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ALL-DAY (A-DK) vs. HALF-DAY (h-dk) KINDERGARTEN

Dr. D. Dean Anderson

Ref.: SB 152 (*and SB 123*)

The Great Falls Tribune, January 27, 2006, reported, that Governor Schweitzer reminded the education community that, ". the state has a limited budget." He said "For them [education community] to expect a superhighway in the next legislative session, that won't happen."

Then, on February 16, 2006, the Billings Gazette quoted the governor as saying he "would sponsor a school readiness summit in June that would address full-day kindergarten (A-DK) as 'one solution' to school readiness and that he [Schweitzer] wasn't ready yet to make a financial commitment." Additional questioning revealed, ".he might consider full-day kindergarten."

Education lobbyists only need to convince elected officials, not recipients, of their notion of the efficacy of A-DK implementation; lobbyists frame the issue to avoid information on the program, polls, studies or research that would negatively influence decisions by the legislative body. Such may well be the case with A-DK.

Many partisans of A-DK claim:

1. "Most education experts agree that full-day kindergarten has improved learning skills for children."
2. ". full-day kindergarten is a good idea but . it doesn't address the 'at-risk' students .."
3. ".we have a lot of information from states that have had full-time kindergarten for years."
4. "Studies have shown that children who attend full-time kindergarten perform better on achievement tests and are less likely to drop out of school."
5. "Despite benefits, full-time kindergarten isn't a viable option for some school districts that do not have adequate classroom space."

Other advocates of A-DK claim, ". the state should take more responsibility for educating young children." - Governor Napolitano; ". more early learning will provide the experiences and environment necessary to promote the healthy developmer of children, leading to subsequent achievement." - Tom Horne, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Arizona.

The above comments represent views by protagonists of A-DK. That is only one side of the debate; only one side of the equation.

I would like to place in evidence material that brings A-DK exponent arguments into serious question. Generally, A-DK groups, such as happened in Minnesota, attempted to scare citizens with statements that ".half of our children are not ready .. In addition, that "this information, [from h-dk advocates], is false." Some state groups "baits the public and legislators with talk about helping "at-risk" children. Then, they [education officials] vastly exaggerate the number of children."

There is a serious disturbance in the focus of the research, what very little there is, by A-DK supporters suggesting that their major concerns are more about themselves than the children. Depending on student numbers, schools are looking for new arguments, crises, and foggy reasons to siphon monies from state and federal coffers and avoid present management and accountability problems. The very questionable marginal benefits, virtually all lacking statistical significance, to significant detriments, are hidden behind smokescreens of hype, understated failures, overstated successes, and refusal to acknowledge that any long-term benefits exist beyond third grade.

Benefits of half-day kindergarten have as much, if not more, statistical significance than claims by others who march children in front of the bayonets, using them as pawns, posturing for A-DK. In Montana, that means giving special interests control of 11+ million dollars of taxpayer's money. In Federalist #10 essay, James Madison said the main purpose of the Constitution was to limit "the violence of faction." He did not want government "dominated by special interests" which would not serve the public interest or justice (as with mercantilism). In this case, we are seeing the encroachment of mercantilism by the A-DK lobby, an assault on the protection of social and economic liberties.

Early childhood educational development prior to first grade, including Head Start, h-dk and A-DK, and other programs dealing with children 6 years (kindergarten age children) and younger are worthy of discussion. In virtually all cases, the same results apply to h-dk and A-DK. This is not surprising if you consider the fact that the difference in schooling between the two is only 18 weeks. Attempts to construct programs with value for early childhood education have been fraught with unanticipated contradictions. Take Head Start, for example, founded by Edward Zigler who said, ". arguments in favor of preschool education were that it would reduce failure, lower dropout rates, increase test scores, and produce a generation of more competent high school graduates . [Early] childhood education will achieve none of these results .. These programs are very expensive and do not work." But maybe not as expensive as 11+ million dollars in expenditures for the State of Montana to add only 18 weeks of marginal schooling in the form of A-DK.

Georgia found that [early] childhood education showed "no differences in standardized test scores between children receiving [the education] and those who did not, and, no changes in scores before implementation." Taxpayers spent \$50 billion, that's with a "B", in over 35 years on 20 million children, have paid for, and received over 600 studies on the program Head Start and found no long-term improvement in academic achievement, IQ, school readiness, social behavior or self-esteem. In Minnesota, the legislative auditor, in 2001, found no positive effect of any [early] program but much evidence of fiscal mismanagement. In addition, this is about a program that supposedly prepares children for school and, yet, we are to believe that adding only 18 weeks of additional schooling, at the cost of 11+ million, immediately following, solves all the problems Head Start claims to correct. We not only inflict higher costs on the taxpayer but also, usurp the parent-child relationship bond during a time of needed family togetherness. A 2002 study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development followed a group of more than 1,300 children in 10 different states through their first 7 years [includes h-dk and A-DK] of life. They found that children who spend more hours per week in non-parental involvement have more behavior problems, including

aggressive, defiant, and disobedient behavior in kindergarten. Now A-DK promoters want to force 18 more weeks of institutional time on all children, time that should be spent with family, whole or single parent. "Children, many from single-parent families, do not need disruption of the bond [for 18 more weeks] with their remaining parent by programs that are ineffective, invasive, duplicative, and expensive in order to provide additional funds for schools under the guise of helping them." Children should not be just "human resources" for state institutions but seen as individuals needing an investment of kindness for an additional 18 weeks in family, not institutional, nurturing, supported by community elder mentoring.

A-DK supporters believe in intervention to satisfy learning and benefit later development. Yet, again, Scarr in "Development and Individual Differences" said, "There is quite a mystique in our culture about the importance of early intervention, [yet] there is no evidence whatever." Advocate claims of studies showing any benefit to A-DK declare positive impacts without acknowledging other possible explanations; negative news reaches a small audience, gaining little circulation.

The result: Parents, elected officials and citizens are not aware of any problems.

Despite reports, and despite untoward studies of A-DK and similar schooling, some politicians vote for and continue to support these programs.

According to the U.S. Dept. of Education study, "America's Kindergartners," (NCES 2000-070, February, 2000), 94% are proficient at recognizing numbers, shapes, and counting to ten, 92% are eager to learn and 97% are in good health." Considering those results and that less than half of the nation has A-DK, is it not a reach to believe that claimed benefits to be realized by A-DK would effect the slightest change in those percentages? Realizing that more than half of the kindergartners in the nation, that were a part of those earlier statistics, were half-day, extends plausibility. How much can we expect them to improve, beyond 90% ranges, by adding just 18 more weeks of schooling (day care) at an expense of 11+ million dollars?

Furthermore, consider France, England, Denmark, Spain and Belgium where more than 90% attend public early education facilities. "International tests show that by age 9, when benefits of early education should be most apparent, American children outscore [without universal A-DK] nearly all of their universally early-educated peers on tests of reading, math, and science." - National Conference of Education Statistics, "Elementary and Secondary Education: An International Perspective", Department of Education, March, 2000, pp.50-56." In other words, early education conferred no apparent gains on participating children. Reports also show that GKAF scores are essentially the same as they were before adoption of universal early education programs, including A-DK, which will cost Montanans 11+ million dollars. One state superintendent said, "The only message you can get from it is that our kindergarten non-ready rate is the same, regardless of what we do." - Florida Times Union, Nov. 1, 1999." "Children who experience long hours of childcare . are more at risk for showing behavior problems, particularly aggression. Not only were these children more likely to engage in assertive, defiant, and even disobedient activities, but they were also more likely to bully, fight with, or act mean to other children." - Society for Research on Child Development. Why would Montana want to extract another 18 weeks from children and their families, single parent or not, during this critical developmental period?

As policymakers you can consider early education proposals, the latest being A-DK. You also have the opportunity to examine the research on early education, review experience and findings from domestic programs, and look to international data. You will find strong evidence that the widespread adoption of A-DK is very unlikely to improve student achievement. You will find that "fade out" will render rather meaningless early schooling and that the current system is unable to sustain what

proponents claim are early gains. Your understanding will discover little evidence to support the contention that even half-day formal kindergarten is necessary for school achievement or more advantageous than learning in a traditional setting. During the past four decades, we have undergone a great change in early education; kindergarten, which was rarely the case, is now the norm. Despite increased enrollment in formal early education programs, student achievement has shown little to no improvement.

When some governors and educational authority figures plead a universal national system, similar to many European nations, most parents and many teachers disagree. At the most basic level, Public Agenda, in an opinion poll, found parents of young children believe more full-time parental presence as being best and, it is what most prefer for their own family, [rather than A-DK].

It is difficult to accept the rhetoric of the education's lobby A-DK plan to make it a lockstep component of public schooling. The faulty logic of the equal opportunity arguments for education will not be satisfied with compulsion --- equal opportunity for a bad choice is no choice at all, unless you see A-DK as a politically palatable way to subsidize day care. The real debate is not about effectiveness or expense but in whose hands the responsibility for young children should rest. Do we really cherish the primacy of the family over the state? Does anyone really believe that 18 more weeks, at this time in a child's development, will provide the experience and environment necessary to promote healthy development of a child, leading to subsequent school achievement?

Claims that research shows a fiscal savings in later years, improved reading, writing and math skills, higher test scores, improved attendance and social skills are suspect and grossly exaggerated, limited in applicability to the majority of students and plagued by methodological shortcomings, including small sample size, high attrition rates, infrequent random selections and infrequent use of comparison groups. A lot of the research has been totally discredited. Fiscal savings studies showed flawed cost-benefit analysis with confidence further undermined by the facts that it cannot be replicated with normal distribution. What short-term benefits that have been found disappear shortly and are non-existent at the end of the third grade; NCES (National Center of Education Statistics) studies show no difference in academic achievement between half-day and A-DK by the end of third grade. Earlier mentioned as "fade out", this phenomenon, when considering A-DK, is important because it means that an additional 18 weeks of schooling and 11+ million dollars may not measurably affect later academic performance. The few instances showing potential improvement were with severely disadvantaged children, in intense settings, involving a level of education far different from A-DK. A significant body of research shows that early education, including A-DK, can be detrimental to mainstream children ---misdirection. - David Elkind, professor of child development at Tufts. Elkind claims "children receiving academic instruction too early, before the age of 6 or 7 are often put at risk for no apparent gain. He concludes, "There is no evidence that . early instruction has lasting benefits and considerable evidence that it can do lasting harm ." If we continue practices of uselessness, we may do serious harm to a large segment of the next generation.

So, where are we in the debate of A-DK?

Consider:

1. At the Greenbrier conference in 1998, democratic members of Congress were told in a paper, "Kids as Politics", that "[children] are the best vehicle to get votes."
2. With dubious benefits and considerable projected financial costs, why agitate for A-DK?
3. That those who promote the "village" concept of A-DK are more interested in

social engineering than real education.

4. That A-DK is only a resource for more state and federal money with attached regulations --- true mercantilism the Constitution and James Madison in Federalist #10 were intent on avoiding.

5. That Americans' confidence in public schools steadily declines; a Gallup poll shows "A great deal of confidence in 1973 dropped to 49% in 1988 and 36% in 1999. Another recent poll shows only 27% of the citizens believe more control over young children's public education is warranted. Politically, that is an untenable alliance with majority views. Politicians actively seek new opportunities to exercise politics and intervene in the economy. A-DK provides political convenience to impose new restrictions and regulations at great expense while appearing as visionaries trying to save the children.

6. That A-DK advocates will propagandize against people who object to the correctness of A-DK as ignorant, evil or not caring about the kids. In fact, it is quite the contrary.

7. Those supporters of A-DK view it as a means to increase their own relevance; they simplify their arguments to doomsday scenarios that must have implementations of A-DK, supported with propaganda and flawed information.

The bottom line is to oppose programs that steal from ordinary citizens to satisfy the greed of lobbyists, school districts, and some politicians for something that does not work; we do not want to be victimized by activities of an education community pursuing the dollar rather than educational excellence.

All-day kindergarten is not a viable option when considering benefits to our children and the taxpayer's pocketbook. I urge you to reject it.

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