

Reader Question: Private Elementary School Cutoff Dates

Description

A reader emailed us asking what to do about cutoff dates since her son's birthday is Dec. 28. What should she do? She says many parents are torn about whether to hold their child back or move them ahead.

If your child has a late summer or fall birthday, you may be unsure what to do about private elementary school cutoff dates. If a school requires that your child turn 5 by Sept. 1 and your child turns 5 on August. 25th for example, your child would meet the cutoff requirements, but might be the youngest child in the class. If you decided to wait another year and have your child remain at preschool, your child would likely be one of the oldest in the class. In general, private elementary schools want kids to be close to 6 when they start kindergarten. My daughter turned 6 in late July and began kindergarten in Sept. She is one of the oldest in her class and that suits her. However, she's not the oldest and there are a group of students around her age.

Keep in mind that schools are not just considering your child's kindergarten year, but their entire time at the school at every grade level. Schools are evaluating how well the child will do in first grade, second grade, etc. Private elementary schools definitely prefer kids in the older age range, hence the cutoff dates. Each school has its own requirements for cutoff dates. For example, Brentwood School requires the child turn 5 by July 1 to enter kindergarten.

There is some debate about "redshirting" or holding a child back if they have a late summer/fall birthday. My son entered DK (Pre-K) at The Willows School at age 4. He was the youngest in his class. We thought he was ready for DK and would be fine as the youngest in his class the ENTIRE way through elementary school. We also told the school that if he needed to repeat DK (if he was not ready to move on to K) we would be fine with that. You should also think about what it will be like for your child, as the youngest in the class, to be with kids a year or more older than him/her. Sometimes your child will be in a class with a child who has repeated a grade and is therefore more than a year older than yours.

With a Dec. 28th birthday, however, it's not even close. This reader's son misses the Sept. 1 cutoff date. Private schools RARELY make exceptions to their cutoff dates. Because, if they make an exception for one child, they would have to make exceptions for many others. Occasionally, parents will enroll their child in public kindergarten which has cutoff dates that allow children to enter kindergarten younger than private schools. They will then switch to private school and repeat kindergarten the following year.

These decisions depend on the maturity of your child, not just cutoff dates. Your child may meet a cutoff date, but really not be ready for kindergarten. Or, your child may just miss the cutoff and be ready. Your preschool director is usually a really good resource to help you make this decision. And, you know your child better than anyone. Trust your instincts.

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