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# When holding kids back moves them ahead

Advocates of academic 'redshirting' say it's best for some to wait a year

**Janice Tibbetts, CanWest News Service**

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"I think when you decide to redshirt a child, they automatically become the oldest in the class and there can be some alienation," said McNamara.

Furthermore, studies suggest that the advantage of the older kids is short-lived and that there is no difference in the oldest and youngest students by the time they reach Grade 3.

"It seems to wash out," said McNamara, who decided against holding back his son, Joe, from kindergarten this year, even though his Dec. 23 birthday falls a week before the cutoff date.

There are no Canadian statistics on the prevalence of redshirting, but McNamara expects the figures are similar to the those in the U.S.

Mary Scissons, a Saskatoon educational psychologist, said she would hold back her daughter, Brigid, if she could do it all over

again.

"She's very bright and I thought she had to be challenged intellectually," says Scissons, who put her late -October child into kindergarten when she was four.

"I think I kind of got caught in the parental treadmill. To do it all over again, I would just slow down a little bit more."

Brigid, who is now almost 16 and is starting Grade 11 this fall, remains one of the brighter kids in her class, but lacks the more sophisticated social and emotional skills of her older peers, Scissons said.

Research on the long-term effects of redshirting is muddy. A paper published last November in the Quarterly Journal of Economics suggested being the youngest in the class can haunt a child throughout his or her schooling. Kelly Bedard and Elizabeth Dhuey, economics professors at University of California, who studied more than 200,000 children in 19 countries, concluded that the youngest students scored substantially lower than the oldest students at both the fourth-grade and eighth-grade levels.

They also found that in British Columbia, that the relatively youngest kids were 10 per cent less likely to be in the pre-university stream in their final year of high school.

"Relative age may play a role in determining educational success throughout the educational process, even into college," the study concluded.

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Education experts, however, say that deciding whether to hold a child back must be made on an individual basis, rather than making across-the-board assumptions based on birthdate.

Thiessen says she will make a decision about her unborn baby by gauging whether the child appears ready for school when the time comes in four or five years.

And how does one define school readiness? "It's an eagerness to learn," she said.

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