

Testimony in Support of S.B. 944: An Act Establishing a Full-Day Kindergarten Requirement

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Education Committee

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Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

I am a policy fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

I am testifying on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children in support of S.B. 944: An Act Establishing a Full-Day Kindergarten Requirement. Full-day kindergarten (FDK) is a necessary complement to the expansion of high-quality early care and education. As the state maintains its commitment to subsidized early care and education, it is critical that all children also have access to full-day kindergarten so that the achievement gains made in the first five years do not diminish. **However, we urge the legislature to ensure that funding through the Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS) is sufficient for every town to afford to provide full-day kindergarten while still meeting all other needs of its students.**

Full-day kindergarten should be part of every comprehensive early care and education initiative. Full-day kindergarten is crucial to maintain and build on gains young children make in pre-kindergarten, and to “enable children to develop the academic, social and emotional skills they need be to successful.”¹ In light of the Governor’s commitment to expand prekindergarten, it is especially critical to view prekindergarten and kindergarten as a continuum, with each an essential part of a young child’s education and development. It is crucial for states and school districts “to improve both pre-K and the early elementary grades to have the most positive effect on student learning and development in the long-term.”²

The benefits of full-day kindergarten are numerous. In particular, as the National Education Association explains, full-day kindergarten:³

- **Increases student achievement.** In studies across the country, students who attend FDK perform better in reading and math at the end of kindergarten and continue to show better performance through first grade. A Pennsylvania study found that FDK students were 26% more likely to be promoted through third grade.⁴ FDK can produce long-term educational gains, especially for low-income and minority students.⁵
- **Better prepares students for first grade.** Teachers in FDK spend more time on reading, math, and social studies compared to teachers in half-day programs.⁶ For example, 68% of full-day but only 37% of half-day classrooms dedicate at least 60 minutes to reading instruction each day. Perhaps most significantly, 79% of full-day teachers read aloud to their students every day, compared to 62% of half-day teachers.⁷
- **Results in healthier and happier children.** The National Institute for Early Education Research found that FDK offers social, emotional, and intellectual benefits to kindergarteners.⁸

- **Is cost effective.** Studies show that students who attend full-day kindergarten are less likely to be retained, resulting in long-term cost-savings to districts and the state.⁹
- **Is preferred by teachers and parents.** In a 2000 National Center for Education Statistics study, 100% of parents with children in full-day kindergarten and 72% of parents with children in half-day kindergarten responded that they would have chosen full-day kindergarten for their child if given the opportunity.¹⁰

Given the overwhelming benefits of full-day kindergarten, it is important that this practice be adopted statewide. Currently, approximately 94% of Connecticut kindergarteners attend full-day programs, while 13 districts do not offer full-day kindergarten.¹¹ This is an improvement from the 2012-2013 school year, when only 74% of Connecticut kindergartners were enrolled in full-day programs.¹² Connecticut must build on this progress and offer full-day kindergarten to all students in every district.

Full-day kindergarten should not be thought of as an intervention, but rather as an essential element of a high-quality educational system. Thus funding through the ECS must be sufficient for every town to provide full-day kindergarten while still meeting all other needs of its students. **It does not make sense for the State to force school districts to choose between full-day kindergarten and other important educational resources and reforms.**

As Connecticut increases access to high-quality prekindergarten, we urge the committee to provide full-day kindergarten to all children, to ensure that all children are getting high-quality experiences beginning at age three and continuing throughout their schooling.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ “Full-Day Kindergarten: An Advocacy Guide,” National Education Association, (2006), available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_kadvoguide.pdf.

² Laura Bornfreund, “Building Bridges Between Pre-K and Kindergarten,” EdCentral, New America Foundation, (December 6, 2013), available at: <http://www.edcentral.org/building-bridges-pre-k-kindergarten/>.

³ “Full-Day Kindergarten Facts,” National Education Association, available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_fdkfactsheet.pdf.

⁴ Andrea Del Gaudio Weiss, Ph.D and Robert M. Offenber, Ed.D., Enhancing Urban Children’s Early Success in School: The Power of Full-Day Connecticut Voices for Children 3 Kindergarten,” School District of Philadelphia. Summary available at: http://www.pema.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/597463/ecer9_pdf.

⁵ Full-Day Kindergarten Facts,” National Education Association, available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_fdkfactsheet.pdf.

⁶ “Full-day Kindergarten: Indicators on Children and Youth,” Child Trends Data Bank, (August 2013), available at: http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/102_Full-day-kindergarten.pdf.

⁷ Debra J. Ackerman, W. Steven Barnett, and Kenneth B. Robin, “Making the Most of Kindergarten: Present Trends and Future Issues in the Provision of Full-day Programs,” National Institute for Early Education Research, available at: <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/kindergarten/report4.pdf>.

⁸ “Full-Day Kindergarten Facts,” National Education Association, available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_fdkfactsheet.pdf.

⁹ “The Full Story on Full Day: An Analysis of Full-Day Kindergarten in Washington State, Economic Opportunity Institute, (July 2007), available at: <http://www.eoionline.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/full-daykindergarten/FullStoryOnFullDay-Jul07.pdf>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Ben Barnes, Appropriations Committee Budget Briefing by the Office of Policy and Management, (February 19, 2015), as transcribed by Brian Coughlin.

¹² “Kindergarten Enrollment by School Districts School Year 2012-2013,” Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Early Learning & Development, available at:
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/KindergartenProgs.pdf>.