

Full-Day Kindergarten Fact Sheet

Benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten

- Children who attend full-day kindergarten learn more in reading and math over the kindergarten year than those in half-day programs.¹
- Children in full-day kindergarten programs receive 40-50% more instruction than children enrolled in half-day kindergarten programs. More instructional time in full-day kindergarten allows for increased learning activities and strategies such as: group read-aloud, peer tutoring, mixed-ability grouping, and child-initiated activities.²
- Children who attend full-day kindergarten spend 30% more time on reading and literacy instruction and 46% more time on mathematics than children in half-day programs.³
- Full-day kindergarteners exhibit more independent learning, classroom involvement, productivity in work with peers and reflectiveness than half-day kindergarteners.⁴
- Full-day kindergarten allows for a more consistent schedule for children and reduces the ratio of transition time to class time, reducing stress for children.^{5,6}
- Parents of children in full-day kindergarten report higher levels of satisfaction with their children's schedule and curriculum and the program's support for working families.

Full-Day Kindergarten Helps Close the Achievement Gap

- At-risk students who received full-day kindergarten through the Kindergarten Initiative in Montgomery County, Maryland made significantly greater progress in language proficiency than comparable children in half-day kindergarten.⁷
- A study of 17,600 Philadelphia children found that full-day kindergarten helps children from low-income families perform better and saves the school district millions of dollars through significantly reduced grade retention in the first through third grades.⁸
- Research from Lowell Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where the average entering kindergartener was already 22 months below grade level, showed that children in the school's half-day kindergarten made an average gain of 5.4 months during a 9 month period, while children in the full-day classes made a 16 month gain.⁹
- Studies of Minneapolis Public Schools showed that minority children in full-day kindergarten gained literacy skills at a faster pace than peers in half-day classes.¹⁰

Strong Public Support for Full-Day Kindergarten

- Eighty-one percent of Massachusetts voters support full-day kindergarten for all Massachusetts children.¹¹
- Among parents who report that their communities do not offer full-day kindergarten, 61% say they would rather send their child to full-day than half-day kindergarten.¹²
- In one national study, after the second year of a full-day kindergarten pilot, 100% of the full-day parents and 72% of the half-day parents indicated that, if given a choice, they would have selected the full-day program for their child.¹³

Kindergarten Policy in Massachusetts

The mandatory school age for children in Massachusetts is six. Current Massachusetts regulations mandate that 425 hours of kindergarten be provided by all public school districts and be made available to all children. This translates to roughly 2.5 hours per day, however, there is some local variation in how kindergarten is offered from district to district in terms of hours per day and days per week. The state defines full-day kindergarten as a minimum of 850 hours per year.

Massachusetts Public School Kindergarten, 2018-2019 school year ¹⁴	
Kindergarten enrollment	65,944
Number of children enrolled in full-day kindergarten (FDK)	63,549 (96%)
Number of children enrolled in half-day kindergarten	2,395 (4%)
Number of districts offering: Kindergarten* At least one FDK classroom Half-day kindergarten only	316 314 2 (<i>Concord, Needham</i>)
FDK districts offering: District-wide FDK Partial FDK, not district-wide	290 24
*Includes charter schools	
Districts charging tuition for FDK (2019-2020 school year)	39
Average tuition: \$3,455 Tuition range: \$1,750–\$5,000	

The proportion of Massachusetts’ children enrolled in full-day kindergarten classrooms has increased to 96% from 29% in 2000. This gradual shift from half- to full-day programming at the school district level has been aided by state investment in high-quality full-day kindergarten, informed by research and standards of developmentally appropriate best practices. Now that nearly all children enroll in full-day kindergarten, remaining policy challenges include tuition, program quality, and alignment of practice to support the larger continuum of birth-third grade.

In the 2018-19 school year, all school districts except Concord and Needham offered at least one full-day kindergarten classroom. Of these, 290 offer full-day kindergarten district-wide and 24 offer it partially and maintain some half-day classrooms. Statewide, 4% of Massachusetts’ kindergarteners are enrolled in half-day kindergarten.

When districts only partially offer full-day kindergarten, there may be a high demand for limited spaces, requiring families to submit to a lottery or a waiting list. In school year 2019-20, 39 school districts require families to pay a fee for their children’s participation in the full-day program. Fees vary widely across the state – for districts charging

tuition for full-day kindergarten, average annual tuition per child is \$3,455.¹⁵

A 2014 analysis by Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center found that a shift to universal, free full-day kindergarten would require an increase in the state foundation budget of \$77.5 million, with \$29.3 million coming from Chapter 70 state aid and the remainder being the local education contribution. This would provide free full-day kindergarten to an additional 8,760 children either in half-day programs or paying tuition for full-day program.¹⁶

Massachusetts Kindergarten Development Grants

From fiscal years 2000 through 2016, the Commonwealth supported local expansion of full-day kindergarten through the Kindergarten Development Grant program, administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Two types of grants were offered: transition planning and program quality. In FY17, the state budget eliminated funding for the grant program, \$18.59 million at the time. Quality grants were awarded to 164 school districts in FY16, supporting a range of program enhancements: increased staff; special needs inclusion; transition planning between preschool, kindergarten, and first grade; expanded professional development opportunities for teachers and staff; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation support, and curriculum development based on the state curriculum frameworks.¹⁷

Loss of state grant impacting classroom quality

In 2017, Strategies for Children conducted a survey of the former grantee districts to better understand the impact of the loss of the kindergarten grant. A total of 40 districts responded, 24.4% of the 164 former grantees, with an even representation from urban, suburban and rural districts. Findings include:

- Class size increases (13 out of 40 districts surveyed).
- Paraprofessional staff reductions (12 out of 40 districts).
- Program quality cuts (20 out of 40 districts). The most commonly reported cut to program quality was NAEYC accreditation. Other cuts include professional development, curriculum, supplies, and family engagement.
- Tuition rates were not increased, and no district reverted back to half-day kindergarten.

Most districts reported using local funding to sustain FDK programming since the loss of the grant. We will continue to monitor the impact of state and local budgets on kindergarten program quality, and related early childhood programming across the birth-grade three continuum.

Kindergarten Policies ¹⁸	# of States
Districts Must Offer Kindergarten	42*
Students Must Attend Kindergarten	17*
Districts Must Offer Full-Day Kindergarten	14*
Students Must Attend Full-Day Kindergarten	2
Compulsory School Age:	
Age 5 years	9*
Age 6 years	26
Age 7 years	13
Age 8 years	2

*Plus the District of Columbia

Kindergarten Policy in Other States

Kindergarten offerings and attendance requirements vary widely by state and even by district within some states.

- Every state pays for kindergarten in at least some districts for a portion of the school day.
- Fourteen states and Washington D.C require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, as well as West Virginia and Louisiana, two states that require all students to attend.
- Ten states, including Massachusetts, provide more funding for full-day kindergarten than half-day.¹⁹
- Eighteen states do not provide different funding for full- and half-day kindergarten and fund kindergarten at a lower level than 1st grade.

The Early Education for All Campaign

The Early Education for All Campaign works to ensure that children in Massachusetts have access to high-quality early education and become proficient readers by the end of third grade. EEA is a broad-based coalition of leaders from business, early childhood, labor, religion, health care, education and philanthropy, allied with parents, grassroots leaders and policymakers on behalf of children and families. To realize this vision, EEA seeks:

- Language-rich home environments
- High-quality infant/toddler supports
- High-quality pre-kindergarten
- High-quality full-day kindergarten
- PK-3 systems alignment and support
- High-quality instruction and professional development

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