

# Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study



## 2013-2014

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Mindy Wilkie, Memorial Elementary School Principal  
Scott Minnick, Parent and Board Of Education member  
Linda Sturm-Ribeiro – Parent  
Belinda Trinks – Parent  
Ronnie Phelps – My School Learning Center  
Joey Bauer – Remedial Reading Teacher  
Stacey Gibson – Kindergarten Teacher  
Alicia Zingarella – Grade 3 Teacher

## Introduction

The East Hampton Public Schools Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study was commissioned by the Board of Education, under the direction of the Superintendent, to study the feasibility of a full day kindergarten program and to provide programmatic recommendations.

In October, a Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study Group was formed. The study group was comprised of representation from the following stakeholder groups: East Hampton Board of Education, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and the greater community. The Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study was co-chaired by Tim Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent of Schools and Mindy Wilkie, Principal of Memorial Elementary School. The following members participated on the Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study group:

Timothy Van Tassel, Assistant Superintendent  
Mindy Wilkie, Memorial Elementary School Principal  
Scott Minnick, Parent and Board Of Education member  
Linda Sturm-Ribeiro – Parent  
Belinda Trinks – Parent  
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From October to January, the Full Day Kindergarten Study Group met and worked to identify best practices, review research and resources, examine exemplary programs, review data, consider impact, and report on the advantages and disadvantages of various programs and options. Activities included the surveying of stakeholders, visiting other districts, presenting findings to the study group and contributing to the completion of the final report to the East Hampton Board of Education on January 27, 2014

At our first meeting, the Full Day Kindergarten Study Group came up with a list of questions that would guide our research in preparation for our recommendation to the Superintendent of Schools. Here is a listing of some of the important questions we looked to answer through our process of inquiry:

- What is the importance of a full day kindergarten program?
- Why are we considering full day kindergarten?
- Why is it important to East Hampton residents?
- What programs/practices/resources are already in place?
- What programs/practices/resources are considered best practice and should we consider?
- What is our end outcome?
- What are the benefits of a full day K program?
- What are the characteristics of a high quality program?
- What are all of the possible models of programming?
- What are the costs of each?
- What curriculum would be required?
- What would various staffing structures include?

- What role do peers play in the delivery of a full day program?
- How will we monitor our success?
- What professional development would be necessary to implement the transition?
- What space and facility needs should be considered? (Playground, classroom, bathrooms, parking, storage, etc.)

The following narrative will provide a background surrounding the efforts of the Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study Group. The committee's narrative is broken into four separate segments: Research; Site Visits; Survey, and the final Recommendation. The synopsis provided in this narrative will support the attached presentation that will be made to the East Hampton Board of Education on July 27, 2014.

## Research

The Full Day Feasibility Study Group spent a significant amount of time discussing the research surrounding full day kindergarten programming. The topic of "research" remained a standing agenda item for each meeting, and all members of the committee were responsible for finding research that supported and disputed full day kindergarten programming. Our protocol for examining and synthesizing the research was to categorize the pros and cons within the following three categories: Academic, Social/Emotional, and Physical Needs. Throughout this process, our committee was able to engage in rich discussion surrounding multiple perspectives, which led us to our final recommendation as a group.

As a committee, we began our research by looking at the academic expectations that have been set with our new Common Core Standards. Further, we looked at the implications that these standards would have on teaching and learning in our kindergarten classroom. It was well-established that the differences between the half day and full day instructional schedules and the amount of time necessary to meet a Common Core standards-based curriculum could not be reconciled. The breadth and expectations of the Common Core State Standards cannot be met in a half day kindergarten program. Students not experiencing a full day program will not possess the essential skills and knowledge necessary for transition into first grade. The Common Core has remained one of the strongest findings that support the need for a full day kindergarten experience.

In addition to the Common Core, we researched best practices in early childhood education. The research we examined highlighted the need for:

- Hands-on experiential learning
- Workshop models
- Expanding opportunities for social-emotional development
- The importance of establishing positive connections between teacher/student
- The need to increase opportunities for early intervention and differentiated instruction

The committee also felt it was important to research other districts, in hopes that we would ensure our students are provided equal opportunity to peers throughout the state of Connecticut. Our finding identified a heavy trend towards Connecticut Public Schools adopting full day kindergarten

programs. In researching East Hampton's District Reference Group (DRG), the committee found out that twenty two of the twenty four districts are already offering a full day kindergarten program.

Although our committee remained very open to differing perspectives on full day kindergarten, the research that supported full day kindergarten was more substantial and compelling than the research not supporting full day kindergarten. Although gains over time have yet to be validated in research, the new expectations we have set for our Kindergarten students, as well as, all students, will likely produce evidence that will support the need for a high quality primary level experience that includes full day kindergarten.

## Site Visits

Members of the committee engaged in site visits to observe the operation of full day kindergarten classes in Granby and Wethersfield. Important to note, Wethersfield is a member of our District Reference Group while Granby is not. These two districts were selected due to the reputation of their programming, similarities to our district, and the perspective they would provide to our visiting team. With each of these districts having implemented full day kindergarten within the past three years, they were able to provide us with a unique glimpse into the impact their transition to full day has made.

Upon arrival, the team met with the school principal and the language arts consultant to get an overview of their school, their full day kindergarten programming, and their process of implementation of full day kindergarten. Team members then embarked on a tour of several kindergarten classrooms to observe students engaged in reading, writing and math workshop. Following the classroom visits, the team was able to meet with kindergarten teachers and curriculum specialists to further discuss the transition to full day kindergarten, the schedule, and the schools greatest outcomes created by the change to full day kindergarten.

Teachers and administrators at both visits discussed the many positive outcomes they have observed as a result of implementing a full day program. These benefits included better preparedness for first grade, more time for alignment to the Common Core State Standards, greater school-wide involvement, increased relationships with students and families, a more relaxed pace, and more time for kids to be kids. Teachers in Wethersfield cited that students in a full day kindergarten are able to produce the volume of writing in December that students in a half day program were not able to produce until June. Teachers in Granby spoke to a decrease in students needing remedial reading support in grade one. In terms of student performance data, Wethersfield has continued to analyze and compare their full day kindergarten data. It was noted in conversation with teachers and administrators that higher percentages of students have attained proficiency on district benchmarks as compared to students who attended half day kindergarten.

It is important to note that both districts emphasized that their full day programs ensure that they are able to devote ample time to all areas of the curriculum. The extra time in a full day program also presents teachers with the time to implement a model of instruction that allows for students to participate in a rigorous, collaborative, authentic learning community where independence and engagement are valued.

## Survey

In order to gather data and determine the community's level of interest in offering a full day kindergarten program within the East Hampton Public Schools, the committee created and offered a survey to parents who have children in our local pre-schools, as well as all Kindergarten through third grade parents at Memorial Elementary School. These families were considered to have the closest and most recent experiences with early childhood education in our district.

The survey consisted of a total of seven questions that related specifically to current experiences and future aspirations for our Kindergarten program. It was posted on our district website, and remained open for a period of twenty days. All returns were anonymous and confidential.

We were very pleased to receive four hundred sixty eight survey responses to the estimated eight hundred families that received our survey notification. Our approximately fifty percent return rate of the survey showed the high level of interest on the topic of full day kindergarten. The constructed responses we received as part of this survey were also very insightful. They indicated the high level of knowledge parents possess in regards to current kindergarten expectations and the newly introduced Common Core State Standards.

The general findings gathered through the feasibility study survey were as follows:

- Nearly a 50% return rate, 468 responses
- Almost 75% of those taking the survey have lived in town for at least 6 years
- 80% of children participated in either a half or full day pre-school program
- Highest return rate was of parents whose children attended the half day kindergarten program
- 88% of parents would have preferred to have their child enrolled in FDK
- 78% of parents were satisfied with their kindergarten experience (both HDK and FDK)
- Multiple negative responses related to the FDK "lottery system"

## Recommendation

The committee is recommending that the East Hampton Board of Education vote to implement full day kindergarten in the East Hampton Public Schools for the 2014-2015 school year.

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**Presentations:**

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*Full Day Kindergarten Proposal.* Berlin, Connecticut.

*Full Day Kindergarten Feasibility Study.* Marlborough, Connecticut.

*Full Day Kindergarten: Why Does It Matter?* Royal Oaks, Michigan.

*Full Day Kindergarten: A Proposal to the Southington Board of Education and the Community.*  
Southington, Connecticut.

*Full Day Kindergarten Proposal.* South Windsor, Connecticut.

*Full Day Kindergarten Proposal.* Suffield, Connecticut.

*Full Day Kindergarten Proposal.* Wethersfield, Connecticut.