



SNAPSHOT

Kindergarten Readiness and Academic Performance

November 2022

Anna Johnson | *Legislative Research Analyst*
Jaymi Thibault | *Legislative Research Analyst* | Jaymi.Thibault@cot.tn.gov

In Tennessee, children entering kindergarten must be at least 5 years old on or before August 15. Students may, however, enroll later, if enrollment occurs no later than in the academic year following the child’s 6th birthday. This allows for children of varying ages to be enrolled in kindergarten at the same time.

In response to a legislative request, OREA explored a possible correlation between a child’s age when he or she begins kindergarten and his or her performance in 3rd grade on measures of literacy.

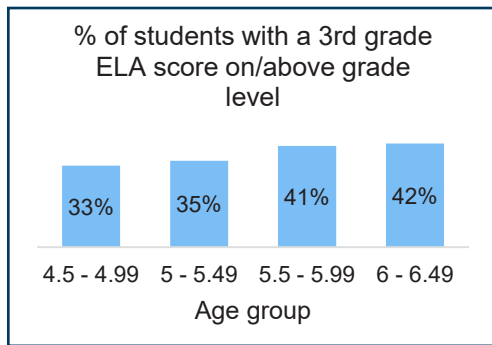
What is redshirting?

Parents may wish to voluntarily delay their child’s kindergarten enrollment for several reasons. For example, parents may believe their young child is not as developmentally ready for kindergarten as other children and needs more time to mature.

The practice wherein a parent enrolls a child after the academic year he or she first becomes eligible for kindergarten is commonly referred to as **academic redshirting**. Redshirting occurs most frequently among male students from families who are not economically disadvantaged and students born in summer months (i.e., close to traditional kindergarten cutoff dates). Between 2012-2018, the redshirting rate in Tennessee was about 5 percent of kindergarten students (or approximately 23,000 students).

Is kindergarten entry age correlated with academic performance?

OREA found that students who enrolled in kindergarten older than their peers performed better on 3rd grade literacy tests.



On average, 41 percent of students aged 5.5 to 5.9 years old and 42 percent of students aged 6 to 6.49 were proficient in 3rd grade literacy. These rates are higher than the proficiency rates for younger age groups; 33 percent of students aged 4.5 to 4.9 at kindergarten enrollment and 35 percent of students aged 5 to 5.49 were proficient in 3rd grade literacy.

This trend of older students outperforming their younger peers continued past 3rd grade as measured by students’ later performance on 6th grade ELA tests. The oldest group of students, those aged 6 to 6.49 at enrollment, had the highest 6th grade proficiency rates, outpacing students who entered kindergarten early by over 10 percentage points.

How should this information be used?

Tennessee parents may use the information contained in OREA’s brief to help determine the appropriate age for their child to begin kindergarten, and schools may use it to tailor services or adjust curriculum accordingly.

Further research is warranted before pursuing any policy changes. Any state or district policy decisions on kindergarten age enrollment requirements or cutoff dates should involve greater considerations of demographic and socioeconomic factors than those addressed in this brief.