

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based only on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: CS/SB 62

SPONSOR: Senator Diaz de la Portilla

SUBJECT: Kindergarten Eligibility

DATE: April 25, 2000 REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

|    | ANALYST       | STAFF DIRECTOR   | REFERENCE | ACTION              |
|----|---------------|------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| 1. | <u>Harkey</u> | <u>O'Farrell</u> | <u>ED</u> | <u>Favorable/CS</u> |
| 2. | _____         | _____            | <u>FP</u> | _____               |
| 3. | _____         | _____            | _____     | _____               |
| 4. | _____         | _____            | _____     | _____               |
| 5. | _____         | _____            | _____     | _____               |

## I. Summary:

The bill permits children whose birthdays occur between September 1 and December 1, to take a kindergarten readiness assessment during the school year in which they will reach the age of 5 years. A child who was determined to be eligible for early placement in kindergarten could be admitted to kindergarten that year. The provisions of the bill would be phased in over a three-year period.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2000.

This bill substantially amends s. 232.01, Florida Statutes.

## II. Present Situation:

Section 232.01, F.S., requires school attendance by children between the ages of six and sixteen. Children who have attained the age of six years or who will have attained the age of six years by February 1 of any school year or who are older than six years but who have not attained the age of sixteen years must attend school. The law permits children who have attained the age of five on or before September 1 of the school year to be eligible for admission to public school kindergarten during that school year.

While five-year-old children are not required to attend school, the law presumes that kindergarten is part of a pupil progression plan. To enter first grade at age six, a student must have attained the age of six years on or before September 1 of the school year and have been enrolled in a public school or have satisfactorily completed kindergarten in a nonpublic school from which the district school board accepts transfer of academic credit. The law does not require children to complete public school kindergarten before entering first grade because some schools group primary grades together in a continuous progress primary program that permits children to proceed at their own pace through the kindergarten, first, and second grade years without formal separation of the grades.

Under s. 229.592, F.S., the Commissioner of Education can waive, upon the request of a school board, the provisions of chapters 230 through 239, F.S., except those pertaining to the allocation and appropriation of state and local funds for public education; the election, compensation, and organization of school board members and superintendents; graduation and state accountability standards; financial reporting requirements; reporting out-of field teaching assignments under s. 231.095, F.S.; public meetings; public records; or due process hearings governed by chapter 120. Under this provision, a school board could request a waiver of the September 1 cut-off date for admission to kindergarten in order to admit children through a locally determined procedure.

Educators debate the level of maturity a child should have before entering school. In 1979, the law required a child to be five years old by January 1 of the school year in order to enter kindergarten. The date by which a child had to be five years old was moved to December 1 in 1980, to November 1 in 1981, to October 1 in 1982, and to September 1 in 1983. Whatever the cut-off date for entry to kindergarten, the class that enters will vary in age by as much as one year, thus creating a range of maturity among the children in the class. Educational researchers and theorists have written much about this range of maturity, and some recommend delaying a child's entry into school so that he or she can be among the oldest children in the class rather than among the youngest.

Florida once used readiness testing for kindergarten. Before 1981, school boards could select their own measures of readiness for kindergarten; there was no uniformity across the state. The 1981 Legislature passed a law making the Department of Education responsible for establishing criteria for kindergarten readiness. After a statewide test was implemented, the department received complaints that the test in Spanish was easier than the one given in English. The Legislature did away with admitting children to kindergarten on the basis of tests. In 1983, September 1 became the cutoff date for admittance in a given year.

Screening for school readiness has been required in Florida since 1996 when the Department of Education distributed a list of 16 Expectations for School Readiness that school districts must use in screening kindergarten students. The readiness assessment is not used to preclude or inhibit admission. Each school district chooses or develops an instrument for screening.

School readiness legislation (ch.99-357, L.O.F.) passed by the 1999 Legislature requires adoption of a statewide uniform screening for kindergarten readiness. By July 1, 2000, the Florida Partnership for School Readiness must prepare and submit to the State Board of Education a system for measuring school readiness. The system must include a uniform screening to provide objective data. Information from the screening could be used in structuring a student's academic program. Over time, the screening results could indicate the relative effectiveness of the preschool programs students attended. The screening is not intended for use as an admittance test for kindergarten.

The statute lists 17 expectations that must be included in the uniform screening prepared by the Florida Partnership for School Readiness. This list is not a screening instrument, but rather,

concrete examples of the kinds of things educators expect of children entering kindergarten. The 17 expectations are listed below:

1. The child's immunizations and other health requirements as necessary, including appropriate vision and hearing screening and examinations.
2. The child's physical development.
3. The child's compliance with rules, limits and routines.
4. The child's ability to perform tasks.
5. The child's interactions with adults.
6. The child's interactions with peers.
7. The child's ability to cope with challenges.
8. The child's self-help skills.
9. The child's ability to express his or her needs.
10. The child's verbal communication skills.
11. The child's problem solving skills.
12. The child's following of verbal directions.
13. The child's demonstration of curiosity, persistence, and exploratory behavior.
14. The child's interest in books and other printed materials.
15. The child's paying attention to stories.
16. The child's participation in art and music activities.
17. The child's ability to identify colors, geometric shapes, letters of the alphabet, numbers, and spatial and temporal relationships.

Screening for school readiness is not the same thing as assessing a child for program placement. Child development experts and early childhood educators recommend caution in using tests to determine placement in the early grades. Children develop at very different rates from birth to age nine; by the age of nine they generally have reached a comparable level of development. Imposing a high stakes test before age nine and making permanent placements based on those test results is not considered to be a sound practice because it could seriously impair a child's self concept and development. Researcher Sharon Lynn Kagan, a nationally respected expert and the president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), says in the report *Not by Chance*:

*...There are serious concerns about how child-based results would be defined, whether they would actually emphasize strengths rather than deficits, and whether they would gauge progress across all developmental domains...particularly when the data are used to make "high-stakes" decisions concerning children's placement or resource allocations. For these reasons, a move to a results orientation should take place only if there is broad participation in the identification of developmental child-based results, if results are accurately and sensitively measured and reported, and if results are directly linked to efforts to improve the lives of children.*

Under accountability legislation passed by the 1999 Legislature (ch 99-398, L.O.F.), Florida's statewide assessment system will be expanded to include testing at every grade from third grade through tenth grade. The system does not test students below grade three because of the difficulty of making assessments based on standardized tests at those young ages.

The age at which a child leaves home to begin formal schooling and the conditions under which it happens are the subject of discussion involving strongly held opinions and different theories about what is appropriate for young children. Public policy varies accordingly.

Requirements for school entry age vary among the states. Seven states--Arkansas, Delaware, Maryland, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia--require children to attend school at age 5. Nineteen states require children to attend school at age 6. Twenty-two states require children to attend school at age 7. Two states require children to attend school at age 8.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The bill amends s. 232.01, F.S., to permit children whose birthdays occur between September 1 and December 1, to take an assessment for early kindergarten placement during the school year in which they will reach the age of 5 years. If a child's parent or guardian requests in writing that the child be able to take the assessment, the school district must provide at least one opportunity for the child to be assessed for early kindergarten placement. The assessment must consist of multiple measures and must involve consultation by parents, teachers, school district administrators, and student support personnel, including the school psychologist and counselor. A child who was determined to be eligible for early placement in kindergarten could be admitted to kindergarten that year.

The change in kindergarten admissions policy would be phased in over a 3-year period. Beginning in 2000-2001, children born during the month of September could take the assessment for early kindergarten entry. In 2001-2002, children born in September and October could take the assessment. In 2002-2003, children born in September, October, and November could take the assessment.

### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

#### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

#### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

#### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**

**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

Parents of children born in September, October, and November could save the cost of child care or private school during the school year of their child’s fifth birthday if their children were determined to be ready for kindergarten.

To the extent that children entering kindergarten before their fifth birthday left private child care or kindergarten to do so, the private institutions would experience a loss of enrollment.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

Under the requirements of this bill, an entering kindergarten class would consist of a 12-month birth cohort and an undetermined number of children born during a 3-month period of the following school year’s birth cohort. During the three years of implementation the enrollment, and the cost, of kindergarten would be greater than what was projected. It is not possible to determine the cost without knowing the number of children born during September, October, and November who would be admitted to kindergarten the year they reach the age of 5 years.

The DOE estimates that if early admittance to kindergarten increased the student membership by 5% in 2000-2001, by 7.5% in 2001-2002, and by 10% in 2002-2003, the cost would be as follows:

|                           | <b>2000-2001</b> | <b>2001-2002</b> | <b>2002-2003</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>FEFP funding</b>       | 32,161,443       | 48,447,635       | 65,608,763       |
| <b>Facilities funding</b> | 117,664,694      | 177,248,769      | 240,033,853      |

These figures are based on a cost per student station of \$12,482, and the 1999-2000 Base Student Allocation of \$ 3,227.74, weighted at the K-3 cost factor of 1.057.

The DOE did not estimate a cost for transportation of additional kindergarten students. The state and school districts likely would incur an increase in transportation costs under the provisions of this bill.

The DOE estimates that purchasing a commercially available test for school entry would cost approximately \$6 per child.

If a test were not available commercially, and the department developed a test for early kindergarten placement, the work would take three years and the cost would be

approximately \$750,000 for development of test blueprint and item specifications, writing of items, and field test of items.

The cost of translating a kindergarten placement test into other languages is indeterminate.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.

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