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Transitional kindergarten is open to all Lafayette families

By Sora O'Doherty



Teacher Katie Norris, Happy Valley Elementary School in Lafayette, gets her Transitional Kindergarten class started in the morning with carpet time. Photo Sora O'Doherty

There is huge growth in transitional kindergarten (TK) enrollment in Lafayette, according to Betsy Balmat, Lafayette School District Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. For the coming school year, 2024/25, Lafayette will have eight TK classrooms across all four Lafayette elementary schools.

Balmat emphasized that TK is a resource for families to make sure that their children are provided with the pre-school learning foundation the district wants children to have. TK is geared to provide accommodations for a wide range of student needs, and provides a curriculum under the universal pre-school plan for academic growth, which includes learning letters and numbers, as well as a focus on play-based learning first and foremost. In addition, TK supports toilet training, and the district has to make sure that teachers are prepared to navigate the physical, social, and emotional needs of very young children.

Although Lafayette began offering two TK classes in 2019, the program suffered from the effects of the Covid pandemic in 2020/21 school year, but came back in 2022/23 with four classrooms. This year, 2023/24, they still have four classrooms, but there is one at each elementary school in the district, and following renovations to meet the requirements for TK classrooms, Lafayette will have eight TK classrooms in the next school year.

Balmat would like parents to understand that TK is a part of the public school system to which students in the district have a right. Unlike private pre-schools, there are no deadlines, no waitlists, no lotteries, or other impediments to being enrolled for TK. If a child meets the age and residence requirements, that child will be enrolled in a TK class, if their parents so desire. TK, like kindergarten, is not mandatory, however.

For the 2024/2025 school year, children who will turn five years old between Sept. 2 and June 2 are eligible, and by 2025/26, any child who turns four by Sept. 1 will be eligible. New student registration for TK-5 is open through May 24, and will later resume on July 8.

TK students are either on an "early" or "late" schedule, with those on the early schedule arriving at 8:15 a.m. and finishing at 11:45 a.m., and those on the late schedule arriving at 9:15 a.m. and finishing at 12:45 p.m. Before and after school daycare is offered on site by private providers. Depending on financial need or other needs of the family, Balmat explained that the state provides financial support for extended nine hour care.

TK students also receive food from the universal breakfast and lunch program, but they don't eat with the other students or in their classrooms; they may consume food at recess or in after school care. TK and Kindergarten students have their own playgrounds, separate from those for older children in the school, but they also participate in school buddy programs, which pair up younger and older students. Additionally, TK students are fully included in school activities. For example, they receive instruction from school art teachers and music teachers.

Balmat emphasized that Lafayette is now fully staffed for TK and for the increased need for the next year. She praised their "amazing educators," who "trained for TK and continue to grow and learn about development needs of these students." She added, "It's a different approach to teaching. Teachers are making this shift possible for our kids to really shine."

To enroll, see www.lafsd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=3822615&type=d&pREC_ID=2524664

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[back](#)

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