

## **Sacramento Bee**

September 26, 2010

### **Kindergarten bill would help spare kids the pain I felt**

Marcos Breton

I don't have to wonder if my childhood would have been fuller and less traumatic if I had started kindergarten a year later than I did.

I know it.

Beginning kindergarten at age 5, instead of 4, would have given me a leg up to succeed developmentally and emotionally in ways that eluded me in my school years.

A Public Policy Institute of California review of 14 studies found that students who wait to start kindergarten score better on reading and math tests.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has the power to make this law. On his desk is a bill by Sen. Joe Simitian, a Palo Alto Democrat, that would roll back the date by which entering kindergartners must turn 5 from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1.

Please sign it, Governor.

It's hard to describe the damage done when a kid feels dumb. That's how I often felt from the fall of 1967, when I started kindergarten at age 4, to the spring of 1980 when I graduated from high school at 17.

Being a November-born kid often meant being the youngest student in class. The main casualty in my young life was self-confidence.

That's not an issue for me today. On Tuesday night, a nationwide audience will see me featured prominently in the new PBS documentary on baseball by acclaimed filmmakers Ken Burns and Lynn Novick.

But as a kid my story was wrapped in self-doubt.

It began that first day of kindergarten, when separation anxiety from my parents caused me to bolt out an open door when my teachers weren't looking.

Can you imagine? I can still picture my teacher and her assistant frantically running after me in their sensible shoes and bouffant hairdos. The ensuing years brought so-so grades. I often faded into the background, shrank from challenges and withdrew within myself while life swirled around me.

What saved me were my late parents, immigrants from Mexico who wanted the best for my brother and me – even if they didn't always know how to help us achieve the best academically.

And at 19, I found a purpose – journalism.

I don't blame my teachers, though I was moved along in San Jose's public schools in the 1970s with remedial skills, particularly in math.

Even in my loving house there were bad study habits that should have been addressed much sooner.

Simitian's bill can't solve all the issues, but it does call for transitional kindergarten, which could be a godsend for poorer families who can't afford preschool.

It also allows exceptions for parents who want their kids to start kindergarten at age 4.

Signing this bill could be one of the last, best gestures Schwarzenegger can extend to Californians before leaving the state Capitol.

Our jails and unemployment rolls are populated with former kids who bombed out at school. Without love and good fortune, that could have been me.

## **Palo Alto Daily News**

September 24, 2010

### **Op-Ed: Giving young 5-year-olds the gift of time before school**

Sharon Keplinger

This fall, as families across California ease into the school season, many of Palo Alto's kindergartners will begin school more prepared for success because of the important skills they learned in Palo Alto's Young Fives program.

For the past 35 years, Young Fives has been giving the gift of time to our district's youngest kindergartners, providing them with an additional year to develop the skills that will put them on the path to academic success. With 120,000 4-year-olds entering kindergarten every year in California, programs like Young Fives are essential to ensuring all our children begin school ready to learn.

California is one of only four states that sets a cutoff date as late as Dec. 1 for kindergarten; at the same time, we have some of the most rigorous state standards for what we expect our children to learn in our kindergarten classrooms.

That is why we are excited that Sen. Joe Simitian has decided to address this critical issue and help close the kindergarten age gap with the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010, which will change the kindergarten entry date in California from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1, so children enter kindergarten at age 5. The legislation will also create a year of transitional kindergarten, similar to Young Fives, to provide 4-year-olds with birthdays between September and December with an additional year to master skills our youngest learners are routinely expected to develop before kindergarten.

Research shows changing the date for kindergarten entry so children begin kindergarten at an older age would increase test scores by as much as 27 percent in California. Additionally, we know high-quality early learning programs like Young Fives and Simitian's proposed transitional kindergarten boost children's chances of success in school and in life, and help close the achievement gap.

As an educator and administrator with the Young Fives program, I have observed firsthand the positive impact the program has had on our district's youngest learners, and on our community. During my 15 years as the Young Fives program coordinator, I have seen many children thrive during their year in Young Fives and go on to achieve great academic success in college and even graduate school.

That is why when I decided to enroll my own daughter, Erin, in the Young Fives program 22 years ago, I was confident that my decision would support her academic future. After excelling in high school, Erin went on to receive a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, followed by a master's degree in counseling psychology from the University of San Francisco. Erin attributes much of her success to the skills she learned in her Young Fives class.

High-quality early childhood programs build a bridge between early learning and kindergarten and are critical to ensuring children succeed in early elementary and beyond.

I applaud Simitian's efforts to take this important step toward reforming our state's K-12 education system. This is the first time in at least two decades that such a proposal has passed both houses of the Legislature, and I urge Gov. Schwarzenegger to take this historic opportunity to establish his legacy as a champion for education reform.

Sharon Keplinger is program coordinator for the Palo Alto Unified School District.

# Kindergarten at four: Can they succeed?

## Bill to delay start of kindergarten awaits governor's approval

By Cheryll Lingo  
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A bill headed to the governor's desk could change a decades old practice that has some kindergarten students heading to school at the tender age of four.

The change appeals to teachers who must deal with young students not yet ready for the rigor of today's kindergarten curriculum, but parents who have grown to rely on the public school system for the bulk of its child care may not agree.

California has the fourth-latest cut-off date in the nation. If SB 1381 passes, California would join 28 other states with a Sept. 1 birthday. The change would be phased in over a three year period, moving the date up by one month beginning in 2011. It would also create a transitional class for those students affected by the change.

Washington Elementary school principal Mary Stanley favors the proposal. "I wish they would do it right away," she said. "It makes a

huge difference in our kids."

Washington Elementary School has a state pre-school on its campus but Stanley said the program is heavily focused on child development, not necessarily on academics. But even children who have attended pre-school sometimes arrive in Kindergarten not ready to do the required work. Sometimes, she said, kindergarten students are retained to give them a chance to better prepare for success in school.

By moving the enrollment cutoff date - which means students will be older when they enter school - there is more opportunity to prepare children so they hit the ground running when they start Kindergarten, she said.

Language in the bill points to studies that indicate up to ten percent of parents voluntarily delay the start of kindergarten (often referred to as "redshirting") in order to increase the child's chances for academic success.

Although redshirting raises the average age of kindergartners, some researchers say the practice inadvertently contributes to the achievement gap because it is most often the children of more affluent parents that can afford to pay for pre-school options for their "young fives".

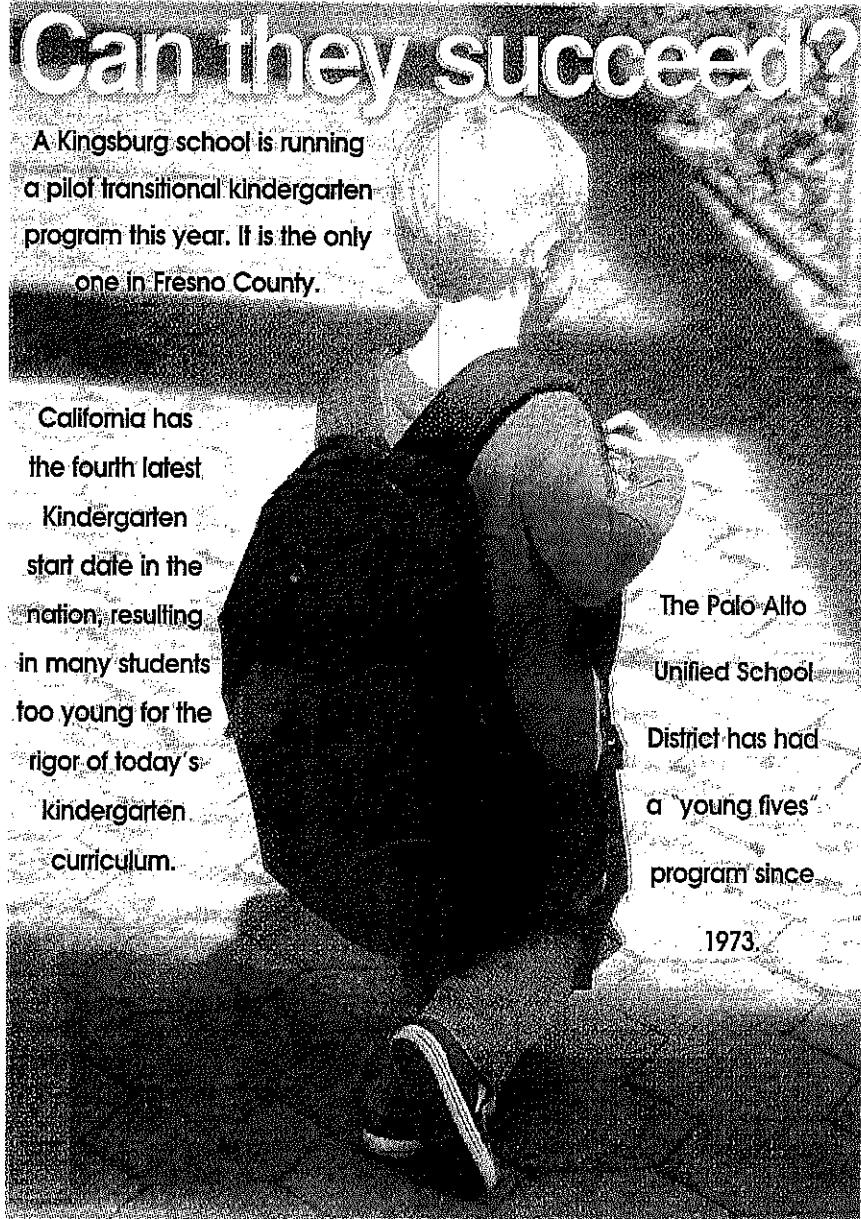
According to the Fresno County

See KINDERGARTEN on page 6

A Kingsburg school is running a pilot transitional kindergarten program this year. It is the only one in Fresno County.

California has the fourth latest Kindergarten start date in the nation, resulting in many students too young for the rigor of today's kindergarten curriculum.

The Palo-Alto Unified School District has had a "young fives" program since 1973.



# Kindergarten:

Continued from page 1

Office of Education's (FCOE) Associate Director of Early Childhood Care and Education Wilma Hashimoto, the state's move toward an earlier cutoff date and a transitional kindergarten program was anticipated. Last year, FCOE began meeting with principals of the 34 school districts in the county, inviting them to participate in developing a transitional kindergarten program that would work best in the county. Of a group of about 12 people who served on a steering committee, Kingsburg's Washington School was the most aggressive of the schools, Hashimoto said, and began this school year with a pilot transitional kindergarten program in place.

Kingsburg's Washington School principal Shirley Esau also believes transitional Kindergarten is the answer to the problem of children not doing well when they start school. At her campus, there are eleven kindergarten classes, and one of them devoted to the transitional program. Parent response to the program huge, she said, even leading to a waiting list to get into the class. Esau said she didn't have to hire a new teacher. She just moved one of the regular kindergarten teachers over to the Transition Kindergarten class which serves the youngest students.

It is a full-day program that uses California state standards, but the teacher focuses on helping students to develop skills and concepts at their own pace.

The state pays ADA funds for kindergarten students for up to two years, so the Transition students can move to a traditional kindergarten class

the next year, or - if they're ready - move to first grade.

"We call it the 'gift of time' because it lets children develop on many levels before they have to meet the rigor of traditional kindergarten," Esau said.

A handful of other school districts also have pilot programs this year, including Los Angeles Unified, Palo Alto, Torrance, Orange County, Sacramento, San Jose.

The Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) reports that the earlier cut-off date of SB 1381 would reduce kindergarten enrollment by about 100,000 students, reportedly freeing up about \$700 million that could be redirected for mandatory transitional kindergartens for students whose birthdays fall between the day after the new cutoff date and Dec. 2. But Hashimoto said the real benefits of SB1381 may not be monetary. Using an education phrase, she said transitional kindergarten can help students avoid the harsh reality of "start behind, stay behind" effects. "We think we can see a payoff [of transitional kindergarten] by age 8, but also up to age 18," she said.

Kings Canyon Unified School District Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Marcy Guthrie, said the district hasn't taken a stance on the issue yet. "We're watching this development carefully."

"It gets students into the system sooner so they are ready to learn," she said, noting the importance of early childhood education.

Hashimoto said kindergarten teachers already have to teach a separate curriculum for kindergarten students who aren't developmentally or academically ready to meet the requirements of the state standard-aligned kindergarten program. With transitional kindergarten class, students would be able to learn at their

level, without the risk of failing to meet the objectives of a regular Kindergarten class.

It would also mean more funding for school districts who would capture increased Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for students who have aged out of preschool programs but aren't ready for Kindergarten.

The California Parent Teacher Association and the Association of California School Administrators support the bill while the California Teachers Association has taken a neutral stance. But at least one state senator opposes the bill.

Senator Dave Cogdill (R-Modesto) disputes the claim that transitional kindergarten would save an estimated \$700 million. Instead, Cogdill said the bill would create \$700 million in annual costs at a time the state is facing chronic multi-billion dollar deficits.

Although he first voted in favor of the bill, Cogdill said last minute amendments in the Assembly removed any savings associated with the policy change.

"In 2008, I asked the Legislative Analyst to review the cost-savings of delaying kindergarten start dates and even taking into account the minimal increases in state-subsidized child care costs for the children too young to enter kindergarten, the state would have saved more than \$4 billion over four years." Cogdill said the transitional program will consume any cost savings.

At press time, SB 1381 still awaited the Governor's approval.

## Los Angeles Times

September 7, 2010

### Transitional kindergarten a step closer for California

Carla Rivera

At Gulf Avenue Elementary in Wilmington, 4-year-olds in a transitional kindergarten class start the day singing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" before sitting down to trace the letter A and learn its sound. Nearby, students in the school's regular kindergarten class are also hard at work, reading and writing sentences.

The two sets of students are separated in age by only a few months, but the gulf in maturity and academic skills is wide.

Teacher Carmina Gonzalez, who helps some of the 4-year-olds with their letters while tending to a little girl who is crying distractedly, says she saw the contrasts every day in the kindergarten classes she taught.

"The younger ones are all about exploration: They want to walk around, I couldn't get them to sit," she said. "Sometimes they do well, but as the grades get more difficult and the curriculum gets more difficult, that's when we see them fall behind."

Those disparities are one reason many educators are supporting legislation that, if signed by the governor, would require that California children entering kindergarten turn 5 by Sept. 1 rather than Dec. 2.

The bill, SB-1381, which was approved by the Legislature last week, would also provide a year of transitional kindergarten for children with fall birthdays, essentially creating another grade level for an estimated 120,000 4-year-olds.

California is one of only a few states with a kindergarten cutoff date later than Sept. 1, and many educators believe that puts younger children at a disadvantage when entering today's academically demanding kindergarten classes.

Transitional kindergarten would provide two years of preparation for the first grade, which supporters say would boost test scores and reduce special education placements and the number of students held back a grade.

"Today's kindergarten is not what most of us think of when we remember our own experience decades ago," said state Sen. Joe Simitian (D- Palo Alto), who wrote the legislation. "It's a pretty rigorous place these days, and the youngest are struggling to keep up. One thing that caught my attention was a kindergarten report card that had a space for algebra skills, and I thought, 'OK, this is a lot more challenging.' Too many kids are just not ready."

In fact, in a practice some call kindergarten red-shirting, parents frequently hold their child back a year to allow them to mature and give them an academic advantage.

Typically, they are parents with the means to pay for an additional year of childcare or to send children to private preschool programs. Some critics question the long-term benefits of holding a child back, but the proposed changes in California would help level the playing field for low-income children and English learners, proponents say.

The California legislative analyst's office estimated that changing the cutoff date could save the state \$700 million annually by having 100,000 fewer kindergartners in school. The savings would be used by districts to establish transitional programs, so the legislation is considered cost neutral.

The age change would be phased in by moving the cutoff date a month earlier for three years beginning in 2012. Children born after Sept. 1 could still start kindergarten if their parents applied for early admission and the school district agreed it would be in the child's best interest.

Transitional kindergarten programs would be staffed by credentialed teachers and adhere to basic kindergarten standards, but with a curriculum that emphasizes fine motor skills, hands-on activities, learning to write names and basic counting.

The change would help young children who might otherwise find themselves competing academically with classmates six months to a year older, said Debra Weller, president of the California Kindergarten Assn., which began calling for a later start to kindergarten more than two decades ago.

Over time, expectations for kindergartners have increased dramatically. They now are expected to be able to write three sentences with punctuation, read simple sentences and at least 50 words on sight, do simple addition and subtraction, and understand concepts of social studies and science.

But many 4-year-olds would still rather roll around on the rug and scribble, said Weller, a teacher at Bathgate Elementary in Mission Viejo.

"There's nothing wrong with their intelligence, they are perfect little 4-year-olds doing what 4-year-olds should do; but they start to realize they're not equal to their peers, so their self-esteem can start to be affected," said Weller, who has taught kindergarten for 18 years. "In many cases, they are the children who wind up in intervention classes and wind up being retained and costing a lot of extra time and resources."

Weller's observations are borne out by a 2008 report by the nonprofit Public Policy Institute of California, which reviewed 14 studies that examined the effects of entry age on student outcomes. Several of the studies suggested that older students are less likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability and more likely to attend college.

For Emma Payares, the transitional program at Gulf Avenue made sense for her 5-year-old son. The boy, whose birthday fell after last year's kindergarten deadline, can be shy in social situations and his attention sometimes wanders, she said.

"Some children, especially boys, need that extra help so that they are not crammed with academics so quickly," said Payares, 53, a community instructor for the Los Angeles Unified School District. "They need time to develop socially, so it's definitely the ideal situation for him."

The legislation is supported by business, education, civic and child advocacy organizations.

The California Teachers Assn. has adopted a neutral position, after opposing a previous version of the bill that did not provide for transitional programs. A spokesman said the group would have liked more flexibility for local school districts and parents to determine what's best for individual children.

L.A. Unified launched a voluntary pilot transitional program this fall that will enroll about 900 students at 38 schools, including Gulf Avenue, said Whitcomb Hayslip, assistant superintendent for early childhood education.

The added year will be a special help to the school district's many dual language learners, he said. "These children come to school with many challenges but also a great opportunity, and that foundation year can give them the boost that they need," Hayslip said.

At Gulf Avenue, about 20 students attend the transitional class and most parents were enthusiastic, said Principal Nora Armenta.

"In affluent areas, the 'preppy K' programs have been around for a while because parents saw the need for their children, but not so much in working-class areas," Armenta said. "It's great that more children are going to have the same opportunity."

# Transitional kindergarten a leg up for younger kids

Posted at 10:28 PM on Tuesday, Sep. 21, 2010

By Tracy Correa / The Fresno Bee

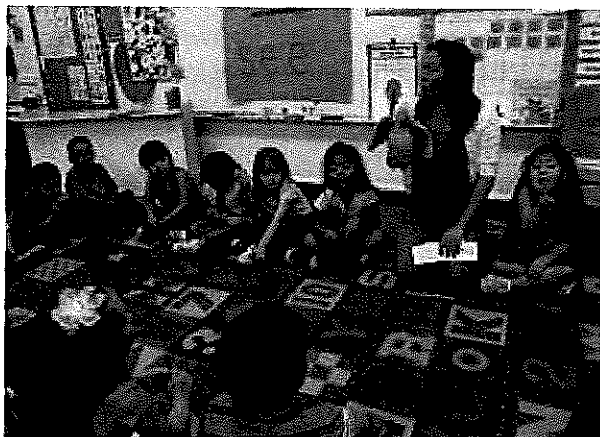
Monica Hoenig could have enrolled her 4-year-old son, Ryan, in kindergarten this year, but she was concerned that his lack of maturity would cause him to lag academically -- not only now, but in years to come.

So she signed him up for a pilot transitional kindergarten program at Washington School, a charter school in Kingsburg.

The transitional program gives Ryan an extra year to learn some of what's taught in kindergarten. But Ryan also can learn at a slower pace -- and with far less pressure to master skills such as writing.

The new program in Kingsburg, one of a growing number of transitional kindergarten classes statewide, would be mandated under proposed legislation that would hike the age of kindergartners and give younger children the chance to be better prepared when they enroll.

Parents and some education activists have tried for years to raise California's age requirement for kindergarten, but past bills failed to win legislative support.



Ying Lee teaches word identification in a transitional kindergarten class for younger students at Kingsburg's Washington Elementary School. The program gives younger students an extra year to learn skills such as writing with far less pressure.



MARK CROSSE / THE FRESNO BEE

Teacher Ying Lee, at right, gives instruction to Elijah Garcia, 5, in a transitional kindergarten class for younger students at Kingsburg's Washington Elementary School.

## HOLDING BACK

SB 1381 would push back the kindergarten entry date in California in phases. By 2014-15, all children would have to be 5 years old by Sept. 1 to enroll.

### It breaks down this way:

In 2011-12, kindergartners must turn 5 by Dec. 2;

In 2012-13, by Nov. 1;

In 2013-14, by Oct. 1;

In 2014-15, by Sept. 1.

In most states, children must turn 5 by Sept. 1 to enroll in kindergarten. However, California 4-year-olds can enroll in kindergarten as long as they turn 5 by Dec. 2. Only three other states -- Connecticut, Michigan and Vermont -- allow such young children to enter kindergarten.

Critics of raising the age requirement worry that doing so would cause some children to lose out on a year of learning, especially those whose parents couldn't afford private preschool or qualify for government-sponsored preschool.

The latest effort to reform California's kindergartens is Senate Bill 1381, which would change the entry age and require transitional kindergarten programs. The bill, called the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 and sponsored by Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, is awaiting Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's signature. The difference this time is the transitional kindergarten component.

Under the legislation, transitional classes would be funded with money that would have been spent on traditional kindergarten. The classes would provide 120,000 of the state's 4-year-olds -- including nearly 50,000 English-language learners and many low-income children -- with age-appropriate learning.

It just makes sense, said Shirley Esau, Washington's principal. She said she talks with nearly a dozen families yearly that choose to delay kindergarten enrollment for 4-year-olds who aren't ready. "And those are the ones we know about," she said.

Other families, especially lower-income families who have no place to leave their children when they go to work, place them in kindergarten, even though they may not be ready.

Transitional kindergarten gives these families a new option, she said: "You have preschool and kindergarten, and sometimes you just need a bridge."

When the Fresno County Office of Education was looking for a school partner to pilot the program, Washington was a natural choice, Esau said. The small campus about 25 miles south of Fresno is a preschool and kindergarten-only school with about 400 students from the Kingsburg area.

Esau had expected to limit the first-year transitional class to 20 students, but when more families signed up, she expanded the class to 25 students. The school is providing an aide to help with students for the first half of the year. Next year, Esau plans to add a second class.

At Washington School, squirmy 4-year-olds listen to teacher Ying Lee as she gives them instructions on painting pictures of apples in red, green or yellow.

"They are practicing their fine motor skills," explained Lee, who has taught kindergarten for six years. The youngsters learned about the fruit and colors, and also tasted apples as part of the lesson.



## Kindergarten Transition Program: Beverly Park Elementary Gets Kindergartners Ready for Their First Big Day

by Molly O'Connor | 0 Comments

Beverly Park Elementary School kindergarten teacher Richard Dunn says he's never had such a great start to the school year ... and the school year doesn't officially start until next week.

Dunn and four other kindergarten teachers at the White Center-area school are at school this week with many of the school's 76 incoming kindergartners as part of the new Kindergarten Transition Program. For three hours each morning, kindergartners are getting to know each other, their teacher and what to expect at school, such as how to behave in circle time, where to find the bathroom and how to get lunch.

During this week, teachers also visit each family's home to learn more about their students' families, set share goals, and talk about school expectations and ways for families to support learning at home.



Dunn says it's great to have this time with the kindergartners before the big kids show up next week and that it will make it so much easier to jump into the school year. Dunn advocated for the program to come to his school after hearing how successful it has been in Yakima schools.

Beverly Park's Kindergarten Transition Program is supported by the White Center Early Learning Initiative's (WCELI), one of two Thrive by Five Washington Demonstration Communities.

The Kindergarten Transition Program first started three years ago in four East Yakima schools as part of the work of Ready by Five, the other Thrive Demonstration Community. Results from the 2008 pilot showed the power of an early start for kindergartners.

- Teachers said they could start teaching on Day 1 because children already knew expectations, routines and procedures.
- 99% of parents reported that they felt comfortable talking to their child's teacher; 98% reported that their child liked school.
- Principals reported that the incidents of children crying or refusing to comply on the first day of school was markedly reduced and, in most cases, eliminated.

All elementary schools in the Yakima School District offer the Kindergarten Transition Program. Participating teachers say it gives them, their students and their students' families a much better start to the school year.

"This is my 14th year beginning the year with kindergarten students and NEVER have I had more of a successful start to my year," said Leah Meiser at Yakima's Garfield Elementary. "All but 5 know how to write their name mostly without looking. (Usually only 5 can scribble the first couple letters and the rest circles). Most know how to hold a pencil. Most know how to play school. The adjustment with these kids the two weeks before school starts is amazing. Just having these students learn procedures and take ownership of their own learning without older brothers and sisters is huge! Before this program, the kids would cry, bang their heads on doors, want to have their brother or sister with them all day long. I had one crier this year; it lasted as long as it took [the mom] to walk out the door. From then on, he hasn't cried. This time was meant to bond and build relationships and we did. I have never had a better start to my year and I have to say thank you."

The program is funded by The Norcliffe Foundation.

## **Fresno Bee**

August 12, 2010

### **Op-ed: Change age for kindergarten entry date in state**

Larry Powell

*Larry L. Powell is Fresno County superintendent of schools.*

This summer, as the Fresno County Office of Education remains hard at work to prepare all of its students for another successful year, I encourage California policymakers to ensure our students' success by supporting SB 1381, a bill to change the kindergarten entry date.

California's children begin kindergarten at a younger age than kids in almost any other state, often before they are prepared to meet the challenges of school.

We are one of only four states that allow children as young as 4 years old to attend kindergarten; at the same time, we have some of the highest standards in the nation for what we expect our children to learn in our kindergarten classrooms.

Currently, if children turn age 5 by Dec. 2, they can attend kindergarten. SB 1381, sponsored by state Sen. Joseph Simitian, will change the kindergarten entry date in California from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1, so all children enter kindergarten at age 5.

Changing the kindergarten entry date in California also will generate savings that would be used to give children an additional year of preparation before kindergarten. This transitional kindergarten will provide 4-year-olds who turn 5 between September and December with a year of early education to help them develop the skills they need to succeed in kindergarten.

Research shows that moving the kindergarten entry date increases test scores by as much as 27%, an improvement that particularly affects the children with the largest school readiness gaps who need the extra preparation most. Additionally, children who attend high-quality early learning programs are less likely to drop out of high school, be held back a grade, or be placed in special education, and are more likely to score better on reading and math tests.

Fresno County is one of several counties that have recognized the significant benefits and potential of a transitional kindergarten program. Beginning this fall, Washington Elementary School in Kingsburg will open a new classroom for 24 of the district's youngest students, providing them with an extra year of preparation before kindergarten to develop the skills that will help them succeed in elementary school and beyond.

The program at Washington Elementary, called Transition Kindergarten, is part of a pilot program being offered through the Kingsburg Elementary Charter School District, and will allow children additional time to mature socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically in the year before kindergarten.

Children in the pilot Transition Kindergarten class will benefit from focused instruction and hands-on activities that encourage them to develop skills and concepts at their own pace. Furthermore, the new class will emphasize language, pre-literacy and early math instruction to build a foundation for future learning.

High-quality early childhood programs like transitional kindergarten provide critical preparation for California's students to enjoy success in elementary school and beyond.

I encourage the California legislature to support SB 1381, setting our children on a path to develop the skills they need to build a brighter future for California.