



50-STATE REVIEW

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Full-Day Kindergarten: A look across the states

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Research indicates that a high-quality, full-day kindergarten experience is a crucial component to setting students up for ongoing academic success, yet vast differences exist in the quality of

many are also looking to establish quality full-day kindergarten to support the gains made in the pre-K space and to set students up for success throughout their academic careers. This report explores the spectrum of full-day kindergarten programs and highlights different models of funding implemented by states. Additionally, it examines the requirements for full-day kindergarten, including state bans on parent tuition and the length of day for full-day kindergarten.

In **27 STATES**, the length of full-day kindergarten (whether it is required or optional) is equal to that of first grade length of day.

The **DEFINITION** of full-day, and the level at which the program is funded, varies considerably from state to state.

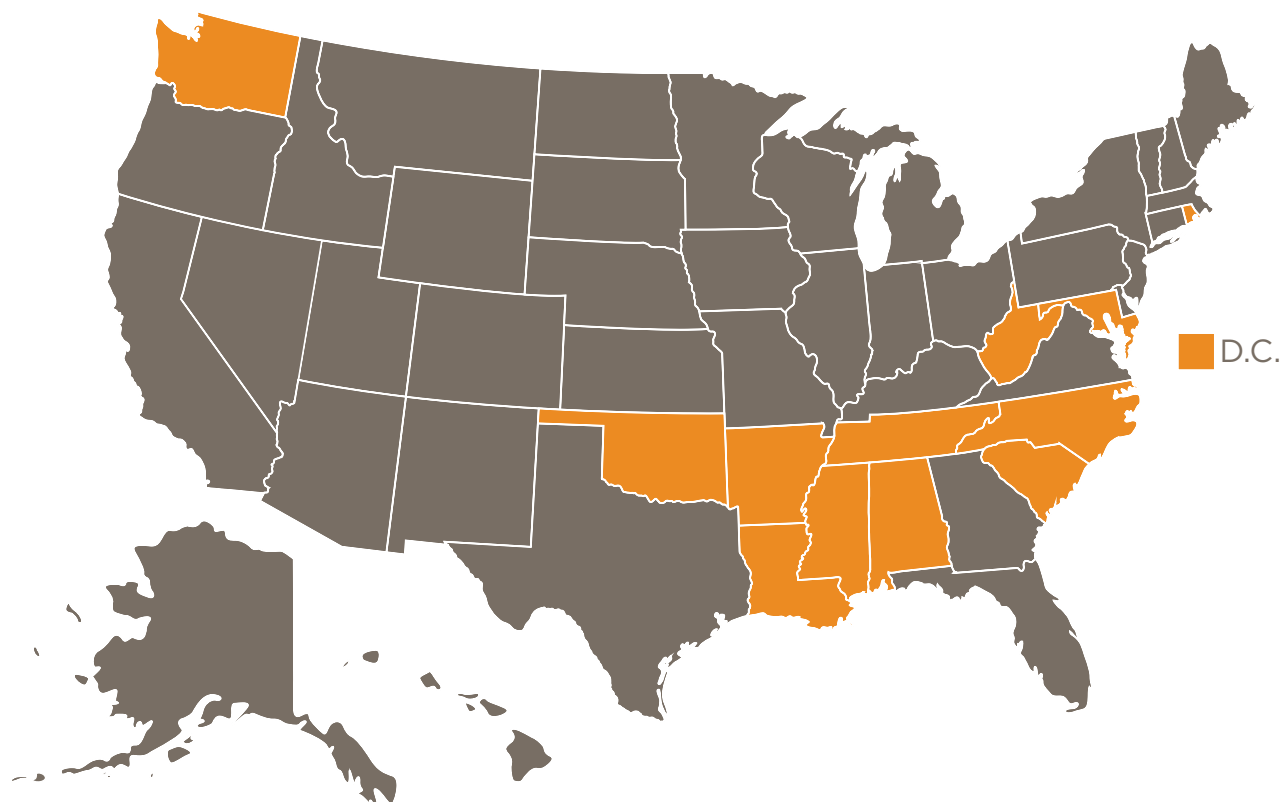
IN 13 STATES
PLUS THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA, DISTRICTS ARE
REQUIRED TO OFFER FULL-
DAY KINDERGARTEN.

kindergarten programs and how they are funded across the states.¹ As states **continue to develop** strong pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs,

Where is Full-Day Kindergarten Required?

While 13 states plus the District of Columbia (D.C.) (see Figure 1) require full-day kindergarten, the definition of full-day, and the level at which the program is funded, varies from state to state. In 27 states, the length of full-day kindergarten (whether it is required or optional) is equal to the length of day in first grade while in the remaining states, a full-day program may be shorter than the required hours for other grades. For example, **Nevada** and **Utah** require kindergarten at a minimum of 360 hours per year; while **Alabama** requires a minimum of 1,080 hours per year. Even though only 13 states plus D.C. require full-day kindergarten, reports indicate that when states offer full-day kindergarten as an option, many families take advantage of the opportunity. Thirty-five states report that 70-89 percent of their students attend full-day kindergarten programs. Only five states have full-day kindergarten attendance rates above 90 percent, demonstrating that even when programs are available, they are not always accessible to children and families.²

FIGURE 1: WHERE IS FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN REQUIRED?



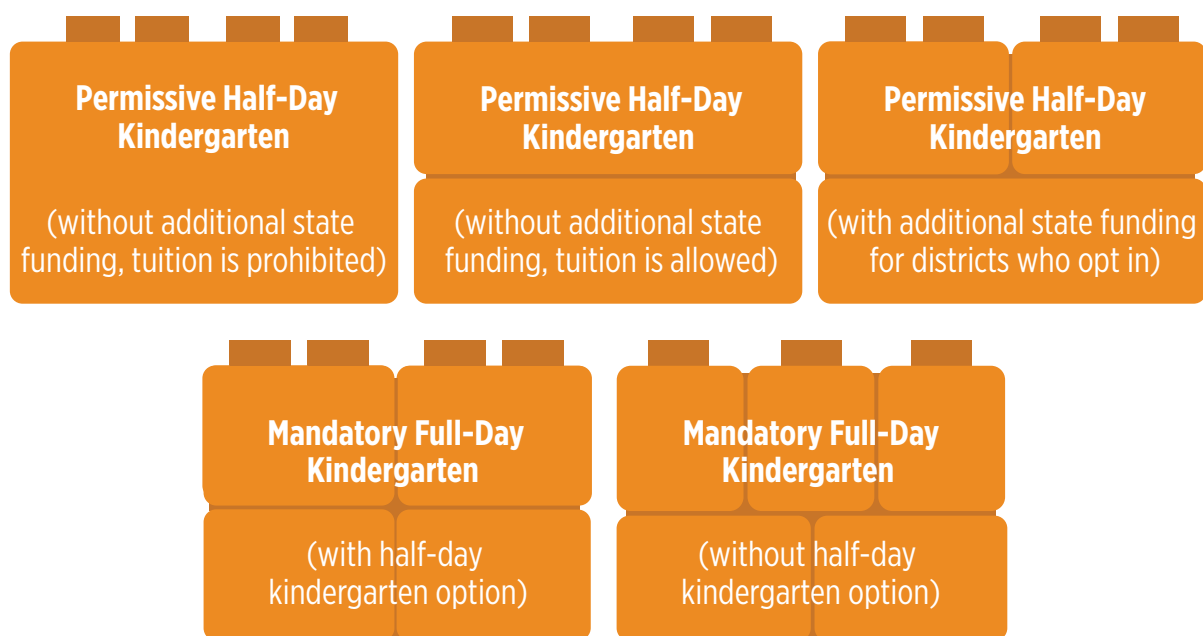
Discrepancies in kindergarten funding and quality may leave many students less prepared to enter first grade than their peers who attended a quality full-day kindergarten program. This is of particular concern for many low-income students, as well as students with learning disabilities, who may require additional support services. Results of empirical research on the effects of full-day versus half-day kindergarten show that children who attend full-day kindergarten make significantly stronger academic gains in reading and math over the course of the kindergarten year than their peers in half-day kindergarten.³ Children in full-day kindergarten gain an additional 12.8 percent in reading assessments and an additional 10.3 percent in math assessments over children in

half-day programs between the fall and spring tests.⁴ Additionally, more time in the classroom gives children the opportunity to have a greater number of early learning experiences and child-teacher interactions that help prepare them for their academic and developmental growth.

Examples of how States Fund Full-Day Kindergarten

While there are a handful of states on the forefront of full-day kindergarten policy innovation, the majority of states do not require full-day kindergarten programs. Various state funding models offer a spectrum of support. Figure 2 shows the range of funding models that states use when funding full-day kindergarten programs. On one end of the spectrum, offering the highest amount of financial support are states such as West Virginia. West Virginia requires all districts to exclusively offer full-day kindergarten, without an option for half-day kindergarten. On the opposite end of the spectrum are states such as Maine. Maine allows districts to offer full-day kindergarten, but does not provide additional funding for this option and prohibits districts from charging tuition to families. Currently, no states prohibit districts from offering full-day kindergarten.

FIGURE 2: STATE APPROACHES TO FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN



MAINE



Maine permits districts to offer full-day kindergarten, but they do not receive additional state funding. Regardless of whether the district offers full-day kindergarten or half-day kindergarten, the district receives the same amount for each student.¹² Additionally, Maine has banned districts from charging families tuition for full-day kindergarten, so there is no way for districts in Maine to receive additional funding for the extra hours that full-day kindergarten students spend in school.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Permissive Half-Day Kindergarten

(without additional state funding, tuition is allowed)

New Hampshire provides state funding for half-day kindergarten and permits individual districts to offer full-day kindergarten. However, if districts opt to offer full-day kindergarten, they do not receive any additional state funding.⁹ Regardless of the length of the day, the New Hampshire school funding formula funds students in kindergarten at a weight of 0.5.¹⁰ The state permits districts to collect tuition from families to pay for additional hours. Compulsory school attendance in New Hampshire does not begin until age six, meaning that while the state requires districts to offer at least half-day kindergarten, it does not require students to attend kindergarten until the year of their sixth birthday.¹¹

NEBRASKA

Permissive Half-Day Kindergarten

(with additional state funding for districts who opt in)

Nebraska permits districts to offer full-day kindergarten, and, at a minimum, requires all districts to offer half-day kindergarten. State funding is weighted at 0.5 for half-day kindergarten students. Full-day kindergarten is funded at the same level as first through 12th grade.⁸ Because districts receive additional funding if they offer full-day kindergarten, they have a financial incentive to do so.

OKLAHOMA

Mandatory Full-Day Kindergarten

(with half-day kindergarten option)

Oklahoma requires school districts to offer full-day kindergarten to all students and the state fully funds the mandate. Families have the option to send their child to either half-day kindergarten or full-day kindergarten. Half-day kindergarten students receive a weight of 1.3 and full-day kindergarten students receive a weight of 1.5 in the state funding formula.⁷ The state prohibits districts from charging tuition to supplement the state funding. The full-day kindergarten programs must run for six hours per day, which is the same requirement as a full-day in other grades.

WEST VIRGINIA

Mandatory Full-Day Kindergarten

(without half-day kindergarten option)

West Virginia is often cited as a model for a well-constructed and funded full-day kindergarten program. West Virginia requires all districts to exclusively offer full-day kindergarten programs for all eligible students. The state mandates that all kindergarten programs be full-day everyday programs, meaning that districts cannot opt to only offer half-day kindergarten.⁵ The state funds kindergarten students through a funding formula and gives equal weight to students in first – 12th grade.⁶ The length of the school day for full-day kindergarten is equivalent to that of first grade length of day.

Policy Considerations

In addition to ensuring that kindergarten classrooms have high-quality standards to prepare students for their educational careers, policymakers may want to consider the following when designing a model for full-day kindergarten.

- 1. Fund kindergarten through the school funding formula and assign kindergarten students enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs a weight equal to a first grade student.**

If the state fully funds a full-day kindergarten program, districts do not need to charge tuition for full-day kindergarten. Charging families tuition for full-day kindergarten limits access to those programs only to students and families who can afford the tuition. Full-day kindergarten programs funded through tuition can increase inequity.

- 2. Increase full-day kindergarten to be the length of first grade.**

Students who attend full-day kindergarten programs are more likely to have better attendance, academic success and social/emotional development.¹³ Additionally, strengthening kindergarten programs can expand and support the gains made in the pre-kindergarten space.

- 3. Include compulsory kindergarten attendance.**

Many states do not require school attendance until first grade. By lowering the compulsory education age requirement, students can learn skills earlier and will not be left behind their peers who attend education programs at an early age.

It is imperative that state and district policymakers take a comprehensive view of full-day kindergarten policies to provide a coherent continuum of early education for all young children in this nation.

Kristie Kauerz^{xiv}

Data Table of all 50 States

The following table shows full-day kindergarten requirements in all 50 states plus D.C. The first column shows the states that require districts to offer full-day kindergarten; the second column shows the states that have banned charging families tuition for full-day kindergarten enrollment; the third column highlights whether the length of a full-day kindergarten school day is equivalent to a full day of first grade; and the final column looks at the minimum number of hours that states require for full-day and half-day kindergarten.

State	Is full-day kindergarten required? ¹⁵	Is there a state ban on tuition? ¹⁶	Is the length of full-day kindergarten equivalent to first grade?	What is the minimum number of hours for kindergarten? ¹⁷
Alabama	yes	yes	yes	~1080 hours required per year
Alaska	no	yes	yes	740 hours per year (~4 hours/day)
Arizona	no	no	no	356 hours per year (~2 hours/day)
Arkansas	yes	yes	yes	6 hours per day (~1080 hours/year)
California	no	yes	no	3 hours per day (~540 hours/year)
Colorado	no	no	no	450 hours per year for half-day (~2.5 hours/day) 900 hours per year for full-day (~5 hours/day)
Connecticut	no	yes	yes	450 hours per year for half-day (~2.5 hours/day) 900 hours per year for full-day (~5 hours/day)
Delaware	yes	yes	yes	1060 hours per year (~6 hours/day)
District of Columbia	yes	yes	no	5 hours per day (~900 hours/year)
Florida	no	yes	yes	720 hours per year for full-day (~4 hours/day)
Georgia	no	yes	yes	4.5 hours per day for full-day (~810 hours/year)
Hawaii	no	yes	yes	915 hours per year (~5 hours/day)
Idaho	no	no	no	450 hours per year (~2.5 hours/day)
Illinois	no	no	yes	2 hours per day for half-day (~360 hours/year) 4 hours per day for full-day (~720 hours/year)
Indiana	no	yes	yes	Not specified



State	Is full-day kindergarten required? ¹⁵	Is there a state ban on tuition? ¹⁶	Is the length of full-day kindergarten equivalent to first grade?	What is the minimum number of hours for kindergarten? ¹⁷
Iowa	no	yes	no	Local decision
Kansas	no	no	no	465 hours per year (~2.5 hours/day)
Kentucky	no	yes	no	6 hours per day for all grades except kindergarten, which may be operated for less than 6 hours per day (~1,110 hours/year)
Louisiana	yes	yes	yes	6 hours per day (~1,062 hours/year)
Maine	no	yes	no	2.5 hours per day (~440 hours/year)
Maryland	yes	yes	yes	1,080 hours per year (~6 hours/day)
Massachusetts	no	no	no	425 hours per year for half-day (~2.4 hours/day) 900 hours per year for full-day (~5 hours/day)
Michigan	no	yes	no	549 hours per year is half of the requirement for first-12th grade (~3.25 hours/day) 1,098 hours per year is required for all other grades (~6.5 hours/day)
Minnesota	no	yes	no	425 hours per year for half-day (~2.25 hours/day) 850 hours per year for full-day (~4.5 hours/day)
Mississippi	yes	yes	yes	5.5 hours per day (~990 hours/year)
Missouri	no	no	yes	522 hours per year (~3 hours/day)
Montana	no	yes	yes	360 hours per year for half-day (~2 hours/day) 720 hours per year for full-day (~4 hours/day)
Nebraska	no	yes	no	400 hours per year for half-day (~2 hours/day) 1,032 hours per year for full-day (~5.75 hours/day)
Nevada	no	no	no	2 hours per day (~360 hours/year)
New Hampshire	no	no	no	450 hours per year (~2.5 hours/day)
New Jersey	no	no	yes	Local decision
New Mexico	no	yes	yes	450 hours per year for half-day (~2.5 hours/day) 990 hours per year for full-day (~5.5 hours/day)
New York	no	yes	yes	2.5 hours per day for half-day (~450 hours/year) 5 hours per day for full-day (~900 hours/year)
North Carolina	yes	yes	yes	1,025 hours per year (~5.5 hours/day)



State	Is full-day kindergarten required? ¹⁵	Is there a state ban on tuition? ¹⁶	Is the length of full-day kindergarten equivalent to first grade?	What is the minimum number of hours for kindergarten? ¹⁷
North Dakota	no	yes	yes	2.8 hours per day for half-day (~480 hours/year) 5.5 hours per day for full-day (~960 hours/year)
Ohio	no	no	yes	455 hours per year for half-day (~2.5 hours/day) 910 hours per year for full-day (~5 hours/day)
Oklahoma	yes	yes	yes	6 hours per day for full-day (~1,080 hours/year)
Oregon	no	yes	yes	450 hours per year for half-day (~2.5 hours/day) 900 hours per year for full-day (~5 hours/day)
Pennsylvania	no	no	no	2.5 hours per day for half-day (~450 hours/year) 900 hours per year for full-day (~5 hours/day)
Rhode Island	yes	yes	no	5.5 hours per day for full-day (~990 hours/year)
South Carolina	yes	yes	yes	6 hours per day (~1,080 hours/year)
South Dakota	no	yes	no	437.5 hours per year (~2.5 hours/day)
Tennessee	yes	yes	yes	4 hours per day (~720 hours/year)
Texas	no	yes	yes	3.35 hours per day for half-day (~549 hours/year) 7 hours per day for full-day (~1,260 hours/year)
Utah	no	yes	no	2 hours per day (~360 hours/year)
Vermont	no	yes	no	2 hours per day (~350 hours/year)
Virginia	no	yes	no	3 hours per day (~540 hours/year)
Washington	yes ¹⁸	no	no	1000 hours per year for full-day (~5.5 hours/day)
West Virginia	yes	yes	yes	5.25 hours per day for full-day (~945 hours/year)
Wisconsin	no	yes	no	437 hours per year (~2.5 hours/day)
Wyoming	no ¹⁹	yes	no	Not specified

Final Thoughts

Full-day kindergarten can help to close achievement gaps early on in a child's education. Research shows that longer school days enable children to receive more individualized, academically focused and meaningful instruction from teachers, as well as more time interacting with their peers – both of which can lead to long-term benefits and increased scores in third grade assessments.²⁰ The major barrier to states enacting full-day kindergarten is determining how to fund the additional hours. State policymakers may want to consider creating incentives in state school funding formulas for school districts to offer full-day kindergarten. To incrementally build toward a true K-12 system, full-day kindergarten funding can be integrated into the per-pupil funding allocation formula, which currently funds first - 12th grade (and half-day kindergarten). Through aligning full-day kindergarten funding metrics with first - 12th grade in the school funding formula, educational success outcomes will likely be improved.

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