

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

To: Superintendents of Schools
Early Care and Education Providers

From: Beth Bye, Commissioner
Office of Early Childhood

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Connecticut State Department of Education

Date: July 7, 2023

Subject: Minimum Age to Enroll in School

The primary purpose of this joint memo from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is to ensure that all parties are aware of the recently enacted change by the Connecticut General Assembly to raise the minimum age for automatic entry into public school in Connecticut. Specifically, Section 1 of Public Act 23-208, Section 1 states that children will need to **turn five on or before September 1 of the school year** in order to be automatically eligible to enroll in school. The legislation also allows a school district to admit a child who has not turned five by September 1 of the school year if the parent makes a request in writing and the school district conducts an assessment of the child to ensure that admitting such child is developmentally appropriate.ⁱ

Prior to this change, Connecticut had among the youngest school entry ages in the country. This policy change has significant implications for families, early care and education providers, and school districts. In addition to making sure that all parties are aware of this change, this joint communication also affirms the commitment of the two agencies to work closely with all concerned parties, including policy makers, to assess the impact of this change, identify solutions, develop detailed guidance, and support implementation. While we will continue to work together on supporting effective implementation, the CSDE and OEC **ask that districts and early care and education providers honor all commitments to families already enrolled for preschool in fall of 2023, regardless of the time frame for that child's entry to kindergarten.**

The CSDE and OEC fully understand the many important considerations and significant implications facing all of us due to this legislative change. Some of those are detailed below.

- First and foremost is the impact on **students and their families**. It is estimated that there will be more than 9,000 students in 2024-25 who will be unable to automatically enroll

in school in Fall 2024 because they will not have turned five by September 1. It will be critical that these families, including those living in rural areas of our state, are supported to the greatest extent possible so that they can access high quality pre-school educational opportunities for one more year. This will be particularly important for families of children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) who receive special education services during pre-school. When community-based Birth to Three services end, working families are often challenged by half day public preschool special education models. This change extends that challenge for a year for impacted families.

- **Public and Private Early care and education programs** are expected to see a significant increase in the demand for preschool spaces. It is estimated that approximately 71% of all entering Kindergarten students access preschool. If more than 9,000 students do not turn five by September 1 and are unable to enroll in school in Fall 2024, then potentially an additional 6300 students will need preschool spaces somewhere, and it is anticipated that 2,700 will have no formal education for another year. To meet the increased demand, early care and education programs may need to make adjustments and have wider age ranges in preschool classrooms/programs. The OEC and CSDE are not discouraging private or public programs from enrolling children younger than three years old in September into preschool. We know how important the early years are for supporting child development and well-being. It is expected that public school and private programs will need additional professional development to support curriculum and instruction practices for mixed-age preschool classrooms.
- **School districts** are expected to see significantly lower enrollment in Kindergarten in Fall 2024 and a potentially smaller grade cohort moving through our education system. The enrollment and resulting grade cohort could potentially be smaller by about 9,000 students. Many of these students will likely need to continue receiving preschool services (both general education and special education) for an additional year, which could reduce capacity for new preschool spaces. Choice programs that charge tuition may face an extended year of reduced funding at sliding-scale preschool tuition rates. Districts will also need to determine if they will admit students less than five years old based upon a child assessment, and if so, how that process will be implemented.

In the coming weeks, both agencies will seek extensive input from many stakeholders and work collaboratively to develop detailed guidance and implementation recommendations. In the meantime, school communities are urged to engage in proactive and collaborative dialogue throughout the community. Teams of staff from early care and education programs, school districts, and early childhood councils and collaboratives should assess the anticipated impact for their own community, communicate with families about this change, begin planning for collaboration and coordination over the next year to minimize the negative impact on children and families, and facilitate an open dialogue among all impacted parties.

The CSDE and the OEC will share details regarding opportunities to provide input. Thank you for your cooperation and collaboration in implementing this major legislative change.

ⁱ Public Act 23-208, Section 1(a) reads as follows:

Sec. 1. Section 10-15c of the general statutes, as amended by section 3 of public act 23-159, is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2024):

(a) The 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 [January] 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.