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Recent Research on All-Day Kindergarten

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In the fall of 1998, of the 4 million children attending kindergarten in the United States, 55% were in all-day programs and 45% were in part-day programs (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000, p. v). The growing number of all-day programs is the result of a number of factors, including the greater numbers of single-parent and dual-income families in the workforce who need all-day programming for their young children, as well as the belief by some that all-day programs better prepare children for school.

Research during the 1970s and 1980s on the effects of all-day kindergarten yielded mixed results. In a review of research on all-day kindergarten, Puleo (1988) suggested that much of the early research employed inadequate methodological standards that resulted in serious problems with internal and external validity; consequently, the results were conflicting and inconclusive. Studies conducted in the 1990s also produced mixed results; however, some important trends appeared. This Digest discusses the academic, social, and behavioral effects of all-day kindergarten, as well as parents' and teachers' attitudes and the curriculum in all-day kindergarten classes.

Academic Achievement

Despite the generally mixed results concerning the effect of all-day kindergarten on academic achievement in the 1970s and 1980s, consistent findings appeared concerning the positive effect on academic achievement for children identified as being at risk (Housden & Kam, 1992; Karweit, 1992; Puleo, 1988). Research reported in the 1990s shows more consistent positive academic outcomes for all children enrolled in all-day kindergarten (Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, & Bandy-Hedden, 1992; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Fusaro, 1997; Hough & Bryde, 1996; Koopmans, 1991). Cryan et al. (1992) conducted a two-phase study that examined the effects of half-day and all-day kindergarten programs on children's academic and behavioral success in school. In the first phase of the study, data were collected on 8,290 children from 27 school districts; the second phase included nearly 6,000 children. The researchers found that participation in all-day kindergarten was related positively to subsequent school performance. Children who attended all-day kindergarten scored higher on standardized tests, had fewer grade retentions, and had fewer Chapter 1 placements.

Hough and Bryde (1996) looked at student achievement data for 511 children enrolled in half-day and all-day kindergarten programs in 25 classrooms. Children in the all-day programs scored higher on the achievement test than those in half-day programs on every item tested.

In a study of the effectiveness of all-day kindergarten for the Newark, New Jersey, Board of Education, Koopmans (1991) looked at two cohorts of students: one in its third year of elementary school and the other in its second year. There were no significant differences in reading comprehension and math scores on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) for the first cohort; however, both reading comprehension and math scores were higher for students in the second cohort who had attended all-day kindergarten.

Elicker and Mathur (1997) also found slightly greater academic progress in kindergarten and higher levels of first-grade readiness for children in an all-day kindergarten program. Teachers reported significantly greater progress for all-day kindergarten children in literacy, math, and general learning skills.

Finally, in a meta-analysis of 23 studies on all-day kindergarten, Fusaro (1997) concluded that children who had attended all-day kindergarten achieved at a higher level than children in half-day kindergarten programs. According to Fusaro, all-day kindergarten accounted for approximately 60% of the variance in outcome measures.

Social and Behavioral Effects

Most studies on all-day kindergarten have focused on academic achievement; however, some researchers have also examined social and behavioral effects. Cryan et al. (1992) asked teachers to rate half-day and all-day kindergarten children on 14 dimensions of classroom behavior. According to researchers, a clear relationship emerged between the kindergarten schedule and children's behavior. Teachers rated children in all-day kindergarten programs higher on 9 of the 14 dimensions; there were no significant differences on the other 5 dimensions. Other researchers who have studied social and behavioral outcomes found that children in all-day kindergarten programs were engaged in more child-to-child interactions (Hough & Bryde, 1996) and that they made significantly greater progress in learning social skills (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

Attitudes about All-Day Kindergarten

Recently, researchers have examined parents' and teachers' attitudes towards all-day kindergarten, as well as considering academic, social, and behavioral effects. Both parents and teachers whose children were enrolled in all-day kindergarten were generally satisfied with the programs and believed that all-day kindergarten better prepared children for first grade (Hough & Bryde, 1996; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Housden & Kam, 1992; Towers, 1991). Teachers and parents also indicated a preference for all-day kindergarten because of the more relaxed atmosphere, more time for creative activities, and

more opportunity for children to develop their own interests (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

Parents reported that all-day kindergarten teachers provided suggestions for home activities more frequently (Hough & Bryde, 1996). They also felt that the all-day kindergarten schedule benefited their children socially (Towers, 1991).

Teachers surveyed felt that the all-day program provided more time for individual instruction (Greer-Smith, 1990; Housden & Kam, 1992). They also indicated that they had more time to get to know their children and families, thus enabling them to better meet children's needs (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

Curriculum in All-Day Kindergarten

Researchers who have looked at the types of activities children are engaged in, how teachers structure time, and how teachers interact with children during instructional time have found that the greatest percentage of time in both half-day and all-day kindergarten programs is spent in teacher-directed, large-group activity (Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998). Elicker and Mathur (1997) note that, although the average amount of time spent in large-group teacher-directed activity is greater in all-day classrooms than in half-day classrooms, the percentage of total time spent in teacher-directed activity was 16% less in all-day programs.

Some studies (Hough & Bryde, 1996; Morrow et al., 1998) found that all-day kindergarten teachers utilized small-group instruction and provided for small-group activities more frequently than half-day teachers. Hough and Bryde also found more individualized instruction in all-day programs, when compared with half-day programs.

An interesting pattern occurred when Elicker and Mathur (1997) compared data collected from the first and second years of their study. They noted that many of the differences in kindergarten programming became stronger during the second year of implementation. They found that children in the all-day classrooms in the second year of implementation were "initiating more learning activity and receiving more one-to-one instruction from their teachers" (p. 477). Further research in this area is needed to determine whether, over time, all-day kindergarten teachers restructure the curriculum to accommodate the increased amount of time available to them and the children in more developmentally appropriate ways.

Summary

There seem to be many positive learning and social/behavioral benefits for children in all-day kindergarten programs. At the same time, it is important to remember that what children are doing during the kindergarten day is more important than the length of the school day. Gullo (1990) and Olsen and Zigler (1989) warn educators and parents to resist the pressure to include more didactic academic instruction in all-day kindergarten programs. They contend that this type of instruction is inappropriate for young children.

An all-day kindergarten program can provide children the opportunity to spend more time engaged in active, child-initiated, small-group activities. Teachers in all-day kindergarten classrooms often feel less stressed by time constraints and may have more time to get to know children and meet their needs.

For More Information

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