

Research Briefs

Title

The Efficacy of Full-Day Kindergarten

Background

Early research on the efficacy of full-day kindergarten (FDK) was hotly debated in the 1970s and '80s. The lack of clarity within the literature of that time is attributed to methodological weaknesses and a lack of internal and external consistency of findings. However, since that time, there has been a growing consensus that FDK is highly beneficial to early school success, particularly for students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research has shown that, in the short term, the positive effects of FDK include gains in socioemotional growth, enhanced linguistic and academic progress, better attendance, and stronger skills in mathematical literacy as children progress into Grade 1. Heagle et al (2017, 979) point out that “for many children, the kindergarten years form a bridge from the free-play settings of early childhood education to the academic rigours of the grade one classroom.” This implies that while it may be tempting for policy-makers to increase the amount of academic content taught in FDK, this could be to the detriment of the development of the whole child and, therefore, their academic progress.

It becomes more difficult to ascertain whether FDK continues to hold advantageous results for students after the early grades. Longitudinal studies have been conducted on this question, but the results are mixed.

In 2003, Alberta’s Commission on Learning (ACOL) recommended that FDK be implemented by Alberta school boards. While the Alberta government accepted this recommendation, it has never been fully implemented due to a lack of funding. The findings of the 2014 Early Child Development Mapping Project Alberta (ECMap) help illustrate why the ACOL recommendations should be fully implemented.

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The ECMAP project was a large-scale study, with more than 70,000 Alberta kindergarten students being assessed using the early development instrument (EDI). EDI measures five dimensions of childhood development: (1) physical health and well-being, (2) social competence, (3) emotional maturity, (4) language and cognitive development, and (5) communication skills and general knowledge. The findings of this study are sobering. The “most striking result is that 46.4 per cent—less than half—of kindergarten children are developing appropriately in all five areas of development” (Alberta Government and ECMAP 2014, 9). Furthermore, Alberta kindergarten children, when compared with other Canadian kindergarten children, lag behind and experience greater difficulty in one or more of the five dimensions of development. The ECMAP project findings make it clear that early intervention and additional supports for all children and families are sorely needed.

Key strategic considerations

- Public education that provides strong foundational support through FDK for early childhood learners will support children’s success as they enter grade school.
- The literature on FDK affirms the relational nature of learning, emphasizing that learning is enhanced with greater time and in high-quality learning environments.

Sources and further reading

Alberta Government and Early Child Development Mapping Project Alberta (ECMAP). 2014. *How Are Our Young Children Doing? Final Report of the Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMAP)*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Government and ECMAP. Also available at www.ecmap.ca/images/ECMap_Reports/ECMap_Final_Report_20141118.pdf (accessed October 15, 2018).

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Websites

Early Childhood Education Council of the ATA
www.ecec-ata.com

Early Childhood Coalitions Alberta
<http://ecdcoalitions.org/about-us/>

Offord Centre for Child Studies
<https://offordcentre.com>

Office of Head Start
www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/

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