

Increasing Alberta's kindergarten entry age could make 'big difference' for some children ^[1]

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Mar 2016

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

If the NDP government follows through on a proposed change to the province's Education Act, some Alberta children could be entering kindergarten at a later age.

Currently, children must be four years old on or before March 1 to start kindergarten in September of the same calendar year — which means the age range in the classroom can be as wide as 18 months.

"That's huge. In a life of a five-year-old 18 months is like a quarter of their life," said Hetty Roessingh, a University of Calgary professor who specializes in early childhood education and literacy.

Should the rules change, children entering kindergarten in the fall must turn five by Dec. 31 of the same year.

"Even a couple of months can make a big difference."

The earlier cut off date would put Alberta in line with other provinces — but not Finland and Taiwan, where children stay home until they are seven.

"And they still outperform our little kids," said Roessingh.

"There are other countries who don't see a rush at all and go slow. They think slow is good."

Change would shrink age gap in classroom

Calgary Catholic spokesperson Karen Ryhorchuk says Alberta's current system can be tough for children who enroll in kindergarten at age four.

"This can mean a range of abilities for students in that classroom, from anything to motor skills, language skills — and this gap can be significant for some."

When it comes to academic performance, younger children can catch up quickly, said Roessingh.

But, emotionally, that's not always the case.

"I know anecdotally, from friends of mine who were accelerated at an early age they often felt that, in those later years ... their stride was always a bit off," she said.

"And it took well into their adult years to find it again, find the confidence to be who they wanted to be."

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