

The Columbus Dispatch

BACK-TO-SCHOOL ADVICE

Having child wait isn't easy

Tuesday, August 17, 2010 02:52 AM

BY JANE HAWES

COLUMBUS PARENT

Redshirting isn't just for hulking Buckeye linebackers anymore.

Nowadays, when a mom is overheard mentioning redshirting, she is probably discussing a young boy with a summer birthday.

Julie Yoakum was doing just that seven years ago.

Ben and Will, her twin sons with husband Lee, were born July 7.

When the boys reached kindergarten age, their parents had a choice to make: enroll the 5-year-olds at St. Mary School in Delaware or wait a year - and have them be among the youngest or oldest in the class.

The Yoakums opted to wait.

"Believe me, I would have loved to get them in sooner," Mrs. Yoakum said. "But I could tell that Will just wasn't ready. Ben was, but I wasn't going to separate them."

The choice is one that plenty of central Ohio families face each year with summer-born children.

Since 2001, Ohio law has allowed districts and private and parochial schools to choose either Aug. 1 or Sept.30 as the cutoff birth date for kindergarten entrance. (A child must be enrolled at least in kindergarten by age 6.)

The percentage of youngsters who have waited a year to start kindergarten is on the rise nationally.

Some studies peg it at as high as 20 percent of the population starting kindergarten each year; others put the figure at 9 percent to 11percent.

Boys are more typically held back, research also shows, and such decisions are seen most often with families that might more easily afford another year of preschool or have one parent at home all day.

Educators differ on which is considered better for children: being younger or older within a class.



"Given all we know about brain research, the earlier we get to them, the more primed they are to learn," said Lisa Usselman, a consultant with the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness in the Ohio Department of Education.

"And redshirting kind of looks like retention," she said. "There can be self-esteem implications, and the potential to drop out increases because it's hard to keep ... (an older child) in school."

Bernice Smith, supervisor of early-childhood education for Columbus schools, also views enrollment at a younger age as potentially beneficial.

"You have to ask yourself what is the reason you want to hold a child back," she said. "If it's because they have trouble tying their shoes, they don't know all the letters of the alphabet or all their colors, well, that's not necessarily a good reason, because those things can be taught."

Still, after 25 years of teaching, Kelly Hicks - principal of Jonathan Alder Elementary School in Plain City - is inclined to support parents who want to hold a child back.

"Especially with boys," Hicks said. "Girls mature faster, and they like to 'play the school game.' If a parent is doubting with a young boy, then I would say don't (enroll him)."

Even when a child is intellectually gifted, Hicks said, a delay might make sense:

"Just because you're gifted doesn't make you less apt to cry at the drop of a hat. There are social issues that have to be considered, too."

With her boys, Yoakum said, a combination of her instincts and the opinions of preschool teachers prompted the decision.

"Will just wasn't achieving the pre-reading skills," she said, noting that she even took advantage of a Delaware County program to have his hearing, vision and cognitive and motor skills tested.

"He was totally in the normal range, but he just wasn't ready. I could tell."

Relying on instinct, the educators agreed, is ultimately what parents must give themselves permission to do.

"They might be getting some pressure from the school (to hold back) or from other parents," Usselman said. "And you sometimes see people holding back for sports reasons - although, these days, it's usually more for academic considerations."

Her antennae go up, Smith said, whenever she hears parents use the phrase "someone said" in defending their choice.

"I say to them: 'That's your decision. But you have to know that we teach all children and we take them where they are,'" Smith said. "And I also say that parents know their child best."

Next week, Will and Ben Yoakum will start sixth grade at St. Mary.

Both are finding success in school and busily trying a variety of sports and extracurricular activities.

Their mother, meanwhile, doesn't second-guess the family's decision.

"It just depends on the kid," she said, "and a mother's intuition."

jhawes@columbusparent.com

Recommend



Subscribe to *The Dispatch* and SAVE!

- Every day - Save 25% off the retail price
- Thur-Sun - Save 20% off the retail price
- Sunday - An average of over \$200 in coupons each week!

[Click here to start your subscription.](#)

Already a subscriber? Enroll in EZPay and get a free gift! [Enroll now](#)

Don't miss these stories on Dispatch.com

 <p>Life & Arts Dear Abby: Balding males have their fans (Yesterday 02:53AM)</p>	 <p>News First day of classes orderly (Yesterday 02:54AM)</p>
<p>Local News Woman killed when car veers off side of Rt. 33 (Today 05:55AM)</p>	 <p>High School Sports Bob Hunter commentary: High school football a slice of Americana</p>
 <p>Ohio State Senior receivers hear footsteps (Yesterday 02:54AM)</p>	<p>Local News Bengals cheerleader wins \$11 million judgment against gossip website (Yesterday)</p>

© 2010 Kibboko, Inc. [Terms](#) [Feedback](#)

©2010, The Columbus Dispatch, Reproduction prohibited