

MINUTES

EARLY CHILDHOOD SUBCOMMITTEE  
OF THE  
HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Monday, January 9, 2012  
10:30 A.M.  
Room 171, State Capitol  
Little Rock, Arkansas

Representative Debra Hobbs, the Chair of the Early Childhood Subcommittee of the House Interim Committee on Education, called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

**MEMBERS OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION IN ATTENDANCE:** Representative Debra Hobbs, Chair; Representative James McLean, Vice Chair; Representative Eddie Cheatham, Ex Officio; Representative Karen Hopper; Representative Tim Summers; and Representative Kathy Webb.

**OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ATTENDANCE:** Representative Lori Benedict; Representative Robert Dale; Representative Donna Hutchinson; Representative Sheilla Lampkin; Representative Homer Lenderman; and Representative Loy Mauch.

Representative Hobbs stated that the purpose of the meeting is to hear testimony and begin gathering information for Interim Study Proposal (ISP) 2011-030. She thanked members for their attendance.

Preliminary Discussion of Interim Study Proposal (ISP) 2011-030 by Representative Mauch, TO AMEND THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MINIMUM AGE FOR ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTEN

**The Honorable Loy Mauch**, State Representative, District 26, was recognized. He said he sponsored House Bill 1442 in the 2011 Regular Session. However, given concerns about the legislation, the bill had not been pursued. It was referred to interim study so that information could be gathered and the legislation refined for reintroduction during the 2013 Regular Session. Representative Mauch said he is looking for this study to have a positive effect on the proposed legislation. Handouts, including several published by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), were distributed to members.

**Mrs. Carrie Collins**, Kindergarten Teacher, Magnet Cove Elementary School, Malvern, Arkansas, and Parent, was recognized. Mrs. Collins testified that she is a parent of a child born August 3, 2007, and her child is negatively affected by the Bill because the child's fifth birthday misses the cut-off date for entering kindergarten by two days. She said August 1 is good from an educator's point of view; but, from a parent's perspective, there needs to be some flexibility with age requirements.

A discussion session followed Mrs. Collins' testimony. **Mr. Mark Hudson**, Senior Legislative Analyst, Bureau of Legislative Research, was recognized, and provided information, as necessary. Topics included:

- deciding social readiness of a child to attend school,
- best solutions for Arkansas that do not put additional responsibilities on the school district,
- number of children in Arkansas that would be affected by a change,
- stance of the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) on the bill,
- data needed on how flexible enrollment is working in other states,
- testing for kindergarten readiness,
- maturity playing a role in student achievement,
- background to setting Arkansas's start date; Arkansas's start date vs. that of other states, and
- goal of proposal should be for the advantage of the child.

Representative Hobbs thanked Mrs. Collins for her testimony.

**Dr. Richard Abernathy**, Executive Director, Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, was recognized. Dr. Abernathy commented that this issue has been studied for many years, and changes have been made many times; there's no magical start date. He thought that administrators, teachers, and preschool programs were on board with August 1. He expressed the opinion that the start date should be left alone, so legislators can focus on other aspects of the state's public education system.

Representative Hobbs thanked Dr. Abernathy for his remarks.

**Mrs. Leigh Nogy**, Parent, Lowell, Arkansas, was recognized. Following an account of her son's positive emotional experience and academic proficiency in preschool at age three years and three months, Mrs. Nogy commented that he will be ready to enter kindergarten on August 1 at age four, turning five on September 26. She stated it would be detrimental for her son's development if he is unable to start school because of not meeting the age requirement by two months. She said some children are ready for early entry and some aren't. She said parents should have a choice, and the state should consider leaving the decision of a suitable kindergarten entrance age to parents.

**Mr. Chris Nogy**, Parent, Lowell, Arkansas, was recognized. Mr. Nogy said that instead of trying to figure out how to standardize a response to 90%-93% of children who fall within statistical norms, it should be of critical importance to provide the flexibility to address those children, especially the exceptional ones, who fall outside of the norms. If only 600 kids in the entire state are affected by this change, but those 600 kids are exceptional children who are ready for an early educational and socialization process, the end output from those children, *i.e.*, the benefits to society, to family, to those children themselves, is something that shouldn't be dismissed because of the numbers. There has to be a process that can be initiated by those who are personally familiar with students, can recognize exceptional students, and can move them towards achieving their potential.

Representative Hobbs thanked Mr. and Mrs. Nogy for their testimony.

**Mr. Davis Hendricks**, Legislative Liaison/GT Advocacy, Arkansans for Gifted & Talented Education (AGATE), was recognized. Mr. Hendricks stated that AGATE is interested in the potential for flexibility, because Arkansas has a population of students who would benefit from it. He said this is about devising a process that makes sure the right people, *i.e.*, educational authorities, local school districts, and teachers, who can give good information about a child's readiness, can work together to make decisions about children who should not be held back if they're indeed ready. AGATE has no issue with the date, other than setting the date and then moving it around, which does nothing to address the issue. The issue is flexibility and developing a process that is manageable, implementable, and fair for all kids, all parents, and the schools.

Topics raised following Mr. Hendricks' presentation were: 1) getting the exact numbers from North Carolina for children who qualified for early admission to kindergarten, and 2) the cutoff date for schools counting students.

Representative Hobbs thanked Mr. Hendricks for his comments.

**Dr. Laura Bednar**, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Learning Services, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized. Dr. Bednar commented that the pendulum has swung back and forth on the start date, and August 1 seems to be working better than others. She said the concern should be on what is best for the student. She stated there does need to be flexibility that would allow early start in some cases, so considering options is good.

**Ms. Tonya Russell**, Director, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, Arkansas Department of Human Services, was recognized. Ms. Russell explained that the set entry date for starting school is used by many state programs and federal programs in rules regarding young children. She said a change was considered in 2007, which was a rolling date from August 1 to September 15; it created complete confusion for schools as well as for parents. She said that window affected about 600 children per week, and hasn't changed significantly since then. Ms. Russell said she has done some research and thinks the August 1 date is good, but options should be explored. She said putting a process into place would benefit schools and parents who are interested in early start. Ms. Russell clarified that it is a law in Arkansas that the Qualls Early Learning Inventory (QELI), an assessment tool for use in the primary grades to identify student development, has to be administered by every school district and taken by every child coming into kindergarten, so that apples can be compared to apples.

In the discussion that followed, topics included 1) whether or not the October 1 cutoff date allows sufficient time for a comprehensive evaluation of a child, and 2) the approach to a child's evaluation for early start should be consistent and promptly executed.

Representative Hobbs thanked Dr. Bednar and Ms. Russell for their input.

In closing remarks, Representative Mauch reemphasized that maturity levels differ among children. He said the key word is flexibility.

Representative Hobbs thanked Representative Mauch for bringing this issue to the Subcommittee's attention. She announced that the next meeting will be scheduled after all information is gathered.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

*Approved: 11/26/12*