, such choices may mitigate the district’s declining enrollment as well as improve the probability that those students will remain with the district through the duration of their elementary and secondary education, providing both a stable learning environment for new students and more stability for the school district.

For more resources on expanding TK, please visit:

www.tkcalifornia.org
www.earlyedgecalifornia.org

To estimate the cost and benefits of TK expansion in your district, check out School Services of California’s new Cost/Benefit Calculator:

www.sscal.com/tk/