

New Law Kicks Some Indiana Kindergarteners to the Curb

By Shawnta S. Barnes – April 26, 2018



Unfortunately, every four-year-old student currently in preschool won't be able to attend kindergarten in the fall like their parents had planned. House Enrolled Act 1001, signed into law by Governor Holcomb on March 19, requires that only students who are five on or before August 1 be counted in

the school's average daily membership (ADM). What is the big deal about this change?

In many cases, students who were close to the cut-off date and attended preschool the prior school year or deemed ready to attend kindergarten were granted a waiver to enter kindergarten. These students were counted towards ADM. The number of students counted determines basic and complexity grant funding for each school. According to a memo from IDOE:

This change means that if a school enrolls, in the manner outlined above, a student who is less than five years of age on August 1, the school may not receive state tuition support for that student. This is a legislative change, which takes effect immediately.

Simply, if a school district admits a kindergartener under a waiver, the district receives no funding for that student. The district would have to foot the \$6,000 bill per student for each kindergarten waiver granted.

This leaves families with few options and a short amount of time to make a decision. My parents experienced a similar situation with my youngest sister. Her birth date was June 3 and the kindergarten cut off when she was entering kindergarten in the early 90s was June 1. My parents believed she was ready for school so they enrolled her in private kindergarten. Private kindergarten is an option for preschool parents who now cannot send their children to kindergarten in the fall. Many districts are no longer granting waivers because they will not receive funding for these students, but everyone can't afford to pay for private kindergarten. Some parents will have to sit their children down and explain to them why they will be staying in preschool for another year.

Kindergarten in Indiana is complex. Attending kindergarten is still not mandatory since students don't have to attend school in Indiana until they are seven. Despite not being mandatory, the majority of Hoosier families send their children to kindergarten even though districts weren't even required to offer full-time kindergarten until former Governor Mitch Daniels signed it into law in 2012.

I wish this bill would not have gone into effect immediately. Why couldn't we wait until the 2019-2020 school year? This would have given families adequate time to make a plan or to save money for private kindergarten if necessary or to give districts an opportunity to see if they could look at their budgets and pay for some students who needed waivers.

Kindergarten teachers are special people. They set the foundation for school and I believe districts try their best to only grant waivers for preschool students who are ready for the kindergarten curriculum. When are we going to start listening to educators and school districts? If we did listen, the compulsory school entry age would have been lowered and kindergarten would be mandatory by now. Educators, not lawmakers know when a child is ready to enter school and schools should not have to turn students away who are ready because they won't have the funding to educate them.