



TO: DOE Partners
DATE: April 17, 2012

- TUESDAY TELEGRAPH –

News from the Office of Early Childhood Education at the DOE

Kindergarten in New Hampshire - a dedicated issue to current practice

- 1. Kindergarten as a State Law in New Hampshire - required offering; optional attendance**
- 2. Compulsory Attendance in New Hampshire Age 6 - full time program RSA 193:1**
- 3. Kindergarten Enrollment, Redshirting and the Reality in New Hampshire**
- 4. Kindergarten Enrollment: Awareness, Best Practice; Recommendations for Districts, Parents and Communities**

- 1. Kindergarten as a State Law in New Hampshire** - Effective with the 2010-2011 school years, every public school district in New Hampshire is required to offer a minimum of a half-day Kindergarten program. The cut-off enrollment date is set locally by each district. In addition, each community decides if it will offer a full day or half-day educational program. The state adequacy formula for funding Kindergarten states that no kindergarten pupil shall count as more than ½ day attendance per calendar year (**RSA 198:38 I.**) Therefore, regardless of the local decision to offer a full or half-day program, the State pays for half-day. Kindergarten programs are to immediately precede other elementary grades and be designed primarily for five year olds.
- 2. Compulsory Attendance in New Hampshire begins at age 6 - RSA 193:1 - Duty of Parent; Compulsory Attendance by Pupil.** - **A parent of any child at least 6 years of age and under 18 years of age shall cause such child to attend the public school to which the child is assigned in the child's resident district. Such child shall attend full time when such school is in session unless:** attending another public school outside the district, receiving a home education (RSA 193-A), the district superintendent has excused a child for extenuating circumstances, the child is attending public or private school located in another state, exempt due to RSA 193:5, and other reasons exceeding the developmentally appropriate norms of Kindergarten such as achieving a GED and other advancements. **A child who reaches the sixth birthday after September 30 shall not be required to attend school under the provisions of this section until the following school year.**
- 3. Kindergarten Enrollment, Redshirting and the Reality in New Hampshire** - The intentional practice of allowing children an extra year of maturity by “holding back” at age

five, or *redshirting*, often backfires in New Hampshire because of the way our laws are constructed. New Hampshire law intentionally requires districts to offer a minimum of half- day Kindergarten for five year olds. Attendance laws intentionally allow parents to “opt out” of public Kindergarten programs and begin compulsory education at age six, full day, first grade. Because many are unfamiliar with the regulations, they are surprised to discover their local schools requiring a youngster who turns six before September 30th, and has never attended Kindergarten, to be enrolled in first grade. This is correct according to state law. The only option a principal may have for a full day public program, according to state law, is if the district offers full day Kindergarten. Then, according to state law, compulsory education full time at age six can be achieved in a full day Kindergarten program. The advantage parents seek by giving a youngster time to mature is often met with confusion, misunderstanding and dismay. Building administrators who seek to provide the best educational experience for a child are bound to uphold our State laws.

- 4. Kindergarten Enrollment: Awareness, Best Practice; Recommendations for Districts, Parents and Communities** - All districts are encouraged to conduct a Kindergarten policy audit to align their current practices with the new regulations. Kindergarten enrollment policy should include readiness criteria, screening tools, cut off dates, and a clear process for individual consideration, exceptions and appeals. Policy should consider 21st Century family life and the optimal educational experience for children who have attended full day programs for several years in advance of public education. Districts are encouraged to communicate their local policies to child care programs in their area for increased community awareness amongst parents who are unfamiliar with public education rules and procedures. This is especially important for first time parents to local districts and currently enrolled children with younger siblings whose parents had a different experience with their first child due to different laws.

Current Kindergarten enrollment cut-off dates in New Hampshire range from August 15th - December 31st. Parents, child care providers and service providers in early childhood are encouraged to make contact with local SAU offices for information on current Kindergarten enrollment practices, including the offering of half-day or full day programming. These decisions vary greatly in New Hampshire and from year to year based on budgets and enrollment. All private and public providers for young children are encouraged to update their practical information regarding local Kindergarten policies annually, in order to continuously meet the needs of young children, without shock or disappointment...because *things do change*.

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