

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: SB 1740

SPONSOR: Senator Meek

SUBJECT: Schools/Kindergarten Admission

DATE: April 15, 1999 REVISED: 4/20/99 _____

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

I. Summary:

The bill permits children whose birthdays occur between September 1 and January 1, to take the Kindergarten readiness screening during the school year in which they will reach the age of 5 years. A child who was determined to be ready for kindergarten would be eligible for admission to kindergarten that year.

The bill takes effect July 1, 1999.

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, they must attend kindergarten if they are to enter first grade at age six. To enter first grade, 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 progress at their own pace through the kindergarten, first, and second grade years without formal separation of the grades.

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. In 1993, the Legislature did away with admitting children to kindergarten on the basis of tests and established September 1 as 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 list is a compilation of the areas included in the major commercial instruments by which readiness is assessed. The readiness assessment is not used to preclude or inhibit admission. The 16 expectations are grouped into three categories:

- (1) Health and physical development,
- (2) Personal, social and behavior development, and
- (3) Preacademic, academic and literacy development. The specific criteria in each category are:

Health and Physical Development

The child's immunizations are current.

The child displays physical development appropriate for kindergarten.

Personal, Social and Behavioral Development

The child complies with rules, limits and routines.

The child engages successfully in kindergarten tasks.

The child demonstrates appropriate interactions with adults.

The child demonstrates appropriate interactions with peers.

The child copes effectively with challenges and frustrations.

The child demonstrates appropriate self-help skills.

The child expresses needs appropriately.

Preacademic, Academic and Literacy Development

The child demonstrates verbal communication skills necessary to success in kindergarten.

The child demonstrates problem solving skills necessary to success in kindergarten.

The child follows verbal directions.

The child demonstrates curiosity, persistence and exploratory behavior.

The child demonstrates interest in books and other printed materials.

The child attends to stories.

The child participates in art and music activities.

Children who meet 75 percent or more of these expectations are determined to have met the expectations for school readiness.

While public schools have a common understanding of the elements of school readiness, they do not measure readiness in the same manner. Some cite the checklist as the instrument they use, though the checklist is so general it would require much interpretation. Others use locally developed instruments or commercially purchased instruments. At present, the Senate and the House of Representatives are in conference regarding school readiness legislation (CS/CS/SB 366, 382, & 708, 1st Eng.) that requires adoption of a statewide uniform screening for kindergarten readiness.

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 incoming 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.

The age at which the 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.

Fourteen states offer a full-day kindergarten program; four of those states require children to attend kindergarten. Twenty-six states offer a half-day kindergarten program; ten of those states require children to attend kindergarten. In ten states, school districts decide whether or not to offer kindergarten.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill amends s. 232.01, F.S., to permit children whose birthdays occur between September 1 and January 1, to take the Kindergarten readiness screening 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 screening, the school district must provide at least one opportunity for the child to be screened for kindergarten readiness. A child who is determined to be ready for kindergarten will be eligible for admission to kindergarten that year.

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, November, and December 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.

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 4-month period of the following year's birth cohort. During the first year 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, November, and December who would be admitted to kindergarten the year they reach the age of 5 years.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The bill refers to the kindergarten assessment that is part of the statewide assessment program. There is no kindergarten assessment in the statewide assessment program. A test would have to be developed.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

1 by Education

The change in kindergarten admissions policy would be phased in over a 3-year period. Beginning in 1999-2000, children born during the month of September could take the readiness assessment. In 2000-2001, children born in September and October could take the assessment. In 2001-2002, children born in September, October, and November could take the assessment.

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