

Economic Benefits of Transitional Kindergarten for California

Economists, researchers and kindergarten teachers agree – early education programs like transitional kindergarten – are one the best financial investments California can make.

Economic analyses show high-quality early learning saves our schools and our state money, and provides long-term economic benefits to our children, families and communities.

S.B. 1381 (Simitian) would change the kindergarten entry date in California from 5 years old by December 2 to 5 years old by September 1, so all children enter kindergarten at age 5. This would generate savings that could be used to provide 4 year olds with birthdays between September and December with an additional year of preparation before kindergarten. This transitional kindergarten would provide 120,000 4 year olds with high-quality early learning, including approximately 49,000 English Language Learners and 74,000 who attend Title I schools.¹

Studies suggest that moving the kindergarten entry date up increases test scores by as much as 27%,² helping to close the achievement gap. Additionally, research demonstrates that early education helps children develop the academic, social and emotional skills to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. Children who attend high-quality early education programs are less likely to drop out of high school, be held back a grade or placed in special education, and more likely to score better on reading and math achievement tests.³

Furthermore, economists, including Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, have found that high-quality early education programs offer one of the highest returns of any public investment – more than \$3 for every dollar spent.⁴ It saves government spending on K -12 education, public assistance and the criminal justice system, and increases tax revenues as a result of higher earnings.⁵ If the savings generated from S.B. 1381 is reinvested in transitional kindergarten, California will see a return on investment of \$3.6 billion in present dollars.

“I’m really trying to get the business community excited about that [early education programs], because I do think I look for a great investment. The upfront costs are relatively low, but the output, the return on investment, is huge. We have three- and four-year-olds entering kindergarten unprepared to be able to read, to be able to socialize in their environment, and so I believe it’s absolutely critical for us to get to these kids at an early age and work on these deficiencies.”

— Ken McNeely, President of AT&T California

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