

# Proposition 98 and K-12 Education

## **RECOMMEND CHANGING KINDERGARTEN START DATE, EFFECTIVE FOR 2011-12 SCHOOL YEAR**

In California, a child can begin kindergarten as young as four years and nine months. This is because California's current cut-off date for entering kindergarten is December 2 of the year in which the child turns five years old. This is one of the latest kindergarten entry dates in the nation. In recent years, the California Performance Review, the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence, and numerous legislative proposals have suggested moving the kindergarten entrance date back to September 1 (requiring a child to have turned five prior to entering kindergarten). We recommend the Legislature take action this year to make this change beginning in the 2011-12 school year. (As is current policy, we recommend allowing parents to seek a waiver if they want to enroll a younger child.)

**Research Suggests Positive Effects on Children.** Many have argued that entering kindergarten before turning five years of age is too young, and beginning school at an older age would benefit children's academic performance and social development. Data suggest children who are older when they start kindergarten tend to perform better on standardized tests. Some research suggests this change also may lead to other positive student outcomes, including less chance of grade retention and higher earnings as an adult. The research is somewhat varied on the factors that contribute to these positive effects, mentioning family characteristics, preschool experience, and the relative age of the child as important influences on later student outcomes. Taken together, this body of research suggests that changing the kindergarten entry age would be generally positive, with no overall negative effect on children's academic achievement.

**Change Could Lead to Budgetary Savings.** Our economic forecast suggests the state and schools will face another tight budget situation in 2011-12. Because of the ambiguity surrounding the Proposition 98 minimum guarantee, we are not certain that changing the kindergarten start date would have any effect on the amount the state is required to spend on schools in 2011-12. Even if the change does not result in state savings, however, it could help ease the budget crunch for schools. Changing kindergarten eligibility for roughly 100,000 children born between September and December would mean schools would be required to serve fewer students. We estimate that having 100,000 fewer kindergarteners in 2011-12 could free up roughly \$700 million from revenue limits and categorical programs. These funds could be redirected for other K-12 purposes, including a portion for subsidized preschool for any affected low-income children.