

➤ Hearing Records ... HR

\*\* **09hr\_ab0119\_AC-Ed\_pt01**

**WISCONSIN STATE  
LEGISLATURE COMMITTEE  
HEARING RECORDS**

**2009-10**

(session year)

**Assembly**

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

**Committee on  
Education**

**(AC-Ed)**

(FORM UPDATED: 06/28/2010)

**COMMITTEE NOTICES ...**

➤ Committee Reports ... CR

\*\*

➤ Executive Sessions ... ES

\*\*

➤ Public Hearings ... PH

\*\*

➤ Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

\*\*

**INFORMATION COLLECTED BY  
COMMITTEE FOR AND AGAINST  
PROPOSAL ...**

➤ Appointments ... Appt

\*\*

Name:

➤ Clearinghouse Rules ... CRule

\*\*

➤ Hearing Records ... HR (bills and resolutions)

\*\*

➤ Miscellaneous ... Misc

\*\*

( )

AB 119



Public Hearings 3/17/09 - AB35&AB119





---

# WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

---

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Great Schools  
benefit  
Everyone!*

Testimony of Anne Knapp, Teacher

Edward Bain School of Language and Art, Kenosha Unified School District

Before the Assembly Education Committee

Assembly Bill 119

March 17, 2009

My name is Anne Knapp from Kenosha, Wisconsin. I was born and raised in Kenosha and am a proud product of Kenosha's Public Schools.

I am a Kindergarten Teacher at the Edward Bain School of Language and Art in the Kenosha Unified School District. I am a single mom with three children in the Kenosha Public School system.

I have been teaching kindergarten for 14 years now. I strongly support Assembly Bill 119, which would require all 5-year-old kindergarten students enrolled in school to attend, and to make kindergarten a prerequisite for admission to first grade, with specific exceptions to allow for local control.

For 14 years I've participated in the kindergarten learning experience with its academic rigor and social skills development as an essential building block for success in school and adulthood. Research has shown that attending kindergarten decreases the probability that a child fails a grade and increases the probability that a child finishes high school and becomes employed.

At its implementation, kindergarten was designed for students to become acclimated to the school environment to ease the transition to a highly academic first grade classroom. Throughout my teaching career, I have witnessed the kindergarten curriculum become increasingly more academic. As school districts around the state increase their kindergarten standards, they are demonstrating their belief in the value of the kindergarten curriculum. We must also demonstrate the value of attendance in order to attain these expected standards.

I'm sure that most educators would agree with me that children who participate in kindergarten are much more likely to be prepared for the challenges of first grade. Those students who show up for first grade with no prior school experience are likely to have missed essential opportunities to develop necessary skills, competencies and interests in a supportive classroom environment.

Each year either I or one of my colleagues has had a student who is absent in excess of 30 days of school throughout the school year. Three years ago I had a student who was absent more than 50 days that year. If he woke up that day and decided he did not want to go to school, he would tell his mother so and she would keep him home. He had the ability to succeed in kindergarten with little intervention, but because he had missed so much schooling he was unable to keep up with his classmates.

Mary Bell, President  
Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director



During the first quarter of the current school year, one of my low-performing students missed 21 of the 44 days of that quarter. She then moved and transferred to another school where her attendance has not improved.

A student in a kindergarten classroom two rooms down from me has already missed 40+ days of school this year. This little boy is performing extremely well below kindergarten level. He also receives speech and language services from the school speech therapist. Due to his very high rate of absenteeism, he quite often misses these services.

Near the end of the 2005-2006 school year, a student transferred into my classroom. I was his sixth kindergarten teacher that year. His academic skills were well below grade level, but it was well past the retention deadline so he had to be assigned to first grade. In his first few weeks of first grade, his teacher fought to get him back into kindergarten because it was the best academically appropriate atmosphere to address his needs. Her request was denied because kindergarten is not a requirement in the state of Wisconsin.

Three years ago, a colleague of mine who teaches first grade had a student in her class who had never attended kindergarten. This student struggled all school year because she did not have the foundation of skills that are obtained in kindergarten. This student was put up for retention at the end of the school year.

A psychologist that I have worked with, who has worked in districts throughout Wisconsin, has said that teachers have been encouraged to assign students who qualify for retention to first grade instead in order to have some legal standing as far as truancy is concerned.

A first grade teacher at my school reported that two years ago a female student in her class, who had missed 62 days of kindergarten, could barely function at the first grade academic level. This student required many extra hours of intervention.

Two other first grade teachers reported that this year they each have a student that was chronically absent in kindergarten. One of them had been considered for retention during the kindergarten year; but was denied because the lack of academic progress could have been due to this child's lack of attendance.

According to the Education Commission of the States there are 14 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands that have compulsory attendance in kindergarten. If Wisconsin joins this group, kindergarten teachers, instead of spending many hours catching students up on missed work, will be able to work with students to not only master their expected skills but quite possibly exceeding them, as well.

Kindergarten students come to school with a wide range of levels of academic readiness. From the first day of school kindergarten teachers work hard to close the achievement gap that is already apparent. Many of my previous students who had chronic absences are not as strong in their academic skills as the regular attendees. These students are aware of this difference, which has had an impact on their confidence in their ability to perform as well as other students. The lack of self confidence seen in these students almost always goes hand-in-hand with a reduction in effort to perform in school.

I believe, and would like to respectfully suggest to you, that the investments we make in great schools build strong communities, and kindergarten helps prepare students to be critical thinkers, collaborative team players and effective leaders to successfully live and work in the



21<sup>st</sup> Century. Clearly, we can all be proud of quality early childhood education. After all it was here in Wisconsin that the first kindergarten was established in 1856.

I believe that this legislation builds on this proud tradition of offering the most we can in early childhood education, and provides the next steps in assuring that every kid benefits from it. For these reasons, I'm here today to ask you all to support and work to pass Assembly Bill 119.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important legislation.

Anne Knapp

7924 38<sup>th</sup> Ave

Kenosha, WI, 53142

[annie3@wi.rr.com](mailto:annie3@wi.rr.com)



---

# WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

---

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Great Schools  
benefit  
Everyone!*

**Testimony of Kelly McMahon, Teacher**

**Lancaster Elementary, Milwaukee**

**Before the Assembly Education Committee**

**Assembly Bill 119**

**March 17, 2009**

My name is Kelly McMahon and I teach five-year-old kindergarten for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). I am here today to ask you to support Assembly Bill 119.

Consistent kindergarten attendance has become increasingly important during my career as a teacher for MPS. My students are expected to leave kindergarten reading books, solving addition and subtraction story problems, and writing stories. The kindergarten curriculum has become more rigorous year after year, with higher demands and educational expectations placed on these young children. Yet, kindergarten attendance is not required in the state of Wisconsin.

Two years ago, a student in my classroom was dropped from receiving special education services because the team could not determine if the delayed educational progress was due to cognitive delays, or due to the child's poor attendance in both K4 and K5. At the time of the child's Individual Education Plan meeting, she had already missed over 30 days of kindergarten. Attendance of kindergartners is a major factor in determining whether or not a child meets the qualifications for special education services.

Last year, I had two 5-year-old students that missed over 40 days of school, and three more students that missed over 20 days of kindergarten. When I first spoke with my school's social worker, she informed me that she was given the direction not to bother with the attendance of kindergartners by her supervisor, because kindergarten was not required. The social worker ended up referring one of my student's attendance problems to the District Attorney's office only because she had older siblings in first and second grade. Unfortunately, nothing was done regarding my other student that missed over 40 days of school. I spoke repeatedly with the child's mother regarding the importance of getting her child to school on time, each and every day so that the child didn't fall further behind her peers. The mother decided to ignore my professional advice that the child repeat kindergarten, and moved the child onto first grade where she has struggled.

When Milwaukee Public Schools, the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association, and the Greater Milwaukee Committee began their work on our school district's strategic plan, one of our district's startling facts was that roughly 20% of all kindergartners are absent each day. Milwaukee Public Schools needs the assistance of this legislature to improve the attendance of our kindergarten students, which will lead to higher levels of student achievement for years to come.

Mary Bell, President

Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director





In closing, I ask that you please vote in support of Assembly Bill 119. Your support of this bill will validate the importance of making sure kids start their education off on the right foot by attending kindergarten and are prepared for the challenges of first grade.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.

Kelly McMahon

7926 North 107<sup>th</sup> Street

Milwaukee, WI 53224





---

# WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

---

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Great Schools  
benefit  
Everyone!*

**Testimony of Kim Wilson, Retired Teacher**

**Eau Claire School District**

**Before the Assembly Education Committee**

**Assembly Bill 119**

**March 17, 2009**

I am Kim Wilson, a newly retired teacher who taught first grade for one year and kindergarten for 31 years. I am here today to ask you to support Assembly Bill 119.

I must confess that I taught many years before I found out that kindergarten attendance was not required in Wisconsin! I truly believe that it is time for the State of Wisconsin to require regular attendance of children enrolled in kindergarten. A requirement such as this would benefit the kindergarten program and be of great benefit to children throughout their school career.

Kindergarten is an integral component of the entire school system. Reading, writing, music, math, physical education, art, social studies and science are required subjects in kindergarten, just as they are in first through fifth grade in elementary school. Kindergarten is the foundation of a child's educational career. Perhaps if "kindergarten" was named "first grade" it would be perceived as more important and regarded as the true beginning of the elementary education program.

Children who do not attend kindergarten on a regular basis not only lack achievement in academic growth but also lose out in feeling a part of the kindergarten family. The child loses out on the emotional, social, and academic pieces of a successful kindergarten experience. A child with poor attendance can be "haunted" by these effects during kindergarten as well as first grade when they find themselves out of step with their classmates. This has an effect on the other children as valuable education time and resources must be directed toward assisting this child in catching up (and how does this affect the child's attitude toward school?).

I believe I have struggled with truancy situations every year. Last year, my last year of teaching, I had a very difficult situation with a five-year-old child's habitual tardiness and absence. This little girl missed over 36 days of school. Each time she returned she required extra coaching, assistance, and direction from me as well as the other children in order to join us academically and to feel a part of our kindergarten community. I had numerous conferences with her parents including at different times, the counselor, the Title I teacher and the principal. We developed behavior modifications for the child as well as for the parents at their request. These attempts did not help the child's attendance record. The principal sent several letters to the parents but because Wisconsin does not mandate attendance for 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten, there was no recourse for our truant little girl.

Mary Bell, President

Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director



I am sure that the State of Wisconsin wants to give children like this the kind of education they need and deserve. We are not asking parents to give up any rights concerning their children. Under Assembly Bill 119, parents can still decide whether their 5-year-old child is ready for kindergarten and school boards can grant exceptions for children whose parents seek to enroll their child in first grade who have not attended kindergarten. Personally, I can't imagine a child skipping kindergarten and being successful in first grade. However, once a parent enrolls a child in kindergarten, the same attendance expectations that apply to grades 1-12 should also apply to kindergarten. It is the right thing to do for our children.

I am hoping that you will join us in our endeavor to give our children the best and most appropriate educational experience possible in our great State of Wisconsin. Please support Assembly Bill 119.

Thank you,

Kim Wilson

4896 Hobbs Road  
Fall Creek, Wisconsin 54742





---

# WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

---

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Great Schools  
benefit  
Everyone!*

**Testimony of Jeanne Richie, Teacher**

**Longfellow Elementary, Eau Claire**

**Before the Assembly Education Committee**

**Assembly Bill 119**

**March 17, 2009**

I am Jeanne Richie and I have taught kindergarten in Wisconsin for over 20 years. I currently teach kindergarten at Longfellow Elementary School in Eau Claire, WI.

I believe that it is time for the State of Wisconsin to require regular attendance of children enrolled in kindergarten. In fact, I would imagine that most people would be surprised to know that kindergarten attendance is not mandatory.

Wisconsin has been a leader in kindergarten education from the very beginning. Watertown, WI is the birthplace of kindergarten. In those early years kindergarten was viewed as a social experience for five-year-old children. It was their first venture away from home and kindergarten was viewed as a first opportunity to be among other children. Those days are long gone.

Today kindergarten is an important part of the curricular process of every public school system. Reading, writing, math, science and social studies are required subjects in public school kindergarten, just as they are in grades 1 through 5. First grade learning standards are based on the learning that is expected to occur in kindergarten. Kindergarten is the foundation of the elementary school education. I have long wondered if the title "kindergarten" may trivialize the important work of our grade level. Perhaps if kindergarten had been re-named as "first grade" it would be regarded more as part of the process.

Children who do not attend kindergarten on a regular basis will struggle to achieve in first grade. The child with poor attendance pays a price but the first grade classmates pay a price as well. Valuable education time and resources must be directed toward helping this child catch up. I would think that parents of children with good attendance might be quite disturbed to know how much time and energy has to be directed towards a child who does not attend regularly.

Every year I struggle with a truancy situation. This year I have had a particularly difficult situation with habitual absences and tardiness. Each time this child returns to the classroom after an absence, I spend a great deal of time catching her up on the skills that were taught in her absence. I can see her frustration and I am concerned that she will be developing negative attitudes and patterns towards school. Requests to her family to send her to school on a daily basis are of no help. Because the State does not mandate attendance for 5-year-old kindergartners, there is absolutely no recourse for a 5-year-old who is truant. As we approach the end of the school year, I can see that this girl does not have the skills to be successful in first grade. It feels as though her parents have used kindergarten as a convenient place to send their daughter when they feel like it. This should not have to happen. I am comforted to know that at least next year when she is in first grade, truancy actions can be applied if she is not attending school.

Mary Bell, President  
Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director



I cannot think of any reason why the State of Wisconsin would not want to give these children the kind of education they deserve and need. We are not asking parents to give up any rights where their children are concerned. A waiver process would be in place for those families opting out of kindergarten. But once a parent enrolls their child in 5-year-old kindergarten, the same expectation that is applied for grades 1-12 would also apply to kindergarten. It just makes sense.

It is good for kids.

Thank you.

Jeanne Richie

3115 Anric Drive

Eau Claire, WI 54701





AB 119?  
Date?

This is Eli's story. He has not been the only one just the most recent. Eli did not come to my kindergarten or any kindergarten until the end of September 2005. His family had been on vacation and his Step-mom had "forgotten" that school was starting. Eli's birth Mom had decided 6 months before to take an older brother and sister and seek a new life in Las Vegas. Imagine standing there and not being chosen to go with your mom? Strike One!

Eli is a sociable little guy and caught on to school rules and routines quickly. He made friends and became a leader in our classroom. Life was starting to look pretty stable and Eli was animated and happy. His new family structure did leave him being the oldest with 3 younger siblings behind him. He was occasionally late for school because Dad had left for work Step-mom worked nights and was still sleeping so Eli was responsible for dressing, feeding and keeping an eye on his younger siblings. We made phone calls to the home and our counselor did a home visit stressing the importance of this first year and getting to school on time, but when Step-mom asked if his attendance would be reported to social services and our answer was no, well that door slammed shut! Eli was embarrassed to be late so often and the smiling, happy, active participating little boy started to sit at the back of the group keeping to himself. Strike Two!

Enter the winter season. With his siblings, parents and 22 other kindergarteners in his classroom colds and the flu can keep going around and around. It eli wasn't sick someone in his family was and he would have to stay home and care for them. Caller ID is a wonderful thing! Now our calls and home visits were ignored. I did get a note from Step-mom after they failed to come to January conferences telling us to stop bothering them. She had asked her friends and she knew Eli didn't have to come to school. I thought we were turning a corner in mid-February when eli was there every day for 2 weeks! False alarm Dad and Step-mom had been in Florida for that time period and a neighbor was watching the kids.

One day in the spring Step-mom had to come to school to pick up a sick feverish little Eli. I had a chance to talk with her about Eli's attendance and how it was affecting his ability to be successful in school. I had the attendance records from the office and Eli was up to 47 absent days, we had stopped counting tardies. She asked me if he were retained for the next school year would he still be able to come all day? Do I smell babysitting?

Our kindergarten music program was in April and I sent numerous notes home letting Step-mom and Dad know that Eli had a speaking part in the program and when he was at school he was working very hard on his part and would be so proud to have his family at the program to see him. I think we all can figure out what happened the night of the program. No Eli. Strike Three!

Eli ended the school year with over 50 absent days! More than 2 months of school! He was not ready for 1<sup>st</sup> grade. We don't retain based on attendance but his readiness skills were so far behind there was no way he could go to 1<sup>st</sup> grade and be successful. By the time kindergarten started again for Eli in 2006 the family had moved across town. I kept track of him through his new kindergarten teacher and she reported big problems with attendance and now this little guy that had a shot at being successful was angry and embarrassed to be so far behind and his behavior started to change. The happy little boy with the potential for strong leadership skills and lots of friends became withdrawn, angry and very much a loner.

Eli's family structure certainly played a big role in his schooling, but I can't help think had we had the opportunity to insist Eli get to school that his family would be breaking the law if he didn't get to school could that have made a difference in this little boy's life? I say yes! I hope you do to.