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Key Education Issues in Review: Full Day Kindergarten

Introduction

Full-day kindergarten (FDK) is a public school experience that occurs the year before a child enters first grade, in which students attend school for 6 hours per day, 36 hours per week, and 1008 hours annually. A quality FDK experience is characterized by a welcoming, developmentally appropriate, safe, healthy, and nurturing learning environment taught by teachers with licenses in early childhood/early childhood special education who possess strong teacher-child interaction skills. Quality full-day programs include:

- Highly-qualified teacher educators challenging all children and differentiating instruction.
- A play- and academically-based curriculum that includes a mixture of large group, center-based, individual, and small group instruction.
- Children utilizing technology (and assistive technology as needed).
- Learner outcomes that are documented on a regular basis (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, annually) and utilized to develop goals, write lesson plans, and implement program improvement measures.

Nevada's Facts and Statistics

- Kindergarten is not mandatory; children are not required to attend school until they reach the age of 7 and can skip kindergarten as long as they are able to pass a developmental screening test.
- At the start of the 2014-15 school year, there were a total of 488 FDK classrooms in Nevada (NDE, September 2014).
- Less than 40% of Nevada's children attending kindergarten are attending full-day kindergarten.

- Of the 69 elementary schools in southern Nevada that offered full-day kindergarten during the 2013-2014 school year, 53 were tuition based.

U.S. Facts and Statistics

- FDK numbers have increased from 28% of all kindergarteners in 1977 to 76% of all kindergarteners in 2012 (Child Trends, 2012).
- FDK is beneficial for all children, particularly those who are at-risk for school failure and for English language learners.
- Quality early childhood programs provide a 3 to 1 or higher return on educational investment: \$3 for every \$1 invested (NEA, 2006).
- States have reported cost savings in both child care subsidies and transportation due to full-day kindergarten.
- Currently 13 states and the District of Columbia provide publicly funded mandatory FDK for all students (Children's Defense Fund, 2013; Workman, 2013).
- The variability in kindergarten programming leads to unequal access to FDK programs.

Nevada's Recent Actions to Date

- Nevada currently allows for tuition based enrollment in Full-day Kindergarten.
- Class-size reduction measures were passed by the Nevada Legislature in 2013, however schools are allowed to apply for exemptions to these requirements.
- Full-day kindergarten and kindergarten assessments were made an initiative of Nevada P-3 in 2014.

- In 2012 Nevada received the Council of Chief State School Officers Kindergarten Entry Assessment Technical Assistance grant (Silver State Strong Strategic Plan 2014-17).
- A kindergarten entry assessment, Silver State KIDS (Kindergarten Inventory of Development Statewide), was piloted in 2013 using Teaching Strategies Gold.
- An Executive Order signed by Governor Sandoval established a new Division of Early Learning and Development in NDE's Office of Educational Opportunity (Silver State Strong Strategic Plan 2014-17).

Considerations for Future Directions

Stakeholders should examine Nevada's current programs within the national context. Nevada has the opportunity to evaluate the successes of FDK programs to improve and expand them as necessary. Doing so will allow policymakers to predict a meaningful return on any new funding or resources invested. Key issues for policymakers to consider include:

- Developing a consistent definition of FDK among districts in Nevada.
- Increasing funding of FDK comparable to K-12, at a minimum equal to first grade to align with recommended practices.
- Developing a sustainability plan for Full Day Kindergarten in Nevada.
- Consulting experts and using task forces to evaluate research, data, and programs.
- Requiring high-quality teacher preparation and professional development for FDK teachers in Nevada.
- Requiring FDK ratios as a range of 1:10 (group size of 20), 1:11 (group size of 22) or 1:12 (group size of 24).

Statewide Benefits of Future Action

- Increasing FDK programs increases the likelihood that all children have equal access to a high quality FDK and equal chances for academic success.
- Providing sustainable funding allows for long term educational planning.
- FDK produces citizens better able to participate in effective citizenship for the betterment of Nevada.

Implications of Status Quo

- Young children who are economically, linguistically, or ability diverse are less likely than other children to have access to and attend high-quality preschool programs, leaving less time to mitigate achievement gaps in elementary school, creating a need for an extended day in FDK.
- The FDK numbers will continue to grow even if no new actions are taken as the public demand for full-day kindergarten increases.

- Solely relying on tuition based FDK may create a system of unequal access to FDK.

Selected Resources

- Children's Defense Fund. (February 2013). Interactive map. Author. Retrieved from <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/state-data-repository/full-day-k/full-day-kindergarten-states-2012.html>
Includes a thorough review of the literature and state statutes, including whether or not full-day kindergarten is required, FDK entry age, and funding source(s).
- Kauerz, K. (2010). PreK-3rd putting full-day kindergarten in the middle: PreK-3rd policy to action brief no. four. NY: Foundation for Child Development.
PreK-3rd policy brief discussing the rationales and recommendations for putting full day kindergarten as the new standard for kindergarten.
- NAEYC. (1996). Top 10 signs of a good kindergarten classroom. Washington, DC: NAEYC. <http://oldweb.naeyc.org/ece/1996/12.pdf>
Provides quick and easy indicators of quality kindergarten programming.

UNLV Contacts for Additional Information/Background

This summary represents a portion of work and research from faculty members in the UNLV College of Education. For more information or to receive a copy of comprehensive paper on this topic, please contact:

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