



Full-Day vs. Half-Day Kindergarten: Which Children Learn More in Which Program?

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Summary Statement: Children who attend full-day kindergarten programs learn more in literacy and mathematics over the kindergarten year than those in half-day programs.

Topic/Goal: To examine and compare children's learning in full- and half-day kindergartens.

Method: Evaluation of longitudinal data from The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K), a nationally representative sample of over 8,000 kindergarteners (class of 1998-1999) and 500 U.S. public schools. Examined children's learning in full- (58% of children) and half-day (42% of children) kindergarten at the beginning and end of the year, as well as background factors related to children's learning. Children were individually administered adaptive and untimed cognitive assessments in literacy, math and general knowledge. Background information was collected from parents and school administrators. Sound research design (longitudinal, large, national).

Major findings:

- Children who attend full-day kindergarten programs learn more in literacy and mathematics over the kindergarten year than those in half-day programs.
- Children who attend full-day kindergarten spend 30% more time on reading and literacy instruction as well as 46% more time on mathematics than children in half-day programs.
- The full-day advantage in literacy amounts to slightly more than one month of extra learning and the advantage in math is slightly less than one month.
- Full-day kindergarten is equally effective for children of different social backgrounds (note: this is contrary to findings in most other full-day kindergarten studies, which have found that low-income / at-risk students benefit more from full-day kindergarten than more advantaged peers).
- Demographic Trends:
 - White children are more likely to be in half-day programs than full-day ones. Black children are more likely to be in full-day programs than half-day ones.
 - Children in full-day kindergarten are generally less advantaged (lower SES, more likely to be black than white, less proficient in math at start of year) than those in half-day programs.
 - Full-day kindergarten is more common than half-day programs in schools in large cities.

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