



To: Senate Education

From: Jay Nichols , Executive Director

Date: Feb 10, 2023

Subject: Kindergarten Entrance Age/Date S. 34

*The Vermont Principals' Association supports school leaders to improve the equity and quality of educational opportunities for all students.*

For the record, Jay Nichols, Executive Director of the Vermont Principals' Association. Earlier in the year, officials from the Vermont Agency of Education (VTAOE), convened a gathering of education stakeholders to discuss the issue of Kindergarten entrance age. Additionally, it is our understanding that the VTAOE also discussed this issue with others including early childhood advocates.

In discussion with elementary principals and our Executive Council, it is clear that the vast majority of school districts have a Kindergarten entrance age of five by September 1 of the year the child would be entering Kindergarten. We do believe that there is utility in having one set date across the state should the General Assembly be interested in this issue.

We listened to Senator Chittenden's thorough testimony in this Committee recently. The Senator talked about setting some criteria of exemptions or waivers from a set date. In other words, some students could start Kindergarten earlier than their 5th birthday occurring by September 1 if they were deemed ready by that criteria.

Frankly, we would rather have a firm cutoff date - regardless of when that date was set. Too often, we see parents try to pressure schools in putting students into Kindergarten as an economic move to save on daycare costs. We don't feel the need to rush students into Kindergarten. If a student, later on in school, is not being challenged academically, or if the parents and school agree that he or she would benefit both academically and emotionally from skipping a grade, we think this is a more informed decision.

Moreover, the VPA has a position that we believe four year olds should be allowed to attend schools in an early kindergarten program that we understand is part of a bill proposed(S.56) by Senator Ruth Hardy that Senator Champion and other Senate leaders have sponsored. This would help to address this issue and also allow schools to have licensed teachers providing developmentally appropriate experiences to four year olds across the state in our schools. We believe this would have an enormous impact on students' ability to regulate their behavior and thus be more successful in the academic world of public education that is necessary for children to be readers and have strong numeracy skills by the end of third grade. Additionally, supporting S.56. would have added economic benefits and be a major step toward Vermont really becoming the “education state” that we all believe and wish it can be and connects very well to any Teach in Vermont campaign concept.