

Transition to Kindergarten Testimonials

Administrators

I've seen firsthand how impactful our TK program has been for students, families, and our school community. It provides young learners with a strong, developmentally appropriate foundation that truly prepares them for kindergarten. Through play-based learning, structured routines, and early academic experiences, our TK students build confidence, independence, and essential early literacy and numeracy skills. What I love most is watching them grow into leaders, students who enter kindergarten ready to participate, collaborate, and support their classmates. Our TK program has added so much value to our school system, giving students a positive start and giving families confidence that their children are ready for the next step.

- Amy Dorey, Principal, Clovis Point Elementary School

Transitional Kindergarten is not just an early start to school in Ferndale. It is the opening chapter of a student's educational story and a vital component of a comprehensive mixed delivery early learning system. When we say a comprehensive mixed delivery system is the strongest investment we can make, we mean it. TK is a critical part of that comprehensive plan. It fills a gap that no single program can meet on its own, ensuring that every family has access to the right opportunity at the right time.

When you step into a TK classroom, you see more than children playing. You see the beginnings of lifelong pathways. Block play becomes robotics, engineering, and problem solving in high school and beyond. A toy kitchen becomes the first spark for culinary arts, nutrition science, and hospitality careers. Dramatic play builds communication, empathy, collaboration, and leadership. Early writing in shaving cream becomes literacy confidence. Pouring water in a sensory table becomes early math, science thinking, and persistence.

These moments matter. They are grounded in child development and they build the skills our students need for the future. The investment we make now shows up years later in classrooms, internships, apprenticeships, and college programs. It shows up in young adults who believe in themselves because they began school confident, capable, and seen.

Our data tells the same story. Before TK expansion, roughly thirty percent of our incoming kindergarten students demonstrated age typical readiness. Today, that number is closer to sixty percent. That is not abstract progress. That is real children gaining access, real families receiving support, and real educators building a developmental foundation that lasts.

TK works. And when paired with community partners, early learning providers, and strong family engagement, it becomes a powerful lever for equity, readiness, and long-term success. Anything less would leave children behind and weaken the mixed delivery system we are building in Washington.

When we invest early and when we invest comprehensively, we do more than prepare children for school. We prepare them for life. We prepare them to dream, to build, to lead, and to thrive.

- Kellie Larrabee, Executive Director of Teaching in Learning in Ferndale School District

TK has quickly become a vital cornerstone of early learning in our community, providing access to families that did not have any other options. Many children were excluded because they didn't qualify for ECEAP or WCCC and couldn't afford private tuition. TK fills that gap. It has allowed parents and guardians opportunities to get back into the workforce and strengthened the social and academic readiness for kindergarten entrance. The landscape of early learning has become stronger, more inclusive, and more effective with TK as an option.

- Candace Harris, Early Learning Director Valley School District

We are proud of our Kinder Bridge (TK) program we have built over the past 8 years. It is the one of best use of funding to meet the needs of students.

- Jeri Young, Director of Special Programs East Valley School District

Teachers

I taught Transition Kindergarten for three years before teaching Kindergarten. As a transitional Kindergarten teacher, I was challenged to carve a path of learning for students who may have had no experience at all. Many students did not have access to early learning or daycare centers. Transitional Kindergarten was their first experience away from their families. For many students, this transition proved difficult. Some students were expressing their feelings about this transition through aggression, big feelings, and defiance. This felt daunting as a first-year teacher but in my next years with experience under my belt I saw the incredible benefit that transitional kindergarten is to our students. Students were entering transitional kindergarten never having to sit on the carpet and wait their turn, and they left TK as young scholars who were confident and capable. I can think of a few students who entered transitional kindergarten exhibiting extreme or tier 3 behaviors. I was able to document, intervene, and create a plan for these children to be successful as they entered Kindergarten. Now, as first and second graders these students are making leaps and bounds. Without transitional kindergarten, they would be a year behind their peers in academics, following directions, and independence as a learner. Transitional Kindergarten prepares students for entering kindergarten socially, academically, and behaviorally. Without transitional kindergarten, many of our kindergarten students are behind their peers, and they just got started. TK evens the field for our young learners to become equipped students with school skills in their back pockets.

- TK/K Teacher, Sedro-Woolley School District

Thorp School District is entering its fourth year of providing Transitional Kindergarten, and the program has had a measurable, positive impact on students, families, and the community. Kindergarten and specialist teachers consistently report that children who participate in TK demonstrate stronger social-emotional skills, greater familiarity with school routines, and improved readiness for academic instruction. This early foundation enables staff to identify and address individual learning needs sooner, allowing for more targeted supports and interventions. Families have also noted that the program eases the transition to school, and the district has observed a significant reduction in behavioral challenges among incoming kindergarteners.

Ways Thorp TK has prepared students:

- *Strengthening social and emotional development*
- *Establishing school expectations and routines prior to kindergarten*
- *Supporting a smoother transition into academic learning*
- *Allowing for earlier identification of student needs and interventions*
- *Reducing behavioral concerns through proactive skill-building*

- Tiffany Watkins, TK Teacher, Thorp School District

My name is Rachel Acosta and I am a Transitional Kindergarten Teacher in the Auburn School District at Lea Hill Elementary. Transitional Kindergarten continues to make a significant difference for families in the Auburn and Lea Hill communities. Since the program started at Lea Hill Elementary in 2022, we have served 83 students/their families and have had countless more on the waitlist hoping to benefit from the program.

Access to affordable, quality pre-school programs has gotten more difficult over the years, which significantly impacts the students and families who qualify for our TK program: students with disabilities, Multi Language Learners, students from low-income families, single parent households, and students experiencing homelessness. Having access to a free, full day pre-school program that is taught by qualified and certificated teachers makes a significant difference for these students and their families in preparation for their K-12 education. My TK students can benefit from the professional development I receive from my district as a certificated teacher. I have received certifications in the LETRS for Early Childhood Educators program, Preschool GLAD model, and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, all of which directly benefit our youngest learners. Additionally, as a certificated teacher, my students benefit from my participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

The students that leave our TK program and enter kindergarten are consistently showing that they are academically, behaviorally, and social/emotionally more prepared for kindergarten than their peers that did not participate in a Transitional Kindergarten program. They know their uppercase/lowercase letters and their corresponding sounds, they can write their name, they know their colors, shapes, and numbers, and they can sort and recognize patterns. Our TK students go to kindergarten knowing how to

express their feelings and take turns, they can solve problems and help each other, and they can manage school routines/procedures with ease. We are able to address behavioral problems early and get students the right support needed before they ever enter a kindergarten classroom.

For example, in my current TK class, we have a student who came to us as a Tier 3 behavior concern. He would elope, hit, bite, kick, and destroy a classroom within seconds. Because he was in a TK classroom, we were able to quickly access a team of services to help this young student. The student had access to a certificated teacher, behavior interventionist, school psychologist, Student Support Team, kindergarten transition specialist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, resource room teachers, and administrators who were able to collaborate and best address this student's high needs. We were able to collaborate and execute interventions that were able to turn this student's behavior around well before they entered kindergarten.

I would like to share a story about a student in our TK class for the 24-25 school year, who I will call T. T's family had recently come to the United States from Ukraine to escape the violence in their home country. They settled here in Lea Hill and enrolled in the TK program at our school. T's family did not speak any English, they were considered low income, and T had never received any formal schooling, preschool, or daycare before. She would cry every day at the beginning of the year and struggled with her academic skills. T knew 0 colors, 0 shapes, 0 letters/sounds, and couldn't write her name. Socially, she would hide from other students, refused to engage in play at recess, choosing to sit in a corner and cry by herself. Because T was in TK, she quickly received services and access to programs that could support her and her family. She worked with the ML teachers at our school, received targeted small group interventions in class, socialized with other peers of the same age, and began to feel comfortable at school. T quickly became a role model in our class. She could often be seen helping other students academically, setting an example for others, leading groups in play, and taking charge of her own learning. By the end of the school year, T knew all of her colors, all of her shapes, she could count past 100, knew 26 uppercase letters, 26 lowercase letters, and 26 letter sounds. She was now fluent in Ukrainian and in English and was often seen interpreting for her parents.

This program is designed for students like T, and she is just one of the 83 students that have come through the doors of our Lea Hill TK classroom. They each have their own backgrounds, stories, and growth that prove that funding Transitional Kindergarten is making a difference for our highest need students and families every day.

- Rachel Acosta, NBCT, Transitional Kindergarten Teacher, Lea Hill Elementary, Auburn School District

Parents

My daughter's speech has flourished in these last few months since starting the TK program at Clovis Point Elementary School. Her word bank has grown tremendously, she is using her words, and the

most exciting part is when she gets home she loves to share her work and talk to us about her day at school. She's broken out of her shell, gained so much confidence, and is now making wonderful friendships along the way. The staff has made her feel so welcomed and supported-it really feels like a second home for her. She absolutely loves purposeful play and has learned to use the Zones of Regulation to express her feelings in such a healthy, appropriate way. Watching her grow, communicate and shine has been such a pleasure and a gift these past 2.5 months. I am excited to see how much she will accomplish by the end of the school year.

- Amalia, Eastmont School District

Our daughter has had an incredible experience in Transitional Kindergarten so far. She has faced challenges with certain social-emotional skills for years, particularly with self-regulation. She is deeply empathetic and feels emotions very strongly, which can sometimes lead to sensory overload. While her previous daycare worked hard to create a positive environment, she consistently came home overwhelmed and struggled to reset.

Since starting in TK, she has thrived. The structure, consistent routine, and engaging curriculum have provided exactly what she needed. She's learning to regulate quickly, and when she does become upset, she's using her words and applying calming strategies on her own. Most importantly, she feels proud of herself and confident in her abilities. She has always been a huge critic of herself, so it is great to see that boost in confidence.

Her teachers have built such a warm, nurturing, and supportive classroom that allows her to grow both emotionally and academically. We are deeply grateful for fostering such a positive environment where children like her can flourish.

- Stephania Fayant, Eastmont School District

Transitional Kindergarten has been a tremendous support for our family. It gives our children an extra jumpstart into kindergarten—academically, socially, and emotionally—without the financial burden of worrying about how to pay for childcare. This program truly bridges the gap for families like ours, making early learning more accessible and equitable.

- TK Parent, Valley School District

TK is helping my student in his social emotional and educational learning. He comes home singing songs, doing math, and teaching us new games.

- TK Parent, Valley School District