

Members:

Rep. Paul Robertson, Chair
Rep. Dennis Avery
Rep. Greg Porter
Rep. Cleo Duncan
Rep. Robert Hoffman
Rep. Rich McClain
Sen. Teresa Lubbers, V. Chair
Sen. Robert Meeks
Sen. Greg Server
Sen. Mark Blade
Sen. Billie Breaux
Sen. Connie Sipes



INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION ISSUES

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Authority: Legislative Council Resolution 2-1998

MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: June 10, 1998
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St., Room 233
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 1

Members Present: Rep. Paul Robertson, Chair; Rep. Dennis Avery; Rep. Greg Porter; Rep. Cleo Duncan; Rep. Rich McClain; Sen. Teresa Lubbers; Sen. Robert Meeks; Sen. Mark Blade; Sen. Billie Breaux; Sen. Connie Sipes.

Members Absent: Sen. Greg Server; Rep. Robert Hoffman.

Chair Robertson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair Robertson introduced the members of the Committee to the audience. After introductions, Chair Robertson had David Hoppmann, Legislative Services Agency, briefly explain the Committee's charge, authority, and budget to the members of the Committee and to the audience.

Chair Robertson explained that in the interest of time, the Committee would study three issues: 1) birth date for kindergarten enrollment; 2) funding for full-day kindergarten; and 3) special education issues relating to ISTEP. With regards to full-day kindergarten, he indicated that discussions would relate to fully state funded optional programs.

At this time, Chair Robertson indicated that the Committee would hear testimony regarding birth date for kindergarten enrollment.

TESTIMONY

Terry Spradlin, Legislative Liaison, Department of Education

Mr. Spradlin distributed a packet to the Committee reflecting his presentation (Exhibit #1).

¹Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House, Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage at <http://www.ai.org/legislative/>

Mr. Spradlin gave an overview of his handout relating to the following items: 1) current law; 2) current brain research; 3) DOE state survey results of kindergarten attendance; and 4) Senate Bill 145-1998 (SB 145) which would have ultimately changed enrollment date to September 1 under a staggered implementation.

Mr. Spradlin also indicated that during the 1998 General Assembly, the Senate Education Committee voted in favor of SB 145 with a vote of 6-4. Chair Robertson acknowledged this, and expressed interest in why there were four votes against it. Mr. Spradlin indicated that the fiscal impact of the bill was a point of contention with regards to school corporations and to the school funding formula.

At this point, Chair Robertson had Mark Goodpaster, Legislative Services Agency, give a brief overview of the fiscal impact of SB 145 (Exhibit #2) to the members of the Committee and to the public audience.

Senator Lubbers indicated that there were additional concerns other than just fiscal issues. She stated that there was some resistance to changing the enrollment date when it had just been changed 11 years before. She also stated that certain educators believed that a more mature student was more likely to succeed. She explained that there should have been a better presentation of compelling facts to warrant another change.

Mr. Spradlin indicated that changing the kindergarten enrollment date to September is absolutely a priority for DOE. He added that full-day kindergarten is also a priority but that DOE is not sure which of the two is its highest priority.

Mary Beth Morgan, Primetime Coordinator, Department of Education

Ms. Morgan explained research that supports DOE's position on moving the birth date for kindergarten enrollment to September 1 (Exhibit #1). She indicated that programs such as Head Start do not serve all children seeking a pre-kindergarten experience.

Ms. Morgan stated that Indiana has the earliest cutoff date in the nation for kindergarten enrollment. She added that Indiana citizens are very mobile, and that older children moving to other states could experience difficulties in school systems outside of Indiana due to the early cutoff date.

She addressed the point that there are people currently living in Indiana that would not have moved to Indiana had they known about the June cutoff date for kindergarten enrollment. She stated that people in Indiana care very much about this subject.

Ms. Morgan indicated that the appeal process to allow younger children into kindergarten is not uniform across school corporations due to the fact that school corporations are not required to follow specific guidelines. She added that she believes the process is bias with regards to cost due to the fact that certain school corporations charge parents to test their children. She indicated that although DOE has expressed a legal opinion against this practice, it is still continued.

At this point, Senator Meeks expressed interest in research that would support an early cutoff date as opposed to a later cutoff date. He indicated that he would like to see both sides of the issue, and not just data that supports DOE's position on a September cutoff date. Ms. Morgan indicated that DOE would do a search and provide this information to the Committee.

Chair Robertson asked Ms. Morgan if DOE could produce gender research specifically addressing whether or not males are mature enough to attend kindergarten at an earlier age. She indicated that DOE does not have such research but would look for this information and provide it to the Committee.

Senator Breaux asked Ms. Morgan if DOE had given any thought to an adjustment to curriculum in light of a kindergarten enrollment date change. Ms. Morgan indicated that school curriculum should be developmentally appropriate, and that DOE strongly supports adjusting the current curriculum to meet the needs of all children regardless of the kindergarten enrollment date.

Senator Sipes indicated that kindergarten teachers are concerned about curriculum and the ISTEP test with regards to a later kindergarten enrollment cutoff date. She explained that if we continue to judge schools on ISTEP test scores, we also need to look at how appropriate the curriculum is with regards to an enrollment date change.

Senator Sipes, Senator Lubbers and Ms. Morgan then discussed the 3rd grade ISTEP test and how learning differences, due to age, are usually dissipated by the 3rd grade. In light of this discussion, Chair Robertson reiterated his request to DOE regarding research that does not support DOE's position on a later kindergarten enrollment cutoff date. He indicated that academic adequacy is more important than maturity with regards to this issue.

Mr. Spradlin indicated that DOE would provide this information to the Committee.

Dr. Ena Shelly, Professor, Butler University; Board Member, Professional Standards Board

Ms. Marlane Tisdale, Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, spoke for Dr. Ena Shelly. She stated that Dr. Shelly had recently experienced a death in the family and would be unavailable for comment. Ms. Tisdale informed the Committee that Dr. Shelly is in agreement with the September kindergarten enrollment cutoff date.

Dick Thompson, North Salem

Mr. Thompson distributed a packet to the Committee reflecting his presentation (Exhibits #3a, 3b, and 3c).

Mr. Thompson stated that he is concerned about what happens to a child that is not mature enough to be in kindergarten. He urged caution in determining whether or not a child should be allowed to attend kindergarten at an earlier age. He stated that he only wants to provide information to the Committee.

He stated that maturity and academic readiness are two different things. He explained that the reason for an enrollment cutoff date of June was established in 1987, was due to the fact that enrollment cutoff dates were "all over the board". He stated that the goal was to establish one cutoff date.

Mr. Thompson made reference to a study done in 1984 (Exhibit #3a) which supports an earlier kindergarten enrollment date. He stated that this study would be a study that Senator Meeks would like to read since it does not support DOE's position on the issue.

Senator Lubbers expressed concern that Indiana has one of the earliest kindergarten enrollment cutoff dates. She indicated, however, that the Committee needs absolutely convincing reasons to recommend changing the enrollment date. She expressed concern that the study provided by Mr. Thompson is outdated, and suggested that a different kind of student exists today as opposed to 15 years ago.

Senator Lubbers agreed that some children may not be ready to attend kindergarten at an earlier age, but indicated that the Committee needs to find out if staying at home an extra year is good for the child. In light of these comments, and similar comments from the Committee, Chair Robertson asked Mr. Spradlin to provide 3rd and 6th grade ISTEP scores broken out by age cohort.

Mr. Spradlin indicated that DOE would provide this information to the Committee.

Trish Weis, Director of Early Childhood, Anderson Community Schools

Ms. Weis began her testimony providing her background in the area of early childhood education and her experience with at-risk children. Ms. Weis stated that the issue is not about younger or older kids, but more about what it is that we want for all kids.

Ms. Weis expressed concern about the appeal process, and stated that age is the only unbiased criterion for kindergarten enrollment cutoffs. She indicated that no parent should have to make the decision to appeal on behalf of their child. She added that many parents lack financial resources to appeal even if they would like to do so.

She stressed that parents who provide an intellectually stimulating environment for their children should be applauded. She added that the education community should be concerned with the children who do not benefit from such an environment. She stated that this is why Indiana needs to change its kindergarten enrollment date.

Representative Avery expressed concern regarding Ms. Weis's stance on the appeal process. He stated that he receives a lot of complaints regarding this issue and would like to see the appeals process changed.

Ms. Weis stressed that the appeal process is very diversified and even if it is changed, it could still favor one child over the other. She explained that certain children will always benefit from a positive intellectual environment but that other less fortunate children will not. She added that this is the reason she is against an appeals process as opposed to changing the kindergarten enrollment date cutoff.

Senator Sipes asked Ms. Weis if she is concerned that an appeals process that precludes a child from attending kindergarten could result in academic difficulty for the child in later years. Ms. Weis indicated that she is concerned about such a scenario.

Tom Smith, Principal, North Harrison Elementary School

Mr. Smith distributed an article to the Committee supporting his position (Exhibit #4).

Mr. Smith stated that there are no villains in this debate. He explained that parents simply want what is good for their children. He indicated, however, that moving the kindergarten enrollment date to a later time, would affect children throughout all grades.

Mr. Smith indicated that age is an advantage to young children in a school environment. He added that often in the past, parents retained their children in order to ensure that they would excel at sports. He explained that brain development is not unlike physical development. He purported that older students in a kindergarten environment are ready to learn whereas not all younger students are.

Mr. Smith added that teachers tend to sacrifice more prepared students in order to help less prepared students. He indicated that he would prefer to see either mandatory or full-day kindergarten as well as pre-kindergarten instead of changing the kindergarten enrollment date.

Senator Lubbers stated that their will always be older as opposed to younger children in a kindergarten classroom. She explained that we will never be able to take care of such a discrepancy. Mr. Smith stated that younger children are less prepared to learn in an academic environment.

Representative Avery stated that Indiana's kindergarten students are the oldest in the nation. He asked whether or not our ISTEP scores should reflect this. Mr. Smith answered that it is difficult to isolate how a child learns.

Lisa Jones, Counselor, North Harrison Elementary School

Ms. Jones testified that she does not agree with moving the kindergarten enrollment date to September. She stated that although some younger children may learn and succeed in a kindergarten environment, they will not be happy. She explained that this is due to the fact that they are not emotionally prepared to operate in a structured classroom environment.

Ms. Jones indicated that it is desirable to prepare a child intellectually but that the child should also be emotionally equipped to function in a school environment. She contended that age is a determining factor in the emotional preparedness of a child in a kindergarten setting.

She suggested that children take advantage of pre-school programs, and that such programs will enable them to intellectually and emotionally develop.

Mr. Lynn Black, Director of School Improvement, MSD Pike Township

Mr. Black distributed a packet to the Committee reflecting his presentation (Exhibit #5).

Mr. Black began his testimony with a description of Pike Township's appeal process. He indicated that Pike Township does not test children as part of its process. He indicated that he is disturbed that certain school corporations require the testing of children to enroll in kindergarten if born before the June cutoff date. Mr. Black stated that testing should be used as an assessment and diagnostic tool.

Mr. Black reported that Pike Township grants approximately 90% of its waivers into kindergarten. He also reported that currently there are approximately 54 children waiting to enroll in kindergarten early, of which a small percentage will not meet the appeals criteria.

Mr. Black explained that schools should be ready for children, and not the other way around. He stated that the education community should not be about testing children to come to school. He contended that if back in 1987 we had the data that we have today, the kindergarten enrollment date would not likely have been set in June.

Mr. Black explained that there is a "window of opportunity" regarding the intellectual development of children and that the education community needs to recreate such an opportunity in kindergarten classes. He stated that certain children who do not enroll in kindergarten because of the cutoff date will go back to intellectually deprived environments. Mr. Black indicated that he is not in favor of the education community deciding if a child is ready. He explained that early childhood programs are more effective than are remediation programs.

Senator Meeks asked Mr. Black specifically whether or not he was for or against changing the kindergarten enrollment date. Mr. Black stated that he is not for changing the date. To this response, Senator Meeks asked why then does Pike Township change the date through an appeals process if he would not allow the General Assembly to do so. Senator Meeks stated that if the General Assembly changes the date, Pike Township's issue of 54 students on appeal would disappear. Senator Meeks made the point that if the law is changed, a small percentage of children who are not ready in the opinion of Pike Township would be allowed to enroll in kindergarten.

Marlane Tisdale, Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children

Ms. Tisdale distributed a packet to the Committee reflecting her presentation (Exhibit #6).

Ms. Tisdale stated that the kindergarten enrollment cutoff date should be moved to September. She explained that age is the only unbiased factor to determine the appropriate age for kindergarten enrollment. She stated that it is the job of teachers to adapt to the students, not the students to the teachers.

She briefly explained that older is not necessarily better. She stated that there is overwhelming evidence that "earlier is better" with regards to brain development. Ms. Tisdale suggested that before the General Assembly considers full-day kindergarten, it should consider changing the enrollment date cutoff.

Senator Meeks asked Ms. Tisdale how many members are in the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children. She indicated that there are approximately 1,800 members statewide made up of kindergarten teachers. She added that her group is affiliated with a national organization as well.

Senator Blade asked Ms. Tisdale why she would prefer changing the enrollment cutoff date instead of establishing full-day kindergarten. She indicated that there are children who do not have positive home environments that are conducive to positive intellectual development. She restated that teachers should adapt to students and not students to teachers.

Senator Blade brought up the point that there is much disagreement regarding this issue within the education community. He added that the State would be investing a lot of resources. He posed the question of why the General Assembly should change the enrollment date if the education community is

not in total agreement.

Ms. Tisdale suggested that there is always a wide span regarding children's abilities to learn, and that the curriculum should be adjusted in order to compensate for such differences. She also entertained the idea that family backgrounds should be considered.

Senator Meeks asked how active Ms. Tisdale's organization is with regards to kindergarten curriculum development. She indicated that it is very active. In response, Senator Meeks asked how her organization impacts Indiana's 294 school corporations. He also asked her to provide her organization's curriculum plan. Ms. Tisdale indicated that she would provide this information to Senator Meeks.

Ruth Guthrie; Donna Laut; and Stephanie Adamson, Require Entrance Age Change Today (REACT)

Ms. Laut and Ms. Adamson provided the Committee with handouts reflecting REACT's position on the kindergarten enrollment date cutoff change (Exhibits #7a and 7b).

The following members of REACT addressed the Committee in the following order: 1) Ms. Laut; 2) Ms. Guthrie; and 3) Ms. Adamson.

1) Ms. Laut stated that she wants teachers to do their jobs, and not to wish that they had older and more mature students to teach. She contended that every child's right to attend kindergarten was taken away in 1987 with the adoption of the June cutoff date. She indicated that she does not want children labeled as failures by not passing a test to gain entrance into kindergarten.

Ms. Laut indicated that she is in agreement with SB 145 but would like to see the change in enrollment date be effective immediately instead of over a staggered period of time. She added that full-day kindergarten would not be a wise move until the enrollment date is changed.

Representative Robertson stated that the General Assembly is very concerned with this issue, otherwise, there would not be a study committee looking into these matters. He stated that SB 145 had some problems in the Senate and that to answer the questions, a study committee was created.

Representative Avery explained that in 1987, he voted "no" for the June cutoff date, and that while he agrees with Ms. Laut regarding the changing of the enrollment date, he is concerned with her negativity regarding full-day kindergarten. He stated that it has worked well in his district and works well in other states. Ms. Laut stated that once the enrollment date is changed, she would not be against full-day kindergarten.

Senator Meeks indicated that the State has to look at the overall good of its citizens with regards to this issue, much as it does regarding the issuance of a driver's license. He stated that he is there to listen to all sides.

2) Ms. Guthrie and Ms. Adamson addressed several issues including the difference between two- and three-year old with regards to learning ability, the importance of home environments, as well as how wrong it is to make children wait to attend kindergarten. Ms. Guthrie explained that to make a child wait until six years of age for kindergarten enrollment is an injustice.

Representative Avery asked for a membership count of REACT. Ms. Adamson stated that REACT has no current count.

Senator Blade asked Ms. Adamson if she would have moved to Indiana had she known about the June cutoff date for kindergarten enrollment. She answered that she would not have moved to Indiana.

Robert Kalinsky, Carmel

Mr. Kalinsky stated that he would not have moved to Indiana had he known about the June cutoff date for Kindergarten enrollment. He explained that he has a two-year old daughter who will be more than ready

for kindergarten even though her birthday falls after the June cutoff date.

Mr. Kalinsky stated that he would look for private schools were it not for a lack of resources. He stated that he is afraid that the June cutoff date will be a detriment to his daughter all the way into college.

He urged the Committee to help the kids of Indiana by moving the kindergarten enrollment date to September.

Donnette Trader, Gosport

Ms. Trader stated that she is against the June cutoff date. She explained that she is a mother and that she is concerned for her three-year old daughter born after that date. She indicated that her daughter is ready to learn right now. She stated that she as a mother knows her daughter best, and that making her wait until six years of age could kill her desire to learn.

Ms. Trader explained that programs such as Head Start are not available to her daughter and that she would urge the Committee to recommend an August enrollment cutoff date.

FINAL BUSINESS AND FUTURE MEETINGS

Chair Robertson stated that the next meeting would be held on June 24, 1998 at 10:00 A.M. He stated that as the Committee moves into different areas of discussion, other emotional topics are likely to be discussed. He stated that the next issue to be addressed would be funding for full-day kindergarten.

Chair Robertson explained that the Committee would decide what to vote on later in the summer. He expressed a desire to meet bi-weekly and to finish committee work by Labor Day.

Representative Avery asked if the budget could be expanded to meet more than five times. Chair Robertson stated that he would "play that by ear". He added that if there is an opportunity, the Committee would entertain other issues. He stated, however, that in the interest of time, he does not want to cover all issues of the charge.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.