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Members of the Connecticut General Assembly
State Capital
Hartford, CT 06106-15951

To the Members of the Education Committee:

The Connecticut Legislature is misguided in thinking that raising the Kindergarten entrance age will help the State's children or reduce the achievement gap. There is abundant evidence that entrance age in and of itself is a relatively poor predictor of academic achievement in elementary school. Further, raising the entrance age will serve to hurt those children most in need of early intervention.

We have become acutely aware in recent years of the enormous gap in children's language, cognitive, and academic skills that emerges well before children start school. Scientists and practitioners have been searching for the underlying causes of these gaps as well as for ways to close them. In this important search for causes and cures, substantial evidence has accumulated that entrance age, in and of itself, is a rather poor predictor of academic success in school. Compared to family background, quality of parenting and early childhood education, a child's chronological age contributes very little to their school prospects. Further, we have demonstrated that, compared to children who just miss the kindergarten cutoff, those who are young and make the cutoff show much stronger growth in reading, math and other cognitive skills. Hence young entrants are completely capable of learning and benefitting from instruction.

Raising the entrance age therefore will delay the academic growth of all children. Most problematic, delaying school entry will likely serve to further increase the social disparities among young children rather than its intended outcome of decreasing them. At-risk children from disadvantaged homes will not have equal access to the stimulating early childhood environments of their more advantaged peers, resulting in widening differences in their emergent literacy skills.

Clearly the evidence implies that reducing the achievement gap requires serious attention to the preschool years and to the home and school environments that shape their growth. Changing the entrance age is not a silver bullet for education reform and could backfire.

Respectfully,



Frederick J. Morrison
Professor of Psychology