



River Forest  
Public Schools

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## Why Half-Day Kindergarten in District 90?

River Forest District 90 employs a half-day kindergarten format at both Lincoln and Willard Elementary Schools. This model has been in place for many years, and its overall effectiveness for the D90 community continues to be supported by standardized achievement data and other student performance indicators. Since the majority of Illinois school districts currently implement a full-day kindergarten program, questions occasionally surface about whether District 90 has considered transitioning to a full-day kindergarten model, and the basis to determine that the present model is still suited to the needs of our students and community. This document is intended to provide historical context and a thorough response to the question: “Why half-day kindergarten in District 90?”

### Background

Initial investigation about the possibility of implementing a full-day kindergarten program began in 2010 under Superintendent Hagerman. Dr. Hagerman and the Superintendent’s Leadership Council (SLC) initiated a study about full-day kindergarten prior to his departure in 2011, mainly in response to discussions originating from the 5-year strategic planning process. When the current Superintendent, Dr. Ed Condon, joined District 90 in 2011, the investigation continued involving an extensive 18-month study examining the potential benefits and drawbacks of implementing a full-day kindergarten program at Lincoln and Willard Elementary Schools. The inquiry was framed around the questions, “What is best for our students within the context of available resources?” and “To what extent would a full-day Kindergarten program yield academic benefits for students?” The financial impact of full-day Kindergarten was also included in the analysis to determine both the initial and ongoing costs of an expanded program.

Recommendations from the original investigations were presented to the Board of Education in January 2012 and revisited/reaffirmed in 2015 when a subsequent review did not yield new information meriting an expanded program. Please click the link to view the [2015 District 90 Program Review and Recommendation: Kindergarten](#) presentation.

### Review Process

During the program reviews, Dr. Condon engaged the collective expertise of the Administrative Team and the SLC to accomplish the following:

- Consult with area Superintendents and conducted site visits to full-day Kindergarten programs
- Update financial projections to include potential start-up costs for construction, supplies, and personnel, and the effects on long-term fund balances
- Survey parents of current and former students regarding their perception of their children’s experiences within the current kindergarten program format

- Consider the impact of the adoption of the Illinois Learning Standards (based on Common Core State Standards) on instruction
- Review research, professional literature, and case studies related to the impact of full-day kindergarten on student achievement
- Discuss resource needs with elementary school principals
- Conduct focus groups with kindergarten faculty
- Consult with school-based PTOs and the PTO Council
- Review D90 standardized assessment performance with a focus on kindergarten, first, and eighth grade

### **Conclusions**

In both 2012 and 2015, Dr. Condon, the Administrative Team, and the SLC reviewed the information gathered from research, site visits, assessment data, and interviews with key stakeholders and arrived at the following conclusions:

- The research available about the academic benefits of full-day kindergarten ranged from inconclusive to generally indicating that early increases in student achievement were negated by third grade. Therefore, it was unclear if the implementation of full-day kindergarten in District 90 would result in long-term increases in student achievement. Unfortunately, the ambiguity of the evidence is confounded by a dearth of research conducted in communities with attributes similar to River Forest (small, affluent, high levels of parent education).
- Student achievement data (MAP) indicated a pattern of high performance for students across the district, over time. Longitudinal data did not indicate negative implications for students who were enrolled in the current kindergarten program; to the contrary, student academic performance remained strong over the full K-8 span. As such, it was unclear if the implementation of full-day kindergarten would result in increased student achievement performance meriting the outsized investment that implementation would require.
- Parent survey data (228 respondents - 53% Lincoln, 47% Willard) indicated that 90% of respondents rated their child's kindergarten experience as excellent or good.
- Parent survey data indicated that the vast majority of rising kindergarten students in District 90 attend at least one year of preschool programming, with a large proportion of these students enrolled in multiple years of early childhood and preschool instruction.
- The aggregate cost to implement a full-day kindergarten in District 90 through FY 2021 was estimated at \$6.2 million (2015), with annual operating costs into perpetuity estimated at approximately \$400,000. Further, unknown expenditures such as state pension costs being shifted to local school districts and legislative proposals to freeze property taxes were also a factor. Full-day kindergarten would also require construction of additional spaces at each elementary school.

### **Board of Education Determination**

Based on the lack of conclusive research evidence, the current level of documented student achievement, significant financial and opportunity costs, and potential for unintended consequences, the Board of Education has twice declined to move forward in implementing a full-day kindergarten program. However, providing intervention support for those kindergarten students who would benefit from remediation was identified as a priority. The Kindergarten

Intervention Program (KIP), a voluntary program for students in need of an academic “boost” in advance of first grade was developed and implemented in 2012. While the need for intervention services is typically limited to a small number of students at each school in any given year, KIP data is routinely monitored to ensure that it is supporting student growth and preparedness for students when they enter first grade.

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