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February 13, 2013

Members of the Connecticut General Assembly
State Capitol
Hartford CT 06106-1591

RE: Proposed Rule Change for Entry Age to Kindergarten

Dear Honorable Members of the General Assembly:

I am writing to share my concern about the potential rule change from January 1 to October 1 for kindergarten entry in Connecticut. The rationale for requiring children to be a quarter of a year older in order to start kindergarten does not make educational sense. As I understand it, those who advocate for this rule change suggest that children who are not yet five by October 1 perform less well than those who are older. Their solution is to make the entry age older. This view is based on two problematic assumptions. First, it implies that age trumps development—that if you are older, then you have more ability to succeed in school. Yet nearly every parent knows that young children's development is extremely variable and does not follow a linear timeline. Some children acquire skills earlier than others, regardless of their age, and others show strengths in one area of functioning and not others. Age is only one variable among many that influences achievement. We also need to take into account genetics, maturation, environment, parental education and income, siblings, preschool experience, and so forth.

But what may be most concerning about the rule change is the second assumption—that curricula in kindergartens have changed over the past 10 – 20 years, thus placing younger children at a greater disadvantage than their older peers. Indeed, curricula have changed, but not necessarily in a positive direction. The issue is not whether five year olds should be exposed to challenging learning opportunities. They should. But they should be exposed to these opportunities in developmentally appropriate ways. Instead, what we are seeing in kindergartens throughout the nation as well as Connecticut is a host of educational materials, practices, and objectives appropriate for older children now invading the kindergarten. Parents of means have responded to these changes by holding their children out of kindergarten for an extra year. Some degree of affluence is required because public programs for five year olds (other than kindergarten) are in extremely short supply and the tuition for an extra year of preschool is beyond the financial ability of many families.

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By raising the entry age Connecticut will be reinforcing the poor practices that have brought so many affluent parents to reject public kindergarten even when their children are age-eligible. For children whose families are not affluent, this rule change is fundamentally inequitable. Those children born in the last quarter of the year simply have no choice—unlike children whose parents can afford private preschool. Indeed, some of the children who need early education the most will not have access to anything.

The crucial matter about age is that once it is established, it is a nondiscriminatory selection variable. It affects everyone in the same way. As soon as you alter it, you are advantaging some and disadvantaging others. Leave the entry age alone and shine the light of legislative action on the quality of the state's kindergarten curricula. Require that the CT State Department of Education ensure that every child of eligible age is provided with the best possible, developmentally appropriate first time to school experience possible. The state and the nation will be indebted to you.

Respectfully,



Samuel J. Meisels

SJM:edm