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Minnesota Center for Reading Research

Research Brief

Literacy Instruction in Full-Day Kindergarten

Capable and motivated readers and writers do not just “appear” once they have a reading book put in their hands at school. Readers and writers are cultivated from their earliest conscious moments through verbal and visual interactions with text in their homes, communities, and preschool classrooms. A strong emergent literacy foundation is built on the language skills that children bring with them to school. Kindergarten presents an ideal context for bridging the language and emerging literacy capabilities of children to



the more structured curriculum of letters, sounds, words and texts. In order to maximize children’s opportunities to experience a language-rich structured academic environment, the Minnesota Department of Education has offered some full-day kindergarten support for teachers and administrators. On August 23, Dr. Debra Peterson of the MCRR interviewed Debbykay Peterson, a Minnesota Department of Education Early Childhood Education Specialist who is leading the efforts at the department to support schools and districts as they are implementing full-day kindergarten. Here is a summary of their conversation, with helpful insights and links to further information.

Q: How has the change in MN law impacted the implementation of full-day kindergarten?

Debbykay: The state has set aside \$134 million per year for full-day K! Last year only about 62% of Minnesota kindergarteners were in full-day kindergarten. This year it will be about 95%. Now schools will have the time to provide the depth of instruction that will benefit all our students. This includes instruction that is integrated, provides a balance of child-cen-

tered and teacher-directed activities, and is developmental. Instruction that can go deep into the content, expose students to 21st Century skills like critical thinking and collaboration, can fully engage them as learners. This legislation gives us a wonderful opportunity to examine our practice and incorporate change. We can think about instructional design and learning environments in new ways.

Q: What kinds of questions are schools and districts asking as they move to full-day kindergarten programs?

Debbykay: They are saying, “Now that we have this time, now what do we do? How do we use the time meaningfully? What should our schedules look like? Do we need to have 90 minutes of reading? Do we provide interventions? How do we incorporate child-focused activities, inquiry and mature, purposeful play? How do we align with the standards?”

Q: What research or resources would you recommend for teachers of full-day kindergarten?

Debbykay: MDE is offering a series of seminars on full-day kindergarten. The next one will be on Oct. 21 and the topic is “Transformational Full-day Kindergarten Teachers: Motivating the Learner in EVERY Child.” The keynote presenter will be Dr. Adam Holland, from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He is a researcher and a former kindergarten teacher. Registration is open here. We have also started a Wiki that is open to everyone. It can be accessed here.

In the future, we hope to develop guidance documents on curriculum, designing environments to support all learners, especially our students of color, males, and students of poverty.

Some resources that I would recommend are: *Developmentally Appropriate Practices: Focus on Kindergarten* by Copple, Bredekamp, Koralek & Charner from NAEYC* and *Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice* by Eva Phillips and Amy Scrinzi from NAEYC.*

Full-day kindergarten provides extended time for children to use language at school, connect this language to meaningful reading and writing activities, and experience systematic, developmentally-appropriate instruction in the code and meaning of print. Here at the Reading Center, we look forward to working with teachers, literacy coaches, schools, and the MDE to take advantage of this opportunity to reach our state’s early literacy goals.

* *National Association for the Education of Young Children, see www.naeyc.org.*