

What does the research say about all day kindergarten programs?

A great deal of research supports all day kindergarten programs. A general trend in education suggests that more children will be attending full-day kindergarten in the years to come. State policies, funding and improved student attendance all demonstrate the growing public acceptance of the full-day kindergarten. Some of that information is included below for your convenience.

National Center for Education Statistics

The National Center for Education Statistics conducted a study with the kindergarten class of 1999. Many of their findings were consistent with previous research conducted on comparisons between half day and full day kindergarten programs. You may wish to access their website to view the full report. The website address for this report is: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004078> . It is important to note that the researchers of this study indicate that the findings are subject to some research design limitations, although as noted above, their findings are similar to those of earlier studies. The results presented in this research report do suggest that “public school, first time kindergarten children in full day classes are making greater gains in reading/language arts and in mathematics achievement” (p. 67) than those in half day programs. The report also indicates “It may be that some of the curriculum differences found between half day and full day classes can be explained by demographic differences associated with program type rather than program type alone.” It continues to state, “Moreover, children in the top third of the fall kindergarten scores make smaller overall reading gains during the year compared to other children.”

Here are a few statistics and generalities they cite.

- 61% of all U.S. schools offer at least one full day kindergarten class (p. 65).
- 54% of all public school children attend a full day program compared to 77% of Catholic school children and 65% of other private school children (p. 65).
- The average number of children in full day classes is higher than in half day classes (p. 65).
- Full day kindergarten classes spend, on average, more time each day on teacher-directed whole class, small group, and individual activities and they spend more time on child-selected activities. However, the percent of their total time spent in each type of activity is similar between full day and half day classes (p. 66).
- A large majority of both full day and half day classes have reading and language arts activities every day. However, full day classes are more likely to spend time each day on other subjects, i.e. mathematics, social studies, and science compared with half day classes (p. 66).
- The most common skills and activities in full day classes are generally the most common in half day classes (p. 66).
- Some of the reading activities and skills that are more likely to be part of at least a weekly routine in full day classes are typically considered more advanced than the traditional kindergarten reading curriculum, i.e., reading aloud fluently, reading multi-syllable words, and alphabetizing (p. 66).

Burnsville (Minnesota) Public Schools

(Wahlstrom, Kyla L., Kruse, Tina Patane, Hansen, Anastasia, “District 191 Full-Day Kindergarten Program Evaluation of Year 1”, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI), University of Minnesota, 2004)

In a recent local study of the Burnsville Public Schools all day kindergarten program the following findings were documented:

- Significant increases on every academic skill variable measured by pre and post tests.
- Achievement gap elimination among all racial/ethnic groups.
- Decrease in gap between socioeconomic extremes.

Teacher focus groups yielded the following observations from teachers involved in the full day kindergarten program when comparing it to a half day program:

- More in-depth instruction.
- Closer relationships with students resulting in more individualized instruction.
- Increased need for planning time.
- Feel less rushed and can take advantage of “teachable moments”.
- Well adjusted students and positive parents.
- Most teachers showed great enthusiasm about teaching full day versus half day with a small number wondering about its developmental appropriateness.

Classroom observations yielded the following findings:

- “There was clearly a difference between half and full day classes in the amount of time devoted to any one lesson (full day had longer lessons).”
- “The amount and quality of unstructured writing done by students was significantly higher in the full day classes.”
- “The time available in the afternoons for lesson follow-up and re-teaching made the pace of learning much more relaxed than in the half day classes.”

Parents reported the following about the program on a year-end survey:

- “My child has enjoyed full day kindergarten.”
74% Strongly Agree 24% Agree
- “The length of the school day has been difficult for my child throughout the year.”
56% Strongly Disagree 30% Disagree 10% Agree 2% Strong Agree
- “I am satisfied with my child’s academic experience in full day kindergarten.”
75% Strongly Agree 22% Agree
- “Overall, I have been satisfied with this full day kindergarten program.”
78% Strongly Agree 19% Agree
- When asked the following question relating to their opinion before the full day experience; “If a choice had been given prior to this school year for kindergarten for my child, I would have chosen”, parents responded in the following way: 19% Half Day 81% Full Day
- When asked the following question relating to their opinion after the full day experience; “If a choice had been given prior to this school year for kindergarten for my child, I would have chosen”, parents responded in the following way: 7% Half Day 93% Full Day

Other Research Study Findings

Academic benefits

- *Positive academic outcomes for all children in all-day kindergarten.* Research since the 1990s has shown consistent positive learning and social/behavioral benefits for children in all-day kindergartens programs. (Rothenberg 1995; Clark 2001)
- *Prepares children for first grade.* Full-day kindergarten offers an immediate payoff in preparation for first grade and relates to success in middle school. (Stofflet 1998)
- *Greater reading growth.* Full-day students experienced significantly greater growth in reading prerequisite skills than half-day students. (da Costa 2000)
- *Higher test scores.* When compared to their half-day counterparts, children in all-day kindergarten scored higher on tests and experienced fewer grade retentions. (Clark 2001)
- *As much as two-thirds the outcome gains are for full-day programs.* Fusaro (1997) performed a meta-analysis of 23 studies and found that all-day kindergarten programs accounted for almost two-thirds of the achievement gains of children in the study.
- *Opinions of administrators.* Twenty-six district superintendents surveyed in Ohio believe that full-day kindergarten increases academic performance and improves first grade adjustments. (Ohio State Legislative Study 1997)
- *Benefit children of lower socioeconomic status.* Full-day kindergartens may be especially beneficial to children of low socioeconomic backgrounds. (da Costa 2000)
- *Do significant differences exist?* The findings of one study indicated that full-day kindergarten students scored higher in all areas than the half-day kindergarten comparison group, however those differences were *significantly* higher in only one area. (Alber-Kelsay 1998) This was one of the few studies that questioned the value of the full-day kindergarten.

Social benefits

- *Higher social skills, more independent learning.* Children in all-day kindergarten were more engaged in child-to-child interactions and made significantly higher progress in learning social skills. Those children experienced more independent learning, classroom involvement and productivity in work with peers. (Rothenberg 1995)
- *More child-initiated activities.* Children in full-day kindergarten spent relatively more time in child-initiated activities and teacher-directed individual work as opposed to whole group, teacher-directed activities. Students also exhibited higher first grade readiness. (Elicker 1997)
- Full-day students showed no increase in their levels of fatigue. (Hough 1996)

Why Full-day Kindergarten Matters

For children:

- *Better prepared.* All-day kindergarten programs can provide children with opportunities to spend more time engaged in active, educational activities. These students are better prepared for first grade than half-day students. (Stofflet 1998)
- *Greater use of small group activities.* Teachers that spend a full day with children have time to structure their classes with more opportunities for small group interactions. (Elicker 1997)
- *Attendance more regular.* Full-day students attend school with more regularity than their half-day counterparts. (Hough 1996)
- *Quality of time spent.* The quality of the teachers and activities are much more influential on the child's development than the amount of time they are actually in classrooms. (Clark 2001)

For teachers and parents:

- *Better preparation for first grade.* Parents and teachers of children in all-day kindergarten believe that all-day kindergarten better prepared children for first grade. (Clark 2001)
- *Teachers less stressed by time constraints.* All-day kindergarten teachers report feeling less stressed by time constraints and those teachers have more time and opportunity to get to know the children and meet their needs. (Elicker 1997; Clark 2001)
- *Eliminates the need for buses and crossing guards at mid-day.* (Rothenberg 1995)

Parents with questions or desiring additional information about curriculum or all day kindergarten research information may contact Dr. Jenni Norlin-Weaver, Edina Public Schools Director of Teaching and Learning, at 952-848-4001.