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HB 47

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Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

House Education Committee
February 2, 2005
HB 47- Full-time Kindergarten
Superintendent Linda McCulloch's Remarks

For the Record, I am Linda McCulloch, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Thank you to Representative Kathleen Galvin-Halcro for sponsoring HB 47, for full-time kindergarten which is requested by the Office of Public Instruction.

I believe that now is the time for Montana to have a real conversation about full-time kindergarten. Frankly, I was ready to introduce this bill in the 2003 legislative session, but due to the state budget deficit, I didn't introduce it. You had enough on your plate last session.

Full-time kindergarten is a priority for me because it enables our schools to provide an educational opportunity that we know makes a difference in a child's life.

Expanding half-day kindergarten to a full-time educational program is a powerful early intervention tool that can help level the playing field for students who enter our schools already behind. As I travel the state, I have seen first-hand the difference a few extra hours in a day can make in the long-term academic success of a student.

House Bill 47 proposes to provide full-time ANB funding for kindergarten students enrolled in a full-time public school kindergarten program. This proposal does **NOT** require schools to offer a full-time kindergarten program, but provides full-time funding for those districts that do. HB 47 does **NOT** it require parents to enroll their child in full-time kindergarten.

Background

Public support for kindergarten has grown over the past 50 years when most families had one parent at home. Nationally, nearly all (98%) children attend at least half-day kindergarten. And there has been a steady increase in students attending kindergarten full-time with 23% in 1988, 55% in 1993 and now 6 out of every 10 (60%) kindergarten students attend a full-day program.

In Montana, 54 schools in 36 districts reported to OPI this fall that they offer a full-time kindergarten program. That represents slightly less than 20% of kindergarten students around the state who are attending a full-time kindergarten program. These school districts' decided to expand the kindergarten day because it supports what their kids need for continued academic and social success.

Our changing society greatly influences this drive for full-time kindergarten. More children live in dual-income or single parent families, and are shuffled between school, day care and home throughout the day. All of those transitions are stressful for children and their parents, and can detract from the learning – academic and behavioral – that is taking place.

Parents find full-day kindergarten helps their child better adjust and perform in school. And their young children need more access to quality educational opportunities during the day.

Benefits

Full-time kindergarten has been proven to be a vital step in starting children on a successful path to learning. Children who are enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs, in comparison to half-day programs, demonstrate:

1. Greater progress in literacy, math and general learning skills
2. Significant gains in social and emotional development
3. Fewer grade retentions and special education placements
4. Higher scores on achievement tests
5. Reduced behavioral problems
6. Significantly stronger academic gains over the course of the kindergarten year than their half-day counterparts

Studies have shown there have been NO detrimental effects to children attending full-day kindergarten. Students easily adjust to longer days in school without any major difficulties. In reality, students are better prepared for a successful transition to first grade. Children who fall behind in the first grade have only a 1 in 8 chance of ever catching up to grade level.

The positive outcomes appear to be even larger for disadvantaged students. Poor and minority students especially benefit from participation in full-day program. Research tells us that full-time kindergarten significantly helps to close academic achievement gaps for both low-income and minority children. And of importance also for low-income children, is the increased opportunity for good nutrition that a longer school day provides.

The benefits to full-time kindergarten do not end when the student completes their kindergarten year. Studies show there is a positive effect on both short and long term student achievement. We know that if a student isn't reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade, the gap in achievement continues to increase, as does the cost to help that student catch up. An investment in full-time kindergarten is an investment in early success rather than trying to remediate failure in the upper grades.

The economical benefits of full-time kindergarten extend beyond the classroom. Research on "quality early education" emphasizes the long-term benefits for the student and society. A longitudinal study revealed that students with early childhood education opportunities were more likely to complete a higher level of schooling, have higher monthly earnings at age 27 and were more likely to be own a home. These students were also less likely to receive social services and had fewer arrests.

Pennsylvania views the importance of full-time kindergarten, in combination with other educational innovations, as building a stronger economic position because their future workforce is school-ready and prepared for years of learning ahead.

Funding

In Montana, kindergarten students receive half-time ANB funding. OPI's budget request is $22 million in the 2007 biennium to provide ANB full funding for kindergarten students enrolled in public schools. HB47 does not require schools to offer a full-time kindergarten, but provides funding for those districts that do. Our $11 million per year is based on 70% of the state's10,500 kindergarten attending full-time. This estimate is based on the recognition that:

1. Not all schools have facilities or staff for full-time kindergarten
2. Not all parents would enroll their children in full-time kindergarten

House Bill 47 recognizes the academic, social and economic benefits that full-time kindergarten can provide for our youngest students in public school. This bill understands that not all kindergarten students begin school with the same experiences and seeks to provide full ANB funding for expanded learning opportunities that start kids off on a good foundation for life. HB 47 provides the flexibility for school districts, parents and community members to decide when and if full-time kindergarten works for their students.

Full-time kindergarten has been well received by parents and educators across the state. I ask the committee to support HB 47. Thank you for your time today.

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