



Indiana's Kindergarten Entry Date Will Change for the Upcoming School Year

By Educator Barnes – May 1, 2019

For this school year, students had to turn five on or before August 1 to be eligible for kindergarten enrollment. For the 2019-20 school year, the law has changed. Parents will now be able to send their child to school if his or her birthday falls on or before September 1. Since the law was written into the state budget, it also affects the 2020-21 school year. At the beginning of that school year, parents can enroll their child if his or her birthday falls on or before October 1.

When I attended school in Indiana, the state fair happened, and then a couple of weeks after that at the end of August, I returned to school. That isn't the case anymore. Most schools begin during the first week of August. I currently work for the MSD of Wayne Township, and we started school this school year during the last week of July. That meant that all kindergarteners started school at age five or turned five within a few days of the school start date this school year.

Next school year, that won't be the case. Students could be four-years-old for weeks while the rest of their classmates are already five. During the 2020-21 school year, students could be four for two months while the rest of their classmates are five. This could pose a serious challenge for kindergarten educators who are already under pressure to ensure students are reading books and able to do some math problems before kindergarten ends. Some students, at four-years-old, might not be up to the task.

I believe this change is due to the push back legislators received last school year. Last school year, the law changed which strongly discouraged schools from accepting students before they were eligible on or before August 1. Prior to this current school year, if parents believed their child was ready for kindergarten but the child's birthday was after August 1, the school district could evaluate the child and decide to allow the parent to enroll the child. When the law changed last school year, districts could still follow the same procedure, but the school district, not the state, would have to foot the bill to enroll the child. In response to the change, the majority of school districts did not allow students whose birthday fell after August 1 to enroll because they could not afford it. In IPS, some parents had already signed up their child using Enroll Indy before that bill was signed into law, so a few school districts like Indianapolis Public Schools did allow some students to enroll who didn't meet the new requirements even though that meant the school district had to pay the cost of those children's enrollment.

With this change, parents don't have to worry about being turned away if their child is still four when the school year begins because the start date is being pushed back over the next two school years. This change also does not force parents to enroll their children even if they will be five on or before the new start date since children, by law, do not have to begin school in Indiana until they are seven.

It will be interesting to learn how this change will affect kindergarten teachers' ability to ensure all students are where they need to be when students exit kindergarten. When children are young, the difference in maturity could be drastically different. At the end of the day, this legislation gives parents the power to decide, and that is what parents have requested for years.