



SENATOR
S. JOSEPH SIMITIAN
ELEVENTH SENATE DISTRICT

Fact Sheet: Senate Bill 1381 (Simitian)
Kindergarten Entry Age

SB 1381: Summary

This bill changes the kindergarten entry-age in California from five years old by December 2nd to five years old by September 1st.

For those “young fives” (i.e., children turning five from September 2 – December 2) whose kindergarten is delayed, the bill creates a transitional kindergarten.

The new age requirement would be phased-in over three years beginning in the 2012-13 school year.

The \$700 million in annual cost savings resulting from having fewer children in kindergarten remains within Proposition 98 to provide an age and developmentally appropriate transitional kindergarten program for those children whose entry to kindergarten would be delayed.

A child born after September 1st may still be admitted to kindergarten on a case-by-case basis, if the parent or guardian applies for early admission and the school district agrees that it would be in the best interest of the child.

Need for the Bill

California is one of just four states (along with Connecticut, Michigan and Vermont) with a cut-off date later than December 1st. In most states, children must turn five by September 1st in order to start kindergarten. California allows children as young as four years and nine months to start kindergarten as long as the child turns five by December 2nd.

Research indicates that beginning kindergarten at an older age improves children’s social and academic development. A 2005 study by the Rand Corporation found a “significant boost” to test scores, especially for children from low-income families.

Based on these benefits, California's non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office, the California Performance Review, and the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence have each called for an earlier kindergarten cut-off date.

In the Analysis of the 2010-11 Proposed Budget the Legislative Analyst recommends that the Legislature take action this year to change the kindergarten cut-off date to September 1st.

The LAO notes:

- California's kindergarten start date is one of the latest in the nation;
- Beginning school at an older age would benefit children's academic performance and social development;
- Children who are older when they start kindergarten tend to perform better on standardized tests; and
- Research suggests changing the kindergarten start date may lead to positive student outcomes, including less chance of grade retention and higher earnings as an adult.

The LAO estimates that changing the kindergarten cut-off date could lead to budget savings of approximately \$700 million from revenue limits and categorical programs by having 100,000 fewer (the number of children with birthdays between Sept. 1st and Dec. 2nd) kindergarteners in school. The cumulative savings over 13 years would reach \$9.1 billion as a smaller kindergarten cohort transitions through the K-12 system.

SB 1381 redirects these savings to provide transitional kindergarten to children born after September 1st and on or before December 2nd. Transitional kindergarten means the first year of a two year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate.

Transitional kindergarten will improve the pre-first-grade preparation for those fall-birthday children who would otherwise be the youngest in their class. This is especially important for low-income and English language learner children, who often receive less academic preparation. Transitional kindergarten will provide a two-year preparation for first grade while reducing the likelihood of retention after a year of traditional kindergarten.