



## Kindergarten

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### Access to Kindergarten: Age Issues in State Statutes

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This *StateNote* documents how state lawmakers have addressed kindergarten-related age issues, including compulsory school age, kindergarten entrance age, early entrance to kindergarten, skipping kindergarten and kindergarten exemption.

#### *Kindergarten Entrance Age*

The entrance age cut-off dates for kindergarten are not uniform across states.

- Only four states (California, Connecticut, Michigan, Vermont), the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands have cut-off dates between December 1 and January 1. This practice leads to a robust mix of 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten. Hawaii passed legislation to change the cut-off date from December 31 to August 1, beginning with the 2006-07 school year.
- Thirty-five states and Puerto Rico have kindergarten entrance cut-off dates between August 31 and October 16. These policies lead to fewer 4-year-olds entering kindergarten, but classrooms consist of a combination of 4- and 5-year-olds entering each fall.
- Four states (Alaska, Hawaii, Indiana and Missouri) have cut-off dates on or before August 15. While legislative intent cannot be determined without additional research, it can be supposed that these states want to ensure all children are 5 years old before they enter kindergarten. Hawaii passed legislation to change the cut-off date from December 31 to August 1, beginning with the 2006-07 school year.
- Another six states (Colorado, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania) leave the entrance-age question up to local district decision.
- One state, Ohio, allows local districts to choose a cut-off date of either September 30 or August 1.

#### *Early Entrance*

No matter when the age of entry is set, most kindergarten classrooms have an age span of at least one year among students. Further contributing to this age span are allowances for early entrance to kindergarten. Statutes in 28 states allow children to enter kindergarten before they reach age eligibility; one state does not permit early entrance; and 21 state laws, as well as laws in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, are silent on the issue.

#### *Compulsory School Attendance*

Only eight states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have a compulsory school age of 5 that effectively, if not explicitly, mandates kindergarten attendance for all children. Compulsory attendance ages in the other states range from age 6-8. These laws allow parents and schools to delay a

child's entrance into kindergarten for a year. The reasons for delaying entry into kindergarten include beliefs that some children are not yet developmentally ready to succeed and beliefs that older children are more able to adapt to the intellectual, social-emotional and academic demands of kindergarten.

*Permissive Kindergarten Attendance, Skipping Kindergarten and Kindergarten Exemption*

Fourteen states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands require students to attend kindergarten. Of those states and territories, only Tennessee does not allow exemptions from kindergarten attendance. Delaying entrance to kindergarten and skipping kindergarten altogether — whether because the state does not mandate kindergarten attendance, because students enter 1st grade early or because students exempt out of school until the compulsory school age — raise equity issues because both the causes and the effects of such practices vary. For instance, access to high-quality early childhood education programs and/or enriched educational environments at home are likely effective replacements for kindergarten at age 5. Children from better-educated and wealthier families, however, are more likely to have access to such experiences than poorer children from less-educated homes.

**Key:**

***Decision – (parties listed)***

A decision to allow early admittance to individual children on a case-by-case basis may be made by the parties listed.

***Policy – (authorities listed)***

The authorities listed may adopt a policy to allow early admittance; this policy must be applied equally to every student seeking early admittance.

***Gifted***

A child may be allowed early admittance if s/he is determined to be gifted.

***LEA***

Local education agency

***NA***

Not Applicable. Kindergarten attendance is not mandatory in this state.

***Not permitted***

Under no circumstances may a child be allowed early admittance.

***Not specified***

This issue is not addressed in state statute.

***Parent request***

A child may be exempted from kindergarten upon the request of a parent or guardian.

***Readiness***

A child may be allowed early admittance if it is determined the child is ready to attend at a younger age. A child may be admitted to 1st grade without attending kindergarten if a readiness screening is passed.

**Transfer**

A child who was enrolled in another state or district may continue to attend the grade s/he was enrolled in when transfer to the new district or state occurred. If a child completed kindergarten in another district or state, s/he may be admitted to 1st grade.

State	Compulsory School Age	Kindergarten Entrance Age (Child must be 5 on or before this date)	Early Entrance to Kindergarten Allowed?	Student Attendance in Kindergarten	Skipping Kindergarten Allowed (Enter 1st grade at age 5)?	Kindergarten Exemption Allowed?
Alabama	7	September 1	Transfer	Permissive	Transfer	NA
Alaska	7	August 15	Transfer	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Arizona	6	September 1	Decision – parent, child, teacher and principal	Permissive	Decision – parent, child, teacher and principal	NA
Arkansas	5	5 on or before September 15 (In 2009-10, the date will change to on or before September 1. In 2010-11 the date will change to on or before August 15. Thereafter the date will be on or before August 1.)	Transfer	Mandatory	Not specified	Readiness and Parent request
California	6	December 2	Decision – school district and parent	Permissive	Decision – school district and parent	NA
Colorado	6	LEA option	Gifted	Permissive	Gifted	NA
Connecticut	5	January 1	Decision – local school board	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request
Delaware	5	August 31	Decision – local school authorities	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request
District of Columbia	5	December 31	Not specified	Mandatory	Not specified	Not specified

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Florida	6	September 1	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Georgia	6	September 1	Transfer	Permissive	Transfer	NA
Hawaii	6	August 1	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Idaho	7	September 1	Not specified	Permissive	Transfer	NA
Illinois	7	September 1	Decision – school district	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Indiana	7	August 1	Decision – parent and superintendent	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Iowa	6	September 15	Not specified	Permissive	Readiness	NA
Kansas	7	August 31	Transfer	Permissive	Transfer	NA
Kentucky	6	October 1	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Louisiana	7	September 30	Gifted	Mandatory	Readiness	Readiness
Maine	7	October 15	Transfer	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Maryland	5	September 1	Not specified	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request or Readiness
Massachusetts	6	LEA option	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Michigan	6	December 1	Not specified	Permissive	If district does not offer kindergarten	NA
Minnesota	7	September 1	Not specified	Permissive	Policy – local school board	NA
Mississippi	6	September 1	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA

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Missouri	7	August 1 LEA Option between August 1 and October 1 for metropolitan districts.	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Montana	7	September 10	Decision – board of trustees	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Nebraska	6	October 15	Transfer or Readiness	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Nevada	7	September 30	Not permitted	Mandatory	Not permitted	Parent request and Readiness
New Hampshire	6	LEA option	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
New Jersey	6	LEA option	Decision – local school board	Permissive	Not specified	NA
New Mexico	5	September 1	Not specified	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request
New York	6	LEA option	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
North Carolina	7	August 31	Transfer or Gifted	Permissive	Decision – principal	NA
North Dakota	7	September 1	Transfer or Readiness	Permissive	Transfer or Gifted	NA
Ohio	6	September 30 or August 1	Policy – school district	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request and Readiness
Oklahoma	5	September 1	Not specified	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request

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Oregon	7	September 1	Policy – local school board	Permissive	Policy – local school board	NA
Pennsylvania	8	LEA option	Not specified	Permissive	Policy – state board of education	NA
Puerto Rico	5	August 31	Not specified	Mandatory	Not specified	Not specified
Rhode Island	6	September 1	Not specified	Mandatory	Not permitted	Not specified
South Carolina	5	September 1	Transfer or Decision – school district	Mandatory	Decision – school district	Parent request
South Dakota	6	September 1	Transfer	Permissive	Transfer	NA
Tennessee	6	September 30	Not specified	Mandatory	Not permitted	Not permitted
Texas	6	September 1	Readiness and Policy – school district	Permissive	Transfer	NA
Utah	6	September 2	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Vermont	6	January 1 or LEA option between August 31 and January 1	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA
Virgin Islands	5	December 31	Not specified	Mandatory	Not specified	Not specified
Virginia	5	September 30	Readiness	Mandatory	Not specified	Parent request
Washington	8	August 31	Decision – LEA	Permissive	Decision – LEA	NA
West Virginia	6	September 1	Decision – county board	Mandatory	Decision – county board	Readiness

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Wisconsin	6	September 1	Policy – school district	Permissive	Policy – school district	NA
Wyoming	7	September 15	Not specified	Permissive	Not specified	NA

*This ECS StateNote was originally completed by Kristie Kauerz, program director, and Jessica McMaken, researcher, as part of ECS' study, Full-Day Kindergarten: An Exploratory Study of Finance and Access in the United States, which is funded by a grant from the Foundation for Child Development.*

Full details on each category in this *StateNote* are available online in ECS' searchable database of kindergarten policies. The database may be accessed at [www.ecs.org/kindergarten](http://www.ecs.org/kindergarten).

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