

Examining the implementation and impact of full-day kindergarten in Oregon

Many states and districts offer full-day kindergarten (FDK) with the belief that additional learning time will lead to improved student outcomes in kindergarten and beyond. The evidence base on FDK is generally positive for short-term effects and unclear for longer-term effects, with some prior research associating FDK with gains in student outcomes such as grade 3 math and reading standardized assessment scores. In 2015/16, Oregon shifted its policy on kindergarten enrollment, creating financial incentives for districts to offer FDK. By 2017/18 nearly all Oregon kindergarten students were enrolled in FDK. State policymakers, district leaders, and other stakeholders need additional information on FDK to support decisionmaking and to understand FDK practices in Oregon.

Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest conducted this study in partnership with the Oregon Department of Education and one large Oregon school district. The study examined FDK implementation in the two years before the policy shift in 2015/16, including which districts were implementing FDK and how the programs were structured. The study also estimates the impact of attending FDK compared to half-day kindergarten (HDK) on student outcomes in kindergarten through grade 3 in one school district in Oregon before the 2015/16 policy shift. Lastly, the study explores activities and practices used in FDK programs in 2017/18, after the policy shift.

Key findings

- Before a policy shift in 2015/16 that resulted in nearly all kindergarten students enrolling in FDK, most Oregon districts already offered FDK and used district funding to support it in 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- In one large Oregon school district, about 30 percent of kindergarten students attended FDK in 2013/14 and 2014/15, and they tended to be more economically advantaged than their HDK peers.
- Compared to attending HDK, attending FDK in this district had a small positive impact on attendance in grades 1 and 3 for the 2013/14 cohort and in grades K–3 for the 2014/15 cohort; a negative impact on English language proficiency in grade 3 in certain domains for English learners; and no impact on grade 3 test scores in math or reading, grade retention, or discipline.
- For different student groups and school characteristics, attending FDK in this district compared to attending HDK had mixed impacts on attendance and no impact on test scores.
- In 2017/18, some FDK teachers reported a focus on teacher-directed activities and limited use of kindergarten entry assessment data. Some principals reported that a small number of FDK students only received a half day of instruction and that there was a lack of curricular and professional development alignment between preschool and kindergarten. These responses are not representative of all FDK teachers and principals in Oregon.

The study's findings indicate that FDK may have mixed results for student outcomes in early elementary grades in one large Oregon school district. The study also reveals a need for more research on the barriers to offering, accessing, and implementing FDK, as well as the variation in impact of FDK on student outcomes. Finally, the study points to a need for additional state guidance and support on how to implement high-quality FDK programs.