

Kindergarten Entry Age

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Issue

Provide an overview of changes to the kindergarten entry age and the early admission waiver process since 2023, including their legislative history and rationale.

Summary

Under state law, public schools must be open to children who turn age five by the statutory cutoff date ([CGS § 10-15c](#)). The state's compulsory school attendance law generally requires parents to send children age five or older to public school or show they are otherwise being educated, but it also allows parents the option to delay sending their child to school until age seven ([CGS § 10-184](#), as amended by [PA 26-37](#)).

In 2023, the legislature moved the statutory cutoff date four months earlier, from January 1 to September 1 of the school year, beginning with the 2024-25 school year ([PA 23-159](#), § 3). The change was part of a group of legislative proposals addressing teacher retention and received significant support from teachers and other school officials. The rationale for the policy change is two-fold: (1) the academic and behavioral demands of kindergarten now exceed the developmental readiness of many four-year-olds and (2) families opting to delay kindergarten entry ("red-shirting") has widened the age and developmental range within kindergarten classrooms, making it more difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all students.

In the same year, but in a different bill, the legislature established a mandatory process through which parents of children who not five years old by September 1 can have their child considered for early admission to kindergarten ([PA 23-208](#), § 1). The stated rationale for the change was to allow children who may be developmentally ready the opportunity to be admitted.

This session, as part of the omnibus emergency certified bill passed in February, the legislature enacted a law phasing out the waiver process. For the 2026-27 school year, the new law allows school boards to provide a waiver process but no longer requires that they do so; starting with the 2027-28 school year, the new law eliminates the waiver process entirely. The main reasons given for phasing out the waiver were (1) the challenges and administrative costs associated with assessing school readiness in four-year-olds and (2) inequitable outcomes stemming from variation in implementation among school districts. In the 2025 legislative session, the Education Committee considered this proposal and the House passed it, but the Senate took no action.

Cutoff Date Change

In the 2023 session, the legislature raised the age children can start public school kindergarten by requiring them to have turned age five by September 1 of the school year rather than by January 1 of the school year ([PA 23-159](#), § 3). (The school year runs from July 1 to June 30 of the following year.) The change applied starting with the 2024-25 school year.

Legislative History

The proposal originated in [HB 6884](#), § 10, which was an omnibus bill with a number of proposals aimed at enhancing the teaching profession in Connecticut and improving teacher retention. According to public hearing records, many proposals in the bill were requests from teachers' unions, such as the [Connecticut Education Association](#) (CEA).

Public Hearing. The bill received a public hearing on March 15, 2023. Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President of CEA, [testified](#) that, due to federal legislation and testing requirements, kindergarten expectations have shifted closer to those of a first-grade classroom. She specifically noted that students who enter at age four face high demands and limited opportunity to develop necessary social emotional skills, and many districts do not allow students to be held back and repeat kindergarten, even if it would be beneficial to the child. Many teachers testified in favor of the proposal, and their arguments included (1) teaching four-year-olds and six-year-olds in the same class is difficult and negatively impacts teacher retention, (2) the later kindergarten entry age impacts the preschool entry age, and many two-year-olds are attending preschool programs when they are not developmentally ready to do so, and (3) the entry age was established when kindergarten was half-day and has not been reevaluated as demands have increased.

The Early Childhood Commissioner, Beth Bye, [testified](#) against the change, primarily due to equity concerns. Although she acknowledged the challenge teachers face because of the wide age range of kindergarteners, she said that the disparity is due not just to the early entrance age, but also to families exercising the option to delay kindergarten (often referred to as redshirting). She noted

that, according to data from the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), this practice is more common for higher-income families, while lower-income families are more likely to send their child to kindergarten at the earliest age of eligibility. She argued an entry date change would align with the practice of wealthier families and, without universal preschool, could disproportionately affect lower-income families who would need to pay for an additional year of preschool unexpectedly or go an additional year without formal schooling because they cannot afford it. Lastly, she raised concerns about the state's early childhood education system and its ability to absorb the additional children. The State Department of Education (SDE) [commissioner](#) similarly recommended that the legislature should hold off on changing the entry age until, among other things, the state expands its preschool supports and investments.

Floor Debate. The proposal was ultimately incorporated in an amendment to HB 6880, which became PA 23-159 after passage.

According to floor debate transcripts, the Education Committee Chair, Rep. Jeff Currey, said that the bill will “allow for students who are developmentally at the same level to be with their peers. This will mean that no longer you will have four-year-olds in a classroom with six-year-olds.” In response to a question about discussion with OEC about the impact to other early care programs, Rep. Currey said “they understand that this is a long time coming, and they have assured us that there are additional slots that are available for students who may be impacted by this.”

One representative noted that the proposal had been introduced frequently over the years but had not been enacted and asked what prompted the committee to move it forward in that session. Rep. Currey said:

“I think it is simply the conversations that we have had with our educators post-COVID, and the stressors, especially in which that they have been dealing with and the conditions under which they are working. And so, if we can simply eliminate one of those extra barriers that they have for furthering the growth of our children, I’d like to think that the Legislature is simply going to do that.”

Other reasons representatives gave for supporting the bill included (1) alignment with other states, most of whom do not allow children to start kindergarten before age five and (2) the benefits that starting later will have on children when they get to middle and high school due to the additional maturity.

The bill passed the House 112 to 37 and the Senate with a vote of 32 to 4. (The Senate did not discuss this particular provision during floor debate).

Early Admission Waivers

Mandatory Waiver Process

Prior to the 2024-25 school year, the law granted school boards discretion to admit children under age five by vote at a school board meeting.

In 2023, after passing the entry age change in PA 23-159, the legislature eliminated school boards' early admission discretion and instead established a mandatory process through which parents can have their child evaluated and potentially admitted to kindergarten before reaching the statutory entrance age. Specifically, the act (1) allowed parents or guardians to make a written request to the school principal and (2) required the principal and a certified staff member to conduct an assessment to determine whether the child is developmentally ready ([PA 23-208](#), § 1).

Floor Debate. According to floor debate transcripts, Rep. Currey described the waiver provision as “clarifying” the entry age change, but it was not further discussed in the debate. In the Senate, Sen. Doug McCrory, Education Committee Chair, stated the rationale for including this provision was that “some children do development [sic] early and have the ability to start school at a very early age. So this gives the opportunity for the parent to request a meeting with the principal of a particular school and basically get a waiver to allow those children to go start school at a very early age.”

Agency Guidance. SDE's [guidance](#) includes considerations related to administering assessments as well as accommodating children with disabilities, engaging families, and staffing. Regarding assessments, the guidance notes that:

1. no one set of skills can determine readiness for kindergarten, but that the [Connecticut Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#) can assist schools in identifying what five-year-old children should know and be able to do;
2. SDE will not identify an assessment tool for schools to use, and schools have discretion in determining whether they will use a standalone assessment tool or a more holistic evaluation of a child's developmental level; and
3. any assessment tool used should yield results that are valid and reliable for the intended purpose.

Waiver Process Phase-Out

Prompted by school district concerns, the legislature first considered phasing out the waiver process in the 2025 legislative session. While the proposal passed the House in the 2025 session,

the Senate took no action. The phase-out was ultimately enacted as part of an emergency certified bill (“e-cert”) in February 2026

Initial Proposal (2025). In the 2025 legislative session, the Education Committee considered and favorably reported a bill making the waiver process optional for school districts by allowing early admission only if a school board adopts an early admissions policy ([HB 7076](#), § 1).

During the bill’s public hearing (held on March 3, 2025), House Education Committee Chair Rep. Jennifer Leeper stated that the proposal to make the waiver process optional was one of the top requests from the superintendent’s association. Because SDE guidance leaves the evaluation process to districts’ discretion, school districts had to develop and execute their own evaluation methods and procedures. Rep. Leeper cited school district concerns that this had placed considerable demands on staff time without a clear benefit, as there is no standard, reliable method for assessing four-year-olds for kindergarten readiness.

In the hearing, SDE discussed the data it had collected showed significant variability between how the existing mandatory waivers were implemented in districts and suggested that further study was needed to ensure that the policy is not creating inequities across districts. In the hearing, several educators and school officials testified on the improvements they have seen in kindergarteners since the age increase, and some requested that the legislation go further and eliminate the ability to waive in entirely.

The proposal from [HB 7076](#), § 1, was eventually incorporated by amendment into [HB 7009](#), which phased out the waiver process entirely over a two-year period (File 926, §§ 8 & 9). The bill passed the House but was not taken up in the Senate.

February E-Cert (2026). In February of this session, the legislature enacted the two-year phase-out as part of an omnibus e-cert that contained many elements of HB 7009 (2025) along with several other provisions unrelated to education ([PA 26-1](#), §§ 26 & 27). Starting July 1, 2026, the act makes the waiver process optional for school districts by allowing children under age five to enroll in kindergarten only if the school board adopts an early admissions policy. Any admissions policy must require the same written request and evaluation as required under the prior law concerning mandatory waivers. Starting July 1, 2027, the bill eliminates the waiver process entirely.

During floor debate on the provisions enacted in PA 26-1, Rep. Leeper said the following when asked for the reason behind the change:

“We had, several years ago, updated the kindergarten start age cutoff date to be in line with, more or less, the other 49 states across the country. We had allowed for a provision for local districts to waive that cutoff date.

We have since heard from our districts that is creating an inequity of students being prepared and throughout their educational journey. So, we have phased in the cutoff...for this coming school year, beginning in 2026, a district can decide if they would like to continue to offer this waiver. And then after that, there will no longer be a waiver where we will have four-year-olds enrolling in kindergarten so that we can have all of our students sort of on a level playing field to be developmentally of the right age and ability for the rigors that are now in modern kindergarten.”

When asked why there was urgency to pass this provision in an emergency certified bill, Rep. Leeper responded: “we heard from our districts that having clarity around this and also clear timeline for families to plan was really important to our communities.”

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