

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SUBJECT: Age Requirement for Kindergarten Attendance

REFERENCE: Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 107, SD1
(2002 Session)

ACTION REQUESTED: Provide an update on the plan to help prepare families, providers and communities for a change in the kindergarten entry age, for the 2005 school year.

DOE REPORT: The “Department’s Alternative Proposal,” Part C on page 6 has been revised to reflect the Board of Education’s current position on the kindergarten entry age.

**REPORT TO THE
TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE**

**ON S.C.R. NO. 107
Kindergarten - Change in Entry Age**

Submitted by The Department of Education
Office of the Superintendent
December 2003

INTRODUCTION

In response to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 107, the Department of Education (DOE) is charged with developing a preliminary plan to advance the cutoff date for kindergarten to June 30, beginning with the 2005-2006 school year.

This report is to: (1) include estimates of the number of children, teachers, and classrooms affected by this proposal, (2) address the resources that could be reallocated to early childhood education, (3) provide an inventory of existing early education programs and facilities throughout the state, and (4) provide recommended actions to implement the proposed change.

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 107 seeks to provide the best possible opportunities for our children so they may achieve academic success. It asks that resources be carefully examined to see if they can be used to support early education opportunities for every child denied entry to kindergarten as a result of the proposed change of entry age.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN AFFECTED

The number of students from this "cohort group," estimated to enroll in kindergarten in the 2005-06 school year and born before or on June 30, 2000, is 7,010. The number of students born after June 30 but by December 31, 2000, that will not be able to enroll in kindergarten in the 2005-06 school year is 6,344. This is the projected "displaced group" of children who will be affected by the change in entry age the initial year of implementation. In the following school year and subsequent years, the number of students able to enroll in kindergarten will return to normal.

When compared to the number of children qualified to enroll in kindergarten in a given year, the number of children actually enrolled in kindergarten is about 90%. Those not enrolled in the public schools are likely to be in private schools, home schooled, or receiving home/day care. Kindergarten is not mandatory in the State of Hawaii.

The special education preschool population will also be affected. Those students not reaching age five by June 30, 2006 would remain in their special education preschool settings, which serve children ages three to five. Additional classroom space will be needed to accommodate this group of students as well as the incoming eligible three- and four-year-olds.

NUMBER OF TEACHERS AFFECTED

Currently there are 626 kindergarten teachers in the DOE. The proposed change in the 2005-06 school year will theoretically reduce the number of kindergarten teachers by

one-half or 313 teachers by today's numbers. However, actual student enrollment and the state of available elementary school teachers at that time will determine the full impact of this action on teachers. It is hoped that all displaced teachers affected by this change can be reassigned to other positions and that terminations will not be required. In ensuing years, as the "cohort group" advances through the grade levels, other teacher positions will be affected because of its reduced numbers.

NUMBER OF CLASSROOMS AFFECTED

The DOE is currently faced with severely limited classroom space. Currently a few elementary schools assist the community by providing some space for preschool programs. Statewide data show that there are 35 classrooms used for the Head Start Program, five for Parents and Children Together (PACT), four for the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), two for the Boys and Girls Club, and two for the Even Start Program.

As student enrollment fluctuates and need for facilities by DOE programs and support staff increases, classroom space is quickly utilized. It is unlikely that classroom facilities will be available to house programs for the "displaced group" in the future.

OTHER RESOURCES AFFECTED

The DOE does not anticipate any savings from this change as costs for education escalates. The projected one-year-only savings (estimated at \$5 million) that may be realized as a result of fewer teachers for the "cohort group" is expected to be quickly absorbed by increasing costs and expenditures.

EXISTING EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAMS & FACILITIES

Using May 2002 figures provided by the Hawaii Kid's Watch, there are approximately 47,000 children who are of preschool age (two to four years old). Of the approximate 369 programs statewide, the current enrollment capacity of center-based childcare and preschools number about 19,699 with about 92% of slots filled at any one time (1,812 vacant). As the Resolution hopes to provide accommodations for 6,344 additional preschool children in the 2005-06 school year, the estimated shortfall of slots for that year is about 4,532. Further, the need for these additional slots will exist for only the initial year of implementation.

One of the possible consequences of increasing competition for limited space is that children of parents who have the ability to pay the costs will take slots now being utilized by children on public subsidy. Thus, children from low-income and at-risk families may have decreased opportunities for preschool experiences and reduce their ability to enter public schools ready to learn.

Hawaii's Head Start Programs currently serve about 2,813 three- to four-year-olds but does not have programs for five-year-olds. There is no annual amount of slots that the Head Start programs can guarantee as Congress does annual authorizations and adjustments to program funding.

The Pre-Plus program has 13 preschool sites built or in the process of being built which will accommodate 260 children ages three to four. Eligible families served fall at or below the 85% of the state median income. Each facility is operated by a provider who determines the cost of their program and is also responsible for seeking the necessary funds for their operation. Head Start-run Pre-Plus facilities are able to subsidize tuition costs for families who meet their eligibility requirements. For children who are not in Head Start, their families will need to fund their tuition or seek public assistance if they qualify.

The Kamehameha Preschools are expected to play a significant role in expanding opportunities for Native Hawaiian children in the future. They currently provide 1,050 classroom spaces for four-year-olds and 312 for three-year-olds. Kamehameha Schools also offers a scholarship program for Native Hawaiian Children to attend private preschools. Private preschools receiving funds for these designated children will have to agree to conditions such as attaining quality indicators through program accreditation.

Another group of children for whom we do not have data is children being cared for at home or in private childcare. Although some of these children may very well be receiving enriching early learning experiences, others may not.

ACTION PROPOSAL

A. Need for an early and extensive Public Information Campaign (to commence no later than the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year)

It is absolutely essential that families, preschool and childcare providers, governmental agencies, and communities be informed of any change to the kindergarten entry cutoff age change as early as possible so that they can make informed decisions. A multimedia approach should be considered; i.e., publications, television, internet. Vital information should include what the change will be, reasons for the change, when the change will occur, potential impact of the change, offices and phone numbers that can be contacted for specific information, and availability of preschool and childcare facilities in the community. Furthermore, all providers of services to infants, toddlers, and young children must cooperate to play a role in disseminating information to their clients.

B. No use of formal assessments as criteria for entrance into kindergarten

School readiness assessment is a frequent topic when kindergarten entrance is discussed. The State of Hawaii has, by Statute, defined school readiness as having four key

components: 1) the child's developmental characteristics, 2) family support, 3) school support, and 4) community support. Young children are ready to have successful learning experiences when there is positive interaction among these four components. Research evidence, however, does not support the use of readiness tests for determining entry into kindergarten and as a measurement of school success; and indicate that it may, in fact, discriminate against individual populations of students. Rather, the DOE as well as the early childhood community subscribes to the belief that young children progress through different developmental stages of growth, which occur at different times and in an uneven manner. Instruction must, therefore, be conducted in a developmentally appropriate way for all children. Further, many four- and five-year-olds are not equipped as test takers in the traditional sense, but are nonetheless able to benefit from instruction if delivered appropriately. The use of school readiness assessment is not recommended for determining kindergarten entry.

C. Department's Proposal

It appears that the reduction by six months of the entry age into kindergarten during the 2005-06 school year will place undue burdens on families and the community. Many families will be unable to fund the additional year of preschool/childcare services for their "displaced students." The community will be challenged to provide appropriate resources to accommodate these projected 6,344 "displaced students" for a one-year period.

The DOE is sensitive to these needs. It is also committed to promote early school success.

The DOE, therefore, strongly recommends that the Board of Education be authorized to determine the cutoff age for kindergarten entry. This will allow for a more comprehensive and coordinated effort within the DOE to implement this change.