

Time to hold back kids in preschool [CA-AB] ^[1]

Calgary Herald

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Source: canada.com

Format: Article

Publication Date: 21 Feb 2008

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Both the public and separate school boards in Calgary have decreed that children entering kindergarten must reach their fifth birthday before March 1st. That policy deeply affects parents of children born in January or February, who must make a crucial decision while their children are in preschool. Do you hold them back to give them a year advantage or push them ahead, even though they'll be among the youngest in the class?

It's a controversial policy with a ripple effect right down the line and a hot topic of conversation among parents out on the playground.

Cheryl and Jeff Lovenuik decided to hold their daughter Anna back a year even though her birthday is in December.

"She was so small -- she was tiny," Cheryl recalls. "Physically I didn't think she would be ready to start school when she was four years old."

So the Lovenuik's kept Anna in the four-year-old program at St. Andrew's Preschool for two years instead of one. She then began kindergarten when she was five, giving her an extra year to mature.

Cheryl recalls that her mother was against the idea.

"She said, 'Why, Anna is bright as a button. I think you're doing her a tremendous disservice,' " Cheryl says. "I didn't really pay attention. But you know, out of all the mothers I've talked to, no one has ever said, 'Gee, I should never have held my child back.' They all think it was the right thing to do."

Gail Danysk, kindergarten specialist with the Calgary Board of Education, says the decision to hold back or put forward totally depends on the individual child.

"It's really about their overall development, not just their academic skills," says Danysk who has over 30 years experience at education at the kindergarten level. She believes parents should take their child's social development and level of self-confidence into account and, if they're not sure what to do, ask their child's preschool teacher.

"A preschool teacher would see the child in a structured environment and compare them with children of the same age, where a parent wouldn't have that broad range to make comparisons," she says.

Whether children are put in school early or a year later, Danysk says any advantage or disadvantage is not evident by Grade 3, which seems to be the grade that children level off.

"Whether the cut off is March 1st or Dec. 31, it doesn't really matter," Danysk concludes.

"The bottom line is . . . you know your child best."

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- reprinted from the Calgary Herald

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