



Why Minnesota Needs All-Day, Every Day Kindergarten

*Let's Give All Minnesota Children
the Opportunity to Succeed*

Note: In this report, the term “all-day K” refers to a kindergarten program that is offered all-day, every day (five days per week). Research cited on all-day K is on kindergarten programs that are offered all-day, every day. Some school districts offer all-day K only a few days per week; these experiences are educationally equivalent to half-day K.

all-day K

The context

Kindergarten is a child’s front door to our K-12 educational system. While many of today’s adults either did not attend kindergarten or attended a half-day program, now 98% of all American children attend kindergarten — with the majority in all-day, every day programs. Clearly, times have changed.

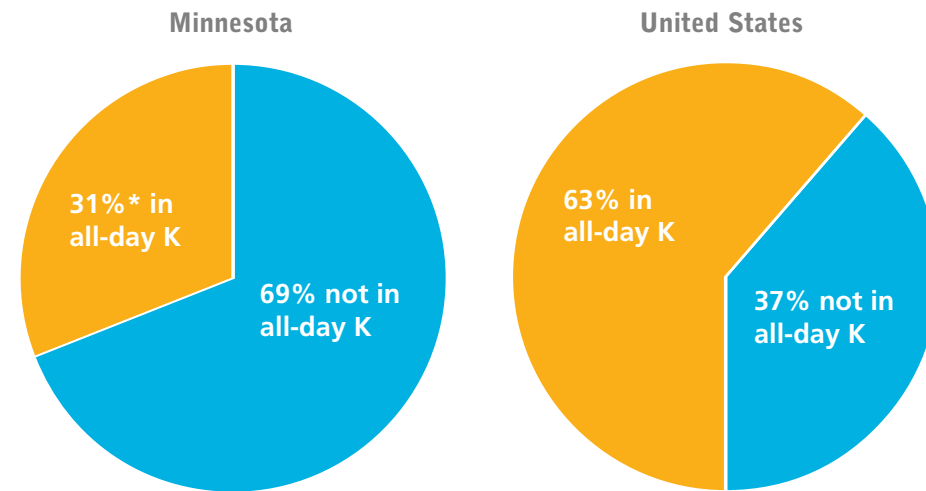
Today’s high standards for academic excellence and our testing accountability system demand that we provide children with the best start possible. Over the past decade, there has been increased interest in the earliest years of a child’s life. Investing in those early years is proving to pay off in both direct and indirect ways: through improved academic achievement and high school graduation rates, as well as lower crime rates and lower special education costs.

When kindergarten was first introduced in the 1930s, it was a voluntary, half-day program. Now, half-day kindergarten is no longer the norm — **nearly two-thirds of U.S. children attend an all-day, every day kindergarten** program because research shows it works and families want it. But in Minnesota the story is a different one: only **one-third of Minnesota public school children attend all-day, every day kindergarten**. Why the discrepancy? Because Minnesota’s kindergarten laws and funding structure create a financial disincentive for school districts to offer all-day, every day K.

The kindergarten year is an important part of a young child’s development and is a critical part of the continuum from early childhood through the early elementary years. For children who have been in an all-day, every day early childhood environment, going to half-day K can often seem like a step backward in their development. For children who did not have a quality early childhood environment, all-day, every day K can help give them the school readiness boost they need.

We must ensure equal access for all children who need or want all-day, every day K.

Percent of children in all-day K



* If families who pay for all-day K are included, this increases to 37%.

Why invest in all-day kindergarten?

“The future productivity of the economy is going to depend on experiences young children have today.”

— Rob Grunewald,
Regional Economic
Analyst, Federal
Reserve Bank
Minneapolis

All-day K works

Currently, half of Minnesota’s children enter kindergarten without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Numerous studies done over the past two decades show that all-day K programs are consistently more effective than half-day, especially for disadvantaged children.

In particular, a growing body of national research demonstrates the following benefits of all-day K compared to half-day K¹. All-day K:

- **Leads to higher academic achievement and reduced achievement gaps between students of different economic and racial/ethnic groups.** These increased achievement levels appear to persist over time, and remain when demographics are taken into account. One study even documented these academic gains through 7th grade.
- **Decreases costs by reducing the need for additional help in later years.** Because children are better prepared during their all-day K experience, the likelihood that they will later have to repeat a grade, receive remedial support or be referred to special education is greatly reduced.
- **Contributes to increased school readiness.** Children in all-day K deal with the transition to first grade more readily, they better understand appropriate behavior and they have stronger learning skills.

- **Improves student attendance.** When children are in class more, they spend more time learning.
- **Supports literacy development.** Children show faster gains on literacy and language measures, and these gains remain over time. This can be an especially important boost for English Language Learners.
- **Promotes children’s social and emotional development.** More time in a structured environment helps children learn appropriate behaviors and develop stronger social and emotional skills.

All-day K is in demand

There is a high demand for all-day K throughout the state. Currently 207 of Minnesota’s 341 school districts offer all-day K in at least some of their schools. With the exception of a few targeted state-funded programs, Minnesota schools must cover the costs for all-day K themselves. Another 35 districts pair half-day K with a fee-based extended day program for families who want an all-day experience. Two Minnesota school districts recently included funding for all-day K in levy referendum requests, because they knew the need and desire were there, but funding was not.

Many parents who would like all-day K are unable to get it because it is either not offered near them, or they can’t afford the fee. Often the children most likely

¹ Research sources can be found at the end of this report.



to benefit from all-day K — those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with limited English skills — are least able to access all-day K. Providing universal access to all-day K would ensure that families who want it can get it — and those who prefer half-day K can still make that choice for their child.

Many teachers and parents prefer all-day K because of the increased learning and creative time for the children, the stronger child-teacher bond and the ability to provide more individualized instruction. And with Minnesota leading the nation in women’s participation in the labor force, working parents appreciate all-day K’s quality and consistency, compared to half-day K and child care.

All-day K should be universally accessible

Right now, Minnesota school districts that offer all-day K must use other resources to pay for it, because our state only funds all-day K at a half-day K rate. While these districts make this choice because they know all-day K makes a difference for their students and families, it forces them to divert funds from other important services to pay for this expense. Many districts can’t make this choice, can only offer limited sections of all-day K or must charge families for all-day K. Low-income families often can’t afford fee-based all-day K. Our state policy

and funding systems effectively shut the door on many children who need or want all-day K.

Scheduling students for only a half-day K experience is more a function of economics than of educational equity and excellence.

Minnesota studies show all-day K works*:

In **Burnsville’s** all-day K program, researchers found significant increases on every academic skill measured by pre- and post-tests, as well as elimination of the achievement gap among all racial/ethnic groups at the end of the kindergarten year.

Stillwater credits its all-day K program as partly responsible for later increases in students’ third grade state test scores.

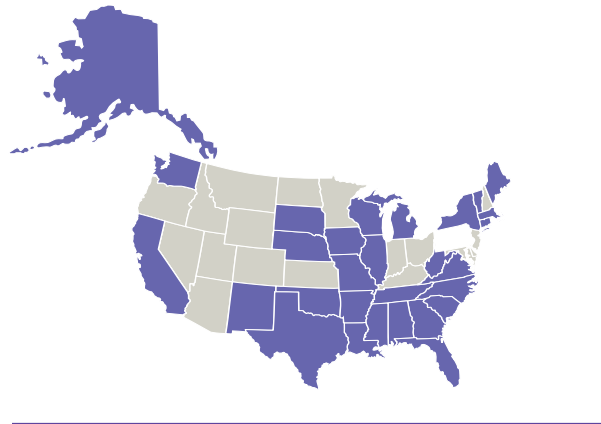
After a **Winona** elementary school implemented an all-day K program, the number of “learning disabled” students dropped by 25%; children’s letter sound recognition increased 34%; and children’s knowledge of upper and lower case letters increased 24%.

Minneapolis found that enrollment in all-day K rather than half-day K significantly narrowed learning gaps between white children and children of color, as well as greatly increased the gains all children made on key literacy concepts.

**Based on individual district studies.*

The majority of U.S. states pay for all-day K

States currently fund all-day K in one of two primary ways: they either pay fully for all-day K or they don't.

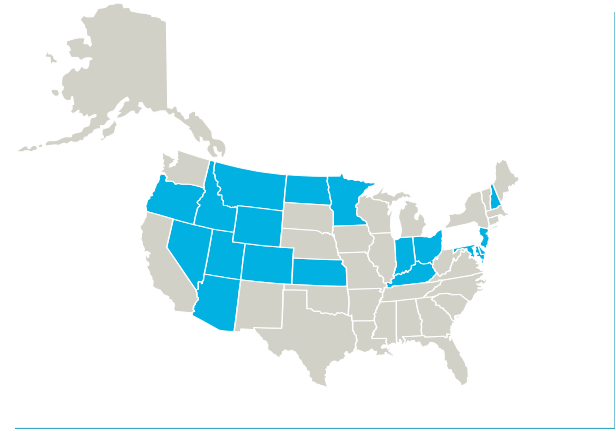


States that pay for all-day K

Twenty-nine states provide a full day's funding for all-day K. These states recognize that all-day K costs more than a half-day program and believe it is worth the investment.

(Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Washington D.C., West Virginia, Wisconsin. Funding formulas vary by state)

Note: Three states – Hawaii, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island – do not have funding formulas that lend themselves to this type of analysis and thus are not included here.



States that don't pay for all-day K

Eighteen states only provide half-day funding for kindergarten. These states are unable or unwilling to provide the necessary resources to fund all-day K. Thus, any district that chooses to offer all-day K must pay for it out of other resources or charge parents for it.

(Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, **Minnesota**, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Wyoming)

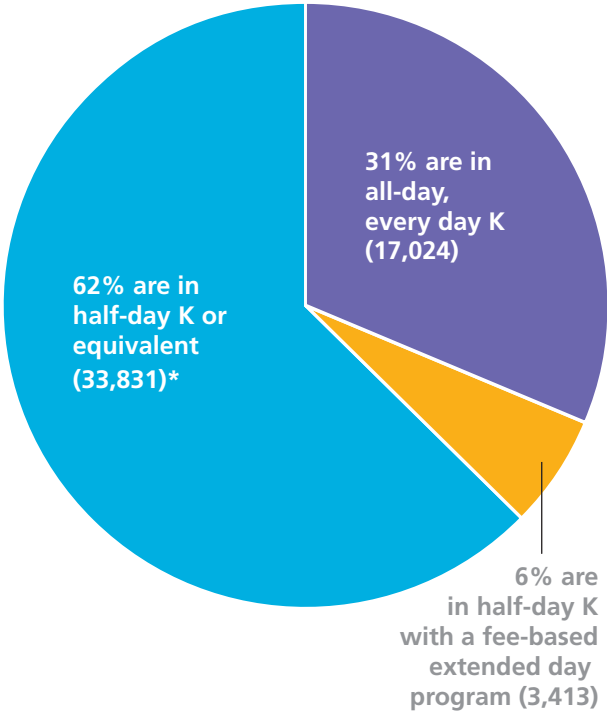
Minnesota does not pay for all-day K

Minnesota only provides half-day funding for kindergarten.

While Minnesota has made some initial investments in targeted all-day K programs, these only reach a small number of children. The vast majority of Minnesota schools that offer all-day K must pay the extra costs from other school funds. Schools that charge parents a fee for all-day K in Minnesota are not allowed to call it all-day K, but instead combine half-day K with a fee-based school-age care program to create a full-day experience.

Minnesota should fairly compensate districts when they offer this proven program, and fund all-day K at a full-day level.

Kindergartners in Minnesota
(2005-06)



** Some school districts offer all-day K only a few days per week; these experiences are educationally equivalent to half-day K.*



What do Minnesotans have to say?

Half of Minnesota's children enter kindergarten without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

— Minnesota Department of Education, School Readiness Study 2003

The **School Funding Task Force**, a statewide group convened by Governor Tim Pawlenty in 2003 to examine K–12 education funding, was asked to describe at least three complete educational programs it felt would ensure all Minnesota students could meet state standards. While there were differences among the proposed plans, there were some common elements. Having all-day kindergarten available to all students in Minnesota was in every scenario developed by the Task Force.

In a **January 2006 poll of Minnesota voters** conducted by Peter Hart Research Associates and Decision Resources, 64% said they would rather the state make sure there is sufficient funding for needs such as education, compared to 29% who prefer to hold the line on state taxes and spending.

Rocori Public Schools Superintendent Scott Staska said, “The Rocori School Board recognized the impact of all-day K by opening opportunities for parents to choose all-day kindergarten. Unfortunately, we have to place the financial responsibility for that change on our parents through tuition reimbursements in the full-day option.” (March 2006)

The Minneapolis Public School Board has determined that all-day K is so important, they have committed funds to ensure that every Minneapolis elementary school has at least one section of all-day K available.

The Fridley School District and Forest Lake School District believe so strongly in all-day K that they both included all-day K funding in fall 2005 levy referendum requests. “The gap is incredibly wide on school readiness. Our desire is to close that gap at the front end so that we don’t have to spend so much time and energy on remedial work as we go on,” explained Fridley Superintendent Mark Robertson.

Don Schuld, Stillwater Public Schools Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, said about their all-day K program, “We’re really seeing increased achievement levels in our students as they progress through. We think it’s made a big difference when students are tested on the state assessments in third grade.” (September 2005)

“Our district has offered an all-day kindergarten program to our families for several years,” explained **Greg Vandal, Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools Superintendent**. “Unfortunately, there has been a fee associated with that option because no state funding has been available; not all families can afford to participate.” (March 2006)

What's needed? Universal access to all-day, every day K

The research is clear:

All-day K improves student achievement and reduces achievement gaps.

The situation is unfair:

Not all children who need or want all-day K can get it.

The answer is straightforward:

Provide universal access to all-day K by funding it at an all-day, rather than half-day, level.

The cost for Minnesota:

For our state to invest what's needed to offer access to all-day, every day K for every child would require approximately \$160 million per year (2.5% of the overall K-12 budget). This would cover the costs of additional staff and materials to ensure that every kindergartner had access to a publicly funded all-day K experience, without asking already stretched school districts to take money from other programs or charge parents. Districts vary in the space they have available for all-day K. There are many ways to implement all-day K that would take the individual needs of districts and families into account.

Investing in all-day K is good for Minnesota kids and good for Minnesota.

The problem in Minnesota:

There is a financial disincentive for Minnesota schools to offer all-day K—but all-day K works for kids.

The solution for Minnesota:

Provide universal access to all-day K by funding it appropriately.



Sources for more information

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For many years, The Minneapolis Foundation has invested in strategies to reduce the educational achievement gap—from early childhood through post-secondary education. For example, Destination 2010, a student achievement and scholarship program of The Minneapolis Foundation, supports a cohort of inner-city students scheduled to graduate from high school in 2010 and will aid their entry into higher education. Since 2002, the Foundation has granted over \$1.3 million to organizations seeking to strengthen early childhood education options and over \$2 million to organizations working to improve the K–12 school system in Minnesota. The Foundation believes that quality preschool experiences, followed by all-day, every day kindergarten as the entry point to a strong K–12 system, are key to reducing the achievement gap in our state, particularly among students of color. In partnership with education advocacy groups, the Foundation is promoting policies to ensure all Minnesota families have access to all-day, every day kindergarten.

Established in 1915, The Minneapolis Foundation is one of the nation’s oldest and largest community foundations. It manages \$640 million in assets, administers more than 800 charitable funds and distributes approximately \$40 million in grants each year. As a center for philanthropy, the Foundation partners with a variety of communities and institutions and offers its expertise to individuals, businesses and other foundations to improve the quality of life in the region.

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