

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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STATE OF MAINE
113TH LEGISLATURE
SECOND REGULAR SESSION

INTERIM REPORT
OF THE
SPECIAL COMMISSION
TO STUDY
SCHOOL ENTRANCE AGE
AND PRESCHOOL SERVICES

MARCH 1988

MEMBERS:

Rep. James R. Handy, Chair
Sen. Stephen C. Estes, Co-Chair
Sen. Edwin C. Randall
Rep. Marjorie L. Kilkelly
Rep. Omar P. Norton
Ms. Robin Boobar
Dr. Roland Burns
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Mr. Laurel Daigle
Ms. Roberta Flynn
Mr. Paul Frost
Ms. Janie Lander
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INTERIM REPORT OF THE
SPECIAL COMMISSION TO STUDY SCHOOL ENTRANCE AGE AND
PRESCHOOL SERVICES

I. INTRODUCTION

In Maine, as in nearly every other state, the sole criteria for school entrance is chronological age. Maine law permits any child who will be five years old on or before October 15 to enroll in kindergarten that fall.¹ Although compulsory attendance laws do not require school enrollment until seven years of age², children have the legal right to a free public education beginning in the fall of the school year in which they turn 5 before October 15.

During 1987, two bills were introduced to the First Regular Session of the 113th Legislature proposing increases in the minimum age for entrance into public school. LD 229, AN ACT to Change the Law Governing School Entrance Age, would have moved the cut-off date for school entrance to May 1. That would have given Maine the earliest cut-off date of any state by two months. The other bill, LD 367, AN ACT to Amend the Date to Determine Age for Kindergarten Eligibility, would have moved the cut-off date to July 15.

The bills were referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Education for consideration. The Committee recognized the complexity of the issues involved in school readiness and the potential impact of any change in the entrance age on children, parents, schools and child care providers. Preferring not to act in a hasty or piecemeal manner, the Education Committee recommended formation of a Special Commission to study school entrance age and related issues.

1 20-A MRSA, section 5201, sub-§2, ¶B

2 20-A MRSA, section 5001, sub-§1

II. THE SPECIAL COMMISSION

The Legislature enacted and the Governor signed Chapter 64 of the Resolves of 1987 creating the Special Commission to Study School Entrance Age and Preschool Services. A copy of that Resolve is attached as Appendix A. The Commission consists of 15 members, including legislators, teachers, school administrators, a guidance counselor, and representatives of the University of Maine System, Headstart, preschool coordination projects and day care centers. Appointments were made in August and the Commission began its work in September, 1987.

Since September, the commission has met 7 times. During its deliberations the Commission met with the following groups or individuals to discuss the topics indicated:

<u>Group/Individuals</u>	<u>Topics</u>
+ University of Maine System and University of New England child development specialists	School entrance age Early childhood development (Ages 0-5 and Grades K-3) Child care programs (Ages 3-5) In-service training for early childhood teachers
+ DECS early childhood specialists	Early childhood school programs (Grades K-3) Technical assistance to local units
+ DHS, Office of Child Care Coordination personnel	State child care needs Licensing requirements
+ DECS Preschool Coordination Project personnel	Preschool coordination projects for at-risk children Coordination of preschool and public school programs
+ Regional Headstart personnel	Headstart programs

The Commission also met with Dr. Lawrence Schweinhart of the High/Scope Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan in a day-long informational briefing and worksession in Augusta to discuss the Perry Preschool Project research, the value of high quality preschool programs for at-risk children and preschool policy options for Maine.

As required in its authorizing legislation, the commission held a series of hearings to receive public comments. Five public hearings were held in Auburn, Scarborough, Fort Kent, Machias and Orono. Over 100 people attended those hearings to express their views on school entrance age, appropriate early childhood educational programs (grades K-3), preschool programs (ages 3-5), childcare services (ages 0-3) and other issues related to appropriate early childhood education. Summaries of the comments received at the public hearings are attached as Appendix B.

III. DISCUSSION

The Commission discovered that the question of the most appropriate age for children to enter kindergarten is not a new issue in the field of education. It is, however, a hotly debated and recurring one. The importance which many people attach to the issue of school entrance age is illustrated by an incident cited by a retired superintendent at one of the Commission's public hearings. He told the story of a pregnant woman who demanded induced labor from her doctor on October 15 so that her child would be able to start school in the fall of his or her fifth year. The issue of school entrance age was studied in Maine just over 20 years ago.³ Among the conclusions reached by that study was that the October 15th cut-off date for school entrance should not be changed.

A. Is School Entrance Age the Real Issue?

With its cut-off date of October 15, Maine falls with the majority of other states which require a child's fifth birthday to occur in September or October in order to start kindergarten that year. Nationally, in 1986, the cut-off date by which a child must turn 5 in order to enter kindergarten ranged from July 1 prior to the school year (Missouri) to January 1 during the school year (Connecticut and Delaware). Seven states permit local school districts to establish the age for entrance to school.

Some states have recently examined their school entrance age with a view toward requiring children to be older when they enter kindergarten. There has been a gradual trend over the past decade to gradually raise the school entrance age. The attached table shows that trend. Some states with year-end entrance dates have changed to earlier dates - usually September. There has been a clear increase in the number of states requiring a September 1 deadline. Three states now have August or July deadlines; ten years ago none did.

3 Maine Department of Education, Ready or Not - Here He Comes, Report of the State Committee on School Entrance Age, December 1966.

Table --States' Admission Dates for Entrance to School, 1978, 1983, and 1986

Day and Month by Which Child Must Be 5 Years Old to Enter Kindergarten

Year	August	September	October	November	December	January	Determined by Local Districts
1978		1 California Kansas Massachusetts Minnesota New Mexico Ohio Pennsylvania Texas Utah 10 Montana 13 Oklahoma 15 Iowa Wyoming 30 Nevada New Hampshire	1 Alabama Arkansas Kentucky Missouri North Dakota 15 Maine Nebraska North Carolina 16 Idaho 31 Tennessee	1 South Carolina South Dakota Washington West Virginia 2 Alaska 15 Oregon	1 Georgia Hawaii Illinois Michigan New York Wisconsin 31 Maryland Rhode Island Virginia Washington DC	1 Arizona Connecticut Delaware Florida Louisiana Mississippi	Colorado Indiana New Jersey Vermont
TOTAL	0	15	10	6	10	6	4
1983	31 North Carolina Washington	1 Arizona California Florida Georgia Kansas Massachusetts Minnesota New Mexico Oklahoma Utah Texas West Virginia Wisconsin 10 Montana 15 Iowa Wyoming 30 Nevada Ohio Virginia	1 Alabama Arkansas Kentucky Missouri 15 Idaho Maine Nebraska North Carolina 31 Tennessee	1 South Carolina South Dakota 2 Alaska 15 Oregon	1 New York Michigan 31 Washington DC Hawaii Rhode Island Maryland	1 Connecticut Delaware Mississippi	Colorado Illinois Indiana Louisiana New Hampshire New Jersey Pennsylvania Vermont
TOTAL	2	19	9	4	6	3	8

(continued)

Table (continued)

Year	August	September	October	November	December	January	Determined by Local Districts
1986	1 Missouri 31 North Dakota Washington	1 Arizona California Florida Georgia Kansas Massachusetts Minnesota Mississippi New Mexico Oklahoma Oregon South DAKota Utah Texas West Virginia Wisconsin 10 Montana 15 Iowa Wyoming Nevada Ohio Virginia Tennessee	1 Alabama Arkansas Kentucky 15 Idaho Maine Nebraska 16 North Carolina	1 South Carolina Illinois 2 Alaska	1 New York Michigan 31 Washington DC Hawaii Rhode Island Maryland	1 Connecticut Delaware	Colorado Indiana Louisiana New Hampshire New Jersey Pennsylvania Vermont
TOTAL	3	23	7	3	6	2	7

SOURCE: Wolf, James M. and Kessler, Anna L, Entrance to Kindergarten: What is the Best Age?; Education Research Service; 1987; pp6-7

The rationale offered to support the trend toward requiring an increased school entrance age is that older children have had more time to develop and are more ready for the requirements of school. Proponents of that rationale cite reports which show a correlation between early school entrance age and later school failure. They also feel children who are younger when they enter school may be more likely to suffer from social and economic difficulties in later life.

There is a growing body of educational research which indicates that school entrance age is, at best, a tangential issue in the question of school readiness. The frequency with which it is cited as an important factor and the trend toward increasing the entrance age may have more to do with the ease with which age can be isolated as an issue and addressed through legislation, and less to do with research on the actual effects of such increases. As one recent study found:

"Generally, states have responded to political pressure and lobbying in changing their school entrance dates, rather than relying on research findings. Those organizations that have first reviewed research on changing school entrance age have subsequently found little evidence to support their proposed changes."⁴

and further:

"Within the five-year-old age range, research does not support an upward shift in the mandatory age for children to enter kindergarten solely on the assumption that older children in general will be more ready to begin preparation for learning to read."⁵

4 Wolf, James M. and Kessler, Anna L; Entrance Age to Kindergarten: Which Age is Best; Education Research Service, 1987, p. 45.

5 Ibid p. 50

The Commission concurs that, at this time, the research which we have reviewed does not support an increase in the school entrance age as the sole or best way to address the problem of school readiness. It is apparent from our discussions with educators, parents and early childhood development specialists that there is a problem. Many children enter kindergarten at a developmental or maturation level which is not appropriate for the curriculum with which they are faced. However, school entrance age is a side issue in addressing the needs of most of those children. A small portion of the children may be helped by delayed entry into kindergarten. That group may simply be replaced by another unready group as there will always be a younger cohort in any class whose makeup is based solely on chronological age. Furthermore, changing the school entrance age alone fails to address the more complex situation of children whose needs are inadequately served by simple delayed school entry.

The real issue, in our view, is providing an appropriate school curriculum for the needs of all school children (whatever school entrance date is chosen), rather than expecting all children to conform to a more or less uniform curriculum or delaying entry in hopes that such conformity will occur given more time. The Commission feels that simply increasing the school entrance age fails to address the needs of the majority of children experiencing readiness problems upon entering school for the following reasons:

- + As children entering kindergarten become older there may be an irresistible tendency to expect a higher academic performance by those students. Such curriculum "push-down" is inappropriate and should be avoided. Leaving the school entrance age as it is may help.
- + Most children with special needs who miss the entrance age cut-off date will have intervention delayed another full year.
- + Children living in rural as well as urban areas without access to pre-school and nursery school programs would be delayed from the socialization and environmental stimulation which kindergarten provides.

- + There is an insufficient supply of quality preschool and child care services now. Delaying school entry would spread those already thin services among more children.
- + Delaying the entry of children who are ready for kindergarten but who might not meet a new cut-off date could result in negative consequences for those children such as delayed access to gifted and talented programs as well as the socialization and stimulation which school provides.
- + Since compulsory attendance laws do not require school attendance until age 7 an option currently exists for parents to keep their child out of school even though he or she turns 5 by October 15. The decision to enroll or hold out an age-eligible child is essentially an individual decision for parents based on their assessment of their child's readiness and other factors.
- + Many families in Maine depend on both parents holding jobs for their economic survival. Delayed school entry could hamper the ability of the second parent to enter the work force.
- + Attention focused on school entrance age (as evidenced by a legislative change of the date) detracts from the real issues which need to be addressed in the area of readiness.

B. The Real Issue: Programs Ready to Meet Children's Needs

The Special Commission is convinced that a problem exists concerning school readiness as it is now defined. We are also convinced that increasing the school entrance age as provided in the two bills which led to the formation of this Commission would not address that problem in a significant way. We believe that for the reasons stated above the current school entrance age should be retained provided that the issue of school readiness be studied comprehensively in the coming year. As the Educational Research Service study cited earlier stated:

"...the issue of school entrance age cannot be considered in isolation of what is to be taught, when, and how. Therefore, it is not productive for educators and policymakers to devote a great deal of energy to debating the merits of a specific chronological or mental age at which all children should begin school. Instead, they should direct their efforts to developing appropriate and effective educational programs that create the most favorable conditions for learning for each child, regardless of the age at which the child enters school."⁶

The problem of school readiness is a complex one and will require thorough examination of a number of interrelated issues, among them, the following:

1. Developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum (Grades K-3). What are the forces which determine the kindergarten curriculum? Are schools receiving mixed signals from parents, the State and society about what the nature of the curriculum should be? How can those signals be clarified and what additional assistance is necessary to assure that the curriculum is child centered and developmentally based? Are screening tools a help in providing an appropriate curriculum? If so, how should they be administered? To whom? When?
2. Alternative structures for early childhood programs (Grades K-3). Do programs such as early kindergarten, transition and ungraded classes adequately address the issue of school readiness? If so, how can their employment on a wider basis be encouraged? Are there other alternative approaches?
3. Early childhood program class size/student-teacher ratios (Grades K-3). Research indicates smaller classes and lower student-teacher ratios are critically important in the early grades. Current Maine law permits kindergarten student-teacher ratios of a maximum of 25:1 and an average ratio of 25:1 for grades 1-8 with no class exceeding 30:1. What are the ranges of class size and student/teacher ratios that actually occur in Maine schools? What factors influence the size and ratios? How much would it cost to provide smaller classes and lower ratios?

6 Wolf and Kessler, p. 50.

4. Preschool services (Ages 3-5). Studies have shown that providing high quality preschool services to at-risk children is cost effective and has positive subsequent effects on the academic success, socialization and economic success of those children as adults. Should existing preschool programs be expanded to help assure school success? How should any new program be structured, targeted and administered? What are the up-front costs and long term financial savings and social benefits?

5. Training/certification/staff development requirements for early childhood teachers and for administrators. Should there be a separate certificate for K-3 teachers which assures training in early childhood development? Should there be an early childhood endorsement for administrators? Can the system of higher education in Maine provide specialized preservice training in early childhood development? How can in-service staff development programs in early childhood development and curriculum be expanded?

6. Parental involvement and child readiness. Recognizing the importance of parents as "first teachers" of their children, some states have established parent outreach and support programs to help parents who wish to improve their parenting skills with an emphasis on techniques which enhance child development. Could such a program be useful in Maine? How should it be structured, targeted and administered? How much would it cost? What role can higher education play in parental training? Is parental training an appropriate role for secondary schools? How can assistance for parents be developed at the local level to provide access to information and services available to them?

7. Changes in institutional structures, relationships and responsibilities which will result in the provision of appropriate early childhood educational programs. Can communication between school units and the Department of Educational and Cultural Services be improved to help assure development of appropriate early childhood curricula? Can cooperation between preschool, and Headstart programs and school units be improved to help assure that appropriate early childhood curricula are available when the child enters school?

8. The appropriate role of the private sector in the provision of quality child care and preschool services. What programs are being offered now? Can successful programs be provided on a wider basis? What incentives would encourage greater participation? How can adequate compensation be provided and appropriate qualifications be assured for day care and preschool staff?

9. Coordination of on-going early childhood education and childcare efforts. What are the current State childcare and early childhood education initiatives? What is the appropriate State role? How can coordination of those efforts be enhanced? What additional initiatives would be helpful, e.g. parental leave policy?

In summary, the Commission believes that the school entrance age is a side-issue to the larger concern of the roles of the family, day care programs, preschool programs, the schools, private industry and the State in child development. The preparation of competent, responsible citizens is a complex problem involving each of these entities. School entrance age is only a small part of that complex challenge. The real focus of early childhood education should be to make sure that the school is ready for the child, not that the child is ready for the school.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1

There is need for a fixed school entrance age cut-off date to facilitate administration of the law and planning by schools, parents and preschool and child care providers. A statewide date provides a basis to assure basic uniformity between school administrative units across the State.

Recommendation #2

The current school entrance age cut-off date of October 15 should not be changed provided that the several related issues affecting school readiness are studied in the present year and addressed by the next session of the Legislature.

Recommendation #3

The Special Commission to Study School Entrance Age and Preschool Services should be renamed the Special Commission to Study Early Childhood Development and Education, have its life extended and be directed to study and report to the First Regular Session of the 114th Legislature by December 15, 1988 on the following issues:

- + Developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum (Grades K-3)
- + Alternative structures for early childhood programs (Grades K-3)
- + Early childhood program class size and student teacher ratios (Grades K-3)
- + Preschool services (Ages 3-5)
- + Training, certification and staff development requirements for early childhood teachers (Ages 3-5 and Grades K-3)
- + Parental involvement and child readiness
- + State, local and higher education responsibilities in assuring developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs (Grades K-3)
- + The appropriate role of the private sector in the provision of quality child care and preschool services (Ages 0-5)
- + Coordination of on-going early childhood education and childcare efforts

Suggested legislation to implement our recommendations is attached as Appendix C.

3878*

APPENDIX A
LEGISLATION CREATING THE SPECIAL COMMISSION

APPROVED

CHAPTER

JUN 29 '87

64

STATE OF MAINE

BY GOVERNOR

RESOLVES

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVEN

H.P. 1111 - L.D. 1505

Resolve, to Establish the Special Commission to
Study School-entrance Age and
Preschool Services.

Emergency preamble. Whereas, Acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, current school entrance age law is based on chronological age and allows children who become 5 years old on or before October 15th to start kindergarten in that year; and

Whereas, for various social and economic reasons, many parents enter their child in school as soon as eligible, regardless of developmental level; and

Whereas, there is great diversity in the rate of cognitive development and social maturation among preschool and school-aged children; and

Whereas, because of that fact, some children are not ready for school although they qualify under the law; and

Whereas, some studies indicate a correlation between starting school too early and later academic and social difficulty; and

Whereas, no comprehensive study of school-entrance age has been conducted in this State for 20 years; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Special commission established. Resolved: That the Special Commission to Study School-entrance Age and Preschool Services is established. The commission shall consist of 15 members appointed jointly by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House as follows: Five members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education; 3 public school teachers, one kindergarten teacher, one transition grade teacher and one teacher in grades 7 to 12; one school superintendent; one elementary school principal; one school guidance counselor serving primarily grades 1 to 6; one University of Maine System faculty member familiar with early childhood development issues; one director of a publicly-funded day care center; one Headstart program director; and one member of a local coordinating committee of a pre-school coordination project. The Joint Standing Committee on Education shall develop a list of suggested candidates for consideration by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House in making appointments to the commission. Appointments to the commission, as far as practicable, shall reflect geographical diversity and shall be made within 30 days of the effective date of this resolve. At the first meeting, the members shall select a chairman and co-chairman. The Chairman of the Legislative Council shall convene the first meeting; and be it further

Sec. 2. Duties. Resolved: That the special commission shall review current research findings, survey national and international trends and consider the opinion of parents, teachers and administrators on the issue of appropriate school-entrance age. Specifically, the special commission shall:

1. Solicit expert testimony from various groups and persons interested in school entrance-age and related issues, including, but not limited to, parents; school psychologists; school medical personnel; special education personnel; personnel for gifted and

talented students; and nursery school directors.

2. Review the experience with preschool, kindergarten and first grade screening, assessment and evaluation programs in this State;

3. Consider possible alternatives to chronological entrance age, including alternative grades, ungraded classes, transitional grades and statewide screening programs to provide appropriate education services; and

4. Assess the impact, financial and otherwise, of any change suggested to deal with the school-entrance age issue; and be it further

Sec. 3. Report. Resolved: That the special commission shall issue its report, including any proposed legislative recommendations, to the Second Regular Session of the 113th Legislature no later than March 1, 1988. In formulating the report, the special commission should consider the need for modeling innovative programs to provide the opportunity to test and evaluate alternatives to chronological entrance-age requirements; and be it further

Sec. 4. Compensation. Resolved: That the members of the commission who are Legislators shall receive the legislative per diem, as defined in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 2, for each day's attendance at commission meetings. All members of the commission shall receive reimbursement for expenses upon application to the Executive Director of the Legislative Council; and be it further

Sec. 5. Staff. Resolved: That staff assistance for the special commission may be requested from the Legislative Council. The Department of Educational and Cultural Services shall also provide technical assistance to the special commission; and be it further

Sec. 6. Appropriation. Resolved: That the following funds are appropriated from the General Fund to carry out the purposes of this resolve.

1987-88

LEGISLATURE

Special Commission to
Study School-entrance
Age and Preschool Ser-
vices

Personal Services	\$1,650
All Other	6,700

Total	<u>\$8,350</u>
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Provides funds for
the per diem,
travel and related
expenses of the
special commis-
sion.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited
in the preamble, this resolve shall take effect when
approved.

APPENDIX B
PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARIES

AUBURN PUBLIC HEARING

DATE: January 13, 1987 6:00 - 9:30 p.m.

ATTENDANCE: 35

COMMENTORS:

- Grace Drown - K teacher
- Dot Sweatt - retired teacher, professor of early childhood education and childcare coordinator
- Carmen Crocker - librarian, former teacher
- Helen Gordon - retired teacher
- Linda Blais - 1st grade teacher
- Kathy Karney - gifted and talented coordinator
- Pam Rasmussen - speech therapist
- Robin Fleck - parent
- Estelle Rubinstein - Headstart director
- Priscilla Small - retired K teacher
- Jan Williams - head teacher Auburn non-graded class

ISSUES/COMMENTS:

1. School Entrance Age

- Lack of chronological development may lead to school failure, loss of self esteem and confidence and increased stress
- Although it is true that there will always be some kids who are young (in a system with an entrance age date) the point is that by delaying the start of school, even the youngest ones have a better chance of being ready.
- Increasing school entrance age may benefit immature child, but is a disservice to the advanced child and the child with special needs.
- Don't close the door for early entry by kids who are ready - it can benefit them. Research shows holding back exceptional kids is detrimental.
- Need to be concerned with the special needs child who will be delayed from school and related services if increase entrance age.
- By increasing entrance age and by providing extra years of early childhood education in the form of transition grades, would we create a problem in middle school or high school where some students would be too old?
- Entrance age provides predicability for families and facilitates administration.
- Changing the entrance age avoids the issue - it attacks the tail of the problem, not the head.

2. Inappropriate curriculum

- The real problem is inappropriate K curriculum which results in overplaced kids.
- First grade curriculum has been pushed down to K, 2nd grade to 1st grade, etc.
- What happens when a child enters school is more important than the age of entry.
- Schools should provide appropriate educational program for each child whatever the entrance age is.
- There are innovative teaching approaches for early grade teachers to provide appropriate programs for all kids, but it requires a special effort by teachers to master them and their use restricted by established school curriculum and class size limits.
- Early K, pre-K, transition grade, developmental screening and changing the school entrance age are band aid approaches. The real solution is providing appropriate curriculum. Teachers, school administrators, DECS and parents each have to adjust their behavior and expectations.

3. Parents' choices

- Some parents send "young" children to school to avoid child care costs.
- Parents are threatened by findings of lack of maturity and readiness in their child.
- Parents need education on the services/options available. Assistance to parents should be from a team of professionals.

4. Recommendations/Issues to consider

- Changing the school entrance age will help some, but, if Commission has authority, it would be more helpful to change the approach of schools to allow teachers to teach what is appropriate for their students. Curriculum flexibility would reduce retention rates, special ed and Chapter I placements and dropout rates.
- Restructuring early grades offers benefits for kids and teachers.
- Provide flexibility in school entrance age - e.g. an early (Sept.-Oct.) date and a later (Jan.-Feb.) date.
- Class size for early classes needs to be addressed. One possibility: leave class size the same but limit K teachers to one session with other 1/2 day devoted to lesson planning and contact with parents.
- Provide a longer kindergarten day and/or a longer school year.
- Provide a period of adjustment for kids from K to 1st grade by reducing the days of attendance or reducing the hours in the school day during the first month of 1st grade.

- Homework in K is unacceptable..
- K scheduling should be less rigid.
- Any meaningful change will cost money and require creative approaches by teachers and administrators.
- Don't be pressured to come up with a new cut-off date just for the sake of change.

5. Additional written comments submitted at the hearing are attached.

3403*

3522*

FORT KENT PUBLIC HEARING

DATE: January 25, 1988

ATTENDANCE: 30

COMMENTORS:

Gerda Sirois - Head Start Teacher
Brenda Donovan - Kindergarten Teacher
Rosaire Daigle - Parent
Kathy Allen - Kindergarten Teacher
Pat Lyons - Kindergarten Teacher
Sheila Carriani - Kindergarten Teacher
Laurie Lamereau - Parent, 3rd Grade Teacher
Wanda Passero - Bureau of Children with Special Needs
Tony Tarridy - Parent
Torn Scott - Curriculum Coordinator
Sandy Bernstein - Teacher
Linda Palmer - Kindergarten Teacher
Sheila Jackson - Headstart Teacher
Robert Dushane - Building Administrator

ISSUED/COMMENTS

1. School Entrance Age

- School entrance should be based on each child's individual abilities.
- Programs need to be changed, not school entrance age.
- Impact on staff needs to be considered if entrance age is changed - would take time to readjust.
- Whatever age a child enters, there will always be that 6-month gap with children entering early. Studies in Sweden where children enter at age 7 show the same problems as studies in England, where children enter at age 5. Better to leave entrance age where it is and look at curriculum/program structures.
- Whatever age is decided - evaluation both upon entry and ongoing is crucial.

2. Parents' choices

- Some parents will keep their children out of school as long as they can, preferring to send them to several years of pre-school.
- Other parents, however, will send children to school to avoid child care costs.
- Parental education is important - why not provide child development courses in high schools to reach teenagers who are potential parents?

- Ongoing awareness programs for parents are also important. There is a need to educate parents that academic skills such as knowing ABCs is all-important.
- Need to increase awareness of current services - e.g. public health nurses which provide parental education.

3. Curriculum

- Why can't a child who is ahead developmentally skip class and move up in system - like in European system? It is damaging to have a child bored in the classroom and learning to hate school.
- It is important to have good strong pre-school programs with strong language component.
- What about transitional grades to provide extra years of early childhood education?
- Curriculum and teachers in pre-school must be reviewed. Research shows that children learn the most between 3 and 5. Sometimes get burned out on learning by the time they get to kindergarten, because pre-school teacher is so concerned about "preparing" them for school - i.e. pushing ABCs, writing, math skills, etc. without developing whole child needs and skills. Therefore, it is vital to have well-trained teachers at pre-school level to avoid burnout by 2nd grade.
- Continued training for teachers should be part of overall curriculum.
- Continuous dialogue between public school teachers and pre-school teachers is important.
- Need uniformity in curriculum across districts.

4. Recommendations, Issues to Consider

- Broaden legislation concerning entrance age. Have a certain date, but entrance is determined by readiness of child, so a child could enter at an earlier age if meets certain emotional, social, physical, language and academic criteria - i.e. more flexibility in entrance age legislation.
- Certification issue. Teachers must be taught how to work and relate to child as a whole not just on an academic level. Currently, there is rigorous training for public school teachers in Maine, but virtually anybody can teach at a pre-school, with little more than a high school education.
- Screening - How do you determine a child's readiness? In every school system, readiness would be defined differently, so there would be inconsistencies across the system. Need to be aware that assessment is a very inexact science. Purpose of screening now is to identify children with special needs - not to exclude children from school. Therefore, there could be some major problems in the future if use 'readiness' as entrance criteria.

- Public schools should get involved with pre-school programs.
- Need to expand number of programs. In Aroostook County, Head Start is the main provider of pre-school services, with a limited number of slots. The other alternative is expensive private pre-school. Need for some expansion - perhaps in conjunction with public schools, to provide services for those who can't get into head start because of lack of slots or don't meet head start income criteria, but can't afford expensive private services.
- Ratios should be lowered, so class sizes do not exceed 15 per teacher, plus a full-time aide.
- If day care is regulated, why not incorporate pre-school into public school system and regulate accordingly?

SCARBOROUGH PUBLIC HEARING

DATE: January 20, 1988

ATTENDANCE: 30

COMMENTORS:

Marge Miller	Early K teacher
Elaine Bowie	Former teacher, Parent, Educational Consultant.
Bill Walsh	Elementary Teacher, Portland
Joanne Johnson	Blue Point School Board Member, Former Portland Curriculum Director
Rosemarie DeAngelis	K 5 Speech and Language Clinician
Linda Paul	Former teacher, parent
Susan Ryder	Parent
Charlene Ulbjerg	Parent, former teacher
Shirley Grover	Superintendent, Scarborough School Dept.
Elsbeth Bellemere	Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Scarborough School Dept.
Priscilla Armstrong	Trains day care staff at USM for State of Maine

ISSUES, COMMENTS

1. SCHOOL ENTRANCE AGE

-- Research indicates that no matter what entrance date is chosen, there will always be a group of children who are ready and a group who are not. The issue is curriculum and need for high quality programs for pre-schoolers.

-- Entrance Age is important because it provides consistency, predictability for families and Administration

-- With the Oct. 15 date, a child can enter school as young as 4 years, 10 months. By moving date to May 1, no child would enter school younger than 5 years and 4 months. This age factor is significant, and becomes critical later on, when child enters middle or high school. An older child has more life experience and ability to deal with drug, alcohol and sexual issues that may have to be faced later on.

2. CURRICULUM:

-- Public Schools need to review curriculum

-- Curriculum should be set up so no children have to feel like a failure at age 5.

-- Current Public School curriculums are inflexible and make children conform to a preconceived notion of what a 5,6,7,8

year old child should learn. A developmental approach is more flexible.

- This society prides itself on its pluralism and diversity, but sets up standardized, inflexible curriculums in its public schools. Families comprise children of different ages, but family activities do not evolve around age groups, but on the family as a whole. So why separate children on the basis of age during the educational process?

- Maine appears to be behind other states in terms of its curriculum options. This Commission should look at what other states have done.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS, ISSUES

- Need for greater cooperation between public schools and pre-school services

- Early childhood education covers ages 0-8. Educators should work with parents both before and after a child enters school.

- Need to lower ratios.

- Public schools should change structure, make more choices for curriculum available, educate parents, educate teachers.

- Improve child development training for teachers

- Provide help, guidelines for parents in making decisions about when child is ready to enter school system.

MACHIAS PUBLIC HEARING

DATE: February 10, 1988

ATTENDANCE: 13

COMMENTORS: Elaine Fickett, Virginia Vinyard, Faith Perkins, Lora Hanger, Donna Shachan, Ginny Brown, Deborah Sargent, Vivian Hall, Nancy Look, Susan Harper, Evelyn Randall

ISSUES/COMMENTS:

1. School entrance Age

- Increasing the school entrance age will hurt special education children and other children with special needs.
- There are not enough out-of-school services for children in Washington County now. Keeping some kids out of school an extra year will deprive them of the necessary socialization, interaction and environmental stimulation which school provides.
- Fact that school attendance is not mandatory until age 7 needs more publicity - some parents might chose to keep their children home voluntarily. Opposing point of view: The more common situation is that for various reasons parents want their children in school as soon as possible.

2. Appropriate curriculum

- Question whether this is an age issue or a curriculum issue. If an appropriate curriculum is developed, age is irrelevant.
- Preschool/Head Start coordination with public schools would help assure appropriate programs are available in the school when the child arrives for kindergarten - especially for special needs kids.
- Pressure on K teachers from 1st grade teachers and administrators to provide certain standardized academic skills in K so children are ready for 1st grade curriculum.

3. Class size/student teacher ratio

- If class size were reduced to 10-12 in K, appropriate curriculum could be provided to most children.
- Reducing class size would be more helpful than changing the entrance age.
- Early grade teachers need more classroom aides. Typically, the higher grades get more aides.

4. Screening

- Need more individual readiness testing.
- Standardized assessment instruments are subject to error. Pressure on kids, dealing with strange adults, shyness and bad days are all factors contributing to unreliability of screening instruments.
- Error rates may be as much as 25-30%.
- Getting qualified administrators for screening instruments is difficult.
- If utilize screening to keep "unready" children out of K, need corresponding network of services to help develop readiness.

5. Special rural problems

- Developmental needs of rural kids are the same as urban kids, just more dispersed.
- There are not enough children to justify a full complement of center-based services (but individual needs are there).
- Distance of travel required to existing centers too great.
- Salaries/benefits alone are not the answer to lack of services/trained personnel. Geographically isolated areas don't attract trained personnel.
- Need more preschool, Head Start and daycare services.

3912*

ORONO PUBLIC HEARING

DATE: February 18, 1988

ATTENDANCE: 9

COMMENTORS: Carol Torrent - parent
Sandra Warner - K-Teacher
Imogene Brightman - teacher/curriculum coordinator
Debbie King - T-1 Teacher
Bonnie Blair - 4th Grade Teacher

ISSUES/COMMENTS:

1. School entrance age

- Age 4 is just too young to start school.
- Personal experience as K-1 teacher indicates increasing the age would make a difference. Should be moved to Spring.
- In the past, many parents (who are pretty good judges of when their children are ready) exercised the option of keeping their children out of school for an extra year. Now, economic factors and family situations tend to push parents to enroll their children as soon as possible.
- Raising the entrance age would take pressure off parents who may not be sure whether to enroll their child but feel pressured for various reasons to do so.
- Don't see harm in raising age. May benefit child academically, socially and athletically in middle and high school.
- Ideally, all kids would be screened for developmental readiness and kept out of school if not ready. If that is unrealistic, raising school entrance age is an alternative.
- Raising school entrance has some advantages but also some disadvantages, including curriculum "push down".
- Raising school entrance age alone won't address the whole problem unless additional services are provided to children who need them.
- Raising school entrance age would help some, but not all kids.

2. Developmentally appropriate curriculum

- The trend in early elementary education is toward developmentally appropriate programs - teaching to the individual needs in each class.
- Inappropriate curriculum programs cause stress in children which can lead to learning disabilities.
- K teachers can adapt the curriculum to the developmental level of the children (teacher had 17 K students plus an aide).

- Need strong K teachers to overcome pressure to "push down" the curriculum.
- K curriculum should emphasize the value of play and unstructured time which provide a bridge to development of socialization skills, leadership qualities, teamwork and the role of individuals in the group.
- Well informed parents want a K curriculum that is play orientated and child based.
- Orono parents would not accept an ungraded early elementary curriculum.
- T-1 grades provide an excellent opportunity to provide developmentally appropriate programming for those not ready for 1st grade. Early K would also be beneficial.

3. Preschool services

- Every child should have some program available before K - would be expensive but the need is there.
- Preschool program should tie into the public school program so that programs don't conflict.
- Preschool really only helpful in socialization skills.

4. Parents as teachers

- More parental education would be beneficial.
- Parents (especially of at-risk children) need skill development in parenting, understanding developmental stages and nutrition needs.
- In England, parents of children enrolled in some preschools are required to attend parental education sessions.
- In some circumstances, rural kids have an extended family and community network which compensates for lack of services. But usually, it is difficult to overcome disadvantages of rural poverty without targeted services.
- Schools need more guidance counsellors and social workers because of adverse family situations.

3959*

APPENDIX C
RECOMMENDED LEGISLATION

Submitted pursuant
to 1987 Resolve
c. 64, and PL 1988
c. 580
DCE 3/4/88
Document #3999m

(EMERGENCY)

SECOND REGULAR SESSION

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH LEGISLATURE

Legislative Document

No.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY SEVEN

RESOLVE, to Amend the Duties, Title and Reporting Date
of the Special Commission to Study
School Entrance Age and Preschool Services.

Emergency preamble Whereas, Acts of the Legislature do not
become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted
as emergencies; and

Whereas, the Special Commission to Study School Entrance
Age and Preschool Services has identified lack of school
readiness as a critical problem; and

Whereas, that problem is caused by several related factors
and not by the school entrance age alone; and

Whereas, the Special Commission has recommended that the
present school entrance age not be changed provided other
related issues are studied in the coming year; and

Whereas, issues related to developmentally appropriate
early childhood curriculum needs to be studied and addressed
immediately; and

Whereas, failure to do so will result in negative consequences for many school children; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. Special Commission renamed. Resolved: That the Special Commission to Study School Entrance Age and Preschool Services, established by Resolve of 1987, Chapter 64, is renamed the Special Commission on Early Childhood Development and Education.

Sec. 2. Duties. Resolved: That the Special Commission on Early Childhood Development and Education shall examine issues related to early childhood development and appropriate educational programming, including the following:

- A. Establishment of developmentally appropriate early childhood curricula;
- B. Alternative structures for early childhood educational programs;
- C. Appropriate class size and student-teacher ratios for early elementary grades;
- D. Appropriate preschool services, including the possibility of targeting at-risk children;
- E. Appropriate preservice training, certification and staff development requirements for early childhood teachers;
- F. The role parents play in the development of their child and how that role may be enhanced;
- G. The appropriate role of the private sector in the provision of child care and preschool services and ways to enhance that role;
- H. Current State initiatives for early childhood education and childcare services and ways those initiatives can be coordinated; and
- I. Changes in relationships between and responsibilities of various institutions and agencies which will result in the provision of more appropriate early childhood educational programs.

Sec. 3. Report. Resolved: That the special commission shall issue its report, including any proposed legislation, to the First Regular Session of the 114th Legislature no later than December 15, 1988.

Sec. 4. Membership. Resolved: In addition to the members provided for in Resolves, 1987, chapter 64, the special commission shall also include one member familiar with early childhood educational programs representing the Department of Educational and Cultural Services and one member familiar with child care services representing the Department of Educational and Cultural Services. Both of those members shall be full voting members.

Sec. 5. Transition. Resolved: That, except as provided in sec. 4, the membership, compensation and staffing requirements established by Resolves of 1987, Chapter 64 for the Special Commission to Study School Entrance Age and Preschool Services shall continue for the Special Commission to Study Early Childhood Development and Education. Funds appropriated by Resolves of 1987, Chapter 64 and not expended shall be carried forward and may be used by the Special Commission to Study Early Childhood Development and Education to carry out its responsibilities.

Sec. 5. Appropriation. Resolved: That the following funds are appropriated from the General Fund to carry out the purposes of this resolve.

1988-89

LEGISLATURE

Special Commission on
Early Childhood Development
and Education

Personal Services	\$ 1,600
All Other	<u>6,000</u>
Total	\$ 7,600

Provides funds for the per diem, travel and related expenses of the special commission.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this Act shall take effect when approved.

STATEMENT OF FACT

The purpose of this resolve is to implement the interim recommendations of the Special Commission on School Entrance Age and Preschool Services. That commission recommended that the present school entrance age remain as it is and that the following school readiness issues be studied in detail: (1) Establishment of developmentally appropriate early childhood

curricula, (2) Alternative structures for early childhood educational programs, (3) Appropriate class size and student-teacher ratios for early elementary grades, (4) Appropriate preschool services, (5) Appropriate preservice training, certification and staff development requirements for early childhood teachers, (6) Enhancement of the role parents play in the development of their child, (7) The appropriate role of the private sector in the provision of child care and preschool services and ways to enhance that role, (8) Current State initiatives for early childhood education and child care services and ways those initiatives can be coordinated, and (9) Changes in relationships and responsibilities of various agencies which will result in the provision of appropriate early childhood educational programs.

The resolve renames the Special Commission to Study School Entrance Age and Preschool Services as the Special Commission on Early Childhood Development and Education, directs the Commission to study those issues listed above and to report to the First Session of the 114th Legislature, and adds representatives on the Commission in the fields of early childhood education and child care services.