

House Bill 216: Increasing the compulsory education age is a bad idea

Summary: *House Bill 216, sponsored by Jeff Greer (D-Brandenburg), would increase the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 17 by July 1, 2016 and to age 18 by July 1, 2017.*

- **There is no good objective evidence to show that raising the compulsory school age will help those it is supposed to help.**
- **Raising the compulsory attendance age could result in the disruption of the learning environment for students who want to stay in school.**
- **The bill has a potential price tag of tens of millions of dollars at a time of fiscal restraint.**

In states that have passed similar legislation, the data is at best inconclusive as to whether raising the drop-out age is effective in achieving any of the goals bill sponsors claim are reasons for supporting the bill. According to The Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, there is no empirical correlation that raising the drop-out age lowers the drop-out rate. Legislators considering this bill also need to consider what the effect on other students will be of keeping older teens who do not want to be there in class. If the school has failed to properly educate a child for ten years, there should be some evidence that further time in school at additional taxpayer expense will have a positive effect on students that would otherwise leave school to find a job.

Supporters of the bill contend that raising the drop-out age from 16 to 18 will result in increased graduation rates and will improve the future prospects of students who would otherwise drop out of school. Keeping kids in school would increase their future employability, say supporters, and would reduce the likelihood that such students would end up in jail or on government assistance. But these arguments are not based on any available objective evidence. There is no reason to believe that students who leave schools where they may not be receiving a good education in the first place for a job will somehow automatically end up in jail. We should be asking instead what states with good schools do. And, according to 2004-05 NCES data, of the ten states with the highest graduation rates, only three require attendance to the age of 18.

No legislative measure can make a teenager want to go to school. The energy being spent trying to pass HB 216 should be used instead to pursue innovative educational alternatives like charter schools to offer students and parents more diverse and rewarding alternatives to those now being offered by our public schools. Simply forcing older students to stay in school when they do not want to be there does not help them and it does not help the students around them.

No measure of goodwill can overcome the problem that lies at the heart of this issue: student apathy. The General Assembly's time would be better spent by finding out why students are disengaged and alienated and find a way to provide alternative educational opportunities that would remedy the real issue.

Vote "No" on HB 216

¹ "Raise the Age, Lower the Dropout Rate? Considerations for Policymakers," The Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, Spring 2009.

² National Center for Education Statistics