

Full-Day Kindergarten

Nevada's program of full-day kindergarten was originally created during the 2006–07 school year with an interim allocation of \$22 million from the School Remediation Trust Fund. When lawmakers reconvened in Carson City in 2007, they installed the program as an ongoing general-fund appropriation and committed \$66.5 million to fund full-day kindergarten in 166 elementary schools for the 2007–09 budget cycle. Schools were selected to receive funding for the program based on the proportion of students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.¹

This spending contracted slightly during the subsequent two budget cycles, but grew to \$81 million for the 2013–2015 budget cycle after Gov. Brian Sandoval proposed to make full-day kindergarten available in 201 schools. Beginning with the 2015–2017 budget, Sandoval expanded it to every school at a cost of \$173.5 million.² This cost has carried forward and was rolled into the new Pupil-Centered Funding Plan that began with the 2021–2023 budget rather than being separated as a distinct line item.

Key Points

Full-day kindergarten does not produce lasting gains in student achievement. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education launched the most significant longitudinal study on full-day kindergarten. It tracked 22,782 children entering kindergarten that year across 1,277 different schools to examine how full-day kindergartners fared compared to half-day kindergartners. By completion of the kindergarten year, students in full-day kindergarten demonstrated slight advantages in letter recognition and other skills.

However, students who attended half-day kindergarten quickly caught up once students moved on to subsequent grades. By the end of the third grade year, researchers could find no difference between the two groups and concluded, "Children's reading and mathematics gains over the first 4 years of school did not differ substantively by their sex or the type of school or kindergarten program they attended."³

A subsequent review of the longitudinal data by the RAND Corporation similarly concludes, "full-time kindergarten programs may not enhance achievement in the long term."⁴

A Nevada study by WestEd is often misrepresented. In 2008, the Nevada Legislature asked researchers from WestEd to review the empirical literature on full-day kindergarten and draw conclusions from this literature about its effectiveness. The WestEd report has since been used by advocates of greater spending on full-day kindergarten as evidence of the program's success.

This has been a misrepresentation of the report's findings. In reality, the report concludes, like the U.S. Department of Education and RAND Corporation, that there is no evidence to suggest full-day kindergarten can lead to lasting gains in student achievement.⁵

Full-day kindergarten is not a cost-effective use of education dollars. Full-day kindergarten entails substantial additional costs over half-day kindergarten without leading to any lasting gains in student achievement. A single teacher and classroom can accommodate multiple half-day classes, but full-day programs require dedicated resources for each class. This additional expense is why the program currently costs Nevadans \$173.5 million every two years.

¹Nevada Legislature, Legislative Counsel Bureau, Fiscal Analysis Division, "Nevada Legislative Appropriations Reports."

²Ibid.

³U.S. Department of Education, "From Kindergarten Through Third

Grade: Children's Beginning School Experiences," August 2004.

⁴Vi-Nhuan Le et al., "School Readiness, Full-Day Kindergarten, and Student Achievement: An Empirical Investigation, RAND Corporation Monograph Report, 2006.

⁵Andrea Lash et al., "Full-Day Kindergarten and Student Achievement: A Literature Review," Prepared for Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau by Regional Educational Laboratory West, December 2008.

Recommendations

Eliminate full-day kindergarten and divert funds to more cost-effective educational programs. The money available for public education will always have limits, so it is incumbent upon policymakers to ensure that this funding goes into the most cost-effective programs possible. Full-day kindergarten produces no lasting advantages over half-day kindergarten and, therefore, fails every test of cost-effectiveness.

A follow-up study by the research team involved in the U.S. Department of Education's longitudinal study actually reveals a negative relationship between participation in full-day kindergarten and growth rates in math and reading skills over the first four years of schooling. Students participating in full-day kindergarten outperformed their peers in half-day kindergarten by the end of the kindergarten year, but these gains were more than offset by a slower rate of learning in ensuing years by students who participated in full-day kindergarten.

Linear model of growth from kindergarten to third grade: Impact of various factors on monthly growth rates in scale scores for reading and math

Effect	Reading Coefficient	Std. Error	Math Coefficient	Std. Error
Intercept	2.07*	.009	1.54*	.008
Primary home language non-English	0.06*	.247	0.00	.021
Living below federal poverty threshold	-0.12*	.022	-0.08*	.016
Mother's education less than high school	-0.17*	.024	-0.12*	.018
Single-parent household	-0.03	.018	0.00	.014
Black, non-Hispanic	-0.17*	.029	-0.18*	.023
Hispanic	-0.10*	.021	-0.08*	.017
Asian/Pacific Islander	-0.06*	.026	-0.01	.023
Other, non-Hispanic	-0.07*	.029	-0.02	.025
Male	-0.07*	.012	0.07*	.010
Full-day kindergarten	-0.04*	.014	-0.02	.011

* p<.05

Source: Jill Walston et al., "Do the Greater Academic Gains Made by Full-Day Kindergarten Children Persist Through Third Grade," Paper Presented to American Educational Research Association 2005 Annual Conference.

