



Key Question in Lindbergh: What Does Your Evidence Say About Full-Day Kindergarten?

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There is a debate going on right now in the Lindbergh School District regarding kindergarten. Lindbergh, one of the top performing school districts in the state, provides students only half-day kindergarten at no charge. If parents want their children to go full-day, they have to pay \$3,500 in tuition. [According to the Post-Dispatch](#), Lindbergh is the last district in the state to charge for full-day kindergarten. Some parents in the district want full-time kindergarten to be offered free of charge.

The debate among parents and school administrators, as far as I can tell, has been all about money. But there is more to education policy than just dollars and cents. Both the district and parents should ask a fundamental question: Is this better for our students?

On the whole, research is not entirely clear as to whether full-day kindergarten is better than half-day kindergarten for students. There is evidence that suggests that the academic benefits fade over time ([Example 1](#), [Example 2](#)).

But Lindbergh has an advantage. The Lindbergh School District has decades worth of student-level data on students who have and have not attended a full-day Kindergarten program (because some Lindbergh students have gone to full day while some have gone to half day). They have the attendance data, behavioral data, test scores, grades, you name it. They have

everything they need to evaluate the effectiveness of *their* full-day kindergarten program. That should be the first step before launching a new program that will cost millions of dollars in operating expenses and construction costs for new facilities.

The district shouldn't offer a full-day kindergarten program just because everyone else is doing it. Remember what your mom asked you about jumping off a bridge? Nor should they decide to do it simply because parents want it for free. They should offer full-day kindergarten if it is the best thing for the students—and they alone have the data necessary to make that determination. Yet, they haven't.

If the evidence indicates that Lindbergh students who attend full-day Kindergarten are significantly better off than students who attend for a half-day, then the district should commit to finding a way to put the program in place. If it turns out that there is not a difference between the two groups, however, the decision should be based solely on costs or cost-savings for the district.

The Lindbergh district is fortunate to have access to data tailor-made to help them make an important decision for their students and for the community that supports the district. Parents and taxpayers should demand that the data be used.

(Disclosure: The author attended half-day kindergarten.)

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[3] <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3200/JOER.99.5.260-270>

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