

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
 AB 1444 (Buchanan and Weber)
 As Amended April 22, 2014
 Majority vote

EDUCATION	6-1	APPROPRIATIONS	12-5
Ayes:	Buchanan, Olsen, Gonzalez, Nazarian, Weber, Williams	Ayes:	Gatto, Bocanegra, Bradford, Ian Calderon, Campos, Eggman, Gomez, Holden, Pan, Quirk, Ridley-Thomas, Weber
Nays:	Chávez	Nays:	Bigelow, Donnelly, Jones, Linder, Wagner

SUMMARY: Requires, beginning in the 2016-17 school year, a child to complete one year of kindergarten before he or she may be admitted to first grade.

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) The California Department of Education (CDE) estimates that approximately 28,000 students were not enrolled in kindergarten or any grade in 2010-11. These students did not attend kindergarten and instead went straight into first grade upon enrollment in school. CDE does not track data on private schools therefore it is not known how many of the 28,000 children attended private kindergarten and would meet the requirements of the bill.
- 2) The CDE estimates a per average daily attendance (ADA) rate of \$8,221 in 2016-17 for kindergarten. This rate assumes: 16% of the total Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) grant at full implementation is allocated to concentration and supplemental grants, an average annual cost of living adjustment of 2%, and about 88% of the target towards full implementation of the LCFF would be funded by 2016-17. For illustration, assuming 15,000 students start school not having completed one year of kindergarten. Using an ADA rate of \$8,221, the state would incur ongoing General Fund and Proposition 98 (1988) costs of approximately \$123.3 million.

COMMENTS: Under current law, compulsory education begins at age six until age 18. Any person subject to compulsory education found away from home without a valid excuse for not attending school can be arrested by school officials or peace or probation officers. Current law does not require a child to attend kindergarten but requires school districts to admit a pupil for kindergarten if a parent wishes to enroll a child as long as the child will be five years old by September 1, for the 2014-15 school year and every year thereafter.

This bill requires kids to attend kindergarten before enrolling in first grade. In the 2011-12 school year, 488,742 pupils were enrolled in kindergarten out of a total enrollment of 6,220,993. The CDE also reports that 43,753 pupils attended private kindergarten programs in 2011-12. The CDE estimates that between 90% to 95% of pupils eligible for kindergarten actually attend kindergarten (public and private). The CDE reviewed data of kids enrolled in first grade in the 2011-12 school year but were not enrolled in kindergarten in 2010-11 and found that 28,000, or 5.7% of kids entered the public school system for the first time in first grade. It is unlikely that all 28,000 skipped kindergarten; many of these kids may have enrolled in private schools for kindergarten.

The Education Commission of the States reports that, as of December 2010, 19 states have mandatory kindergarten policies, including Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virgin Islands, Virginia, Wisconsin and West Virginia. Of the 19, 11 have compulsory education starting at age five, the remaining eight require students to attend school beginning age six or older.

Kids who attend kindergarten are better prepared academically and socially for first grade. For children who have not attended preschool, kindergarten is where they learn how to hold a pencil properly, follow directions, as well as the alphabets and math concepts. Kindergarten is also where they learn reading skills. Kids who enter first grade without having attended kindergarten start first grade behind those who did. First grade teachers must also spend time teaching kindergarten level academics and social skills instead of focusing full attention on first grade standards if they have kids in their class that are entering school for the first time in first grade. Bruce Fuller, an education professor at the University of California, Berkeley, made this statement in a 2002 *Los Angeles Times* article, "Compulsory, full-day kindergarten is the lost soul of public education."

A 2010 study, "Who Benefits from Kindergarten? Evidence from the Introduction of State Subsidization," shows that kindergarten has a positive effect on those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The study looked at outcomes – both long and short term – in the academic and labor markets based on the availability of public school kindergarten in the United States and found that kids from lower income families who attend kindergarten are less likely to be below grade level through their academic careers and earn wages five percent higher as adults.

This bill does not change the age of compulsory education at age five. The author believes that all kids should be required to attend kindergarten but also believes that parents should have the ability to start them at an older age if that is what they believe to be developmentally best for their kids. A possible effect of this bill is that the age of kids in the kindergarten through grade 12 system will be older in every grade. If parents start their kids in kindergarten at age six, then they will be older going into all remaining grades.

The author states, "Research supports the importance of early childhood education. The new Common Core State Standards have academic expectations for kindergarten students. If children don't attend kindergarten, they begin first grade behind and may finish high school behind. This bill ensures all children begin first grade with the foundation for future success, while providing parents the flexibility to determine when the child is developmentally ready for kindergarten."

The Private School Advocacy Center opposes the bill and states, "Mandatory kindergarten creates an unjustified financial burden on two classes of citizens in the state of California. First, those that have children that will have to attend a private school one additional year. These parents, may already be suffering financially, may not be able to afford the education location of their choice or will have to go further in debt to accommodate their child. Secondly, citizens of the state of California will have to pick up the additional cost of buildings and facilities to accommodate these new students entering public schools."