

# SB 321 Testimony

## March 5, 2015

Chair Roblan and the Committee members:

thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Edmund Pierzchala, I live in Milwaukie. I am here on behalf of myself, as well as my wife Sarah, and her parents, Gary and Martha Williams (also residents of Milwaukie), who couldn't be here today.

I have taken time off from my workday to share with you my concerns regarding this bill, which lowers the compulsory age of school attendance from seven to five years. **I urge a NO vote on this bill.**

As the father of five school age children, I'd like to explain why this proposal is not a good thing for children. Everyone agrees that education is, or should be, a top priority for all concerned citizens, whether they are parents themselves or not. Some of the accepted wisdom regarding education in this country is the belief that "more is better." If some time in a child's day is spent in a classroom, then more hours, and starting from an earlier age, must be "better".

Unfortunately, this position is not supported by either personal experience or scientific research. Experts studying the impact of early education throughout Europe, have concluded there are no lasting benefits to pressuring children into more formal, structured learning at earlier ages. Children in cultures with a later formal school age of seven, such as Scandinavia

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/03/finnish-education-chief-we-created-a-school-system-based-on-equality/284427/>

have consistently superior academic results, as well as "higher levels of well-being", in comparison to British children who begin their schooling as early as age four.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/10302844/The-Government-should-stopintervening-in-early-education.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10302249/Start-schooling-later-than-age-five-say-experts.html>

In fact, there is mounting evidence that actual harm can be visited on children by removing them from the low-key environment of home or less-structured preschool and placing them in the higher-pressure environment of a structured classroom before

they are suitably developed. Researcher Peter Gray even attributes the increase of psychopathology in children, including rising rates of anxiety and depression, to less time devoted to “free play”, a phenomenon typical in modern western cultures.

<http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/3-4-article-gray-decline-of-play.pdf>

A study of the history of education, as well as the accumulated wisdom of diverse cultural traditions, bears out the contention that children, especially during the so called pre-school or kindergarten years, learn best by doing, by being free to move, to run about and explore their surroundings. They do not do well being shut indoors, expected to contain their natural exuberance and curiosity while sitting complacently at a desk and performing fine-motor and reasoning tasks that are far beyond their developmental capacities.

Requiring children to attend school by age five also harms the so-called “late bloomers”. Anyone who has spent any time around young children knows that no two are alike, that all have different interests and capabilities at different ages. Boys in particular tend to lag behind girls in decoding and fine-motor skills. Albert Einstein did not speak until after age of three. These are not skills that can be forced on a child at a particular age, but must be fostered and encouraged by the many creative opportunities found in guided-play or even free-play, not the limited confines of a structured classroom. Forcing them to start their academic journey prematurely, and subjecting them to testing which measures them against unrealistic standards, is a recipe for starting some at-risk children along a path of frustration, disillusionment and failure.

The only groups that benefit from an arrangement such as this are special interest groups that include the publishers of curricula and tests, and makers of Ritalin and other drugs often used to keep normally active small children quiet and conforming. Where are the real-live children in this scenario, and what will they experience under a new mandatory schooling law?

It seems these days that children in our society are being forced to grow up much too fast. Five year-olds may be very capable in many respects, but in others they are still virtually babies. They desperately need the freedom to “just be kids” for a year or two longer. By allowing this, we can actually give them the gifts of imagination, self-confidence and resiliency that will help them to excel later in school and in life.

Thank you for your time and consideration.