

TO: Kindergarten Parents
FROM: Dean Wittwer, Superintendent of Schools
DATE: August 4, 2008
RE: Why All Day Kindergarten?

In 2001, Findlay City Schools instituted Extended Day Kindergarten (EDK) to give some of our students an extra "gift of time." EDK was an excellent start and an effective bridge to our early intervention programs. However, as Ohio's academic standards became more rigorous and our own district's demographics changed, it became clearer that our ultimate goal should be instituting daily All Day Kindergarten (ADK) for all students. Our teachers, administrators, and board members studied the potential benefits of ADK. We listened to parents and watched other school systems around our area including Liberty Benton, St. Marys, Lima Shawnee, Elida, Wapakoneta, and Bluffton, institute successful ADK programs. Our teachers made site visits to schools and returned energized to start such a program. Also, our staff believes that Ohio's new kindergarten standards are better taught in full day programs. Last year, we piloted ADK at Jacobs and Lincoln Elementary Schools with much success. On April 28, 2008, our Board of Education voted to institute All Day Kindergarten (ADK) at all of Findlay's primary schools for the 2008-2009 school year. As we now begin district wide ADK, our goals are:

1. To enrich and accelerate students' experience across the curriculum, providing them with a firmer foundation for future academic success.
2. To increase stability for students, helping them to grow socially and emotionally as well as academically.
3. To offer a developmental, child-focused curriculum by providing concrete and relevant experiences that nurture children to become creative thinkers, competent individuals, and independent learners.
4. To use our ADK initiative as a springboard to further growth of our overall district curriculum, so that the benefits of ADK are not short-lived, but rather become a catalyst toward an even stronger K-12 program for the 21st Century.

Our Board of Education made the decision for ADK based on numerous articles, very positive ADK experiences in other districts and our own pilot programs, and a survey of teachers and parents. The vast majority of the data supports the positive benefits of ADK, but there are a few studies that question the long-term advantages. Please be assured we are committed to achieving both long term and short term benefits from Findlay's new ADK program, To us however, the bottom line is we believe that more time on task with competent, caring teachers will lead to deeper understanding and greater success for our kindergarteners.

Enclosed you will find additional information related to ADK research. You may also visit our FCS web page <http://www.findlaycityschools.org> for additional research and information related to ADK. If you continue to have questions, concerns, or would like consideration for a traditional half day option for your child, please contact your building principal. If you would like hard copies of any research documents, please contact your building principal, Elementary Curriculum Director Stephanie Roth, Asst. Supt. Paul Blaine, or contact me directly.

Dean Wittwer

What do we believe are some of the benefits of All Day Kindergarten?

- Teachers have approximately 20-25 students, instead of approximately 40–50 each day: they can get to know children, families, and their needs and interests. More time and fewer children all-day allow our teachers to enrich the kindergarten curriculum and communicate with parents more.
- Teachers feel they have more uninterrupted time in a more relaxed, less hurried school day. The number of transitions kindergartners face in a typical day is reduced. Due to family work schedules, children who attend half day programs may be cared for by many more care givers over the course of a day.
- Increased learning time increases academic engagement and helps set the stage for behavior patterns for learning and achievement later on.
- Allows time for in-depth development of concepts due to larger block of learning time; additional time for skill development; students able to participate in whole school activities.
- Increased instructional time may make reading more accessible to a greater number of students (increases the opportunity)
- Classroom behaviors measured showed positive growth in originality, independent learning, involvement in classroom activities, and productivity with peers.
- Parents note children are better prepared for 1st gr., benefit socially, and have more opportunities to choose activities and develop their own interests.
- Teachers able to detect learning problems in full-day program that would be much harder to see in the half-day programs.
- Approximately 55% to 60% of kindergartners nationwide are presently in all day programs. Children make greater gains due to consistency, not because they are pushed or expected to do more. It establishes routine and more time to teach.

Testimonials from teachers who piloted ADK at Jacobs and Lincoln regarding the benefits of ADK:

"I love that the ADK schedule allows for reading/language arts time in the morning. I feel the students are better able to focus and absorb the material then."

"I feel fortunate that I do not have to cram everything in. I can plan for an hour math lesson every day, like our math series suggests. I have time to meet with small groups, to reinforce reading and writing skills throughout the week. I can also include centers into our schedule. This is an excellent time to reinforce academic skills and social interaction. I did not have time for centers in a half day program."

"With a half time program it seemed as if you never had enough time to do everything you wanted to do. ADK has afforded me the opportunity to not only teach the curriculum, but to go above and beyond the expected."

"Kindergarten students have the opportunity to receive double the time in math and reading. What an awesome boost! We have also been able to expand the students' experiences with visits to local parks, and programs."

Testimonials from parents whose children attended the pilot programs of ADK at Jacobs and Lincoln regarding the benefits of ADK:

"More time to learn all that a kindergartener needs to learn for a better start with their education."

"Since my child started All Day Kindergarten she is not behind like she was. Her teacher is great and she also looks forward to going each day."

"She has learned a lot more that at home."

"More knowledge= higher self esteem = positive future school experience."

"My child has seemed to learn more quickly, become independent, and has adjusted more quickly than older siblings."

"I loved all day kindergarten. It is so beneficial in helping my daughter progress in reading and writing."

What do we believe are some of the concerns related to All Day Kindergarten?

- Programs must be intellectually engaging, developmentally appropriate, and be much more than seatwork and worksheets. We want to make sure ADK is much more than merely childcare.
- Costs of additional staff, materials for additional classrooms, and not enough classrooms.
- At least one longitudinal doctoral study found that students maintained the academic advantage gained during ADK only through 4th grade (see research articles on our website).
- Strong ongoing staff development program is necessary for developmentally appropriate implementation and maintenance.

Testimonials from teachers who piloted ADK at Jacobs and Lincoln regarding their concerns about ADK:

"This has been a struggle and a challenge because of the huge gap in ability that would be lessened if we still had at least one half day program. I don't want to do disservice to my students and know that some students need more one on one instruction and the higher end need to be challenged more."

"I do believe that all kindergartners should be offered an all day experience, but I also feel we need to continue to provide the "at risk" students with interventions of some sort."

Testimonials from parents whose children attended the pilot programs of ADK at Jacobs and Lincoln regarding their concerns about ADK:

"They are tired when they get home."

"I do feel it is hard on him at times just because he gets so tired, and he does get 10 hours of sleep a night. That is the only negative I can see about ADK. But I do hope it will not be so next year when they have to go all day."

"ADK should be available to all primary schools with kindergarten students."

"By the end of the day, my child quits absorbing info, so maybe gym, art, etc. should be in the afternoon."

*** Additional information and research related to All Day Kindergarten (ADK) can be found at the Findlay City Schools web page www.findlaycityschools.org**