

SB 321: Compulsory School Age  
House Education Committee  
April 21, 2015

Dear Chair Doherty and members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing to you and the committee members today in support of the passage of SB 321 to decrease the compulsory school age from seven to five years of age. I have twenty-four years of experience with students, families, teachers, administrators, systems and policy in the field of education as a classroom teacher and principal. As a teacher, and now for the past seventeen years as an administrator, I have the honor and privilege of advocating for and giving a voice to children through the teaching and learning process. Most of my career has been within the elementary school setting and this is based on my desire and passion to impact our youngest learners in providing them with the highest quality initial learning experience they can have, setting them up for success in later years.

Moving into the 2015-2016 school year, we have the distinct privilege of opening our school-house doors for the first time with the ability to provide a full day kindergarten experience for everyone attending our kindergarten programs. This alone will provide our high quality, well-trained teachers an opportunity to impact student academic and social/emotional growth via more time on task and application with essential cognitive and behavioral skills throughout the day.

When considering this bill as a parent and an educator, first and foremost I always ask what's best for kids.

**Best for Kids - Providing strong kindergarten programs for all students coupled with law and policy that support strong attendance.** Current law allowing schools to intervene with truancy support for registered five year olds in kindergarten is a positive step in holding parents accountable. Assuring that parents are giving their children the educational opportunity they deserve during the most critical developmental years up to and including age five, is vital.

Supportive Findings from Referenced Sources

- Chronic absence at kindergarten and first grade may erase many of the benefits of entering kindergarten with strong readiness skills, as well as impact students who enter kindergarten with readiness needs. \*
- Attendance may have a significant impact on school success, even in students' earliest school days. Students with no attendance risks across kindergarten and first grade had significantly higher third grade scores on ELA and Math state assessments than all other students. \*

- Over 11% of kindergartners, almost 9% of first graders, were chronic absentees: they missed at least 18 days or more of the school year. In total, one-quarter of all kindergarten children were either at-risk or chronic absentees. \*\*

- In kindergarten, children in poor families were four times more likely to be chronic absentees than their highest income counterparts. \*\*

**Best for Kids – Provide strong kindergarten programs with highly trained teachers who meet the five-year old child, upon entry, where they are academically and socially.**

In the research article entitled, Opportunity or Opportunity Taken: An Updated Look at Delaying Kindergarten Entry, September 2003, author Dr. Hermine Marshall, Ph.D summarized and synthesized research from many peer-reviewed journals and provides supported evidence that, “delaying kindergarten entry often has negative effects and in doing so, children may be deprived of important opportunities for learning.” (9)\*\*\* Other evidence is included below.

- New knowledge and skills result from support or scaffolding by an adult or a more expert peer. According to this view, **the point is not that children need to be ready for school, but that schools need to be ready to guide, support, and instruct each child, regardless of the skills or knowledge a child brings.** (2)\*\*\*

- It is the school’s responsibility to meet the needs of the children who are legally eligible. (2)\*\*\*

- The position statement on kindergarten trends developed by the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, and endorsed by NAEYC states, “Not only is there a preponderance of evidence that there is no academic benefit from retention in its many forms, but there also appear to be threats to the social-emotional development of the child subjected to such practices.” (NAECS/SDE 2000). (2)\*\*\*

- On average, delaying kindergarten entry has no long-term effect on academic achievement. By about third grade, any early differences disappear. (5)\*\*\*

- Holding children out, deprives them of instruction that, regardless of age, promotes learning of many skills. (5)\*\*\*

- Holding children out does not result in any social advantage. There are no differences in peer acceptance or self-concept. (5)\*\*\*

- In developmentally appropriate kindergartens, children’s age or maturity should make no difference. (5)\*\*\*

In summary, as a principal of an elementary school of almost six-hundred children, setting the tone, the highest of expectations and providing resources and guidance to achieve our mission to educate, nurture and inspire every child at high levels to meet their maximum potential, starts with our youngest learners.

Providing law that supports a school's efforts to advocate for students to attend on a regular and consistent basis allowing them to access the many learning opportunities and experiences provided is essential and is a powerful statement that early childhood education is a priority. Providing a comprehensive full day program for all five year olds with highly trained teachers who are well versed in early childhood education is also essential and becoming a reality in the state of Oregon.

Kindergarten has changed. Kindergarten is academics that includes 90 minutes of reading instruction with an expectation that all will be reading at year's end, one hour of math instruction, science experiments and inquiry, writing at varying levels along the continuum, learning about community, experiencing P.E. and music classes and developing social and behavioral skills through role play, behavioral curriculum and intentional play. SB 321 will provide law that lowers the age of compulsory education from seven to five years of age enforcing and acknowledging the research and evidence that fully supports meeting five year olds where they are in their development and assuring that they can begin their educational journey without delay.

Respectfully,

Todd Robson  
Principal, Templeton Elementary School  
Tigard-Tualatin School District

#### Referenced Sources

- \**Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes*, Applied Survey Research, May 2011
- \*\*National Center for Children in Poverty Report: A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades, Mariajose Romero and Young-Sun Lee, October 2007
- \*\*\*Beyond the Journal, Children on the Web, Opportunity Deferred or Opportunity Taken: An Updated Look at Delaying Kindergarten Entry, Hermine Marshall, September 2003