

SB 123, Full Day Kindergarten  
Testimony, January 10, 2007

My name is Marsha Davis. I am the county superintendent in Lewis and Clark County and I am speaking in support of SB 123 as an option for the school districts in my county. I think it is important that it is an option for school districts because I'm not certain at this time, if all my districts would be able to implement full day kindergarten next year in all their schools even with full ANB funding for each kindergarten student. There also may be parents who would prefer to maintain a half-day program for their child.

It is my belief that kindergarten teachers are currently under a great deal of pressure to cover academic foundational skills in a half day program in order for students to achieve proficiency in reading and math. What seems to then happen is that they find it difficult to balance these cognitive activities with affective/social activities in a two-hour program. Teachers of young children know that children develop in different ways and at different rates and that in order to ensure successful school experiences for all children, their programs must provide more than a basic knowledge of language and math. Kindergarten students also must develop physical, social and emotional competence to have a positive attitude toward learning.

A growing body of research identifies many advantages of a full day program over a half-day program—highlights of that research are reflected in the beginning of this bill. (others have already testified about those specifically and I won't waste time to repeat those). What is of critical importance to me is that should this bill pass, and I urge you to do so, full day kindergarten must be implemented the "right way." By the "right way" I mean that full day programs must provide a balanced approach and meet the needs of the whole child—cognitively, socially, physically and emotionally; that developmentally and individually appropriate learning environments are provided that emphasize hands-on, intergrated learning; that teachers are well prepared and trained in early childhood development and teaching strategies; and that teachers also have the equipment and resources they need to support active and engaged learning.

Now, more than ever before, full day kindergarten is an essential option that my school districts need to better meet the needs of an increasingly challenging population of children entering school for the very first time. I urge you to support our schools and kindergarten teachers by passing SB 123. Thank you.