



# Minnesota Center for Reading Research

## Full Day Kindergarten

# Research to Policy Brief



### Definition of full-day kindergarten

**T**he research defines “full-day kindergarten” as six or more hours a day, five days a week. Programs that offer less time in school (i.e. full-day every-other-day programs, programs with school days shorter than six hours) do not have the same results as longer programs. Programs that do not meet these criteria for “full-day” will not be addressed in this document.

### What does the research say about full-day kindergarten?

- Students who received instruction in full-day programs scored higher on formal, standardized tests of academic achievement

(i.e. reading and math) than their peers who attended half-day programs.

- English learners who attended full-day kindergarten scored higher on tests of academic achievement than their peers who attended half-day programs and were 5% less likely to be retained between kindergarten and second grade than their peers.
- Students who attended full-day kindergarten programs also scored higher on assessments of social and emotional development than their peers in half-day programs.
- The differences in performance by students from low socio-economic and linguistically diverse backgrounds who attended full-day kindergarten were related to class size. Performance was higher in classrooms with less than twenty students.
- Parents were enthusiastic about full-day programs and they expressed more confidence in their children's preparation for first grade.
- Differences in performance results between students who attended full-day versus half-day programs diminished by third grade.
- Just extending the school day or the school year was not enough to facilitate growth in students' achievement. The effectiveness of instruction (i.e. program components, instructional techniques) had an impact on students' progress.



## What should literacy instruction look like in full-day kindergarten?

- Programs should provide 120 minutes of literacy instruction each day. Instruction should

include: teacher read alouds, small guided reading groups, independent reading (i.e. handling books, rereading leveled texts, looking at books, reading books chosen by the students based on interest, rereading charts with songs and poems), writing about texts, word work, oral language development, and targeted interventions for students who struggle in reading. Instruction should also integrate the use of technology and reading in the content areas.

- Reading instruction should focus on explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, comprehension, higher order talk and writing about text, and oral language development. For example, when the teacher is reading a book aloud to students, he or she could demonstrate and explain how to sound out words or track the print from left to right.
- Instruction should be culturally responsive and relevant to the students. For example, programs could use multicultural literature, study historical figures from a variety of cultures, and connect school content to students' lives and community experiences.
- Programs should provide an additional 30 minutes a day focused on the language arts (i.e. Writers' Workshop, penmanship, spelling, grammar)
- Instruction should be balanced between whole group, small group and independent work time. There should also be a balance of teacher-directed and student-centered activities.

## *Policy Recommendations from Research*

- ✓ Full-day kindergarten should be made available to all students especially students who may be at risk for school failure.
- ✓ Benefits from attending a full-day kindergarten program do not serve as an indefinite inoculation. Reading interventions and additional language supports may be required to further foster students' progress in grades 1-5.
- ✓ Continued educational research funding is needed to examine the short- and long-term impact of full-day kindergarten on diverse student populations.

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