



Early Learning - Kindergarten

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State Characteristics: Kindergarten

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Summary:

For the 50 states, District of Columbia and three U.S. territories (American Samoa, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands):

- 16 states set the lower compulsory attendance age at 7; 23 states and one territory set the age at 6; and 8 states, the District of Columbia and two territories set the age at 5. Two states specify that students must attend after age 8.
- Cut-off dates on the entrance age range with 28 states and 1 territory setting a date in September; 8 states set a date in August; 3 states set a date in October; 2 states, the District of Columbia and 1 territory set a date in December; two states set a date in January; and 6 states leave the date to the option of the local education agency
- In 45 states or territories, districts are required to offer kindergarten
- In 19 states or territories, pupils are required to attend kindergarten

Relevant Policy Questions:

- Even though compulsory entrance age ranges from five to eight across the states, in practice — do most children start kindergarten at age five?
- If children in states with higher compulsory ages are starting later, how does that manifest in their performance and test scores?
- Are there benefits to setting a higher compulsory entrance age? What are they?
- Would parents, children and schools benefit from more clarity and alignment of the ages at which a child is eligible to attend school and the age at which the child is required to attend school?

Key:

M= Mandatory

P= Permissive

LEA= Local Education Agency

STATE	COMPULSORY AGE	KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCE AGE	DISTRICT OFFERING	PUPIL ATTENDANCE
		States		
AL	7	5 on or before 9/01	M	P
AK	7	5 on or before 8/15	P	P
AZ	6	5 before 9/01	M ¹	P
AR	5	5 on or before 9/15 ²	M	M ³

STATE	COMPULSORY AGE	KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCE AGE	DISTRICT OFFERING	PUPIL ATTENDANCE
States				
CA	6	5 on or before 11/01 ⁴	M	P
CO	6	LEA option	M	P
CT	5	5 by 1/01	M	M
DE	5	5 on or before 8/31	M	M
DC	5	5 by 12/31	M	M
FL	6	5 by 9/01	M	P
GA	6	5 by 9/01	M	P
HI	6	5 by 8/01 ⁵	M	P
ID	7	5 by 9/01	P	P
IL	7	5 on or before 9/01	M ⁶	P
IN	7	5 on or before 8/01	M	P
IA	6	5 on or before 9/15	M	P
KS	7	5 on or before 8/31	M	P
KY	6	5 on or before 10/01	M	P
LA	7	5 on or before 9/30 ⁷	M	M ⁸
ME	7	5 on or before 10/15	M ⁹	P
MD	5	5 by 9/01	M	M
MA	6	LEA option	M	P
MI	6	5 on or before 12/01 ¹⁰	P	P
MN	7	5 by 9/01	M	P
MS	6	5 on or before 9/01	M	P
MO	7	5 before 8/01 ¹¹	M	P
MT	7	5 on or before 9/10	M	P
NE	6	5 on or before 10/15 ¹²	M ¹³	P
NV	7	5 on or before 9/30	M	M
NH	6	Not specified in statute	P	P
NJ	6	LEA option ¹⁴	P	P
NM	5	5 before 9/01	M	M
NY	6	LEA option	P	P
NC	7	5 on or before 8/31	M	P
ND	7	5 before 9/01	P	P
OH	6	LEA option ¹⁵	M	M
OK	5	5 on or before 9/01	M	M
OR	7	5 on or before 9/01	M	P
PA	8	LEA option	P	P
RI	6	5 on or before 9/01	M	M
SC	5	5 on or before 9/01	M	M
SD	6	5 on or before 9/01	M	M
TN	6	5 on or before 9/30	M	M
TX	6	5 on or before 9/01	M	P
UT	6	5 on or before 9/02	M	P
VT	6	5 on or before 1/01 ¹⁶	M	P
VA	5	5 on or before 9/30	M	M
WA	8	5 on or before midnight 8/31	M	P
WV	6	5 on or before 9/01	M	M
WI	6	5 on or before 9/01	M	P
WY	7	5 on or before 9/15	M	P
U.S. Territories				
AS	6	5 by 9/01	M	M
PR	5	5 by start of school	M	M
VI	5	5 by 12/31	M	M

Equipping Education Leaders, Advancing Ideas

¹ Each school district shall establish a kindergarten program in Arizona, unless the governing board of the school district files an exemption claim with the department of education.

² Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, entrance age changes to 5 on or before 8/01.

³ In Arkansas, pupil attendance is mandatory, but parents can request a waiver.

⁴ California's kindergarten entrance date changes to 5 by 9/01 in 2014.

⁵ The entrance age for junior kindergarten is 5 after 8/01 and before 1/01.

⁶ Illinois permits districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs and receive full state aid.

⁷ The entrance age in Orleans Parish, Louisiana School District is 5 by 12/30.

⁸ Louisiana specifies mandatory half-day attendance or test for first-grade readiness.

⁹ In Maine, schools shall either operate a kindergarten program or otherwise provide for students to participate in such a program.

¹⁰ If the school district has semiannual promotions, a child may enroll in kindergarten for the 2nd semester if he is at least 5 on 3/01 of the school year.

¹¹ The law is different for metropolitan school districts. Those districts "may establish and enforce a regulation which requires that a child shall have attained the age of five for purposes of kindergarten and summer school prior to a kindergarten school term...on or before any date between August 1st and October 1st of that year."

¹² With the 2012-13 school year, the entrance age changes to 5 on or before 7/31.

¹³ Kindergarten is required for accreditation in Nebraska.

¹⁴ A district may admit to kindergarten "any child over the age of 4 and under the age of 5 and shall admit...any child over the age of 5 and under the age of 6 years who is a resident of the district.

¹⁵ Districts may choose to set the cut-off date for August 1 or September 30.

¹⁶ Local education agencies may choose to set the kindergarten entrance date between 8/31 and 1/01.