



Full-Day Kindergarten: Expanding Learning Opportunities

Full-day kindergarten isn't just smart education policy; it's smart economic policy. And it benefits everyone: children, families, schools, communities and businesses.

Although there is much debate about when children who only attend half-day programs begin to catch up academically, research shows that full-day kindergarten programs benefit *all children* who attend. Those same children do better in school in the long-term than children attending half-day programs, and they show greater academic gains in kindergarten and first grade.^{1, 2}

Full-day kindergarten benefits children academically:

- Children who attend full-day kindergarten learn more in reading and math over the kindergarten year than those in half-day programs.³
- Full-day kindergarteners exhibit more independent learning, classroom involvement, productivity in work with peers and reflectiveness than half-day kindergarteners.⁴
- Children in full-day kindergarten classrooms spend more time in self-initiated activities and teacher-directed individual work and less time in large group instruction.⁵

Full-day kindergarten benefits children developmentally and socially:

- Full-day kindergarten allows a more consistent schedule for children and reduces the ratio of transition time to class time, reducing stress for children.^{6, 7}
- Children in full-day programs are more likely to approach the teacher and less likely to express withdrawal, anger, shyness or blaming behavior than half-day kindergarteners.⁸

Full-day kindergarten helps close the achievement gap:

- At-risk students who received full-day kindergarten through Montgomery County, Maryland's Kindergarten Initiative made significantly greater progress in language proficiency than comparable children in half-day kindergarten.⁹
- A study of 17,600 Philadelphia children found that full-day kindergarten helps children from low-income families perform better and saves the school district millions of dollars through significantly reduced grade retention in first, second and third grade.¹⁰
- Research from Lowell Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where the average entering kindergartener was already 22 months below grade level, showed that children in the school's half-day kindergarten made an average gain of 5.4 months during a 9 month period, while children in the full-day classes made a 16 month gain on average.¹¹
- Research from the Minneapolis Public Schools showed that minority children in full-day kindergarten gained literacy skills faster than peers in half-day classes. School officials credit full-day kindergarten with helping to close the achievement gap between low-income and more affluent children.¹²

Parents prefer full-day kindergarten:

- Parents of children in full-day kindergarten report higher levels of satisfaction with their children's schedule and curriculum and the program's support for working families.¹³
- In one study, after the second year of a full-day kindergarten pilot, 100% of the full-day parents and 72% of the half-day parents indicated that, if given a choice, they would have selected the full-day program for their child.¹⁴

Teachers prefer full-day kindergarten:

Teachers report that full-day kindergarten:

- Allows children more flexibility and more time to do activities during free choice times;
- Allows more appropriate challenges for children at all developmental levels;
- Helps ease the transition to first grade;
- Allows more time for teachers to work with children and their parents on a one-to-one basis and to discuss children's progress with parents;
- Allows more time for curriculum planning; and
- Helps teachers to incorporate a greater number of thematic units in the year and cover them more in-depth.¹⁵

Smart Economic Policy

In 2006, Ohio spent \$43 million on grade retention for nearly 8,000 children in kindergarten through third grade.¹⁶ Ohio's education system could save much of that money by helping children enter the first grade ready to succeed. When children are ready for elementary school, they are less likely to have to repeat a grade and more likely to graduate from high school. As a result, Ohio's school system will save money through reduction in special education and grade retention, ultimately reducing pressure on school resources.

Ohio businesses also benefit from full-day kindergarten. In Ohio 63 percent of children under the age of six have both parents working full time. Ensuring young children have access to stable full-day programs enables more parents to work and reduces their absenteeism. The National Economic Development and Law Center estimates that unscheduled absences cost small businesses an average of \$60,000 annually and large companies an average \$3.6 million.¹⁷ Nearly one-quarter of unscheduled absences are due to early care and education issues. Not offering parents a stable full-day kindergarten option is detrimental to many of Ohio's families and businesses.

A Significant Transition for Children

Transitioning from pre-kindergarten programs into elementary school can be difficult for some children and families. Full-day kindergarten allows teachers more time to promote formal and informal learning, reduces the number of transitions in a child's day, and allows children to acclimate to a schedule similar to that which they will have in first grade. Therefore, there is considerable demand for full-day kindergarten programs.

There is a current national and statewide bipartisan trend to promote school readiness for young children. Governors from Arizona to Pennsylvania are increasing state investments in full-day kindergarten programs. These policymakers see the importance of schools, communities, and states having the necessary resources to support children and families from birth through

kindergarten. A 2005 National Governors Association report notes that state systems and infrastructure that support families, schools, and communities in their school readiness roles must also be “ready.”¹⁸ Yet only 127 of Ohio’s 613 school districts receive state funding to offer full-day kindergarten to families in 2009. Nationally, 28 states provide school districts with strong funding incentives to provide full-day kindergarten, such as giving full-day programs more funding than half-day programs, and giving as much or more weight in the school funding formula to full-day kindergarten as to first grade.¹⁹ A full-day kindergarten option in every district is an essential piece of planning for Ohio’s successful future.

Conclusion

Full-day kindergarten is an essential piece of building a comprehensive early care and education system in Ohio. Kindergarten is a significant transition between pre-kindergarten and first grade. Providing every parent in Ohio the option to send their child to a full-day kindergarten program strengthens the overall education system and benefits both families and the local economy.

¹Ackerman, Debra J., W. Steven Barnett, and Kenneth B. Robin. “Making the Most of Kindergarten: Present Trends and Future Issues in the Provision of Full-day Programs.” *National Institute of Early Education Research*. March 2005.

²Viadero, Debra. “Full-Day Kindergarten Produces More Learning Gains, Study Says.” *Education Week*. October 10, 2005.

³Lee, Valerie E., Burkam, David T., Honigman, Joann & Meisels, Samuel. *Full-Day vs. Half-day Kindergarten: Which Children Learn More in Which Program*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Anaheim, CA, 2001. Revised January 29, 2002.

⁴Cryan, John R.; Sheehan, Robert; Wiechel, Jane; & Bandy-Hedden, Irene G. “Success Outcomes of Full-Day Kindergarten: More Positive Behavior and Increased Achievement in the Years After.” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 7 (2): 187-203, June 1992. As cited in: “What Should Parents Know About Full-Day Kindergarten?” ACCESS ERIC Parent Brochure, based on the 1995 ERIC Digest Full-Day Kindergarten Programs by Dianne Rothenberg. Available: www.eric.ed.gov/archives/kinder.html.

⁵Elicker, James, & Mathur, Sangeeta. “What do they do all day? Comprehensive evaluation of a full-day kindergarten,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(4), 459-480, 1997.

⁶Ibid.

⁷“What Should Parents Know About Full-Day Kindergarten?” ACCESS ERIC Parent Brochure, based on the 1995 ERIC Digest Full-Day Kindergarten Programs by Dianne Rothenberg. Available: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/archives/kinder.html>.

⁸Cryan, John R.; Sheehan, Robert; Wiechel, Jane; & Bandy-Hedden, Irene G. “Success Outcomes of Full-Day Kindergarten: More Positive Behavior and Increased Achievement in the Years After.” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 7 (2): 187-203, June 1992. As cited in: “What Should Parents Know About Full-Day Kindergarten?” ACCESS ERIC Parent Brochure, based on the 1995 ERIC Digest Full-Day Kindergarten Programs by Dianne Rothenberg. Available: www.eric.ed.gov/archives/kinder.html.

⁹Nielsen, Jennifer & Cooper-Martin, Elizabeth. *Evaluation of the Montgomery County Public Schools Assessment Program: Kindergarten and Grade 1 Report*, Montgomery County Public Schools Office of Shared Accountability, September 2002. Available: www.mcps.k12.md.us/info/press/Kinder-Grade1Report.pdf

¹⁰Viadero, Debra. “Study: Full-Day Kindergarten Boosts Academic Performance.” *Education Week*, April 17, 2002. Available: www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=31kinder.h21

¹¹Warrick, Sandra. *A Three Year Study of the Effectiveness of Full-Day Kindergarten at Lowell Elementary School*, October 1993; as cited in Think New Mexico, *Increasing Student Achievement in New Mexico: The Need for Universal Access to Full-day Kindergarten*, Santa Fe, NM: Author, Fall 1999.

¹²Minneapolis Public Schools, *Narrowing the Gap in Early Literacy: Evidence from Minneapolis Public Schools Kindergarten Assessments*, November 2002. Available: http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/news/news_release/all_day_k.shtml

¹³Elicker, J. & Mathur, S. “What do they do all day? Comprehensive evaluation of a full-day kindergarten.” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(4), 459-480 (1997).

¹⁴West, Jerry, Denton, Kristin, & Germino-Hausken, Elvira. *America’s Kindergartners*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000. Available: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000070.pdf>.

¹⁵Elicker, James, & Mathur, Sangeeta. “What do they do all day? Comprehensive evaluation of a full-day kindergarten,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(4), 459-480, 1997.

¹⁶Ohio Department of Education.

¹⁷National Economic Development and Law Center. *The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Ohio: Executive Summary*. November 2004.

¹⁸National Governors Association. “Building the Foundation of Bright Futures.” Final Report of the NGA Task Force on School Readiness. 2005.

¹⁹Education Commission of the States. *Full-Day Kindergarten: A Study of State Policies in the United States*. June 2005.

For more information, please contact Susan Blasko at (216) 781-2944 ext. 217 or sblasko@groundworkohio.org. Or visit Groundwork at www.groundworkohio.org.