

**RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE MARYLAND
KINDERGARTEN COMMITTEE
November 2001**

**CHANGING THE ENTRANCE DATE FOR KINDERGARTEN AND
PREKINDERGARTEN ELIGIBILITY**

Recommendation 1: The entrance date should be changed from December 31 to September 1. The change of four months should begin in school year 2003-04 and be changed at a rate of one month per year to be fully implemented by school year 2007-08. The entrance date for prekindergarten operated by the local Boards of Education should commence in school year 2002-03 and be fully implemented by school year 2006-07 at the rate of one month per year.

Rationale: The change in entrance age requirements for kindergarten and prekindergarten will align the “cut-off” date with most of the other states in the country. Presentations before the Committee by teachers, school administrators, and parents, focused on recent trends to revise local school system kindergarten curricula with the state’s content standards. This has placed a greater degree of rigor in kindergarten classrooms more suitable for an older age cohort. While current research did not provide conclusive evidence that a change in the “cut-off” date would be more beneficial to children, several policy-making groups consider an adjustment of the “cut off” date an effective strategy to make the curriculum more developmentally appropriate with an older age cohort. The Maryland State Teacher’s Association, the Maryland School Psychologists’ Association, the Maryland Parent-Teacher Association, and the Maryland Association for the Education of Young Children formally endorsed changing the entrance age requirements.

Impact: The recommendation will require a revision of COMAR 13A.08.01.02. The Committee stressed that chronological age shall remain the only criteria for kindergarten eligibility. At risk children who will no longer be age eligible as a result of this policy change are eligible for prekindergarten services. The Committee advocated the expansion of prekindergarten services to all Title 1 eligible schools. The Committee also pointed out that an incremental change of the “cut-off” over four years could coincide with an incremental change in expanding all-day kindergarten. The option to phase in the policy change over a period of four years will require local Boards of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to provide clear communication to families of five year old children regarding the year-by-year changes of the cut-off date.

Recommendation 2: The current option in COMAR 13A.08.01.02 should remain for parents whereby a request for a Level of Maturity Waiver from the local Board of Education can be requested by parent to exempt from mandatory school attendance for one year a kindergarten eligible child. In addition, the provision in COMAR 13A.08.02 should remain whereby local board of education may adopt a regulation permitting a four-year old, i.e., a child whose fifth birthday is beyond the new “cut-off” date, to be admitted to kindergarten.

Rationale: The parental choice in withholding a child for an extra year due to maturity reasons should be maintained regardless of the policy change. Currently, parents have a choice in the selection of the kindergarten setting such public, non-public, or licensed or registered child care as defined by COMAR 13A.08-02-2. Parents should have the opportunity to withhold the child’s school attendance for one year if the parent believes that the child would benefit from starting kindergarten one year later. In addition, parents should have the option to request admission into kindergarten if the local school superintendent or designee determines that the child demonstrates capabilities warranting early admission. Local boards of education will make the final decision regarding whether five-year old children who receive a Level of Maturity Waiver are eligible to attend prekindergarten.

Impact: Since the mandatory kindergarten regulations became effective in 1992, parental requests for the Level of Maturity Waivers has hovered around 1,000 or 0.1 percent statewide. Both teacher and parent presenters informed the Committee that parents are either not aware or are not using this option extensively. The Committee stressed that local boards of education should inform parents more effectively about this option. The option to admit children early to kindergarten after having met the local procedural requirements has not been fully implemented statewide. Although COMAR regulations permit local boards of education to adopt such procedures, only Baltimore County and Baltimore City have local regulations in place. The Committee believes that any local board of education, which adopts such regulations, should include a nationally recognized developmental screening instrument, behavior and social observation, and a parent interview. While the Committee realizes that such procedures may place additional burden on school systems, it realizes that parental requests for early admission are very few.