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**SFA****BILL ANALYSIS**

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Senate Bill 447 (as reported with amendment)  
Sponsor: Senator Joanne G. Emmons  
Committee: Education

Date Completed: 10-6-99

### **RATIONALE**

Under the Revised School Code, in a school district that provides kindergarten, a child who resides in that district is entitled to enroll in the kindergarten if he or she is at least five years of age on December 1 of the school year. Because of the December 1 eligibility date, kindergarten classrooms often include children who range in age from four to six years. Some teachers and others believe, however, that many younger children have not progressed sufficiently in their physical, emotional, or intellectual development, and are not ready to start school. It has been suggested that the eligibility date for enrollment be changed from December 1 to September 1 to ensure that children are at least five years of age when they enter kindergarten.

### **CONTENT**

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to require a child to be at least five years old on September 1, rather than December 1, in order to enroll in kindergarten. The bill would take effect July 1, 2001.

(The Code also provides that, in a district that has semiannual promotions, a child who resides in the district may enroll in kindergarten for the second semester if he or she is at least five years old on March 1 of the year of enrollment. In addition, a child who lives in a school district that does not maintain a kindergarten and who is at least five years of age on the first day of enrollment for a school year, may attend school in the district. The bill would retain these provisions.)

MCL 380.1147

### **ARGUMENTS**

*(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)*

#### **Supporting Argument**

Michigan is one of seven states in the country where children who are four years old at the start of a school year in September, but who will turn five by December 1, may be enrolled in kindergarten. Many children who begin school before their fifth birthday, however, do not have the intellectual, emotional, and physical maturity necessary to participate successfully in a kindergarten program. Lack of success in the early years of school can affect children throughout the rest of their educational experience. By moving the required birthdate up by three months, the bill would help ensure that children would start school at an age that was more developmentally appropriate for kindergarten.

#### **Opposing Argument**

Since children start school with different abilities, chronological age is not a good indicator of a child's capacity to learn. There is no one age that determines success in kindergarten, and changing the entry age would not resolve concerns about a child's readiness for school. Instead of changing the date for enrolling in kindergarten, the State should design curricula that would meet the needs of each child, accommodate differences in development, and ensure a child's educational progress. Furthermore, teachers should be prepared specifically to teach young children and provide them with appropriate classroom programs that would help these children to perform successfully. Rather than focusing on the readiness of children to enter kindergarten, the State should address the readiness of schools and teachers to educate children regardless of their background, aptitude, or level of socialization.

#### **Opposing Argument**

Recent research on brain development and learning indicates that with quality stimulation, learning can occur in very young children. Moving the date up three months for kindergarten eligibility could hold

back young children who are otherwise ready for school. Deciding when a child enrolls in kindergarten should not be based solely on whether he or she meets an age requirement, but should depend on the total development of the child, as determined by parents, teachers, and school officials. In addition to meeting the needs of children who are less ready for school, the State should not neglect the interests of precocious children. These children should not be forced to stay out of school for a year because their birthdays did not fall three months earlier.

#### **Opposing Argument**

The change in the kindergarten eligibility date could affect a number of at-risk children who need quality preschool programs to improve their chances of succeeding in school. Since the entry date of these programs corresponds to the date for kindergarten eligibility, moving this date forward by three months could result in a similar move of the entry date for programs serving at-risk preschoolers. In light of contemporary thinking about the importance of stimulation in relation to brain development of young children, early intervention and preschool programs actually should be started earlier, rather than later.

#### **Opposing Argument**

There will always be a group of children born in the last three months of any 12-month period. Consequently, there will always be a group of children who are the youngest in a class, regardless of the entry date. For example, a child who turned five years old just before the September 1 deadline would still be the youngest in a classroom of youngsters who turned five earlier in the summer or who were to turn six just after September 1. Furthermore, many kindergarten teachers and experts in early childhood education note that any kindergarten class will include children who exhibit a two-year range in ability, since children grow and develop at different rates. The developmental range of students in a kindergarten classroom as a result of the bill would not change from the range found under the current age eligibility date.

**Response:** Apart from the developmental range of class members, the bill would address the maturity level of the individual kindergartner. Since it is necessary to draw the line somewhere, it would be better to base eligibility on the age of a child at the approximate time a school year begins, rather than three months later.

Legislative Analyst: L. Arasim

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The State would realize savings of approximately one-fourth of the cost of foundation allowance payments for kindergartners. Of the estimated 123,000 kindergartners, approximately one-fourth (or 31,000) pupils would have to wait an extra year

before enrolling in kindergarten. Based on FY 1999-2000 estimates, the result would be savings to the State of an estimated \$196,400,000. These savings would continue for 13 years until the first kindergarten grade reached graduation.

Local districts would have a loss in revenue equal to the above-mentioned figures. The grade affected by this legislation would be permanently reduced by one-fourth throughout the K-12 educational cycle of those pupils. Similarly, the school district would receive one-fourth less in revenues for those 13 years.

Fiscal Analyst: J. Carrasco

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.