

During the 2023 regular legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 23-208, which changed the automatic entry age and cutoff for children beginning kindergarten. Children must turn 5 years old by September 1st of the school year — instead of the previous cutoff of January 1st — in order to automatically enroll in kindergarten. This change goes into effect beginning with the 2024-25 school year.

This change means any child born between September 2nd and December 31st will not be eligible to automatically enroll in kindergarten in the same year as children born earlier in the same calendar year. For example, prior to the law change, a child born on November 1, 2019 would have been eligible to enroll in kindergarten for the 2024-2025 school year, with this change that child will not be automatically eligible until the 2025-26 school year.

This frequently asked questions document covers the legislative change made to the kindergarten entry age in Connecticut and what this change means for the state's students, families, districts, and childcare providers.

Why was the change to the entry age for kindergarten made?

Prior to the change passed in 2023, Connecticut had one of the youngest school entry ages in the country.¹ Changing the entry age for kindergarten has been a topic of discussion and study by the Connecticut General Assembly since the 1999 legislative session.² There are arguments both for and against changing the age of eligibility for kindergarten.

Testimony submitted to the legislature in support of changing the entry age indicated teachers feel younger students were under-prepared for school, especially as kindergarten became more rigorous.³ Teachers noted that due to the January 1st cutoff, and the ability of parents to postpone entry for one year, they will have students as young as 4 years old and as old as 6 years old in the same classroom.⁴ This can result in younger students acting out emotionally because they are not emotionally or socially ready for the demands of learning.⁵ Long-term teachers indicated that in recent years, kindergarten has become more demanding than ever before and, as a result, the youngest students struggle and sometimes repeat kindergarten.⁶

In contrast, both the commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)⁷ and the commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC)⁸ submitted testimony opposing changing the kindergarten entry age. Both indicated that without increasing capacity, the State risks disadvantaging already underserved students if the entry age was changed. The OEC highlighted that the largest complaint of teachers — that being the wide-range of student ages in kindergarten classrooms — is also the result of higher-income families opting to delay kindergarten entrance; indicating the entry age change would further disproportionately impact children and families with fewer resources.⁹

Are there exceptions to the new kindergarten entry age?

Yes, under the legislation passed, school districts are allowed to admit a child who does not meet the new entry cutoff age if 1) the child's parent or guardian makes a written request to the principal of the child's school and 2) the school conducts an assessment of the child that determines admitting them to kindergarten would be developmentally appropriate.¹⁰ The assessment is to be carried out by the principal and an appropriate certified staff member of the school.¹¹ Schools are not required to admit students less than 5 years old and there is no standard assessment.

How many students will be impacted by the kindergarten entry age change?

The CSDE and the OEC estimate that, as a result of the change, approximately 9,000 students will be unable to automatically enroll in kindergarten for the 2024-25 school year.¹² Of these 9,000 students, it is estimated that approximately 6,300 students will require preschool spaces, while approximately 2,700 children will have an additional year without formal education.¹³

How will the kindergarten entry age change impact students and families?

Parents of children no longer eligible to automatically enroll in kindergarten will need to find, and potentially pay for, an additional year of preschool services for their children. On average, full-time preschool care costs \$268 a week for care in a center or \$237 a week for care in a home.¹⁴ This equates to \$13,936 a year for center care, and \$12,324 for care in a home. Though state programs exist to help offset the cost of care for low- to moderate-income families, the State's child care subsidy program, Care 4 Kids, will begin reducing the number of enrollments from 22,000 in 2022¹⁵ to approximately 17,000 by the end of fiscal year 2025.¹⁶

Due to caseload reduction efforts, the OEC began waitlisting new applicants to the Care 4 Kids program.¹⁷ Because the entry age change is expected to increase demand for day care, parents may find it difficult to find day care or preschool for children, even those not directly impacted by the entry age change. Additionally, parents also face potential increasing childcare costs as a result of increased demand, the end of federal COVID-relief assistance, and labor shortages.

It is not clear how the entry age change will impact the academic and social experiences of younger students in school. Research is not conclusive on the academic benefits of delaying kindergarten entry, especially if students do not have access to preschool.¹⁸ However, research suggests that delaying kindergarten entry for younger students reduces the likelihood of a student repeating grades and receiving diagnoses of learning disabilities.¹⁹

How will this change impact schools and school districts?

Districts will have a reduced kindergarten cohort size in the Fall of 2024, compared to their expected cohort without the entry age change, and this cohort will potentially remain smaller than normal through the students' entire school careers.²⁰ This could

potentially result in smaller classes, the consolidation of classes, or districts needing to reallocate teachers across schools and grades as this smaller cohort advances in order to correct for staffing challenges. Schools and districts will also have an added burden of responding to parent requests for exceptions and developing assessments to determine school readiness.²¹

Districts also face financial impacts from the change in kindergarten entry age. If districts do not expand Pre-K seat offerings, districts are likely to have reduced resident student counts, potentially resulting in lower-than-expected Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants. In total this could result in up to approximately \$21.1 million less in ECS funding than expected for historically underfunded districts.^A Districts may also receive reduced funding from other grant programs as a result of reduced kindergarten class sizes.

How will this change impact child care providers?

Child care and preschool providers will experience at least one year of increased enrollment demand when a smaller than normal cohort of students exits to kindergarten. Because current enrollment and transition ages for preschool are aligned to the January 1st cutoff for kindergarten, providers will likely need to make similar adjustments to age cutoffs for preschool enrollments for 3- and 4-year-olds.²² This could result in reduced capacity for new preschool enrollments, and increase demand for toddler care.²³

This additional demand comes at a time where child care and preschool providers are facing the end of federal COVID-relief funds, and are citing labor shortages and increased costs. A survey carried out by the Connecticut Association for Human Services, in partnership with the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, found that over 70 percent of child care centers reported being short staffed and almost a third of programs are operating at a loss.²⁴

^A Because ECS grant reductions are paused for FY 2025, districts currently overfunded according to the ECS formula will be held harmless at their prior year grant amounts. Additionally, no districts are estimated to receive less ECS funding than they will receive in FY 2024. This amount was estimated by reducing resident student counts and student ECS weights for districts based on the proportionate share of the estimated 9,000 students impacted by the kindergarten age change. This amount is only an estimate, the real impact will depend on if districts grant exceptions to the new entry age, if districts expand Pre-K seats, and more.

Endnotes

- ¹ Bye, B., & Russell-Tucker, C.M. (2023, July 7). *Memorandum to Superintendents of Schools and Early Care and Education Providers RE: Minimum Age to Enroll in School*. Hartford, CT: State Department of Education and Office of Early Childhood. Retrieved from <https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/oec-csde-joint-memo-minimum-age-enrollment-2023-07-07-1.pdf>.
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- ³ Addie, J. (2023, March 15). *Testimony Supporting H.B. 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Education Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/eddata/TMY/2023HB-06884-R000315-Addie,%20Jessica,%20Windsor%20Educator-Supports-TMY.PDF>.
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- ⁴ Peck, L. (2023, March 15). *Testimony Supporting H.B. 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Education Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/eddata/TMY/2023HB-06884-R000315-Peck,%20Lynn,%20East%20Hartford%20Educator-Supports-TMY.PDF>.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ramirez, A. (2023, March 15). *Testimony Supporting H.B. 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Education Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/eddata/TMY/2023HB-06884-R000315-Ramirez,%20A,%20Educator-Supports-TMY.PDF>.
- ⁷ Russell-Tucker, C.M. (2023, March 15). *Testimony on H.B. 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Education Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/eddata/TMY/2023HB-06882-R000315-Russell-Tucker,%20Charlene,%20Commissioner-State%20Department%20of%20Education--TMY.PDF>.
- ⁸ Bye, B. (2023, March 15). *Testimony on H.B. 6884: An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut General Assembly, Education Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/oec-testimony-beth-bye-education-committee-hb-6879-6884-2023-03-15.pdf>.
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- ¹¹ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 164, § 10-15c as amended by Section 3 of Conn. Acts 23-159.
- ¹² Bye, B., & Russell-Tucker, C.M. (2023, July 7). *Memorandum to Superintendents of Schools and Early Care and Education Providers RE: Minimum Age to Enroll in School*. Hartford, CT: State Department of Education and Office of Early Childhood. Retrieved from <https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/oec-csde-joint-memo-minimum-age-enrollment-2023-07-07-1.pdf>.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Connecticut 2-1-1 Child Care. (2023, October 2). *Average Child Care Cost*. Retrieved from <https://resources.211childcare.org/reports/average-child-care-cost/>.
- ¹⁵ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. (2022). *Overview of Early Childhood Services in Connecticut*. Hartford, CT: Author. Retrieved from https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022_At-A-Glance_with-references_formatted.pdf.

¹⁶ Connecticut General Assembly, Office of Fiscal Analysis. (2023). *Synopsis of Governor's Budget Plan, FY 24 – FY 25*. Hartford, CT: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/SYNG/2023SYNG-20230210_Synopsis%20of%20the%20Governor%27s%20FY%2024%20and%20FY%2025%20Budget%20Plan.pdf.

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¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bye, B., & Russell-Tucker, C.M. (2023, July 7). *Memorandum to Superintendents of Schools and Early Care and Education Providers RE: Minimum Age to Enroll in School*. Hartford, CT: State Department of Education and Office of Early Childhood. Retrieved from <https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/oec-csde-joint-memo-minimum-age-enrollment-2023-07-07-1.pdf>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Connecticut Association for Human Services and Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. (2023). *Spring 2023 Survey Key Findings*. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1B6BwcQBwpS9_pTcfOzBlstq9Qq0nP-g0GhFSfJWxmQ8/edit.