
Providing Full-Day Kindergarten

Center on Instruction

Over the past ten years, consensus has developed on the educational value of full-day kindergarten, especially for young children who are economically disadvantaged or have other at-risk characteristics; for those children, the additional time in kindergarten contributes to early prevention of the achievement gap. Research syntheses that compare half-day to full-day kindergarten show no negative effects for full-day kindergarten and typically support positive effects for academic learning, specifically early reading skills (although it is not clear that those effects are sustained through the primary grades). In the U.S. Department of Education's landmark Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), kindergarten children in full-day classes had higher reading and mathematics achievement by the end of the kindergarten year compared with those in half-day classes. Studies have also shown that full-day kindergarten reduces the need for remediation and results in fewer grade retentions. Full-day kindergarten seems to promote social and behavioral adjustment to school. Children with the full-day experience do better with the transition to first grade, demonstrate significant gains in socialization and higher behavioral outcomes, and have better attendance in kindergarten and the primary grades.

Full-day kindergarten offers the opportunity for extended time devoted to academic learning as well as social interaction and development. For example, the ECLS study found that children in full-day classes were much more likely to spend more than an hour per day on literacy (68% of full-day classes vs. 37% of half-day classes) and to spend time every day (and more than half an hour per day) on mathematics (81% of full-day classes vs. 52% of half-day classes). Researchers have found that full-day programs are more likely to include individualized and small-group work as well as more child-initiated activities. Some researchers have theorized that, in offering extended and individualized contact with children, full-day kindergarten teachers are more likely to detect learning and developmental needs earlier and arrange for appropriate interventions.

Action Principles

For State

1. Consider reallocation of existing funds to provide financial support for districts to provide full-day kindergarten (especially for disadvantaged children) to help with the additional staffing and space costs incurred by districts.
2. Consider reallocation of existing funds to provide financial support to help full-day kindergarten programs operate quality programs. For example, the additional time of an extended day may require new curricular materials and staff training to use the time for targeted student skill development.
3. Provide model kindergarten standards and assessments that are appropriate for the full-day kindergarten experience as well as recommended criteria for selecting curriculum.
4. Offer professional development for kindergarten teachers to enable them to make productive use of the longer day with developmentally appropriate, challenging, and engaging activities.
5. Set certification standards for kindergarten teachers that require qualifications consistent with national standards.

For District/School

1. Conduct periodic quality reviews of kindergarten classrooms to ensure that the full day is used appropriately and use the results of those reviews to provide feedback to classroom staff.
2. Provide expert coaching for kindergarten teachers, especially to help teachers move from half-day curriculum to a full-day curriculum.
3. Provide kindergarten staffing models that facilitate individualized and small group opportunities to ensure that the additional full-day kindergarten schedule is providing the type of instructional support that makes a difference in student outcomes.

References and Resources

- Brewster, C. & Railsback, J. (2002). *Full-day kindergarten: Exploring an option for extended learning*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/bc/d4.pdf
- Education Commission of the States. (2005). *Full-day kindergarten: A study of state policies in the United States*. Denver, CO: ECS. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/62/41/6241.pdf>
- Education Commission of the States. Online Interactive Kindergarten Database. Retrieved from http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/EarlyLearning/KDB_intro.asp
- Lash, A., Bae, S., Barrat, V., Burr, E., & Fong, T. (2008, December). *Full-day kindergarten and student achievement*. San Francisco: WestEd. Retrieved from http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/REL_West_FDK_Brief_ALL.pdf
- Walston, J. T., & West, J. (2004). *Full-day and half-day kindergarten in the United States: Findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99* (NCES 2004–078). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004078>
- WestEd. (2005). *Full-day kindergarten: Expanding learning opportunities*. San Francisco: WestEd. Retrieved from http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/po-05-01.pdf