



March 30, 2026

The Honorable Al Muratsuchi, Author
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Room 5310
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1631 (Muratsuchi) Elementary education: kindergarten - CONCERN

Dear Assemblymember Muratsuchi,

The California Catholic Conference respectfully expresses concerns regarding **AB 1631**, which would require completion of one year of kindergarten prior to admission to first grade.

While we recognize the value of early childhood education, available data suggest that a statewide mandate is not warranted. Kindergarten participation is already high, with approximately 85–95% of eligible children enrolled, meaning only a small percentage of students do not attend. These decisions are often intentional and reflect a child's developmental readiness or a family's specific circumstances.

Additionally, overall school enrollment in California is declining <https://www.ppic.org/blog/kindergarten-enrollment-declines-mask-differences-by-age/#:~:text=Splitting%20up%20kindergarten%20enrollment%20separately,%20PPIC%20Blog%2C%20May%202023>, and kindergarten enrollment trends must be understood within that broader context. Data shows that kindergarten enrollment dropped significantly during the pandemic and, while there have been modest increases since, much of that growth is attributable to the expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) rather than a true rebound in traditional kindergarten enrollment. In fact, over the past five years, kindergarten enrollment has declined by approximately 11%, reflecting long-term demographic shifts rather than lack of access or participation.

Given these trends, expanding mandates does not address a demonstrated need. Instead, it risks imposing a one-size-fits-all solution at a time when enrollment challenges require flexibility and responsiveness.

The bishops of California affirm that parents are the primary educators of their children and should retain the ability to determine when their child is ready for formal schooling. Children develop at different rates, and some may benefit from an additional year at home, in a faith-based setting, or in a less structured early learning environment. AB 1631 does not adequately account for this natural variability in early childhood development.

It is also important to note that only a limited number of states require mandatory kindergarten attendance, reflecting a broader recognition that early educational decisions are best made by families rather than through rigid statewide requirements.

Finally, this bill would impose additional requirements on local educational agencies, creating new administrative and potential fiscal burdens without clear evidence of improved outcomes.

In summary, the California Catholic Conference respectfully raises the following concerns:

- **Limited need for a mandate**, given already high participation rates
- **Declining enrollment trends**, which do not justify expanded requirements
- **Impact of TK expansion**, which accounts for much of recent enrollment growth

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- **Respect for parental rights and subsidiarity in early education decisions**
- **Recognition of diverse developmental timelines among young children**
- **Potential administrative and fiscal burdens on local agencies**

For these reasons, the California Catholic Conference, as the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in California, respectfully expresses concerns with **AB 1631** and encourages consideration of policies that support early learning while preserving family choice and flexibility. Should you have any questions regarding our position, please do not hesitate to contact Samara Palko, Director of Education, at 916-477-0631 or spalko@cacatholic.org.

Sincerely yours,



Kathleen Domingo
Executive Director

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