

# Assessing Transitional Kindergarten's Impact on Elementary School Trajectories

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# Transitional Kindergarten in California

- Extra year of schooling, part of K–12 system
  - Launched in 2012–13 with limited eligibility
  - Universal for all four-year-olds by 2025–26
- Age-appropriate curriculum
  - At least three hours a day; some full-day programs
  - Some classrooms mix TK with kindergarten
  - Lower staffing ratios than early elementary grades
- One of multiple options for four-year-olds
  - California State Preschool (CSPP), Head Start, private care, etc.

# What do we know about TK?

- Evaluations of initial TK cohorts in California have found improved kindergarten readiness
- National findings on early childhood education are generally positive
  - Multiple short- and long-run benefits, including improved test scores, high school graduation, college attendance, earnings
  - Test score gains sometimes fade out in later grades

# We focused on TK student trajectories in five districts

We study early TK cohorts five large urban California districts

- Cohorts were enrolled in TK before the COVID pandemic
- We follow these cohorts through elementary school

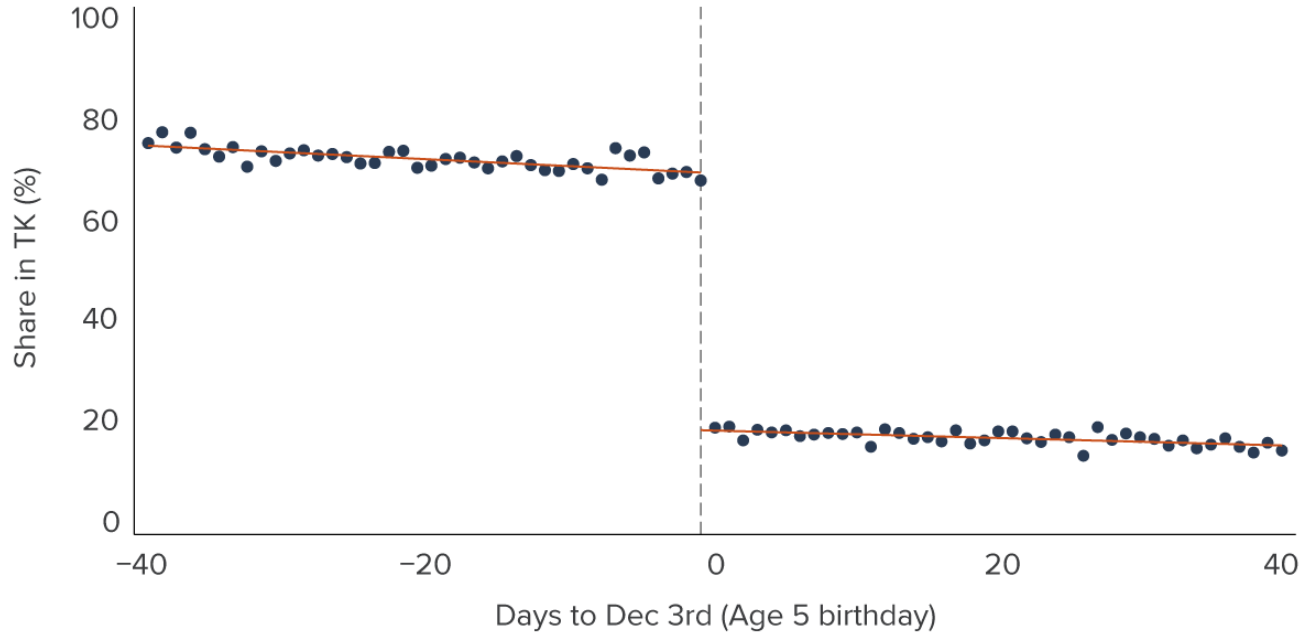
We examine several issues

- Dual-Language/English Learner (DLL/EL) identification; reclassification
- Identification of special education needs
- Standardized test scores; social-emotional learning (SEL) scores
- Differences across demographic groups

# How can we identify TK's impact?

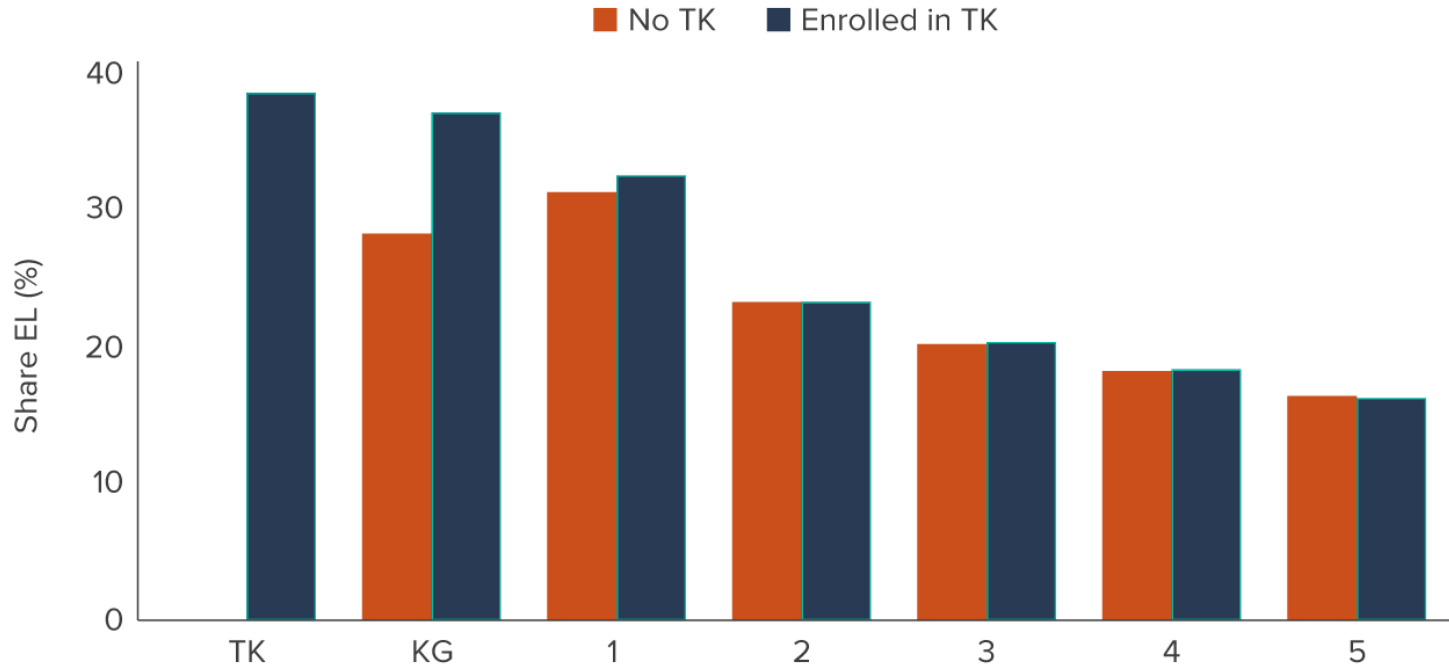
- How can we get at causal estimates of TK?
  - **Problem:** parents choose whether to opt in
- **One solution:** leverage birthdate cutoff (December 2)
  - Those born on/before Dec. 2 were eligible; those born after were not
  - Compare outcome changes across birthdate cutoff
  - Note: impact is *relative* to alternative options

# TK enrollment decreases sharply after the Dec. 2 cut-off

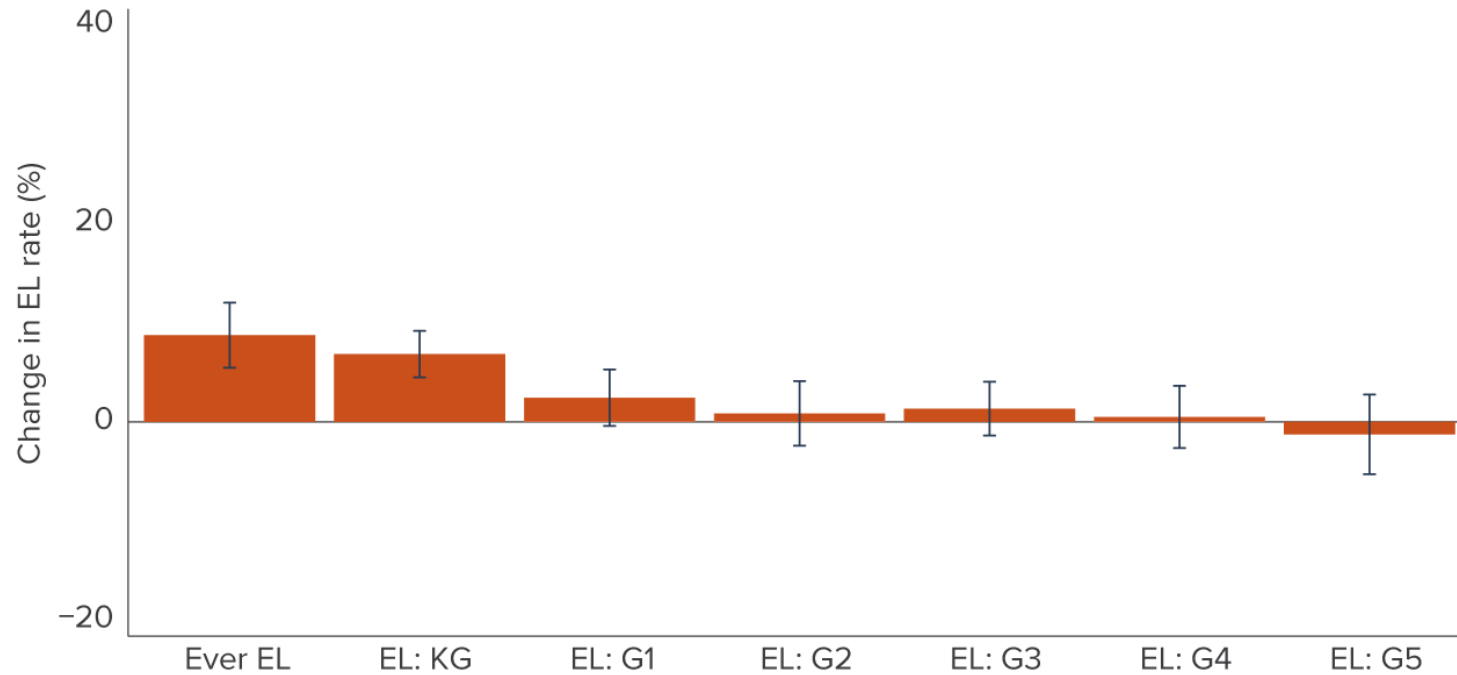


Note: each dot shows average share enrolled in TK for a given birthdate. Horizontal axis in days to Dec. 3 (Dec. 3 = 0)

# EL identification more common in TK than in kindergarten

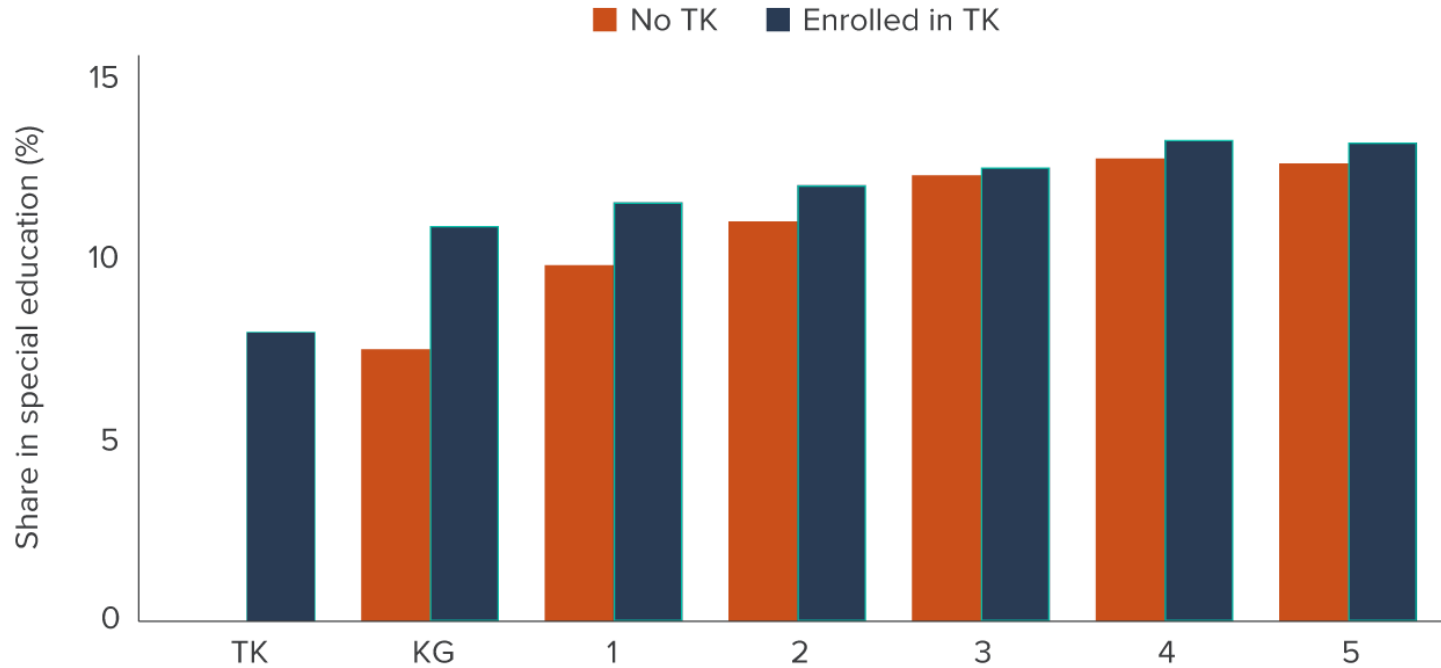


# TK led to earlier EL identification at higher rates





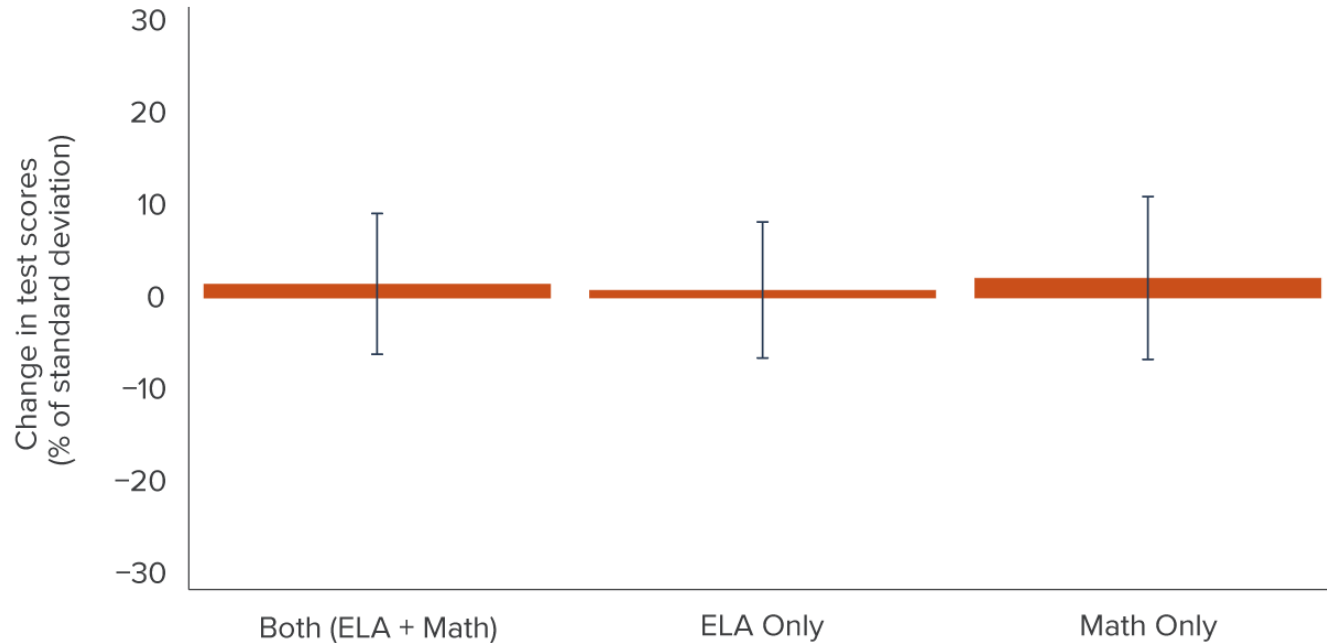
# Special education needs were identified earlier among TK students



# Key findings for dual-language and special education students

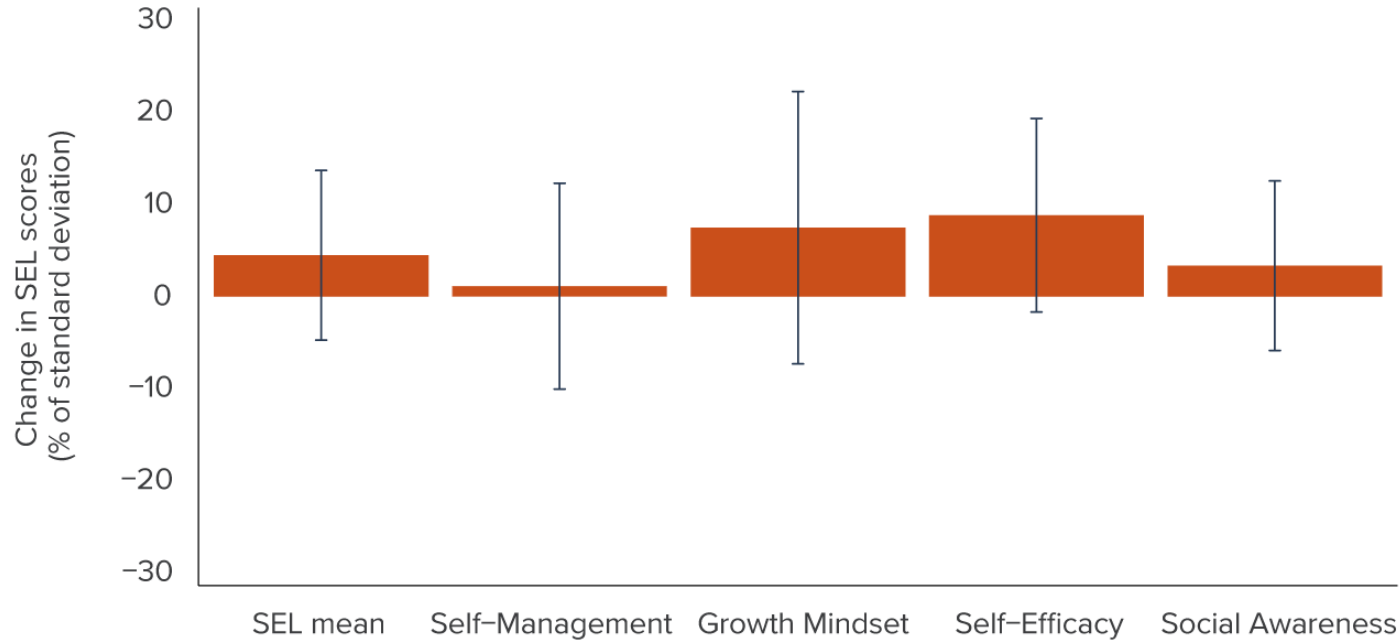
- Earlier identification as EL/DLL
  - But no difference by grade 2
  - Increase in students ever identified as ELs
- Earlier identification of disabilities
  - No impact on ever being in special education
  - Earlier identification centers on autism, speech/language
  - Earlier autism identification notable for students with non-English home languages (earlier by >1 grade level)

# TK had small, insignificant test score impacts



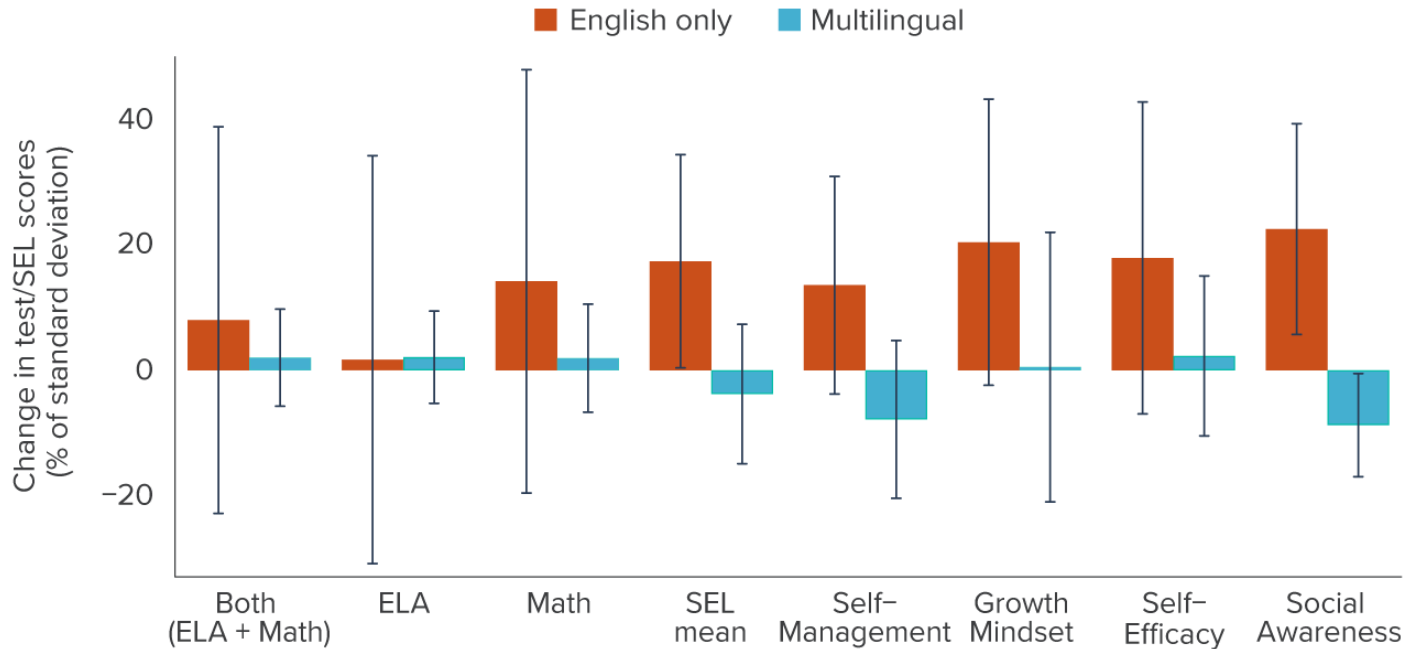
Note: vertical axis in standard deviation units.

# TK's social-emotional learning impacts are modest, statistically insignificant



Note: vertical axis in standard deviation units.

# Social-emotional learning effects found among English-only but not multilingual TK students



Note: vertical axis in standard deviation units.

# Summary of findings and discussion

- Earlier identification of special education needs suggests promising area to improve services—and outcomes.
- Earlier EL identification could be beneficial—but could also be overidentification
- Initial test score benefits of TK fade out in elementary school
  - Important: *relative* to alternatives
- Suggestive evidence of SEL benefits is limited to “English only” students
  - Absence of positive impact (and even some negative effects) on multilingual students suggest areas for improvement

# Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.