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When Should Kindergarten Start?

By [Lisa Belkin](#)

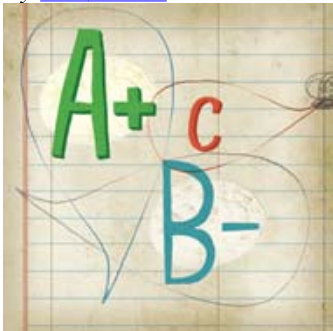


Illustration by Barry Falls

After the discussion here a few weeks back about [children starting school too young](#), comes a report out of Cambridge University recommending that [kindergarten begin at the age of six](#) rather than five in Britain.

The Cambridge Primary Review is a sweeping study, requiring 14 authors, 66 research consultants, 28 research surveys, more than 1,000 “written submissions” and 250 focus groups, all leading to the conclusion that British children are currently not allowed to be children.

In addition to changing the starting age, the report suggests eliminating the national “Sat” exams, and replace them with teacher evaluations and other assessment tools instead. Too many teachers were “teaching to the test” the panel concludes, and real learning is lost in the process.

In an excellent analysis on [PoliticsDaily.com](#), the writer Delia Lloyd, an American living in London, explains that the report is a repudiation of the increasing tendency of Parliament to micromanage education, and also that the conclusions are based not only on what is happening in Britain, but also on how British students compare to those in other European nations:

... The report’s policy recommendations seem largely informed by the experience of nearby countries such as Germany, Sweden and Finland, all of which delay formal schooling until 6 or 7, and all of which achieve better educational results than Britain. Finland — which consistently ranks at the top of all Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for educational attainment — doesn’t even start mandatory education until age 7. (My roommate in graduate school was Finnish and used to read books such as “The Brothers Karamazov” — in English — for fun. Say no more ...)

She also notes that what the report suggests for Britain “with its emphasis on reducing standards, imposing fewer controls on teachers and encouraging more freedom for children — is the exact opposite of where educational policy seems to be headed in the United States.”

True. Here the talk is of [shorter vacations and longer school days](#). At the same time, though, more parents are making the very decision that the panel suggests, and “red-shirting” their children so they start school later.

What do you think? Is five too young for kindergarten? Should every child start at six?

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