

What Utahns Really Think About Full-Day Kindergarten

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Written by: Anna Thomas



For years, state leaders have not prioritized the expansion of full-day kindergarten opportunities for interested Utah families. This has resulted in very limited and uneven access to full-day kindergarten across the state.

Some have justified their lack of action on full-day kindergarten expansion by saying Utahns just aren't interested in having their children participate. They imply that Utah "culture" doesn't prioritize early education opportunities, instead preferring stay-at-home learning opportunities for kindergarten-aged children.

In the meantime, though, stories swirl of Utah families who move, or lie about where they live, in order to enroll their young children in school districts that offer full-day kindergarten programs. Public education administrators say that when full-day classroom seats are made available in their schools, parents rush to put their children on wait lists.

So, who is right? What do Utahns really think about full-day kindergarten? This past summer, Voices for Utah Children worked with [Y2 Analytics](#), a Utah-based market research and data analytics company, to find out.

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From June 26 to July 22, 2021, Y2 Analytics surveyed 1,976 Utah voters, randomly sampled throughout the state - including from each of the top eight largest school districts (Alpine, Davis, Granite, Jordan, Washington County, Nebo, Canyons and Weber). The margin of error for the survey is +/- 2.2 percentage points.

A strong majority of Utahns support expanding full-day kindergarten programming - even if it means higher taxes.

- **Sixty-eight percent (68%) of surveyed voters said they would "support the expansion of optional full-day kindergarten programs in all public schools throughout Utah."** Survey respondents who live in a household with a stay-at-home parent were only slightly less supportive (65%) than those in a household without a stay-at-home parent (69%). Support was strong across counties:
 - In Davis County, 73% of respondents supported full-day kindergarten expansion (with 43% saying they "strongly support" expansion);
 - In Salt Lake County, 71% were supportive (47% say they "strongly support" expansion);
 - In Weber County, 65% were supportive (47% say they "strongly support" expansion);
 - In Utah County, 64% were supportive (36% "strongly support");
 - In Washington County, 59% were supportive (37% "strongly support"); and
 - Across all other counties, 67% of respondents said they were supportive (with 38% indicating "strong" support).
- Expanding full-day kindergarten programs has broad support across religious and political affiliations. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all LDS survey respondents said they "support the expansion of optional full-day kindergarten programs," with 69% of those with other religious affiliations and 75% of those with no religious affiliation agreeing. Sixty-one percent (61%) of respondents who identified themselves as conservative were supportive, as were 77% of those who identify as liberals.
- Those who are most often responsible for child-rearing are also the most supportive of full-day kindergarten expansion: nearly three-quarters (73%) of all women surveyed were supportive, as compared to about two-thirds (64%)

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of men.

- When asked to "imagine for a moment that in order to fund statewide availability for full-day kindergarten, each resident was required to pay an addition \$5 per year in taxes," 69% of those surveyed said they were supportive (40% were "strongly" supportive); only 24% said they were opposed (just 15% were "strongly" opposed). When the tax increase went up to \$65 per year, support dropped among respondents - but a strong majority (57%) were still supportive of the idea.

Utahns have largely positive attitudes toward full-day kindergarten, though some feel they don't know enough about it to have a strong opinion.

- **Three times as many Utah voters (34%) said that full-day kindergarten is better than half-day programs, than those who thought half-day was better (12%).** However, slightly more than one-third (34%) said they didn't know how the two options compare to one another.
- Fifty-six percent (56%) of those surveyed agree that "full-day programs help to close the achievement gap for underprivileged Utah students." Only 18% disagreed with the statement; 25% were neutral on the question.
- Sixty-two percent (62%) agreed that "making more full-day kindergarten programs available would benefit the economy by allowing more parents to work during the day." Only 16% disagreed with that statement; 22% were neutral on the question.
- Nearly 2.5 times as many voters agreed that "making more full-day kindergarten programs available would improve public education in the state" than those who disagreed.

When it is available to their families, Utahns prefer to participate in full-day kindergarten.

- Of survey respondents who had children or grandchildren who did not have the chance to go to full-day kindergarten, we asked "would you have enrolled your children/grandchildren in full-day kindergarten if that option had been

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available to you?" **A strong majority (58%) said that they would have if they could have.** (Currently, only about 29% of Utah kindergarteners participate in a full-day program, according to the Utah State Board of Education).

- **Among those who did have the option of enrolling their children in a full-day program, 69% chose to participate.** Some reasons that respondents gave for not electing to participate in the full-day program available to them, include:
 - The cost of enrolling in the additional instruction hours (some school districts offer [additional enrichment activities](#) in the afternoon for kindergarteners, for an additional cost to the family); and
 - The fact that their children did not score low enough on the Kindergarten Entry and Exit Profile to qualify for full-day programming (in most school districts, full-day kindergarten seats are only offered to students who score below a certain level lack of proficiency in reading and math).
 - More may have chosen full-day kindergarten if the programming had been free and/or available to all children regardless of academic risk factors.

The results of our survey help to confirm much of the qualitative data our staff has gathered from school districts and charter schools over the past several years, some of which can be reviewed in our 2020 report, ["3 Things Utah Can Do to Ensure Right-Sized Access to Full-Day Kindergarten."](#) Education administrators from school districts across the state say that when families have the chance to enroll their children in full-day kindergarten at no cost, participation rates fall somewhere between 80% and 90%.

Confirmation of Utahns' interest in and support of full-day kindergarten is an important step in ongoing efforts - by Voices for Utah Children and multiple partner organizations, including United Way of Salt Lake and the Utah PTA - to [see kindergarten funded in the same way that all other grades in the K-12 system are](#)

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[funded \(via a full WPU for a full-day student\).](#)

Bonus Survey Data: Utahns are REALLY Excited about Preschool!

- **Ninety percent (90%) of survey respondents see Pre-K education as beneficial - with 51% of respondents saying that preschool is very beneficial.**
- When we asked those survey participants who are parents, whether they would enroll their child(ren) "in a public in-person preschool if that option were available to you," more than two-thirds said that they would.
 - Seventy percent (70%) of parents with kids who were still too young to attend K-12 school said they would enroll their children in public, in-person preschool if they had the opportunity to do so.
 - Sixty-six percent (66%) of parents whose kids are already too old for preschool, said they would have enrolled their children if the opportunity had been available to them when their kids were younger.