The Connecticut Association of Schools

The Connecticut Association of Schools provides exemplary programs and services that promote excellence in the education of all children.

Testimony

Proposed Bill No. 0930 An Act Concerning the School Entrance Age

The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) represents over 1100 elementary and secondary schools in Connecticut in advocating for the best interests of schools, their students, faculty and administrators. CAS supports a wide range of activities from academics to athletics, as well as providing professional development for school leaders.

Voluntary kindergarten delay has been dubbed "redshirting" after the practice of benching athletes for a season to prolong their eligibility. As kindergarten programs have become more academic, redshirting can bump children to be one of the oldest in their class. Boys are most likely to be delayed than girls, as are white children and children in high-income families. However, research indicates that the age advantages are not maintained and the effect of being in school becomes more dominant than age effect.

The Connecticut Association of Schools supports legislative efforts to delete the provision allowing parents to withhold enrolling their child in kindergarten until the child is seven years old. Changing this provision to six years of age will continue to offer the option of additional developmental time while avoiding some of the negative aspects of delaying a child's start in school. CAS also supports legislative efforts to increase the age at which children are enrolled in Kindergarten.

The educational community works within state guidelines to offer children developmentally appropriate instruction and improve academic achievement for all children. It is the intent of CAS to secure the best possible educational opportunities for all Connecticut's children and as a result, narrow the achievement gap. Therefore, we concurrently support universal access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs. While educators work within state guidelines to offer children developmentally appropriate instruction, this bill will support these efforts from a child's first day of school.

Position Statement

Connecticut Association of Schools is calling for a change to the entrance age of students enrolling in kindergarten to a unified state cutoff date of 10/1 and the elimination of the provision allowing parents the option to withhold enrolling their child for kindergarten until the age of seven. CAS believes strongly that the state must design policies which will ease the burden of childcare for affected families and provide access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Rationale

- The **Education Commission of the States** reports in a 2010 study that thirty-six states have set the age of entrance to children who turn 5 on or before dates in September, four states set dates in October, two by December, and two states (including CT) set January one. The recent adoption of Common Core State Standards compels us to strongly consider the impact of Connecticut's entrance age as students start school.
- The **Kindergarten Entrance Inventory** (PA 05-245) indicates that wealthier Connecticut communities show larger gaps in skills across developmental domains as reported by teachers on the Connecticut State Department of Education Kindergarten Entrance Inventory.
- The **Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement** refers to state legislation to address the chronic and pervasive "preparation and readiness" gap that exists for low income and minority students with an accompanying provision of state-funded universal preschool education.
- The **Connecticut Early Care & Education Progress Report, 2010** states that the percentage of kindergarteners with preschool experience continues to vary widely between District Reference Groups (DRGs), suggesting that children from different socioeconomic groups have different levels of access to Early Childhood Education programs.
- The **National Center for Education Statistics** found in a 2007 report that 14 percent of children ages 5 to 6 were redshirted or had parents planning to delay their kindergarten entry.
- **Todd Elder and Darren Lubotsky** found in their 2009 study found that the reason children did better in school was not age related, but was attributed to the quality of their preparation prior to kindergarten.

Barriers to providing all children with the best possible start in school

While research focusing on the age-of-entry sustained effect on academic achievement is mixed, the importance of a quality preschool experience helps to shape behaviors and attitudes for learning. Thus, issues of cost and quality of preschools should be examined. Specifically;

- Limited resources for poorer families to attend quality preschool.
- Lack of quality licensed preschool education for all children with common standards.
- Limited information available for all families on early child developmental milestones and early childhood education with systemic outreach to at-risk populations.
- Vast age range in kindergarten classrooms as a result of the option for delayed entry.

Response to Change – Recommendations

- Provide training for preschools in common standards and delivery of developmentally appropriate programs.
- Provide bilingual/multicultural trainings for preschool educators focused on specific strategies for language acquisition with emphasis on oral language development.
- Provide a population study projecting impact on kindergarten enrollment numbers for districts across the state.
- Provide a population study projecting the impact on qualified preschool and infant/toddler programs for the students who are no longer eligible for Kindergarten.

Recent Legislation

In the 2011 January session of the General Assembly, Raised Bill No. SB00928 required a study of issues concerning teacher preparation and training requirements and alternate routes to certification in early childhood education. In the same session, Raised Bill No. SB00927 revised the requirements for early childhood educators and directed the Commissioner of Education to use unexpended funds for providing professional development to school readiness staff. Both Bills are referred to the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. Connecticut is preparing a stronger foundation of qualified early childhood educators.

Conclusion

All children who enter kindergarten deserve the best possible start in school. In order to provide all children the opportunity to reach important developmental milestones, acquire key readiness skills, and engage in an increasingly rigorous kindergarten, Connecticut's children need to have the time to attend a quality preschool program and start kindergarten with age appropriate peers. CAS supports Connecticut's efforts to narrow the timeframe for enrollment in kindergarten and concurrently eliminate the provision allowing parents the option to withhold enrolling their child for kindergarten until the age of seven. Proposed Bill No. 0930 must be examined along with coordinated efforts to provide a quality preschool experience for at-risk learners.

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