



New Entry Age for Kindergarten: Considerations for Connecticut Schools

October 23, 2023

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has developed the following considerations to support schools in implementing Public Act (PA) 23-208. The considerations were developed with a focus on equity, and they have been organized into sections to support readability and understanding.

LEGISLATION

In accordance with Section 1 of PA 23-208, which amends Section 10-15c of the Connecticut General Statutes effective July 1, 2024, public schools shall:

...be open to all children five years of age and over who reach age five on or before the first day of September of any school year, and each such child shall have, and shall be so advised by the appropriate school authorities, an equal opportunity to participate in the activities, programs and courses of study offered in such public schools, at such time as the child becomes eligible to participate in such activities, programs and courses of study, without discrimination on account of race, as defined in section 46a-51, color, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or disability; provided a child who has not reached the age of five on or before the first day of September of the school year may be admitted (1) upon a written request by the parent or guardian of such child to the principal of the school in which such child would be enrolled, and (2) following an assessment of such child, conducted by such principal and an appropriate certified staff member of the school, to ensure that admitting such child is developmentally appropriate.

In PA 23-208, §1(a), the legislature established September 1 as the new cutoff birthdate for children seeking admission to kindergarten beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, and established an assessment process that constitutes the **only** exception to the September 1 cutoff date. The PA 23-208, §1(a) assessment process for determining the developmental appropriateness of an underage child seeking early admission to kindergarten is **not** discretionary and **must** be implemented if requested in writing by a child's parent or guardian. The CSDE recognizes that assessing a child for the purposes of determining the developmental appropriateness of early admission to kindergarten constitutes a challenge for children, families, and schools. This document alerts schools to some of those challenges, while also providing general guidance.

ASSESSMENT

As noted, PA 23-208 requires schools to assess a child who does not meet the age requirement to ensure that admitting the child is developmentally appropriate. The requirement to assess is not discretionary and is initiated when a parent or guardian submits a written request for their child to be enrolled. The following considerations are designed to support schools in making decisions regarding the developmentally appropriate assessment process:

continued

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- Early learning and growth is an ongoing process, and no one set of skills at any given time can determine readiness for kindergarten. The [CT Early Learning and Developmental Standards \(ELDS\)](#) can assist a principal and appropriate certified staff to identify what children from birth to age five should know and be able to do. The ELDS may also assist schools in determining the extent to which their kindergarten program fits a child's developmental level upon entry into kindergarten.
- Schools have discretion in determining whether "an assessment" will be a stand-alone tool, or a holistic measure of a child's developmental level. The CSDE will not identify an assessment tool for use to determine if admitting a child to kindergarten is developmentally appropriate.
- Any assessment tool used as part of the assessment process should yield results that are valid and reliable for the intended uses.
- Parents and guardians know their children well. Obtaining and including information from the parent or guardian, whether formally or informally during the assessment process may provide schools with a deeper understanding of a child's developmental level and will add validity to the inferences a school is able to draw from the assessment process.
- A child's preschool teacher/early care provider may also provide valuable insights regarding a child's development.
- A holistic approach to assessing a child's developmental level should assess a variety of developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, social-emotional, physical development and health, etc.).
- An assessment, or method by which a child is assessed, should be culturally and linguistically appropriate (e.g., questions on the assessment avoid using language or context that is familiar only to one culture).
- An established assessment calendar that includes specific, yet multiple times for receiving written parental requests for enrollment will ensure school staff have the most current assessment of a child's developmental level. Keep in mind, however, that developmental assessments administered too early may not provide a fair assessment of a child's developmental level at the start of the school year. Assessments administered at inconsistent times across children may provide an unfair amount of maturation time to children who are assessed closer to the start of school.
- The assessment process employed must be meaningful to achieve the statutory outcome and should be administered universally across all schools in a district. The clear intent of PA 23-208, §1(a) is that such assessments be efficacious.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

All parents and guardians, including those of children with disabilities, may request early entry to kindergarten. The following considerations are designed to support schools in making decisions regarding this process with special considerations for children with disabilities:

- Children with disabilities are entitled access to the same process utilized for early entry to kindergarten that is available to all children.
- For children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), the assessment process must be individualized and in alignment with the documented IEP accommodations/modifications in Section 5 (Supplementary Aids and Services) and Section 11 (District and State Testing).
- For children with Section 504 plans, the assessment process must be individualized and in alignment with the accommodations documented in the child's plan.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Families have concerns about the short and long-term academic, financial, social and emotional implications of sending their child to kindergarten. There are additional considerations for families attempting to decide whether to request their child be enrolled in kindergarten if they do not meet the new age requirement. The following considerations are intended to help schools support their families in this decision-making process:

- Sharing information in multiple languages with families about a school's kindergarten program will better assist schools and families engage in a discussion about a child's developmental ability in relation to the goals of the program.
- Families will be increasingly engaged with and have a deeper understanding of the kindergarten entry process when communication occurs in a variety of formats and in a family's dominant language.
- District relationships with families may be strengthened if families are provided with information about community partners who can offer alternatives to kindergarten for children who do not meet the age requirement for kindergarten entry in 2024-25.

Districts are encouraged to work in partnership with early care and education providers and community organizations to engage with families and communicate the new age requirement.

STAFFING

Kindergarten enrollment numbers will be impacted by PA 23-208. It will be difficult to determine how many parents or guardians will request enrollment of their child who does not meet the age requirement, and schools may experience enrollment numbers in kindergarten that are less than what was originally predicted for the 2024-25 school year. The following considerations are designed to help schools in making staffing decisions in response to unpredictable levels of kindergarten enrollment:

- Flexible staffing models that allow districts to assign and reassign teachers from one grade to another (e.g., kindergarten to preschool) may support how districts respond to any enrollment fluctuations influenced by PA 23-208.
 - > Utilization of the Emergency Generalist application process will alleviate some barriers to certification, provided a teacher has a Provisional or Professional certificate.
 - > Utilization of a Durational Shortage Area Permit (DSAP) will alleviate some barriers to certification, particularly for certified staff with the 113 endorsement (Integrated Early Childhood/Elementary Education N-3 and Special Education N-K). Teachers who maintain the 113 endorsement typically have the requisite college coursework to make them eligible for a DSAP.
 - > It is already possible for teachers with a 165 endorsement (Comprehensive Special Education, K-12) to teach special education preschool.

The CSDE Talent Office stands ready to support districts in navigating any staffing challenges that may arise during the implementation process.

The CSDE, in partnership with the Office of Early Childhood, understands the level of impact the new entry age requirement for kindergarten is having on families, districts, and early care and education providers. We remain committed to supporting districts and families throughout this transition.

Notes from my phone call with Charles Hewes, Deputy Commissioner for Academics and Innovation, regarding the New Entrance Age for Kindergarten Considerations for CT Schools, CSDE, Oct.23, 2023

My notes below do not replace the text provided by CSDE, they accompany it with responses to questions I asked Mr. Hewes. Please review the entire document issued by the CSDE for a complete picture of the topic.

Discussion summary: Mr. Hewes stated that I raised many excellent questions and wished he could provide more guidance. CSDE wants to support districts in flexibility of decision-making, hence the CSDE will not provide a recommended instrument or process. The waiver process is not optional.

- Lots of acronyms below, so get ready!

The original legislation language contained only the September 1 date regarding K entrance. The requirement for the parental request of the waiver process was included close to the end of the process and was not part of the original proposal.

Districts should consider a holistic look at assessing a child as there is not one instrument that can create a truly valid and reliable result.

Is there a benchmark document to guide our decision-making? Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) are one suggested reference point when considering assessment screeners. This is not a screener but is a continuum of skills, dispositions, and behaviors for families and educators to reference. The CT ELDS “include what young children ages 0 to 5 should know and be able to do. They were developed so that families, communities, and schools can work together to support children’s early learning and growth across all settings,” as stated by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC).

What assessments are districts considering? Some towns are looking at Connecticut’s Documentation & Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS), which requires prior knowledge of the child, Sparkler, an online app/readiness screener, and the CT Kindergarten Entrance Inventory (KEI), which teachers currently administer in early October to all kindergarten students to determine their early fall skillset. Each of these would likely need additional elements in order to be considered holistic. Multiple indicators might include parental input of their child’s developmental level.

Are there timeframes or age requirements for the waiver? No. Parents may request a child to be screened in May, for example, when K registration is commonly completed. The child may be any age... even younger than 4 years old, if the parent considers the child developmentally ready. If the child is not determined ‘ready’ by the screening process in May, the family may opt to return later in the summer to be screened again. Districts must provide multiple opportunities for parents to request enrollment screening.

Even if we screen in May during school hours when teachers are present, we will still need to provide staff during the summer to screen children if parent request it, and to accommodate special education and MLL needs (which may not have even been diagnosed at this point.)

What happens if a parent pushes back on a decision to not permit a child to enroll in K based on assessment data? There is no clear CSDE response to this other than the data must show the child is developmentally ready. I am concerned that this potentially contentious interaction will be one of the first relationship-building conversations our administrators and teachers have with our newest families.

Districts like ours are encouraged to work with neighboring districts who send children to collaborative secondary schools. While we do not need to align, per CSDE guidance, it is important that we talk about this together. I will be bringing this again to BOWA as well as to SCASA.

