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SB 321: Compulsory School Age Senate Committee on Education March 5, 2015

Good afternoon, Chair Roblan and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Karen Twain, director of Literacy for the Oregon Department of Education. Previously, I have been a teacher, counselor and administrator in the Tigard-Tualatin School District. I am here to testify in favor of SB 321, lowering the compulsory age of school attendance from seven to five years of age. Children would attend half-day or full-day kindergarten, whatever their district offers.

Issue

As an educator for more than 30 years, I have come to realize how important a good start in kindergarten is for children.

There is a body of research to support kids being able to start kindergarten as 5-year-olds. The first resource is probably the best and most compelling, from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, a well-respected resource for those concerned about developmentally appropriate practice. NAEYC advocates that age is the most ethical and equitable way to determine kindergarten entry and that all children benefit from an appropriate kindergarten education:

[Opportunity Deferred or Opportunity Taken: An Updated Look at Delaying Kindergarten Entry](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200309/DelayingKEntry.pdf)
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This paper offers research and evidence that delaying kindergarten entrance **does not** have beneficial effects on achievement, self-concept, or social development... “Contrary to popular belief, children whose entry into school has been delayed do not seem to gain an advantage socially.”

In fact, starting children later may be “depriving the child of important opportunities for learning—what Graue and DiPerna (2000) refer to as theft of opportunity... Similar or greater progress might occur if the child were to enter school and receive stimulation, instruction, and intervention services.”

On page 6 of this research article, under the subheading, *Schooling vs. allowing time to mature*, the article states, “The differences between older kindergartners and younger first graders on pretests indicate that a year in kindergarten has instructional benefits. Moreover, there was no difference in the progress of younger and older first-graders from fall to spring. That is, each group achieved one year’s growth. In addition, younger first graders’ progress exceeded that of older kindergartners, suggesting that age is an insufficient criterion for benefiting from reading and math instruction in first grade.”

Kindergarten Entrance Age and Children's Achievement: Impacts of State Policies, Family Background, and Peers (2008)

The evidence in this paper supports the stance that age-related differences in early school performance are largely driven by the accumulation of skills prior to kindergarten and tend to fade away quickly as children progress through school. **Rather than providing a boost to children's human capital development, delayed entry simply postpones learning and is likely not worth the long-term costs, especially among children from poorer families and those who have few educational opportunities outside of the public school system.**

<http://www.econ.wisc.edu/workshop/ELApril4.pdf>

There is some research that supports the idea that older kindergarteners (six-year-olds) do better in kindergarten. However, that advantage fades quickly—by the first, second, and third grade. This seems to be especially true for boys and for children of color and children in poverty. **Waiting a year to start kindergarten means that these children are waiting a year to benefit from stimulation, instruction, and intervention.** The kids that tend to do best with entering kindergarten a year later are Caucasian mid-to upper-class kids that have access to other programs, opportunities, and supports.

Beyond the research, I can speak anecdotally to this issue. As a school principal, I used to conduct home visits to families of children who were struggling with getting their kids to school. As you know, attendance patterns are established from the time children begin to go to any organized school setting. I saw firsthand, five- and six-year-olds being kept home from school to help care for their younger siblings or not going to school because it was too much trouble for the parent to get them moving in the morning. This is unacceptable and gets young students started on the wrong foot in how they will attend school in the future. Further, as we put resources in to full day kindergarten and early learning in Oregon, we need the students who need this the most in those kindergarten classes!

Legislation:

SB 321 makes the research-based change to Oregon law to lower the age of compulsory education from seven to five, giving more of our youngest students the opportunity to begin learning so they do not begin first grade at a disadvantage.

I urge Oregon to join the growing trend in the United States to lower the compulsory age to five.