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AN EVALUATION OF FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMMING

Amy Houlihan

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AN EVALUATION OF FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMMING

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
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National College of Education

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DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION STATEMENT

This document is organized to meet the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement with a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this program evaluation document is to provide a rationale and structure for implementing full-day kindergarten. The persistence of the achievement gap in the United States requires considerable and deliberate action to narrow and eliminate the gap over time. With the evolving educational landscape and the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, early education, including systematically designed and implemented full-day kindergarten are one way to afford children the opportunity to begin their education on pace to succeed. This program evaluation examines the differences between half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs including data analysis from the first year of full-day kindergarten implementation in a large suburban school district. This evaluation of full-day kindergarten reveals the benefits of a full-day program result from a quality kindergarten program that makes use of the additional time with students.

PREFACE

There are many essential components that must come together in order to make a full-day kindergarten program effective. The systems and structures that support a full-day kindergarten program play a critical role in the success of its students. Factors such as a master schedule that indicate when time will be dedicated to content area learning as well as a breakdown of what each of the learning time frames look like in order to best support student learning. Strategic utilization of resources such as push in support teachers is necessary for facilitating a full-day kindergarten program that meets the individual needs of each kindergarten student.

In order to make this possible, the master schedule must also reflect time dedicated to collaborative planning for the Professional Learning Community. Minimally, planning time should be designated for literacy, mathematics and content areas so teachers can design instruction that meets the needs of their students. In a full-day kindergarten program, systems and structures are important but ultimately, teaching matters most. Effective teaching leads to student success in learning in any program. Ongoing professional development will allow teachers to enhance their practice as educators to deliver a full-day kindergarten program worthy of implementation and attendance.

At the core of success for educational programs is the partnership that connects school and home for each child. Schools must respond to the needs of families by providing clarity through regular communication so parents know what to expect and

how they can support their child to develop their skills. The collective efforts of a family and school partnership increase the likelihood of success for our youngest learners.

Full-day kindergarten programs can yield outstanding academic and social emotional benefits for its students. If we earnestly care about closing the achievement gap for all students, we must begin by providing quality full-day kindergarten programs for our youngest learners.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The evolving educational landscape calls for schools districts across the nation to be responsive in meeting the demands of the new Common Core Standards in order to close the achievement gap within the United States and among other great nations.

Typically,

the “achievement gap” in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off. (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011, para 1)

However, Landson-Billing (2006), in her American Educational Research Association presidential address, challenged educators and educational researchers to reconceptualize the idea that there is an “achievement gap” and begin to think about the problem as an “education debt,” or the debt that has accumulated related to historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components, that we must pay back in order for all students in America to be prepared for post-secondary education and work. There is considerable evidence stating in order to close the achievement gap, we must “effectively

promote early literacy and math skills in the context of nurturing and emotionally supportive classrooms” (Klein & Knitzer, 2007, p. 2). As educators think about ways to “pay back” the education debt with increasing demands for doing so, greater emphasis on early literacy, specifically full-day kindergarten, provides a significant opportunity for teachers to meet the needs of their students and for student to acquire the foundational skills necessary for success beyond the kindergarten classroom. Decades of research on full-day kindergarten have demonstrated the various ways students benefit academically and social-emotionally from attending a full-day kindergarten program (Pawl, 2012; Kauerz, 2005; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Hough & Bryde, 1996; Cryan, et. al. 1992; Housden & Kam, 1992; Koopmans, 1991; Gullo, 1990). In full-day kindergarten, “there is more time for formal and informal learning activities; for enrichment experiences in music, art, and physical education; for individual help; and for social interaction with adults and other children” (Housden & Kam, 1992, p. 2). As students enter kindergarten with preexisting inequalities and differences, “school is a place where children should have equal chances to make the most of their potential” (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 5). In order for educators to close the achievement gap in the long term, we must begin to invest in students at an early age to set them up for a lifetime of learning and achievement.

This study focuses on a large consolidated elementary suburban school district outside of a major Midwestern city. The District is comprised of twenty-one elementary schools, five junior high schools, one Kindergarten through Eighth Grade school of choice and one Early Childhood Center. The student population currently stands at over 14,000 enrolled students. The changing assessment landscape has painted a new reality in

the District. Achievement gaps, while narrowing, persist amongst ethnic minority groups, students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), or economically disadvantaged students. Moreover, the growth in linguistic diversity, mobility, and low-income percentages in the District's student population mean that more needs to be done to meet the needs of the diverse population. Like many school districts across the nation, the District is continually focusing on narrowing the achievement gap more and more each year.

This District continually strives to ensure student success on a daily basis, which now includes the addition of a free, full-day kindergarten program. The purpose of this formative program evaluation is to assess the implementation of full-day kindergarten in a large, suburban school system. As the District moves from half- to full-day kindergarten in each of its twenty-two elementary buildings, I will explore both the rationale behind full-day kindergarten, as well as increase awareness of program structures by describing full-day kindergarten programming. More specifically, the purpose of this program evaluation is to evaluate the process and effectiveness of the implementation as well as find ways to support successful, long term implementation of full-day kindergarten.

Rationale

The past use of a half-day kindergarten structure limited the ability to deliver the entirety of the curriculum as well as targeted acceleration supports for all kindergarten students as teachers had less time to meet the needs of each student. The District's

student achievement goals call upon the District to focus resources at the primary grades in order to close the achievement gap and prevent the achievement gap from widening in the years to come.

Since Illinois recently adopted the Common Core State Standards, the District has been working to align curriculum to the standards that provide students with exceptional opportunities to learn and demonstrate their understanding. The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and literacy outlining what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. The Common Core Standards are designed to ensure students are prepared for today's entry level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs. These standards focus on developing the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills students will need to be successful. Forty-three states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted these standards. In June 2010, the Illinois State Board of Education voluntarily adopted the Common Core Standards to be fully implemented during the 2013-2014 school year (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2015).

Since 2012, the District has worked diligently to align the Common Core Standards to their curriculum. Task Forces comprised of administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers from each school, representing each grade level, kindergarten through eighth grade, met monthly to embark on the journey of focusing on standard alignment, development of high quality lesson plans and creation of rigorous common assessment questions. During the first year of implementation, the Task Forces met monthly to focus on reflection and revision as the district evolved in its understanding of

the standards and the capabilities of their students. The Task Forces continued to meet in the fall and spring to evaluate progress, refine the curriculum, and identify areas of focus for the upcoming school year.

While implementation of the Common Core Standards has shown greater growth and achievement for all students as demonstrated by District data, the revised standards were intentionally designed to be implemented in to a full-day kindergarten setting (Bornfreund, 2012). Understanding the importance of early acquisition of foundational skills and the Common Core Standards, full-day kindergarten provides students the opportunity to develop and master these skills resulting in greater future success (Kauerz, 2005). Therefore, full-day kindergarten is the best solution for providing students with the tools they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

A Focus on Early Intervention

The 2014—2015 school year marked the opening of the District’s Early Learning Center (ELC). The ELC serves special education and at-risk students, ages 3-5 (omitted for confidentiality, Early Learning Center, 2015). While the District had early childhood programming spread throughout the district previous to 2014, the opening of the ELC demonstrated the importance of designing a learning environment specially to meet the needs of early learners as well as the commitment and support of the District in investing in early literacy programs. “Education reform efforts need to start as early as birth, and be continued through preschool and into early elementary school” (Klein & Knitzer, 2007, p. 4). The ELC provides students with a foundation for learning to enter kindergarten better prepared which is impactful on a child’s education starting at an early

age. The District is committed to early literacy for all students, especially at risk students. A “strong evidence base is showing that an intentional curriculum and effective teaching supports are promising pathways to increase the early literacy and math achievement of low-income students” (Klein & Knitzer, 2007, p. 4). If we begin by providing our earliest learners with a curriculum and programming that ensures their success, we can prohibit the “education debt” from ever forming and set students up for college- and career-readiness the moment they enter our schools.

In the spring of 2013,

the District adopted three new, rigorous goals for student performance. These goals drive all work taking place in the system and are aligned to the new levels of expectation and rigor articulated in the Common Core State Standards. The goals state:

1. “Students who have attended District schools for at least one year will be at grade level in reading and math upon entering third grade as measured by Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing.
2. Each school will close the achievement gap for all students in reading and math as measured by both district and state assessments.
3. Each school will perform at or above the 90th percentile (top 10% nationally) in meeting individual student growth targets in reading and math as measured by MAP” (omitted for confidentiality, 2015. p.7).

In line with research on early literacy, the Board goals demonstrate the importance of and focus on early intervention in the District. The implementation of full-

day kindergarten will support students in performing at grade level and closing the achievement gap throughout all grade levels as they demonstrate growth each year.

Half-Day versus Full-Day Kindergarten in the District

A typical half-day kindergarten schedule provides students with 2.5 hours of instruction including the District's recommended 90-minute literacy block made up of shared reading, guided reading, independent work time, read aloud, writing, and embedded word work. Roughly 30-minutes are spent on shared and guided mathematics instruction and the remaining time is for daily routines, science or social studies. The half-day schedule limits the teacher's ability to provide individualized and small-group instruction to meet the needs of each student.

A full-day program is only worthwhile if the curriculum kindergarteners are engaged in is meaningful and purposeful. Full-day kindergarten offers 6.5 hours of instruction including lunch and the District's recommended 115-minute literacy block. Comprised of the same elements as the half-day program; shared reading, guided reading, independent work time, read aloud, writing, and embedded word work; but with more time dedicated towards each component, plus a 30-minute literacy acceleration block. Instead of 30 total minutes of math, students will have 60-minute math blocks with an additional 30-minute math acceleration block. Literacy and math acceleration is time focused on accelerating learning in literacy and math for all students. All students spend time with a teacher in a small group instructional setting to master standards and content or extend their learning. Full-day kindergarten students will also have daily opportunities for social studies, science, lunch and fine arts or physical education. The full-day

schedule allows for more time focused on teaching and learning more rigorous standards. A full day of learning early in life can help improve students’ reading, writing and math skills and provide a strong foundation for future learning (omitted for confidentiality, 2015).

Figure 1. Half-Day and Full-Day Schedule Comparison

Half-Day Kindergarten		Full Day Kindergarten	
8:35-8:45	Daily Routines	8:40-9:00	Daily Routines
8:45-9:00	Shared Reading	9:00-9:20	Shared Reading
9:00-9:40	Guided Reading/ Independent Work	9:20-10:00	Guided Reading/ Independent Work
9:40-10:00	Writing	10:00-10:30	Writing
10:00-10:20	Shared Math	10:30-11:00	Library, PE, Music, or Art
10:20-10:30	Guided Math	11:00-11:30	Literacy Acceleration
10:30-10:55	Social Studies or Science	11:30-11:50	Social Studies
10:55-11:10	Read Aloud	11:50-12:35	Lunch
<i>The full-day kindergarten schedule provides students with more time to learn. In addition to an extended mathematics and literacy block, acceleration gives students added opportunities to master skills and extend learning. Full-day kindergarten students also have daily time dedicated towards engaging in the content areas and special activities such as lunch, recess, library, physical education, music and art.</i>		12:35-1:05	Shared Math
		1:05-1:35	Guided Math
		1:35-2:05	Math Acceleration
		2:05-2:35	Science
		2:35-3:00	Read Aloud

As the assistant principal at two of the District's twenty-two elementary schools, my role goes beyond supporting students behaviorally and my main priority and focus each school year is for our schools to provide students with excellent learning opportunities. My role as an assistant principal as related to this program evaluation includes designing, planning and facilitating professional development; supporting Professional Learning Communities during plan time, reflection meetings, and teachers' daily instruction as I do with every grade level. I value early literacy for all students and will work to support full-day kindergarten. Having the opportunity to trace the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program in the District is important in determining whether the program is fulfilling its intended outcomes. The full-day kindergarten program aims to benefit kindergarteners now and in to the future with the hope that the early academic success of kindergarten students in the District will translate in to long term success for all students. It is essential to evaluate the program in order to be proactive and supportive throughout the implementation process with the aim of providing a kindergarten education that sets students up for success. A program evaluation is valuable for parents and taxpayers to know that their tax dollars are working towards an effective and worthwhile cause, ultimately ensuring the success of all students in the district. It is also valuable for teachers, administrators and district employees to know whether they are doing the right work and explore how they can make changes to successfully meet the needs of all students. The program evaluation will ensure the full-day kindergarten program is implemented effectively and ultimately impacts student learning in a positive way. The program evaluation will also provide insight into action

or changes needed moving forward with the ultimate goal relating to student achievement.

Goals

Knowing a solid full-day kindergarten program can slow the growth of the achievement gap, more rapidly narrow the gap over time, and ultimately close the gap indefinitely; the goals of the implementation of full-day kindergarten in the District are to provide free, full-day kindergarten housed at each of the incoming kindergartener's base school. A full school day as compared to a half school day allows teachers more time to deliver instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards used in the District. A full school day as compared to a half school day allows teachers more time to deliver instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards used in the District, and gives teachers a chance to differentiate instruction to student ability level. With a longer day, students have additional opportunities for learning such as, engage in music, art and physical education classes, visit the learning center weekly, eat lunch, and go outside for recess. The goal of a longer school day is to provide more time for students to improve reading, writing, and math skills and provide a strong foundation for learning. Additionally, students involved in full-day kindergarten will derive social-emotional benefits such as; more independent learning, classroom involvement, and productivity in collaborating with peers (Kauerz, 2005).

Evaluating the implementation of full-day kindergarten by assessing the alignment of full-day kindergarten programming in the District to research-based, best practice will be essential in determining the long-term potential and effectiveness of the

program. It is imperative that the full-day kindergarten program is designed to provide additional learning experiences for students where they have further opportunities for growth, development, and mastery of kindergarten skills and standards. By evaluating the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program early in the life of the program, the District can use the information to make improvements, better understand parent, teacher, and administrator perspectives, and provide supports for parents, teachers, and administrators in order to ensure long term success of the full-day kindergarten program.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this formative program evaluation (Patton, 2008) is: How did a large, suburban school system implement a full-day kindergarten program? Secondary questions include: What is the perception of full-day kindergarten for related stakeholders such as parents, teachers and administrators? What supports will be needed in order to successfully implement full-day kindergarten? What curricular considerations need to be taken to implement a worthwhile full-day kindergarten program? What professional development is needed to build the capacity of kindergarten teachers? These questions will drive the research and work of my program evaluation by monitoring how well the goal and objectives of the new full-day kindergarten program are being met, in addition to determining next steps for successfully developing and sustaining full-day kindergarten in our school district (Patton, 2008).

SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Education

It is important that we have high quality learning opportunities for all students in order to set them up for success and college- and career-readiness. Understanding the impact of early literacy, this section provides an overview of the evolution of education, the development of kindergarten and the benefits of full-day kindergarten.

Evolution of Education

Education in the United States began in the 1600's as colonists believed it was important to educate people based on what they needed to know for life at home, work, and activities for daily living. Schools were available for the rising working classes, but formal education was reserved for a select few, such as the upper class and clergy (Marsh & Willis, 1999). As the educational system spread, students of all ages were taught together in a one room schoolhouse with limited curriculum and materials. In the mid-nineteenth century, Horace Mann's knowledge of education in other countries influenced the segregation of students by age as well as the standardization of public school curricula, which is the norm today. In 1852, compulsory attendance laws were passed with a formal schooling system. Mandatory attendance through elementary school was the law across the United States by 1918. (Birch, et al., 2013) Additionally, education expanded to include higher education in order to prepare students for work in the increasingly technical agricultural and engineering sciences and eventually liberal arts and specialized programs with practical coursework that prepared students for specific careers (Birch, et al., 2013).

Throughout the twentieth century, the American education system evolved in order to serve all students equally under the U.S. Constitution. *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 ruled in favor of desegregated schools with equal resources and educational opportunities for all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 “offered new grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for text and library books, it created special education centers, and created scholarships for low-income college students. Additionally, the law provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para 2). The ESEA was renamed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and it aimed to “ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, Sec. 1001.). Title IX ensured equal opportunities in athletics, fair division of federal resources and opportunities regardless of gender. While much progress has been made, an achievement gap exists between groups of students and districts across America are working to narrow and close the gap indefinitely.

NCLB exposed achievement gaps and initiated an important discussion on how to improve the American education system nationwide. In order to expand opportunity for all students in America; to support schools, teachers, and principals; and to strengthen our educational system and economy; many parents, educators, and elected officials have recognized that a strong, updated law was necessary. In 2012, NCLB requirements become more flexible given state developed plans for a rigorous curriculum that would

improve education for all students. Forty-three states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards in order to establish common language across the nation (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2015). These new standards begin in kindergarten and are developed from kindergarten through high school to prepare students for college- and career- readiness. The demand for students to demonstrate high levels of thinking and understanding requires a strong foundation of early literacy skills to translate into long term academic success and achievement.

As laws and standards continue to evolve, the belief that schools can make a difference resonates among educators and policymakers alike.

There is a widespread faith among Americans in the value of education for social betterment, for both individuals and the nation. Among the many institutions in U.S. society, schooling is seen by most Americans as the embodiment of meritocracy. They believe—or at least hope—that children’s experiences in our nation’s elementary and secondary schools allow them to succeed without regard to their family circumstances, their race or ethnicity, or their gender. (Lee & Burkam, 2002, p. 5)

Lee and Burkam raise the point that Americans do believe that education for all provides an opportunity for Americans to succeed and reach their fullest potential. It is important for educators and policymakers to keep in mind that while all children do not begin school as equals; with the right resources and supports, we can work to close the achievement gap that has begun even before students step foot in our schools. Improving

and expanding education experiences from the beginning can result in a long-term effective system that better prepares students for the future (Heckman & Krueger, 2005).

Development of Kindergarten

While there are many facets of education, providing effective early learning experiences for students is imperative in setting them up for future achievement and preparedness for college and career (Klein & Knitzer, 2007). In the early 1800s, Friedrich Froebel established the first kindergarten in Germany. Considered the first “solidified approach to the direct instruction of young children” (Peterson, 1987, p. 111), Froebel’s philosophy focused on several basic principles:

- (a) Education should be passive in the sense that it is primarily protecting and nurturing the child, but not prescriptive or controlling;
- (b) Play is natural to children and should constitute the heart of the curriculum;
- (c) Play is the means by which children gain insights, and it is the means for mental development; and
- (d) Play should be free play, not something to be interfered with by adult supervision. (Peterson, 1987, p. 112)

In Froebel’s kindergarten, emphasis was placed on “training children, 3-6 years of age, in habits of cleanliness, neatness, punctuality, courtesy, deference toward others, language, numbers, forms, and hand-eye coordination.” (Peterson, 1987, p. 112) As Froebel’s ideas began to spread throughout the world, it became increasingly important for teachers to be trained to meet the needs of early learners (Peterson, 1987, p. 112).

In order to combat the difficulties resulting from industrialization and urbanization, kindergarten gained support in the United States by teaching children how to assimilate in the American culture. Throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century, kindergarten developed to provide children with early learning experiences that taught them how to fit the social and cultural norms of society (Peterson, 1987; Kunesh, 1990). With the growth of early childhood education came conflicting viewpoints related to kindergarten, early learning, time dedicated towards free play versus teacher directed instruction, and the nature of creative activity (Kunesh, 1990).

Froebel's principles were challenged in an 1898 "Report for the Committee of Twelve" to the International Kindergarten Union as three key arguments were presented:

1. Kindergarten curriculum should be related to the child's present circumstances rather than to the needs of children from another culture and another generation.
2. Children's personal experiences should be used as the vehicle for helping children gain insight and knowledge about their world.
3. Children should be allowed the freedom to engage in concrete, child-oriented play experiences based upon natural activities of childhood. (Peterson, 1987, p. 114)

Both Froebel and the Committee of Twelve supported kindergarten education. Froebel valued utilizing education as a means for training children to fit the norm, or organization of play, while the Committee of Twelve believed in freedom of play. A main difference would be the constructivist model of Froebel opposed to the creative school of the

Committee of Twelve, or an emphasis on the product versus an emphasis on the process (Wheelock, 1907).

G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey also contributed to the kindergarten reform movement. They believed education should involve active learning and problem solving, social interaction, and learning by doing things that were of interest to the child and tested child development by applying the theory of progressivism, which emphasizes learning by doing, to American education and kindergarten. Dewey argued that education should incorporate practical life experiences integrated within formal education to prepare students for a realistic future (Peterson, 1987).

Kindergarten reform continued into the 1920s and 1930s and momentous events since the 1930s contributed to the evolving in kindergarten structure. To begin with, the poor economic setting resulted in a decrease of kindergarten support in public schools. Additionally, there was a deterioration of the strict formalism of education and a new attentiveness to social and emotional development due to the mental health movement. Moreover, the American people looked unfavorably at school curricula and student development and preparation during the Space Race. The emphasis on kindergarten in the United States evolved throughout these decades as a result of the times.

There is supporting evidence for the developmental significance of early education for young children as compared to children lacking early learning experiences (Peterson, 1987; Kunes, 1990). Eventually, the kindergarten movement gained steady support as an emphasis on early education became important, in order to prepare students and our nation to be internationally competitive.

The kindergarten classrooms of today should include a developmentally and instructionally responsive teaching and curriculum to meet the needs of their kindergarten students. Combining a focus on developing literacy and math skills with developing the whole child is essential to setting students up for life-long learning (Graue, 2009).

High-quality kindergarten practice provides flexible instructional approaches with a planned set of content to help students grow across developmental domains.

This program supports the child who talks and sings, writes and races, solves and causes problems, and makes and needs friends. A program that can enrich all these dimensions is complex. Curriculum design includes the traditional content areas of reading, language arts, math, science, social studies, and the arts, as well as physical and social emotional development. It engages children in activity types, including large and small groups, teacher-directed and child-initiated, individual and peer-oriented, formal and informal. Balancing all these elements is difficult but critical if we hope to have balanced students. (Graue, 2009, para 23)

In response to the increased social and political demands to better set students up for the future, many school districts are opting for full-day kindergarten programs instead of half-day kindergarten. Full-day students spend at least six hours in school instead of less than three hours in a half-day program. However, the time spent at school is not as important as the way that time is spent. An effective full-day program can provide students with a better balanced schedule than a half-day program that makes time for increased learning, more opportunities for play and experiential learning through a more developed curriculum (Pawl, 2012; Kauerz, 2005; Hough & Bryde, 1996; Housen & Kam, 1992; Gullo, 1990).

Benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten

The percentage of kindergarten children enrolled in a full-day program rose from 20 percent in the early 1970s to 56 percent in the late 1990s. In the fall of 1998, more than half of the 4 million children attending kindergarten in the United States were in full-day programs as 45% were in half-day programs (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). The increase in enrollment has been linked to various social, economic, and academic factors.

Socioeconomic factors lead parents to enroll their children in full-day programs while parents and other caregivers are at work. In order to reduce disruptions and transitions throughout the day, many parents are choosing full-day kindergarten options for their children. Additionally, families need high quality, safe, nurturing and reliable places for their children to spend time and gain consistent learning experiences (Gullo, 1990; Kauerz, 2005). Full-day kindergarten offers a quality, stable environment which is a priority for many working families.

Another justification for full-day kindergarten relates to student preparedness for full-day kindergarten. Gullo (1990) states, children who have spent some of their pre-kindergarten years in pre-kindergarten programs or other child care arrangements are better prepared for the cognitive, social and physical demands of a full-day of kindergarten. Participating in full-day kindergarten provides continuity as children transition into first-grade and beyond supporting each child's social and academic success (Kauerz, 2005). By offering full-day kindergarten to all students, we may be able to reduce long-term costs for special education, bilingual education and other programs

designed to close the gap as full-day kindergarten can provide these opportunities to all students.

The greatest argument for providing full-day kindergarten is linked to the academic benefits of increasing the time available for developing and mastering appropriate skills necessary for success in school, especially for children with special needs or low socioeconomic status who are “at risk” for school failure (Walton & West, 2004). The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten (ECLS-K), Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), and Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011 (ECLS-K: 2011) each show the prevalence of the achievement gap based on race, ethnicity, poverty status, and home language (Walston & West, 2004; Denton Flanagan & McPhee, 2009; Mulligan, Hastedt & McCarroll, 2012). Supporters of full-day kindergarten stress the prospective educational benefit for full-day kindergarten students. They value additional time to get to know their students, individualize their instruction to meet students’ needs, and create meaningful learning opportunities for their students. Full-day kindergarten students have more time to attain the foundational skills taught in kindergarten (Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998). Full-day programs provide teachers with additional time for instruction that provides essential learning opportunities to improve academic and social-emotional development (Kauerz, 2005).

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, full-day kindergarten offers students sufficient time to complete more rigorous kindergarten curricula (Shepard & Smith, 1988). “Children enrolled in half-day kindergarten receive less instructional time, likely experience a narrowed curriculum, have less time for

experimentation and exploration, and enjoy fewer opportunities for play” (Bornfreund, 2012, para 3.). Full-day programs are critical to the development of literacy and math skills as well as the cultivation of lifelong learners.

Academic Benefits

“Studies not only show full-day programs have no detrimental effects on children who attend, but students show significantly stronger academic gains over the course of the kindergarten year than their counterparts in half-day programs” (Kauerz, 2005, p. 3). There is no evidence indicating half-day students achieved at a higher level than full-day students which is why we should have full-day kindergarten for all students.

A 3-year longitudinal study of two cohorts of students demonstrated statistically significant results related to achievement differences in favor of full-day kindergarten when compared to half-day kindergarten data. When comparing half-day kindergarten students to full-day kindergarten students, there were no significant differences in reading comprehension and math scores for students in their third year of school; however, when comparing students in half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs, reading comprehension and scores in mathematics were higher for second grade students who had attended full-day kindergarten programs (Koopmans, 1991).

Cryan, et. al. (1992) assessed the effects of half-day, alternate day, and full-day kindergarten programs. Data from a two phase study point towards a positive relationship between students who participated in full-day kindergarten and increased achievement. Children who attended full-day kindergarten had greater achievement on standardized tests and less grade retentions compared to students in half-day kindergarten

or alternate programs. Another study comparing six full-day kindergarten programs to six half-day kindergarten programs found students who attended the full-day kindergarten programs made greater gains in most language arts and some mathematics when assessed using criterion-references assessments (Hough & Bryde, 1996). Further research suggests students who attend full-day kindergarten exhibited greater achievement than half-day attendees and were better prepared for first grade (Hough & Bryde, 1996; Fusaro, 1997; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Wang & Johnstone, 1999). Additionally, studies found that, “regardless of the curriculum, low-socioeconomic students benefited greater from full-day kindergarten than middle-or high-socioeconomic students” (Housen & Kam, 1992, p. 2).

Despite these findings, some researchers have not found significant differences between the academic achievement of students in full-day kindergarten and half-day kindergarten programs beyond the primary grades (Gullo & Clements, 1984; Holmes & McConnell, 1990; Nunnally, 1996). A study comparing longitudinal academic achievement of 489 full-day and half day kindergarten students from 1995 to 2001 validated these findings as statistically significant results emerged at the end of kindergarten, at the beginning of first grade, and at the end of first grade. The results evened out by the end of primary grades and beginning of intermediate grades (Wolgemuth, et, al., 2006).

These findings suggest that simply adding time to the kindergarten school day is not as important as ensuring that all kindergarteners are provided with developmentally and individually appropriate learning environments to meet their needs, regardless of whether these programs are full-day or half-day (Hough & Bryde, 1996; Pawl, 2012).

The length of the school day is only one aspect of the kindergarten experience. Curriculum and the quality of instruction are key factors in the early learning and future success of kindergarten students (Pawl, 2012). Overall, the literature strongly points toward the fact that students in full-day kindergarten achieve at higher levels than students in half-day kindergarten.

Social-Emotional Benefits

Most studies of full-day kindergarten have focused solely on academic achievement; however, researchers have also studied social and behavioral effects of full-day kindergarten. Cryan, et. al. (1992) assessed behavioral effects in addition to academic achievement for full-day kindergarten participants. Full-day kindergarteners demonstrated more positive behavior in kindergarten and in the years following. For example, full-day kindergarteners demonstrated more independent learning, classroom involvement, and productivity when working with peers than half-day kindergarteners. They were also more likely to approach the teacher, and they expressed less withdrawal, anger, shyness, and blaming behavior than half-day kindergarteners (Cryan, et. al. 1992). Overall, students in full-day programs demonstrated more favorable behaviors than students in half-day or alternate day programs.

Other researchers found greater utilization of small group activities, greater number of social interactions and more regular school attendance of full-day students leading to more opportunities for child-to-child interactions and experiences (Hough & Bryde, 1996). Elicker and Mathur (1997) determined that, full-day students compared to half-day students spent considerably more time in independent and small group learning

experiences and attribute significantly greater progress in learning social skills to full-day kindergarten attendance.

Time v. Task

Walston & West (2004), through ECLS-K, found the average percent of class time U.S. public kindergarten classes spent in various classroom organizations was comparable in full-day and half-day programs. However, the average minutes per day U.S. public kindergarten classes spent in whole class, small group, individual, and child selected activities was clearly greater in full-day kindergarten classrooms.

Individualized and small group instruction has been shown to positively impact student achievement, meeting their needs to narrow and close the achievement gap. Students made greater reading gains when they spent more than the average amount of time in individualized reading groups even if they were in larger than average classrooms (American Institute for Research, 2010). Small group instruction in the form of mixed-level groups consisting of children of various ability levels working together and achievement groups made of children at similar ability levels in a particular subject area work together on skills to meet their current needs and abilities (Walston & West, 2004). Differences in strengths, interests, and needs cannot be overlooked and must be considered when planning instruction. Group and independent work is purposefully designed to meet the needs of diverse learners through developmentally appropriate, differentiated, small-group instruction as one way to engage students in learning. Guided reading aligned to the essential outcomes and initial instruction is another important aspect of the day providing “an instructional context for supporting each reader’s

development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 25). Full-day kindergarten classes have more time to implement grouped instructional opportunities.

According to Walston and West (2004), in full-day and half-day programs, most of the day is spent on reading and language arts; however, full-day programs consistently spend more time teaching mathematics, social studies, and science. Furthermore, full-day programs dedicate more time towards art, music, creative subjects, and full-day kindergarten students are spending the additional time during the day exposed to more advanced reading, writing, and mathematics skills resulting in greater academic progress (Walston & West, 2004). The American Institute for Research (2010) found that children in programs that spent more time on reading instruction relative to the total academic instruction time made more reading progress. Darling-Hammond (2015) recognizes the positive connection between reading instructional time and reading success. A full-day kindergarten program allows students to dedicate more time each day to their literacy development. Research suggests that time allocation to specific instructional subjects, such as literacy and mathematics, is positively associated to greater learning in those subjects (Pawl, 2012; Walston & West, 2004; American Institute for Research, 2010).

Attitudes Towards Full-Day Kindergarten

In addition to considering academic, social and behavioral effects, researchers have examined parent and teacher attitudes towards full-day kindergarten. To combat the notion that kindergarteners need time to rest, data suggests no significant difference in the amount of fatigue experienced by full-day and half-day students. In fact, parents of full-

day kindergarten students believed that their children had a better opportunity for success in first grade and beyond over the half-day kindergarten students (Hough & Bryde, 1996; Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

For families, full-day kindergarten is essential for maintaining consistency and stability in the lives of kindergarten students. A great number of American families are in need of childcare while parents and other caregivers work, presenting a challenge for families to maintain continuity of care for their child. To ensure a balanced schedule with a safe and nurturing environment, “many parents favor full-day kindergarten because it reduces the number of disruptions and transitions children experience in a typical day” while providing social and academic opportunities for growth (Kauerz, 2005, p. v).

For teachers, full-day kindergarten is important in meeting the demands of more rigorous standards and increasingly diverse populations of students. Teachers cited many benefits of a full school day for kindergarteners including flexibility, more time for child-initiated creative activities, and less stress (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). Teachers also valued having more time in order to get to know their students abilities and needs, as well as increase communication with families, enabling them to better meet the needs of each student (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). Full-day programs provide teachers more time for instruction that allows for meaningful learning opportunities and encourages the development of the whole child (Kauerz, 2005). Just as parents felt their children were better prepared for first grade after attending full-day kindergarten, teachers also noticed full-day kindergarten students exhibited higher first grade readiness than their half-day

peers (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). Overall attitudes towards full-day kindergarten are positive, especially for kindergarten parents and teachers.

The literature exhibits the benefits of full-day kindergarten when executed effectively with proper alignment and time dedicated towards literacy, numeracy, and social emotional development. This program evaluation will aim to understand the District's implementation of full-day kindergarten and provide actionable results that can improve the program and ensure it is successful for students, families, and educators presently and in to the future.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

A mixed methods approach to research focused on my primary and secondary research questions provides a balanced set of data for analysis of the implementation of full-day kindergarten in the District. Using the secondary questions of; *What is the perception of full-day kindergarten for related stakeholders such as parents, teachers and administrators? What supports will be needed in order to successfully implement full-day kindergarten? What curricular considerations need to be taken to implement a worthwhile full-day kindergarten program? What professional development is needed to build the capacity of kindergarten teachers?*, leads to clarity related to the primary question, *How did a large, suburban school system implement a full-day kindergarten program?*, which directly impacts implementation, supports, and future changes related to full-day kindergarten programming.

The validity of experimental methods and quantitative measurement, appropriately used, has never been in doubt (Patton, 2008). Quantitative data is valuable in evaluating enrollment trends over time in addition to providing information related to the program support and specific stakeholder views of the program. Enrollment trends will show whether there is a pattern between enrollment and half-day versus full-day kindergarten offering. Enrollment trends and multiple-choice selections from stakeholder groups reveal levels of support from various stakeholders in addition to providing comparative data. This data inform considerations related to the program such as initial

implementation, assessing capital and human resources, and determining whether the program is being supported by stakeholders.

Qualitative evaluators work to understand participants' experiences in their own terms by learning how they experience the program and what they think about the program altogether (Patton, 2008). Qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses is powerful as it provides empirical evidence from involved stakeholders. Evaluating individual stakeholder experiences leads to a better understanding of similarities and differences between and among groups as well as individual thoughts and concerns to consider. Collecting qualitative data from open-ended questions gives participants the chance to honestly voice their ideas, thoughts, and concerns related to the program being evaluated in order to find strengths and areas of concern within the program.

Participants

District kindergarten and first-grade enrollment data was evaluated. Additionally, the three major stakeholder groups that participated in the research related to the implementation of full-day kindergarten were;

- kindergarten parents
- kindergarten teachers
- elementary school administrators

These stakeholders were surveyed through a secure, online questionnaire. No identifying information was asked and all information remains confidential and cannot be traced back to individual participants. Each of these groups represents stakeholders directly

impacted by the new model of full-day kindergarten and their feedback provided a greater understanding of our reality during the early stages of implementation and what we need to consider moving forward to contribute towards solutions for their stakeholder group or the full-day kindergarten program as a whole.

Data Gathering Techniques

The primary and secondary research questions were explored through questionnaire data and examining enrollment trends. The goal of collecting this data was to evaluate levels of support of full-day kindergarten from various stakeholders, determine perceived strengths as well as define potential challenges and considerations of a full-day kindergarten program, and to understand supports individual stakeholders need in order to feel successful in implementing full-day kindergarten.

Questionnaires

Data was collected based on a questionnaire soliciting feedback from the perspectives of kindergarten parents, kindergarten teachers, and elementary school administrators. The questionnaire was administered through Survey Monkey, it was sent out via email as participants responded in a secure and anonymous format. While everyone completed the same survey questions, a question was created to differentiate data from each stakeholder group, making data analysis more precise and allowing for stakeholder group comparisons.

An initial multiple-choice question asked participants if they agree to participate in the survey. If they choose “I Agree,” they will be directed to the first question on the questionnaire. If they choose “I Disagree,” they can close out of the survey at any time.

By clicking “I Agree,” you consent to answering the questions in this survey.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> I Disagree

First, a question asked participants to identify which stakeholder group they represent. This allowed data to be collected together but also divided by group during the analysis.

Please select the group that <i>best</i> describes you.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten Parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School Administrator

A multiple-choice question was asked to gauge interest and support for full-day kindergarten programming followed by an open-ended option to provide an explanation for their response.

Given the option for full- or half-day kindergarten in the District, which would you choose? (Please select one)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Full-Day Kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/> Half-Day Kindergarten	<input type="checkbox"/> Undecided
Please explain why you have selected the above option.		

The following open-ended response questions aimed to understand stakeholder priorities and perspectives related to the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

What do you believe to be the strengths of a full-day kindergarten program?
What are some challenges or factors worth considering with relation to full-day kindergarten?
What supports will you need in order for full-day kindergarten to be a success?
Please list any additional questions or comments that you may have regarding a full-day kindergarten program.

Enrollment Trends

Evaluating enrollment trends provides quantitative data related to the participation of half-day kindergarten versus full-day kindergarten. Data was gathered in collaboration with the District’s Department of Human Resources for kindergarten students from 2010-2015 by looking at the actual number of students enrolled in kindergarten each year. This data was collected for the purpose of calculating actual participation and making comparisons in enrollment between school years, in order to evaluate changes in enrollment between half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten. Furthermore, this data was compared to the kindergarten parent survey data to determine patterns between support on the questionnaire and actual parent response through enrollment in the kindergarten programs.

Data Analysis Techniques

Analysis of enrollment trends as compared to quantitative data, such as percentages derived from the questionnaire, aids in understanding the relationship between perceived support as demonstrated by the online questionnaire and actual support for full-day kindergarten as calculated through enrollment data. Patton (2008)

speaks to the power of triangulation, a way of checking the consistency of findings from different data sources in data analysis. Drawing on these relationships is important to provide evidence for the argument. Qualitative analysis through coding questionnaire responses results in the identification of themes within stakeholder questionnaires, highlights confidences and exposes concerns from each stakeholder group. Coded themes were identified as they emerged with the purpose of extracting authentic data between and among groups. Examination of individual stakeholder groups provided meaningful feedback on what they feel is needed in order for full-day kindergarten to fully succeed in the long term. Additionally, analyzing questionnaire responses by topic gave a district-wide interpretation of strength and challenges of implementing full-day kindergarten.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS & INTERPRETATIONS

The Implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten

Understanding the implementation of full-day kindergarten in the District adds context to the data by providing a deeper understanding of the process (see Figure 2). The implementation began as an idea presented to the Board of Education at the first board meeting of a new year in January of 2015. After gaining board approval, the implementation process immediately began in February of 2015.

District administrators including principals, assistant principals and directors were notified of the new program and structures that would follow. The entire staff at each school learned about the new program and the implications for their building and staffing plan for the upcoming school year.

Kindergarten registration began in February as it does each year, only this time, parents were given the option for free, full-day kindergarten for their child. Building principals began interviewing and filling full-day kindergarten teaching positions as kindergarten teaching positions doubled in the District. Each base school facilitated a kindergarten presentation for parents, families and community members so they could learn more about the program and ask specific questions.

In the spring of 2015, the District's Department of Student Learning began providing professional development for all kindergarten teachers and support staff assigned to the full-day kindergarten positions. Professional development topics focused on implications of the new full-day kindergarten schedule and how to make the most of each school day (see Figure 1).

Construction began in early summer as detailed floor plans were modified to accommodate the increase of staff and students in a full-day kindergarten program. Throughout the summer, construction projects were completed in a timely manner, class lists were compiled and each buildings master schedule was finalized to reflect the new structure.

In the fall of 2015, all full-day kindergarten staff participated in a full-day of professional development related to the full-day kindergarten program. Finally, after six weeks of full-day kindergarten, parents and teachers were surveyed and given an opportunity to provide their feedback of the full-day kindergarten program.

Figure 2. Full-Day Kindergarten Implementation Timeline

January, 2015	✓ Board of Education presentation
Winter, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Registration for incoming Kindergarteners began ✓ Building principals filled projected full-day kindergarten positions ✓ Incoming Kindergarten presentation to staff at base school
Spring, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Department of Student Learning provided professional development sessions for all staff assigned to full-day positions ✓ Parent nights were facilitated at the base schools ✓ Construction projects began for floor plan modifications
Summer, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ June and August professional development opportunities were available to all teachers and staff district-wide ✓ Construction projects were completed ✓ Class lists were finalized and accommodations to schedules complete
Fall, 2015	✓ Full-day staff participated in structured professional development facilitated by the Department of Student Learning
November, 2015	✓ Parents and staff were surveyed on first months feedback

Findings

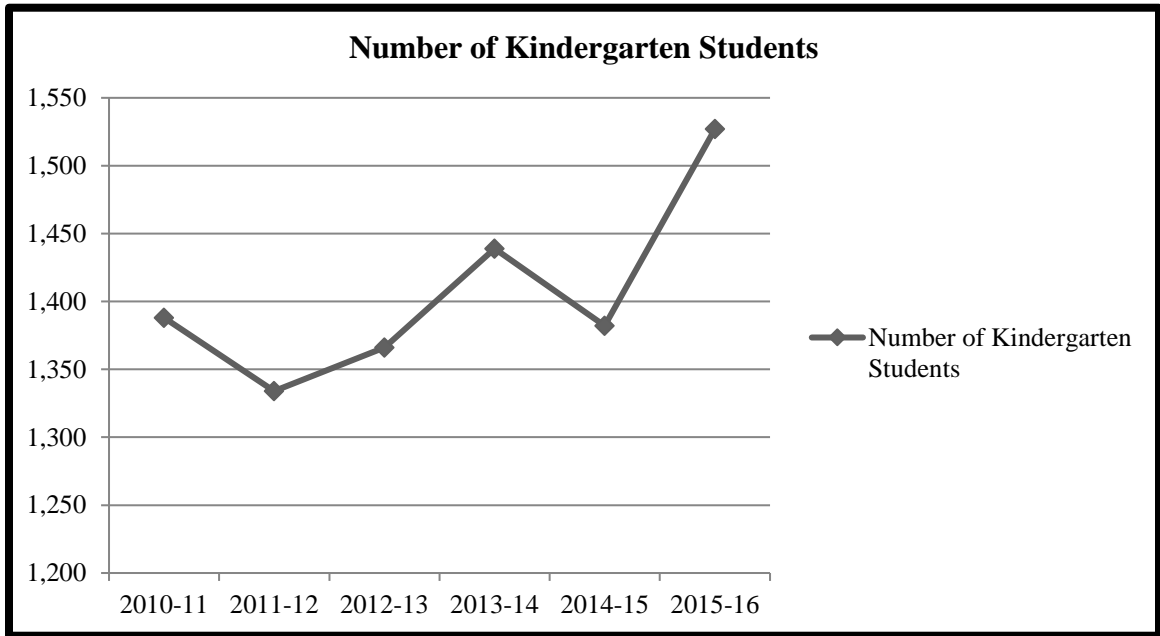
The Consensus on Full-Day Kindergarten

The data indicated widespread support in favor of full-day kindergarten. Given the option of full-day or half-day kindergarten, 100% of parents, teachers and administrators surveyed selected full-day kindergarten. Reasons and rationale for support were related to increased time for academic and social emotional opportunities and gains in order to better prepare students for 1st grade and beyond. Parents, teachers and administrators noted “more time” would profoundly impact students behaviorally, social emotionally and academically to set them up for future success. Comments on the full-day kindergarten survey include praise and gratitude towards the full-day kindergarten program (District Survey, 2015). Overwhelming support from teachers, parents and administrators stemmed from the direct impact on student learning and well-being that students are afforded from a full day kindergarten program. More time dedicated towards core subjects and standards, additional opportunities for fine arts and physical education, and extended peer and adult interactions were all explanations for why parents, teachers and administrators favor full-day kindergarten.

Enrollment trends based on the sixth day of enrollment from the past six years show an increase in the enrollment of kindergarten students during the 2015-2016 school year. The 2015-2016 school year represents the year full-day kindergarten was implemented. Part of the rationale for implementing full-day kindergarten was that some families chose full day options outside of the District. The data, as demonstrated in the figure below, supports this as enrollment increased in the year full-day kindergarten was

introduced (see Figure 3). Families expressed their appreciation and approval of the full-day program while teachers and administrators are pleased to get students in to the classroom from the beginning of their educational experience.

Figure 3. Kindergarten Enrollment Data



An Explanation for Full-Day Kindergarten

Many strengths of full-day kindergarten were cited as reasons why full-day kindergarten was chosen by 100% of parents, teachers and administrators surveyed. These reasons include both academic and social emotional benefits of a full-day kindergarten program.

Academic benefits include more time for core curriculum such as an extended literacy block and mathematics block, dedicated daily opportunities for social studies and science as well as individualized and small group instruction during guided reading, guided math and both literacy and math acceleration. Teachers surveyed indicated

acceleration periods in both literacy and math enhance enrichment and reteaching for kindergarten students with 84% of teachers rating acceleration as supportive to very supportive in providing targeted instruction to meet their students' needs (District Survey, 2015). Benefits beyond core instruction include added opportunities for students to participate in specials such as music, art, physical education, and library resource. In addition to these benefits and depending on the programs and scheduling at a student's base school, students may have opportunities for STEM explorations and learning another language such as Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin, or Sign Language. One parent explained that she chose full-day kindergarten because students can "explore greater educational opportunities such as specials, recess, making friends and social skills." Other parents explained their child would be better prepared for first grade and beyond.

A supplementary study conducted by the District, after seven weeks of full-day kindergarten, revealed that 97% of parents surveyed rated their child's overall experience as satisfied or very satisfied. More specifically, parents rated the academic supports their child is receiving at 96% satisfied or very satisfied. One parent commented, "Full-day kindergarten has been a great experience. Our son has acclimated very well to the environment and we appreciate the efforts of his teachers, school and district for creating and providing an excellent learning environment and process." Another parent stated, "The teachers are great and very supportive. They provide challenging and creative work for my kid, helping him improve his academic and social skills. I look forward to the academic improvements for the rest of the year for my son." Another parent commented, "My husband and I were on the fence about full-day kindergarten for our daughter before we started. We are now thrilled that she has had the opportunity to be in class all day. Her

development in reading, math, and social skills has progressed LEAPS and BOUNDS. We are extremely happy with the amazing progress we are seeing in our daughter's education these first few months of full day Kindergarten.” (District Survey, 2015).

Teachers included “the extra time to reinforce the curriculum through acceleration in math and reading,” as some of the strengths of providing full-day kindergarten to students. Another teacher noted, “With the increased minutes of instruction in math, writing, and acceleration, we are able to meet students at their level and enrich instruction. Likewise we are able to give feedback with increased time for conferencing during guided instruction.” (District Survey, 2015).

Social emotional benefits include added time to develop social skills through further opportunities to engage in both peer and adult interactions. Survey results demonstrate the belief that providing students with a solid foundation for developing academically and social emotionally can have a significantly positive impact on a child’s future success in school and beyond. A parent explained, “My daughter needs the extra learning experiences because she gets impatient when she doesn't understand. The full-day schedule will allow her more time for remediation and enrichment activities.” Other parents explained the full-day kindergarten program will allow their child “more time to establish routines” as well as “more time for peer and adult interactions.” Teachers explained that full-day kindergarten provides “more time to strengthen social skills and student to student interactions” and “extended learning opportunities for social, emotional, behavioral and academic development to better prepare students for first grade.” The supplementary study conducted by the District, after seven weeks of full-day kindergarten, revealed that 95% of parents surveyed social-emotional supports their child

is receiving in full-day kindergarten as satisfied or very satisfied. Teachers included “the time given for the students to have the extra socialization at specials, lunch recess and independent work time” as some of the greatest strengths of the full-day kindergarten program (District Survey, 2015).

Considerations Related to Full-Day Kindergarten

When given the opportunity to express challenges or factors worth considering with relation to full-day kindergarten, parents mentioned the transition and adjustment to full day school as their primary concern before their child began in the full-day kindergarten program. For many students, kindergarten is their first experience in a full day program. While some students have experience in half-day preschool or in-home daycare, parents worried about their child’s adjustment to a day without nap time and lunch time away from home. Kindergarten teachers and administrators also expressed some concern about the transition, but each stakeholder group emphasized the importance of transitioning students to full-day kindergarten will be successful as a result of a collaborative school and home partnership.

After seven weeks of full-day kindergarten, 95% of parents rated their child’s excitement for kindergarten as a four or five on a five-point scale where one is not excited and five is very excited (District Survey, 2015). The data demonstrates that while stakeholders were initially worried about the transition to full-day kindergarten, almost two months in to the school year, students were excited to attend school. Ultimately, the benefits of full-day kindergarten outweighed the concerns of each stakeholder group as

each group selected full-day kindergarten with 100% support and agreement that it is what is best for kids.

Given the opportunity to explain their preference for full-day kindergarten, 36% of parents from kindergarten families commented that full-day kindergarten is the best option available to their child as compared to an alternative placement such as private kindergarten or day care. Parents and teachers explained full-day kindergarten means fewer transitions throughout the day for their youngest learners. Instead of transitioning from daycare to kindergarten back to daycare, students have a consistent experience throughout their school day. This helps provide more consistency and time to establish routines so that children can learn and understand expectations, feeling more connected to the school community in their first experience at school. Parents explained their approval of full-day kindergarten in this regard as they feel better going to work knowing that their child is with a certified teacher in an appropriate learning environment and they do not have to worry about care for the other half of the day.

The survey revealed supports needed in order for full-day kindergarten to be a success. More than half of the parents surveyed mentioned they want clear and consistent communication between school and home in order for full-day kindergarten to be a success. Parents want information on how their child is performing both academically and social emotionally in the full-day kindergarten program as well as ways they can support their child at home. Parents expressed interest in forming a partnership with the school to support their child's learning. Communicating available resources and strategies for supporting a kindergarten student at home are one way to allow parents to become involved in their child's education.

Teachers stated the importance of clarity from administration and the district related to kindergarten structures and planning in a full-day model. The support from human capital, comprised of support staff, specials staff and administration, will be important in maximizing students' experience in full-day kindergarten. Both teachers and administrators emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development at the building and district level as an integral component contributing to the long term success of the full-day kindergarten program. One teacher commented, "Keep the professional development coming!" while many teachers suggested topics for professional development including acceleration, incorporating play, small group work and extended learning opportunities (District Survey, 2015).

Interpretations

The significance of the data is that full-day kindergarten is embraced by all stakeholder groups, and it is ultimately the right thing for students. A contributing factor to the overwhelming support for full-day kindergarten may be derived from the transparency, clarity and ongoing communication that parents, teachers, and administrators had prior to the initial implementation of full-day kindergarten. The District has hosted information nights and welcomed the community to Board Meetings to voice opinions and provide feedback throughout the introduction and implementation process. The longstanding balanced budget and projected plan to sustain full-day kindergarten have taken the fiscal factor out of the conversation so that we can focus on what is truly best for our earliest learners.

The greatest concerns from families of full-day kindergarten students indicated an initial concern with a kindergarten child's transition to full-day school. After seven weeks of full-day kindergarten, most parents rated their child's excitement a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. These findings are significant because they show kindergarten students adapted to a full-day program better than parents had expected. The results mean students are adapting well and parents' greatest concern is not an actual problem.

Another interpretation of data from parents is that families want to be a part of their child's education. Parents explained the need for clear and consistent communication related to their child's progress and ways they can support their child at home. This data is significant because it shows the parents' willingness to form the home-school partnership in order for each child to be successful in school.

The data from school personnel including teachers and administrators was greatly supportive towards full-day kindergarten. It demonstrated the program and structures are working and benefitting all students but the work is never done. The desire for clarity centered on full-day kindergarten programming and structures means the District and building administrators need to continue to communicate expectations and new ideas for improving full-day kindergarten for all students. The emphasis on professional development means the District and building administrators need to provide staff development and PLC time to teams so that kindergarten teachers can successfully deliver instruction to full-day kindergarten students.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgments

After reviewing the data, conclusions can be drawn with relation to the primary question and the secondary questions in the program evaluation. The results related to secondary questions indicate the perception of full-day kindergarten for related stakeholders such as parents, teachers and administrators; supports needed in order to successfully implement full-day kindergarten; curricular considerations needed to implement a worthwhile full-day kindergarten program; and professional development needed to build the capacity of kindergarten teachers. Thus, all results elucidate ways in which a large, suburban school system can implement an effective full-day kindergarten program.

The unanticipated results of the research indicate a strong shift in mindset of parents related to their child's transition to full-day school. Before the start of full-day kindergarten, parents identified the transition to full-day schooling as a great concern since many students are not exposed to full-day school prior to attending kindergarten. After seven weeks of experience in full-day kindergarten, parents enthusiastically indicated their child is excited to attend school. It was unknown whether this concern would arise and how students would react to a full-day setting. The data shows a change in parental mindset as the school year began resulting in no action needed related to students transitioning to full-day school.

Another unanticipated, yet understandable result of the research suggested clear and consistent communication between school and home as an additional support needed

in order for the implementation of full-day kindergarten to be successful. This includes all stakeholders and provides a means for implanting full-day kindergarten as a community by incorporating the school-home partnership. Currently schools are communicating with families via weekly newsletters and daily behavioral and academic notes from the kindergarten teacher, emails from administrators in addition to personal home contact as needed and regular updates to the District homepage including what is happening in the District as well as resources for parents to support their child's education.

In addition to unanticipated results of the research, there were many positive results as well. The positive results acknowledged the favorable perception of full-day kindergarten for related stakeholders such as parents, teachers and administrators, supports that will be needed in order to successfully implement full-day kindergarten. Keeping in mind the District's goal to close the achievement gap, widespread support of full-day kindergarten from all stakeholders provides a solid foundation for closing the achievement gap and preventing the education debt from ever forming.

Additionally, the data recognized curricular advantages and considerations that need to be taken to implement a worthwhile full-day kindergarten program. The District strategically incorporated acceleration blocks in both literacy and mathematics to enhance or enrich the understanding of the standards for each child. With a full-day program, students are afforded opportunities to engage in specials, extracurricular activities and additional social interactions. Increased time devoted to the development of each child academically and social emotionally means substantial opportunity for success in the future.

Moreover, the results indicated a need for professional development in order to build the capacity of kindergarten teachers in the District. More time is not the sole reason for the success of a full-day kindergarten program. The structures, instruction and the way the additional time is spent are critical contributing factors to the success of a program. Both teachers and administrators expressed the need for continuous professional development to support effective implementation of the full-day kindergarten program. Training human capital, including classroom teachers, support staff, specials teachers and administrators, will be essential to making the most of the full-day of school for kindergarten students.

The data provided numerous solutions to the primary question of how a large, suburban school system can implement an effective full-day kindergarten program. These ideas directly impacts implementation, continuous supports, and future changes related to full-day kindergarten programming.

Recommendations

The results of the data outline two priorities needed to support effective implementation and strengthen and sustain the full-day kindergarten program. The first recommendation is for schools to be responsive to the needs of families. Understanding their specific concerns and personal views on what will make full-day kindergarten a success for their family and their child is crucial. Parents expressed the need for clear and consistent reciprocal communication between the school and home. They want to know how their child is succeeding as well as how they can enhance their child's success. Each school needs to communicate effectively with families as the social emotional

development and academic success of each child depends on the partnership between home and school.

The second recommendation is for the District and schools to provide ongoing professional development for kindergarten teachers, support staff, specials staff and administrators. The essential changes that come with the implementation of a full-day kindergarten program include scheduling, planning, and meeting students' needs during a full-day program. Administrators will need clear expectations of structures and their role in implementing a full-day program. They will also need time to collaborate and share ideas with other administrators. With a sizeable district, there are many ways to make a full-day kindergarten program work but it is essential the best way is followed through. Strategic and ongoing professional development related to curriculum, planning, Professional Learning Communities, utilizing resources and other kindergarten considerations are necessary for supporting kindergarten teachers to effectively plan for full-day kindergarten.

Implications of providing ongoing professional development include the time and resources needed to make professional development meaningful and successful. In order to provide professional development, there need to be facilitators of the professional development, goals of the professional development, space to provide the professional development and support for administrators and teachers to implement what they learn through professional development.

To this point, full-day kindergarten in the District has been widely supported but the work is never done. Following through on the recommendations is a way for the

District to be responsive to the needs of the stakeholders. Commitment to responding to the needs of stakeholders early in the implementation of the program provides a greater likelihood of long-term success and closing the achievement gap for students in the District.

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