

Ohio bill would end confusion over kindergarten cutoff dates

By **Laura Hancock**
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COLUMBUS, Ohio - An Ohio House bill seeks to clear confusion about when children can begin kindergarten.

[House Bill 114](#) would change the date by which children must be five years old to “the first day of instruction of the school year of admittance.” The bill would apply to traditional public, charter and STEM schools.

Currently, state law requires local school boards to pass resolutions requiring children to be five years old [by either Sept. 30 or Aug. 1](#) to enter kindergarten, said state Rep. Adam Bird, a Cincinnati-area Republican, who is sponsoring HB 113 with Rep. Kevin Ritter, a Marietta Republican.

Prior to 2001, state law set the cutoff for the entire state at Sept. 30. But since then, each district has had the option to set it at Sept. 30 or Aug. 1.

“Why? I don’t know why it’s that way,” Bird told lawmakers last week during a first hearing on the bill. “And maybe somebody who is smarter or was here a long time ago has the answer to that. What I do know is the current law causes confusion and frustration among parents. And they would like to see some consistency.”

If a school district’s policy is Aug. 1 and a student doesn’t turn five until Aug. 2, they’ve missed the cutoff – even if the school year doesn’t start until Aug. 20, Bird said.

Parents of kids who miss the cutoff sometimes see adjacent districts with the Sept. 30 date, and realize their kids could have started kindergarten a year earlier if they lived a few miles away.

Constituents have requested the bill to change the date, Bird said.

“I’ve often said the best bills come from constituents and their real-life experience,” he said. “And that would be the case for this particular bill.”

Both Republicans and Democrats on the Ohio House Education Committee said last week that they agree with the change. Many said they've heard frustrations from their own constituents.

However, Democrats had concerns about another part of the bill that eliminates flexibility to allow gifted and talented children to enter kindergarten early through "referral and evaluation" processes or through district "student acceleration" policies.

Under the referral and evaluation process, a school must evaluate a child who doesn't meet the age requirements but who will be five by Jan. 1, if admission is requested by the parents, an educator employed by the district, a preschool educator who knows the child, or a pediatrician or psychologist who knows the child.

Under [district student acceleration policies](#), students who won't be five by Jan. 1 can sometimes enter kindergarten early if they are eligible under their district's accelerated learning policy that is set up for bright children who demonstrate they can learn subjects or entire grades in an accelerated manner.

HB 114 eliminates both for kindergarten admissions, although Bird said he's open to amending those sections of the bill.

"I certainly would be willing to work with you and the committee to make amendments that we all see fit so that we're not making it more restrictive," Bird told Rep. Beryl Brown Piccolantonio, a suburban Columbus Democrat. "I do think that there should be a recognition that there are gifted kids out there. For those that are gifted and are capable, they and their parents should be able to make that move to kindergarten at an earlier age."