



# Children's Defense Fund

## The Facts about Full-Day Kindergarten

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Full-day kindergarten (Full-Day K) boosts children's cognitive learning, creative problem-solving and social competence. Yet for many young children Full-Day K is a missing half step in the early learning continuum. Unequal access to publicly funded full-day and full-week high quality kindergarten means too many young children lose a critical opportunity to develop and strengthen foundational skills necessary for success in school and lifelong learning. All children should be guaranteed access to publicly funded Full-Day K, if they are to meet the learning and work-force challenges of the 21st century.

### **New Importance of Full-Day K**

In 2011 over 45 states adopted the Common Core State Standards which sets the course for students in achieving career and college ready skills upon high school graduation.<sup>i</sup> The standards students are expected to meet upon exiting kindergarten are rigorous. Given the new standards and the instability of funding for Full-Day K across the country, children are not guaranteed an equal opportunity for learning and could be severely handicapped in achieving school success.

### **Access to Full-Day K**

- 10 states and the District of Columbia require school districts to provide publicly funded full-day kindergarten through state statute, which guarantees annual funding.
- 34 states (not including those with Full-Day K) require school districts to provide half-day kindergarten.
- Six states do not require districts to provide kindergarten at all<sup>ii</sup>.
- Children enrolled in full-day/full week kindergarten (6 instructional hours per day) receive 1,080 hours of instruction, while students enrolled in half-day kindergarten (3 instructional hours per day) receive only 540 hours of instruction.

### **Full-Day Kindergarten Differs by Place and Circumstance**

As of 2008 more than 70 percent of kindergartners are enrolled in some type of Full-Day K<sup>iii</sup>. But this statistic does not tell the whole story because ***the lottery of geography and income currently are deciding factors in access to Full-Day K***. Some children may be in Full-Day K because:

- Their parents pay tuition for half of the day not covered by other funds
- They qualify for tuition assistance based on family income status or the child's risk of school failure.
- The school district voluntarily chooses to provide a Full-Day K program at no cost to parents using a combination of funding streams.

In the last two years, budget-strapped states have cut funding for Full-Day K. One example of the budget dilemma when Full-Day K is not in state statute is in Pennsylvania. Advocates there are currently projecting a 30% decrease in Full-Day K for the 2011 school year.<sup>iv</sup> The uncertain future for this critical step in a child's education must be addressed.

## RESEARCH SHOWS BENEFITS OF FULL-DAY K

### **Children in Full-Day K have Better Educational Outcomes than Children in Half-Day Kindergarten**

Research comparing half-day and full-day kindergarten suggests that children benefit more from a developmentally appropriate, Full-Day K as part of an early learning continuum.

Full-day kindergartners:

- are more prepared for school: they do better with the transition to first grade, show significant gains in school socialization and are equipped with stronger learning skills
- have higher academic achievement in later grades
- have better attendance in kindergarten and through the primary grades
- show faster gains on literacy and language measures when compared to half-day kindergarten students
- have enhanced social, emotional and behavior development
- have reduced retention and remediation rates.

### **Full-Day K As Part of the Prek-3rd Grade Early Learning Continuum**

New studies are being released that show the importance of a seamless early childhood learning continuum beginning in prek and continuing into third grade. Criteria for a successful early learning continuum includes a full-day kindergarten staffed with highly qualified teachers and curriculum alignment throughout the continuum. Student achievement among children attending Full –Day K is proving to be greater than for those who attend a half-day kindergarten.

Bremerton School District in Washington state studied the impact of Full-Day K as compared to half - day kindergarten as children progressed in first and second grade. The findings show:

- students in the 2008-09 second grade cohort that participated in Bremerton’s full-day kindergarten performed better on DIBELS\* assessments than students from the same cohort that entered the district after kindergarten, having received half-day kindergarten instruction elsewhere. This difference persists through the fall of second grade.
- while starting off at roughly the same level academically, by the middle of kindergarten, students with low socioeconomic status that participated in both a district sponsored preschool and Full-Day K outperformed students participating in a combination of a district sponsored preschool and half-day kindergarten. A significant gap persists through the middle of first grade.<sup>vi</sup>

\* **Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills**

i Common Core State Standards Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org/>

ii Kauerz, K. (2005 updated by CDF, 2011). *StateNotes: How states fund full-day kindergarten*. Education Commission of the States.

iii U. S. Census Bureau. School Enrollment – Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2008 (2010) Bureau website: (<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2008.html>).

iv Davidson, S.(March, 2011) Pennsylvania budget makes drastic cuts to education. <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2011/mar2011/penn-m12.shtml>

v WestEd. (2005). Full-Day kindergarten expanding learning opportunities. [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/po-05-01.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/po-05-01.pdf).

vi Hanover Research Council (2009). Impacts of early literacy interventions. Bremerton (WA) School District unpublished evaluation.