

# Students who are old for their grade more likely to enroll in college

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Teens who are old for their grade appear to feel more confident about their academic abilities and are more likely to enroll in college than their younger peers, according to research published by the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

The study analyzed data from more than 10,000 Australian students who were tracked over a decade and found that the relative age of students in their grade had significant effects. The issue should be considered by government agencies, schools, teachers and parents, especially in enforcing strict regulations about [school](#) starting age for students, said lead author Philip D. Parker, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at Australian Catholic University.

"Being young for your grade really does lead to lower academic self-confidence, especially in math, even accounting for [student](#)'s actual performance in those subjects," Parker said. "Further, being young for your grade appears to slightly lower a student's chances of entering college, and the most likely reason for this is a lower level of academic self-confidence."

The findings from the study were modest in size, with 58 percent of students who were almost a year older for their grade enrolling in college, compared with 52 percent of students who were almost a year younger for their grade. The study was published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

In Australia, the United States and other countries, many parents start their children in school late for their grade to gain a future advantage in academics or sports. Those decisions are understandable but ultimately may hurt other students, Parker said. Parents of children who are young for their grade shouldn't worry about it because the research findings were modest in size, but there are greater implications for school systems and policymakers to create a level playing field for all students, he said.

"It is critical that school systems have a clear and strictly enforced school starting-age policy," Parker said. "While there may be joy or shame for students who are advanced or held back a grade, educators also need to

consider the implications that those decisions will have on other students in their classes."

The study used data from the Longitudinal Study of Australia Youth, which included 10,370 15-year-old Australians who were surveyed over a decade. The participants, who were born between May 1987 and April 1988, were evenly divided between males and females and consisted of 78 percent native-born Australians, with smaller numbers of first-generation or second-generation immigrants. Three percent of the students identified as being of indigenous descent.

**More information:** "The Negative Year in School Effect: Extending Scope and Strengthening Causal Claims," by Philip D. Parker, PhD and Herbert W. Marsh, PhD, Australian Catholic University; Nicholas Biddle, PhD, Australian National University, and Felix Thoemmes, PhD, Cornell University. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, published Mar. 15, 2018.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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