

Dear Senator Hansell and Representative Barreto and the Senate Committee on Education;

I am writing to express my opposition to **SB321 - Decreases compulsory school age from seven to five years of age**. I believe that this is a misguided bill that will further harm our children's development...emotionally, academically and socially. Simply stated, I believe that it is important that children be allowed to be children and be allowed to run, jump, play, and to develop their relationship with their parents and siblings before being forced into the world of structured education.

As we seem to be clamoring as a society to emulate the 'European model', might I suggest we take a moment and listen to the misgivings of our UK brethren experiencing that model. Below is a link to an article in the Telegraph Journal **signed by an impressive list of 130 prominent educators, childhood development specialists and psychologists** expressing their concerns as to the harm being done by compelling 5 year olds to enter the education system. This letter was met with much public discussion and carried in a number of publications in the UK. I have included the text of the letter.....following the link will show all the signatures.

I urge you to vote no on SB 321.

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

Respectfully;

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The Government should stop intervening in early education

Earlier starts to formal learning can affect the health and wellbeing of young children

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We are deeply concerned about the impact of the Government's early years policies on the health and wellbeing of our youngest children. The early years of life are when children establish the values and mindsets that underpin their sense of self, their attitude to later learning, and their communicative skills and natural creativity.

Though early childhood is recognized world-wide as a crucial stage in its own right, Ministers in England persist in viewing it simply as a preparation for school. The term 'school readiness' is now dominating policy pronouncements, despite considerable criticism from the sector.

The role of play is being down-valued in England's nurseries. For many children today, nursery education provides their only opportunity for the active, creative and outdoor play which is recognized by psychologists as vital for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. However, two key qualifications currently being drawn up for nursery teachers and child careers no longer require training in how children learn through play. Indeed current policy suggestions would mean that the tests and targets which dominate primary education will soon be foisted upon four-year-olds.

Research does not support an early start to testing and quasi-formal teaching, but provides considerable evidence to challenge it. Very few countries have a school starting age as young as four, as we do in England. Children who enter school at six or seven – after several years of high quality nursery education – consistently achieve better educational results as well as higher levels of wellbeing. The success of Scandinavian systems suggests that many intractable problems in English education – such as the widening gap in achievement between rich and poor, problems with boys' literacy, and the 'summerborns' issue – could be addressed by fundamentally re-thinking our early years policies.

Instead of pursuing an enlightened approach informed by global best practice, successive ministers have prescribed an ever-earlier start to formal learning. This can only cause profound damage to the self-image and learning dispositions of a generation of children. We as a sector are now uniting to demand a stop to such inappropriate intervention and that early years policy-making be put in the hands of those who truly understand the developmental needs and potential of young children.

[Wendy Ellyatt](#)
[Founding Director and CEO, Save Childhood Movement](#)

Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green

Former first Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Emeritus of Child Health University College London

Professor Lord Richard Layard

Director, Well-Being Programme, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics

Professor Guy Claxton

Co-Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning and Professor of the Learning Sciences, at the University of Winchester

John Freeman

Past Joint President, Association of Directors of Children's Services

Dr David Whitebread

Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology and Early Education, University of Cambridge