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Half or Full Day Kindergarten

A Brief History:

Kindergarten first started to become more popular after World War I, during that time half-day programs were used to server more children and to save families money. When the Depression hit the United States, many schools had to cut back on Kindergarten, but the programs made a comeback following the end of World War II (Rafoth, Grimes, Burzi, n.d.). According, to Rafoth et al., (n.d.), by the year 2000, 88% of five-year-old's in the United States were enrolled in either full or half day Kindergarten programs. During the twentieth century, full day programs grew in popularity primarily because of working parents, many being single parents and the need for a longer program was realized.

Some kindergarten programs are 2 hours per day which is considered a half day. While other programs last 6 hours as the minimum but can be as long as 8 hours (Rafoth et al., n.d.). This paper will explore in depth the difference between the two programs, to see if the length of time a student spends in a classroom really matters in relation to the quality of education received.

Introduction:

Kindergarten plays an early role in any child's educational career and is important for a strong foundation. There are two types of classroom systems that are utilized a full day and half day program. This paper will explain the difference between the two, give an opinion as to which is seen as being superior, and identify who makes the decision on which type of system is being use. This is not a black and white topic, it all depends on the children and how they learn as well as the school board and budget their priorities. The time a child spends in Kindergarten is important because it helps with the growth and the development of a child.

The two systems have been around for a long time and either can be benefit a new learner. Some educators, state that a full day has more educational benefits in the long run for a student as they move past kindergarten to higher grade levels. However, others have pointed out that a half day, allows new learners to get acquainted with school for the first time and it also helps the student with social interaction. Kindergarten sets the foundation for the rest of a students academic career and can help them or hinder them in the future. Whichever, system is used the end goal should be to give the kindergartner the best education available to them. The goal of this paper is to discuss the difference between half and full day kindergarten programs, which in turn is likely to help determine which is the best for schools to practice.

Review of Literature:

Main Differences:

The difference between half and full day kindergarten does not stop with just the length of the school day. Nevertheless, the major difference between the two programs is time. For many educators the best and most effective way for young learners to learn is time ("Which is Best", 2018). With a full day the advantage is that the students are given more institutional time, which compared to a half day the institutional time is cut in half. Understandably, many parents and educators see that cut in time as a disadvantage. The longer days also makes for a more relaxed classroom because the teacher is not in such a rush and has more time to conduct activities. A full day program, also allows for more play and social interactions between peers, which is important for young students ("Which is Best", 2018). However, the model of a full day kindergarten program is new to many parents, which can also causes concerns.

The more familiar program for many parents is the half day program, because this is the type of program many of them grew up with. The primary argument for half day programs is that it allows for the new kindergartner to get adjusted to being in a new environment slowly. Which for some can be very hard especially if they have not been exposed to other children or adults that are not family ("Which is Best", 2018). A school cannot just switch from one program to other, for a school to be full day there are state requirements that must be meet.

The requirements that a full day kindergarten classroom must meet have a lot to do with funding ("Full-Day Kindergarten", 2018). Funding is not the only concern for a school when it is considering moving to a full school day. One of the other concerns is the quality of the program and if that extra time will be a benefit to young age school children (Bernstein, 2018). Some educators feel that introducing a full day at such a young age will add extra stress to children that simply want to be kids and play.

The Finances Behind a Full Day Program:

Some parents want the full day program for their children because of the many academic benefits it is believed to have. However, a school cannot simply add the addition time overnight. There is a process and it can be slow when the change is being made. Bernstein (2018), made an interesting point in his research, "The cost of teachers, supplies, etc. doubles, which can lead to an increase in taxes". This decision is not a simple one and it is important to understand the financial impact that could be felt if all schools change to a full day program.

Making the switch:

Some schools have already made the switch to a full day program, while others are still in the evolving stage, and still others will probably never change. An elementary school in Vancouver, WA has made some changes to their school schedule which is very different than most schools. Kindergartners who attend this school in Vancouver are on two different schedules (Harshman, 2010). One student could attend school all day Monday and

Thursday and half a day every Wednesday; while another students schedule could be all day Tuesday and Friday and a half a day every Wednesday (Harshman, 2010). At first this change in schedule was looked at with confused faces, however, it allows students to have both of the benefits of a half and full day program without a big financial impact. According to Assistant Superintendent Rebecca Miner, this change in Washougal elementary schools is “more consistent and gives students more time with their teachers one on one” (Harshman, 2010).

Another, school that is thinking of changing to a full day system is Wellesley Elementary in Wellesley Townsman MA. As the change is getting closer to being incorporated at the school, some parents are having doubts about the change. During the whole process parents have be divided over the proposal to move to a full day program (Mayblum, 2014). The expansion to a full day program came with an \$760,000 price tag, which is needed for adding teaching assistants to every classroom (Mayblum, 2014). One of the concern parents have is that the full day will add stress to students, and that it is overly vigorous for 5-year-olds (Mayblum, 2014). The school board made concessions for those concerned parents by beginning the school year with half day and transitioning to a full day by the end of September. If other school were to implement the change to a full day program the way Wellesley Elementary did the transition may be smoother and would allow the kindergartners and parents to adjust to the change more gradually.

Is a Full Day Worth it?:

Full day kindergarten is on many parents and educators minds, they envision a full day as the best way to provide a better start for students (Schubert, 1997). Half day programs do have educational benefits which usually get overlooked because full day is seen as having more benefits in the long run. Schubert gives a good example, about full day programs being beneficial for children with special needs, because the addition of time will help in development in language, muscle coordination, and social skills (Schubert, 1997). If a child needs more help and instructional time with a teacher, than a full day is better. However, every child is different and that is why one program has not be eliminated because both programs can be beneficial with different types of children.

What many school boards and administrators want to know is if a full day program is worth the extra time and money. Many studies have been conducted to show if there are any long term effects to children who attend half or full day kindergarten programs. Some, studies look at reading ability, while other studies look at math skills. According, to Romines (2012), “the longer school days does not necessarily result in more academic time for reading instruction” (55). This is when many school starts to second guess the whole idea of full day programs, because many study show conflicting data. Which study is right? Is a full day better than a half day or are there other variables that must be considered as well.

Zvoch, was also looking into the full day kindergarten through student’s literacy growth. The results shown in this study were convincing because they

showed that full day students had a faster rate of literacy, and peers in a half day classroom had a slower rate of literacy (Zvoch,2008. 104). This is one of many studies that did show that a full day kindergarten programs having a positive impact on students reading abilities. Thompson and Sonnenschein also investigated literacy like as Zvoch and came to a similar conclusion. This study, was a little different than Zvoch, Thompson and Sonnenschein wanted to know how the role of early reading affects kindergarten students. Their study also looked at full and half day program and how reading was being incorporated into the classroom. Thompson and Sonnenschein were also concerned with how that early role of reading was affecting students later in their school careers. This study showed that a full day program was associated with better reading skills than a half day program (Thompson et al. 2016, 68). Thompson et al. (2016) found that children in a full day classroom had more time one-on-one with the teacher and student who attend half day classroom spent more time in large groups (68). This was probably a major factor in the full day student having better reading skills than student who attend half day programs.

Additional Findings:

In another, analysis conducted by Leow and Wen (2017) the data was used to examine the differences in school outcomes at the end of kindergarten between students who attend half and full day programs. Their results were unlike anyone else's, because they found little differences between the students academically. Which prompted many educators to ask

is one program really better or is there a time and place for both program to be used? This is the opposite of what the other studies cited above where saying. Which is why, I concluded that picking a side is not black and white and is hard to do because data shows in the end either program can help a child in different ways. There are a number of ways a half day program can help a child, however there are even more ways a full day can be of help to a child.

The Benefits of Both Programs:

At the end of the day it is up to the parents and or the school board to pick which program will best suit their children. Both types are offered, but not all schools provide both at the same time. So parents should to keep in mind while picking the right program for their child is that there are differences between the two. A full day program has been found to have more time for individualized instruction, less hurried school days, and more time spent in free play (Rafoth et al.). If a full day program does not meet to your child's needs, there is always a half day. Half day's allows parents to get involved in the classroom, half day's are also better suited for younger children, and there is less stress put on the child (Rafoth et al.). Picking the right program is crucial for a young learning and the right or wrong decision may affect them academically for years to come.

Primary Research:

Methodology:

The technique I used for my primary research was interviews with Kindergarten teachers. The first step for me was to get in contact with Principal Donna Weingand of Southeastern Elementary, to ask for the email addresses for the three kindergarten teachers that teach there. Next, I emailed all three of them to ask questions about half and full day program use in the classrooms and which is better in their professional opinion. Out of the three teachers I emailed with interview questions, all three answered and I believe added a teacher's perspective to the whole debate about which program is better. Some of their answers did surprise me, however, the information gained from these interviews helped solidify my overall view of this subject.

Southeastern offers half day programs for their kindergarten classrooms. The half day offered at Southeastern lasts 2 and a half hours, the day is split into two sessions, the same teacher teaches a.m. and p.m. class. The parents are not given an option between the half and full day program, if a Southeastern parent is considering a full day they would need to consult a private school. There are three kindergarten teachers at Southeastern, their names are Morgan Taylor, Kathy Heath, and Jennifer Dudley. These are the teachers who answer the questions in my interview.

Data:

This research is being done to help in deciding which program is better half or full day, and if there is really a big difference between the two. When asked if they would change to a full day program two out of three interviewees said they would change. Kathy Heath stated "I would be fine with either one. I

can see pros and cons to both ”(K. Heath, Interview Questions, November 6, 2018). Something else interesting is that two out of three of the kindergarten teachers interviewed have taught full day kindergarten in the past, which was one of the reasons they would switch if the choice was up to them. However, the choice of which type of classroom setup is use is made by the school board and Superintendent. The extra time a full day gives a student and the teacher allows more time to be forced on areas like separate writing time, and more time for guided reading (J.Dudley, Interview Questions, November 6,2018). Morgan Taylor and Jennifer Dudley had opposite view about their lessons plans being changed if they were teaching a full day. While Dudley stated the amount of time allowed would changed her plans drastically, Taylor stated that the same skeleton outline would be unchanged no matter the time restrictions (M.Taylor, Interview Question, November 6, 2018). The SOL standards stay the same no matter how much time a school is given to teach their students. However, the extra time allows for more opportunities like field trips, more hands on learning, and social interactions (Rafoth et al.). There will always be a debate about which program is better and which provides a better learning experience in the long term.

Conclusion:

When a child is entering kindergarten, it is important to understand there are two different programs available half and full day. The two at first glance looks dramatically different onelasts as little as 2 hours and the other can be as long as 8 hours. When a parent is deciding which one is best for their child

they should consider the age of their child and if they are mature enough to stay in school for a long period of time. The two are still offered because every child is different and they come with their own separate needs that one program or the other could be better suited for. For example, if a child is younger and still takes naps the parents are encourage to select the a.m. session to accommodate nap time (Which is best, 2017). Many parents are worried that a full day program is better for their child to advance academically. However, according to Leow and Wen (2017) based on their studies there were little to no differences found between a child who attended half day or full day kindergarten academically.

Lastly, the information gained from Morgan Taylor, Kathy Heath, and Jennifer Dudely helped in my conclusion that both half and full day kindergarten programs are helpful for a student. Both programs are still in use and will probably stay in use for decades to come. One program is not ultimately better, both can be of help to a student. So, maybe the best practice would be using both, start the year off being half a day so new kindergarten students can get use being at school. Then, in the middle of the year switch to a full day so kindergartners can get use to a full day of school before entering the first grade. Kindergarten is an important step for every child because it is the foundation that gets build upon every year, so it is important to start off right.

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