PS1 for 2/5/87#SCHOOL IS BETTER LATE THAN EARLY

""Older and wiser'' may convey the image of a white-headed senior citizen uttering some truth he has learned from bitter experience. However, that's the conclusion of many parents who have found that entering their children into the school system when they are older does, indeed, make them wiser.

Private schools in trendy New York City are now starting to reject the admission of children into kindergarten until they are nearly age 6. Research shows that older children are more likely to succeed during their school careers than those who start kindergarten at age 5 or 4-going-on-5.

The optimum entry age for school doesn't at all correlate with how bright the child is. The best age to enter school has a very great deal to do with physical and emotional development. It is a big disadvantage to the bright child to be put in a structured institutional environment, such as kindergarten or preschool, before he is physically and emotionally ready.

A growing body of research indicates that children who are older when they start kindergarten tend to receive better grades and score higher on achievement tests throughout school than those who begin kindergarten at age 4 or 5. It's twice as hurtful to boys as to girls because, at that age, boys are about a year behind girls in maturation.

Child psychologists David Elkind and Samuel Sava told the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children that more student problems result from starting children too early than from starting them too late. They said, ""When children are force-fed early on, they become turned off with respect to education,'' and we find it ""very difficult to turn these youngsters back on'' to learning.

Despite the mounting evidence that later is better, public schools are rushing headlong in the other direction. New York Mayor Edward Koch and Board of Education President Robert Wagner, Jr., both bachelors who have no children and have the attitude of many childless people that preschool children ought to be regimented into prescribed behavior, are trying to impose their radical

notions about education on children.

Mayor Koch set up an Early Childhood Education Commission which dutifully presented a report calling for ""universal'' schooling for 4-year-olds at an estimated annual cost of $114 million plus increased federal and state aid. There was absolutely no demand from parents for this state intrusion into the lives of little children.

As the first step in this plan to institutionalize 4-year-olds by 1989, New York City opened 28 classes last September. To the amazement of school officials, nearly half of the seats remained unfilled. Parents didn't want their toddlers to attend.

But the city government busybodies were unwilling to accept the parents' decision. The director of the early childhood education unit said, ""We know they're out there somewhere,'' and warned that ""the family-assistance people will be knocking on the doors looking for 4-year-olds.''

All across the country, the National Education Association is turning up the political heat to force us to institutionalize little children as early as possible. The NEA is working for both mandatory kindergarten and early childhood education.

Yet, there is NO verifiable research which provers that kindergarten is better for children than homes. One authority in this field, Dr. Raymond Moore, says that he has looked for such evidence in more than 8,000 early childhood studies and found none.

There is not a single state where early school entrance mandates are based on replicable research or demonstrated need. Mandatory kindergarten and early childhood classes are enacted off the tops of legislators' heads without reasoned argument or evidence, simply to mimic what other states have done, or to accommodate working mothers, or to create new jobs for teachers.

Kindergarten was originally designed for children disadvantaged by the lack of loving parents. It was never planned, until recent years, to displace parents of normal toddlers.

The extravagant misuse of some limited research about disadvantaged children in order to get tax dollars to compel normal children to accept the same programs is like forcing healthy children into hospital beds because hospitals have helped a few who are sick. Mandatory kindergarten and preschooling are worse than that, however, because we are not at all sure that the preschool programs for the disadvantaged have helped anybody.

Adverse consequences of kindergarten and early childhood education also include the new problems suffered by elementary school children: stress (hitherto unheard of among small children), and boredom (because the child has learned so little in comparison to the many hours and years he has spent in the classroom). Little children need time to grow before they are put under the stress of being expected to perform like super-baby in school.