

December 5, 2007

To: Diana Rigby, Assistant Superintendent
Concord Public Schools
Ripley Building, 120 Meriam Road
Concord, MA 01742

CC: Concord School Committee
Citizens of Concord

Dear Ms. Rigby:

Evidence-based research arguing for benefits of full-day K is weak and inconclusive. Further, it appears particularly mismatched with Concord's population of kindergarteners and families. Most full-day K research is based on children in high-needs districts, but Concord children have among the best pre-K developmental opportunities in the country.

For example, a 2006 study by the independent Rand Corporation includes these worrisome findings:

- “after controlling for nonacademic readiness at kindergarten, **children who had attended a full-day program at kindergarten showed poorer mathematics performance in fifth grade** than did children who had attended a part-day kindergarten program.” (pp. xiii, emphasis mine)
- “**Attendance in a full-day kindergarten program was negatively associated with attitudes toward learning, self-control, and interpersonal skills**” (Ibid.)

The Rand authors conclude: “Our analyses reinforce the findings of earlier studies that suggest that **full-day kindergarten programs may not enhance achievement** in the long term. Furthermore, our study raises the possibility that **full-day kindergarten programs may actually be detrimental to mathematics performance and nonacademic readiness skills.**”

This study was cited in the literature review forwarded by your office. This is not the only study that calls into question the full-day kindergarten (FDK) findings that show positive results.

For instance, it is important to realize that the drive for full-day kindergarten (FDK) is often for remedial purposes, and comes primarily from communities with high needs and low socio-economic status. An April 2005 policy brief prepared by the WestEd non-profit research agency cites large urban districts as leaders, and notes that FDK “decreases costs by reducing retention and remediation rates.”

Similarly, a 2004 study sponsored by the US Department of Education notes that “A main rationale for providing full-day kindergarten is to increase the time available for

learning kindergarten skills and for developing appropriate social skills necessary for school success, especially for children 'a risk' for school failure.” (introduction, pg 1).

Interestingly, consider the list of U.S. States which have mandated FDK from at least some of their school districts: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Hawaii and the District of Columbia (Galley 2002). It is not a coincidence that these are locales with high needs populations.

In contrast, Concord children have direct care from highly educated parents who have the opportunity to be closely involved in their development. Concord offers a range of private and independent enrichment programs and high-quality pre-school centers. Because of all this, many of Concord’s kindergarteners are relatively advanced academically.

In short, it does not seem that there is a strong evidence-based argument that full-day K is systematically better for the typical Concord child and family.

I appreciate the dedication and hard work of Concord’s teachers and education administration. I do not question that you have the best motives for our children in undertaking this planning. At the same time, I ask that the school appreciate our work in raising our children, and realize that the answer to all educational problems is not more school.

With due respect, it is hard to envision how a full-day K program, particularly one that is described as “stretching” the existing curriculum over additional time, can be necessarily more effective in promoting growth than the active involvement of parents, who readily provide a range of afternoon activities for their children, including outside-of-school enrichment classes, supervised playground and other physical activity, play dates, or just plain relaxation time at home.

If anything, for children making the transition to a full day of school, having a mixture of in-school and out-of-school activities would seem to be developmentally appropriate.

I respectfully request that the CPS School Kindergarten Planning Team develop an option that respects the wishes of families like my own, who desire to be directly involved in their kindergartener’s daytime activities.

I suggest several possibilities:

- Using mornings for academic/instructional activities and afternoons for enrichment activities, which would allow parents to bring home their children mid-day with no academic or social consequences.
- Providing dedicated full-day and half-day kindergarten classrooms, and offering parent choice (this allows teacher choice as well).

I strongly urge the CPS team that is working on the kindergarten planning to realize that “one size fits all” is not the best option for our children and our families. I ask that you develop and present a set of options to the community in early 2008, including ones that honor the wishes of parents who prefer a half-day kindergarten for their children.

Yours,

Fred Martin, Ph.D.
1595 Main St
Concord MA

References:

Rand study, “School Readiness, Full-Day Kindergarten, and Student Achievement” (2006), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG558.pdf

WestEd study, “Full-Day Kindergarten: Expanding learning opportunities” (2005), http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/po-05-01.pdf

DOE study, “Full-day and Half-day Kindergarten in the United States: Findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99” (2004), <http://nces.ed.gov/Pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004078>

Galley 2002, cited in DOE study.