



### Kindergarten Entrance Ages: A 30 Year Trend Analysis

By Michael Colasanti

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There has been a trend in the states over the last 30 years to establish a cutoff date earlier in the year for children entering kindergarten.

- In 1975, of **30 states** that established a cutoff date, **nine** required students to have turned 5 by a certain date in September or earlier (30%).
- By 1990, **42 states** established a cutoff date and of those, **28** required that students must turn 5 by a certain date in September or earlier (67%).
- By 2005, **45 states** established a cutoff date, and **33** of those required that students must turn 5 by a certain date in September or earlier (77%).

According to the ECS report, *Full-Day Kindergarten: A Study of State Policies in the United States*, lawmakers consider a number of assumptions when deciding to raise the entrance age for kindergarten:

- “From a **policy perspective**...raising the kindergarten entrance age will increase student achievement because they [lawmakers] believe older children are better prepared for success.”
- “From a **fiscal perspective**, raising the kindergarten entrance age creates a one-time decrease in the education budget as it reduces the number of children who enroll...when the age change takes effect.”
- “From a **child’s perspective**, raising the kindergarten age means that some children essentially miss out on an entire year of learning.”

In a report produced by the National Center for Early Development and Learning, the argument is made that, “When an entrance cutoff date is set, a statement is made about the lower bounds of typical development that can be accommodated in instructional practices.” A publication from the Society for Research in Child Development, however, suggests evidence does not necessarily support the argument that raising the entrance age will increase student achievement. “The age differences, when found, were usually stronger at the beginning of school than in later grades, indicating that the younger children actually tended to learn more, often catching up with their older peers after a few years in school.”

The Society for Research in Child Development also states, “Possible negative effects of raising the school entry age must also be considered. Requiring children to be older when they enter kindergarten increases teachers’ expectations for their ability to handle structured academic work...there is a risk that kindergarten will begin to resemble first grade and be less and less developmentally appropriate.”

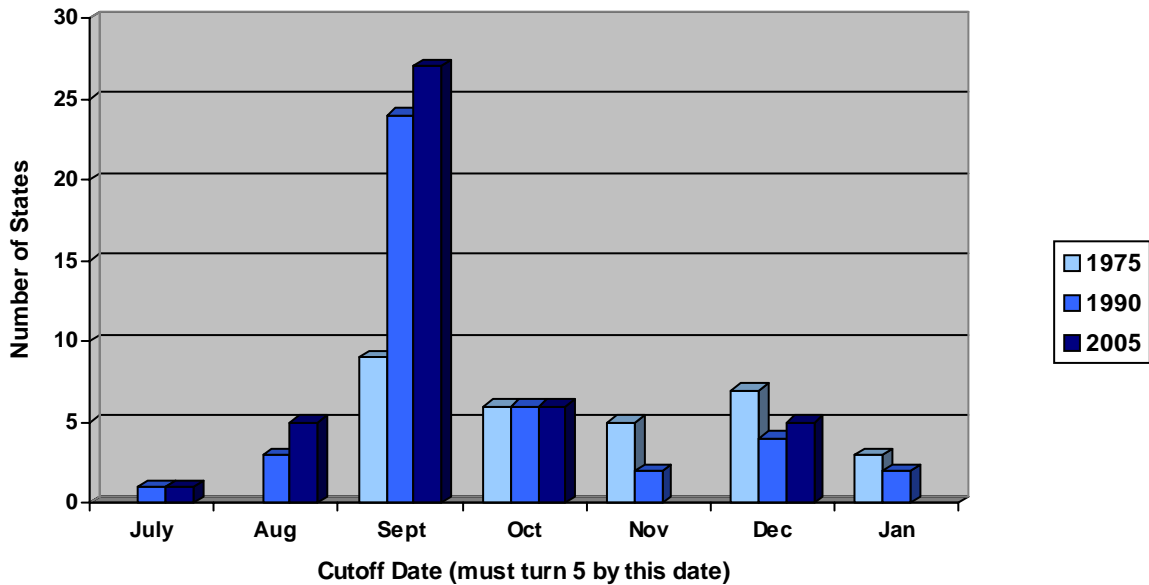
“Delaying school entry for children, whether by changing the law or through parents’ voluntary decisions may...be disadvantageous for low-income children, who already begin school with relatively poor cognitive skills. First, the evidence is clear that out-of-school time contributes to the racial and social class achievement-gap more than does in-school time. Second, middle-income children are also more likely to attend high-quality preschool or daycare programs, which have been shown to contribute to children’s language and other cognitive skills...Children with special needs are especially disadvantaged by

delaying entry into a formal education because they are less likely to be identified and receive early intervention.”

Another report, *The Effect of Age at School Entry on Educational Attainment: An Application of Instrumental Variables with Moments from Two Samples*, published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, suggests the current trend of requiring an earlier cutoff date might have a negative impact on the educational attainment of students. “If students are compared on their sixteenth birthday, those who were born earlier in the year will have spent less time in school than students who were born later in the year. Therefore, assuming that a fixed fraction of students drop out of school upon attaining the legal dropout age, students born earlier in the year will, on average, have less education than students born later in the year.” These hypotheses seem to contradict the reasoning behind the trend of establishing earlier cutoff date.

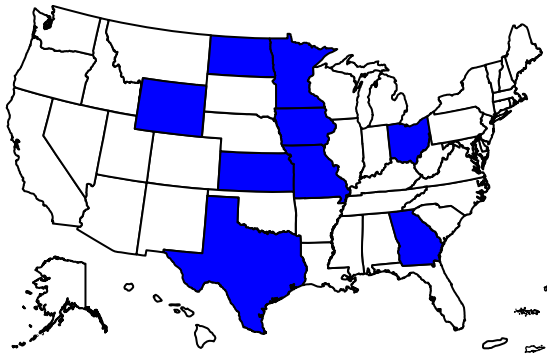
**Food for thought:** *If states were to set the kindergarten entrance age earlier (i.e. younger), would the impact on children and the system be negative, or positive?*

### Cutoff Dates Specified in Statute

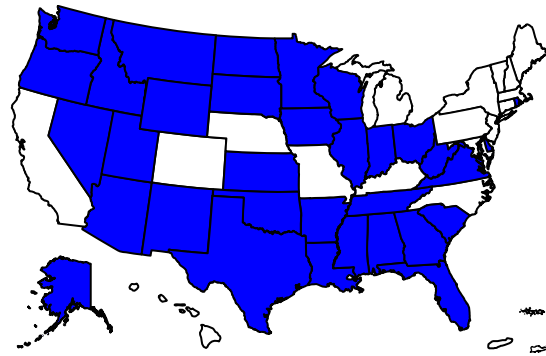


**States with a September (or before) Cutoff Date:**

**1975**



**2005**



**Summary Table**

State	Age (Cutoff Date)		
	1975	1990	2005
Alabama	5 (10/1)	5 (10/1)	5 (9/1)
Alaska	5 (11/2)	5 (11/2)	5 (8/15)
Arizona	5 (1/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Arkansas	5 (10/1)	5 (10/1)	5 (9/15)
California	4 yrs. 9 mo.	4 yrs. 9 mo. (9/1 – first term) or 4 yrs. 9 mo. (2/1 – second term)	5 (12/2)
Colorado		5 (LEA)	5 (10/1)
Connecticut		5 (1/1)	5 (1/1)
Delaware	5 (1/31)	5 (1/1)	5 (8/31)
District of Columbia		5 (12/31)	5 (12/31)
Florida	5 (1/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Georgia	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Hawaii	5 (12/31)	Mandatory half-day attendance or test for 1st grade	5 (12/31)
Idaho		5 (8/16)	5 (9/1)
Illinois	5 (12/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Indiana	LEA	5 (LEA)	5 (7/1)
Iowa	5 (9/15)	5 (9/15)	5 (9/15)
Kansas	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (8/31)
Kentucky	5 (12/31)	5 (10/1)	5 (10/1)
Louisiana	4 yrs. 8 mo.	Mandatory half-day attendance or test for 1st grade	5 (9/30)
Maine	5 (10/15)	5 (10/15)	5 (10/15)
Maryland		5 (12/31)	9 (10/31)
Massachusetts	LEA	LEA	5 (LEA)
Michigan	5 (12/1)	5 (12/1)	5 (12/1)
Minnesota	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Mississippi	No kn dg.	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Missouri	5 (9/30)	5 (7/1)	5 (8/1, or 8/1-10/1 for metropolitan districts)
Montana	5	5 (9/10)	5 (9/10)
Nebraska	5 (10/15)	5 (10/15)	5 (10/15)

State	Age (Cutoff Date)		
	1975	1990	2005
Nevada		5 (9/30)	5 (9/30)
New Hampshire	LEA	LEA	LEA
New Jersey		LEA	5 (LEA)
New Mexico	5 (11/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
New York	5 (12/1)	5 (12/1)	LEA
North Carolina	5 (10/16)	5 (10/16)	5 (10/16)
North Dakota	5 (9/30)	5 (8/31)	5 (9/1)
Ohio	5 (9/30)	5 (9/30)	5 (8/1 or 9/30)
Oklahoma	5 (11/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Oregon	5 (11/15)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Pennsylvania	4		LEA
Rhode Island	5 (12/31)	5 (9/31)	5 (9/1)
South Carolina	5 (11/1)	5 (11/1)	5 (9/1)
South Dakota	5 (10/31)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Tennessee	5	5 (9/30)	5 (9/30)
Texas	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Utah		5 (9/30)	5 (9/2)
Vermont	4 yrs. 9 mo.	5 (LEA)	5 (1/1 or LEA option between 8/31 and 1/1)
Virginia	4 yrs. 8 mo.	5 (9/30)	5 (9/30)
Washington	5	5 (8/31)	5 (8/31)
West Virginia	5	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Wisconsin	5 (12/1)	5 (9/1)	5 (9/1)
Wyoming	5 (9/15)	5 (9/15)	5 (9/15)

**Notes:** LEA = local education agency. Numbers inside parentheses are dates by which child must turn 5 yrs.

## Sources

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