

State Board tells districts Transitional Kindergarten is a must

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Probably the strongest indication of how the State Board of Education would vote on waiver requests from nine school districts seeking to delay the start of Transitional Kindergarten came from the districts themselves; not a single representative showed up to even try to argue their case.

On Wednesday afternoon, the Board unanimously agreed with Department of Education analysts and rejected the waiver applications. That decision sent a clear message to other districts, said Scott Moore, Preschool California's senior policy director. "There was a sense of people are watching this to see how the State Board acts," said Moore. "Granting them a waiver to not provide public education to these students isn't something that they feel is legal."

Transitional Kindergarten is a new program, but doesn't involve new students. The same bill that raised California's age requirement for kindergarten created TK to provide the kids who miss the new cutoff with an additional year of kindergarten the way it used to be; puppets, play kitchens, and an introduction to phonics.

Because these children would have been in regular kindergarten anyway, TK doesn't cost the state any more money. But Gov. Brown tried to spin it as a new program and proposed eliminating its funding to help pay down the state deficit. In the few months between the time the governor released that proposal and the Legislature rejected it, a number of school districts panicked, thinking they'd have to add a new grade without any state funding to pay for it. They appealed to the State Board of Education for an extra year to put the program into place.

This has all been incredibly frustrating to Democratic State Senator Joe Simitian of Palo Alto, who authored [SB 1381](#), the bill that established Transitional Kindergarten. "What's a little bit surprising to me is that it is still not fully understood now, almost two years after the bill passed," Sen. Simitian told EdSource.

For example, in a separate [waiver request](#), a charter school wrote that it only had four children displaced by the new age requirement and it would be too expensive to start a new class just for them. Department of Education staff recommended that the Board approve the request on the condition that the school creates a split TK/kindergarten class. But the bill already gives schools and districts the flexibility to implement TK however they want, Simitian said, as long as it's age and developmentally appropriate. The State Board put off a decision on that request until its next meeting.

So, on the belief that you can never explain things too often, Simitian went before the State Board to give a synopsis of SB 1381 in an effort to clear up confusion. "I think the Board appreciated the recap on just how much flexibility we built into the system, and the fact that we had two years to plan, so this wasn't something that we simply rolled out in the fall without notice," said Simitian. "That being said, I think it's important to remember these are the exceptions to the rule. The buzz we get from around the state is quite positive that people are really excited that this is one of the few bright spots on the public education horizon."

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