

SOUTH WINDSOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dr. Kate M. Carter
Superintendent of Schools
(860) 291-1205

Tracie D. Peterson
Assistant Superintendent
Curriculum and Instruction
(860) 291-1210

Dr. Richard J. Sanzo
Assistant Superintendent
Personnel and Administration
(860) 291-1215

Chris M. Chemerka
Director of Finance & Operations
(860) 291-1269

D R E A M . A C H I E V E . I N S P I R E .

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Dear families:

The purpose of this letter is to inform families of new legislation regarding kindergarten entrance age, the implications for families and school districts, and South Windsor's local approach to implementation. If you have a neighbor, relative, or friend with preschool age children living in South Windsor we encourage you to share this letter with them.

The Connecticut legislature passed PA 23-208, which is new legislation that changes the minimum age for entering kindergarten. Prior to this new legislation, a child must have turned five years old on or before January 1 of the academic year for which the child was being registered. The new legislation states that a child must turn five years old on or before September 1 of the academic year for which the child is being registered. The new legislation, however, also allows for exceptions to this age requirement. The inclusion of exceptions within the legislation has left many families uncertain about their child's access to kindergarten for the 2024-2025 academic year. I hope outlining the district's approach will be helpful to families.

South Windsor Public Schools encourages families to register their children for kindergarten only if their child will turn five years old on or before September 1, 2024. However, because of the lack of notice to families and the related hardships this may cause, South Windsor will grant exceptions broadly for the 2024-2025 academic year. An overview of our concerns and rationale for such an approach is outlined in further detail below.

Overview of Implications and Implementation

South Windsor Public Schools is in full support of legislation that brings clarity to families regarding kindergarten entrance age and brings consistency across the state of Connecticut. The legislation as currently written, however, has created a lack of clarity for families due to the allowance for exceptions. The process for seeking an exception, as described in the legislation, is as follows:

When a parent/caregiver requests an exception, the district must conduct an assessment to determine if early admission for that child would be "developmentally appropriate." Per legislation, school principals and certified staff determine if a child's admission is developmentally appropriate. It should be noted that the legislation does not contain guidance regarding the actual assessment nor does it provide universal criteria for principals to use in decision-making.

Factors Informing Our Local Approach to Implementation

- The lack of clarity and lack of notice is putting families in a challenging situation. Not knowing if a child will have access to full-day kindergarten leaves families with uncertainty and presents a financial hardship if expensive daycare options must be sought. The hardship is exacerbated when seeking daycare at the last minute, or especially in communities where childcare options may be limited.

- Inequitable access to public education is also among our concerns. A system where school districts across the state develop different assessments and school principals apply different criteria to determine when a child has access to kindergarten will likely lead to inequitable access to public education.
- The lack of guidance and lead time for the development, administration and analysis of a universal assessment is also a concern. Families and educators should have access to reliable data to make informed decisions or thoughtful recommendations.

In addition, there are other implications for school districts. For example, the unknown number of families that will seek an exception precludes districts from accurately budgeting for staffing next year as budgets are published long before kindergarten registration data is available. Also of concern is the legislation's impact on enrollment in special education preschool programs. Finally, no additional funding was provided to districts to develop and administer assessments, all of which takes additional resources and staff time.

I hope this overview of the legislation, its implications, and our intention to grant exceptions broadly, gives both parents and educators a better understanding of the complexities and unintended consequences of this otherwise well-intended state legislation.

Questions regarding the new legislation can be directed to Tracie Peterson, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction at tpeterson@swindsor.k12.ct.us.

General Kindergarten Registration Information

Kindergarten registration begins in February. Please go to our website, southwindsorschools.org, to access further details about the registration process, including opportunities for school visits. We look forward to partnering with you and welcoming your children to classrooms filled with love, laughter and learning.

Sincerely,



Kate Carter, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools