NEW BRIEF: The Future of Full-Day Kindergarten in Utah

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Written by: Anna Thomas

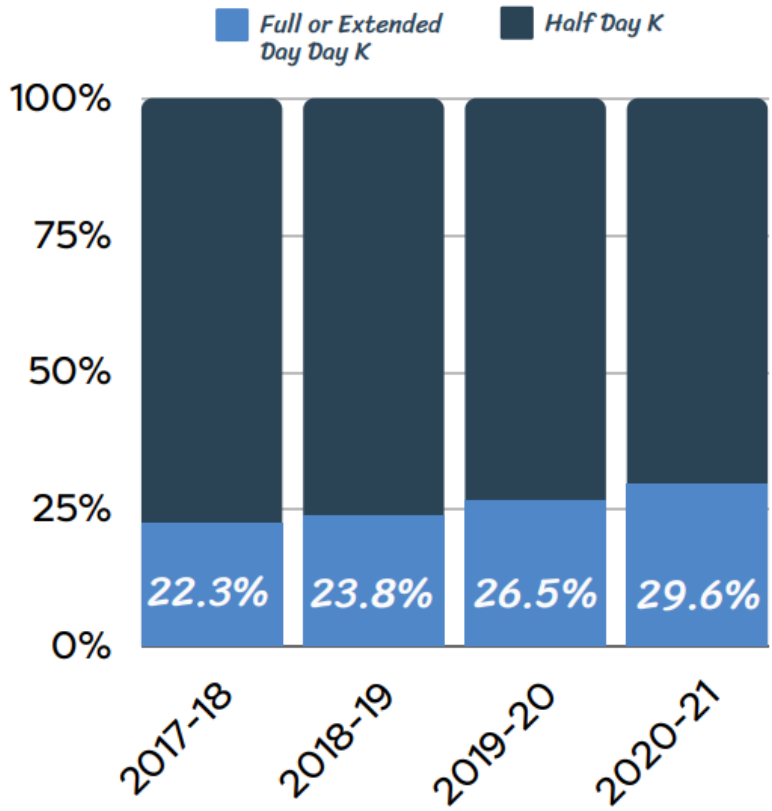


More than 18 months ago - right before the pandemic started to truly rock our world - we released "Three Things Utah Can Do to Ensure Right-Sized Access to Full-Day Kindergarten," a wide-ranging report on the status of full-day kindergarten (FDK) programming in Utah. We are very happy to report that Utah has made some impressive gains in terms of FDK access since 2019, despite the enormous disruptions of the pandemic.

These gains, and other helpful information about full-day kindergarten in Utah, are outlined in our new four-page update brief, "Invest in Utah Kids: The Future of Full-Day Kindergarten."

Even with these substantial gains in access and participation, Utah remains well behind the rest of the nation - including all our neighboring states - when it comes to the proportion of kindergarten students able to take part in a full-day program. Back

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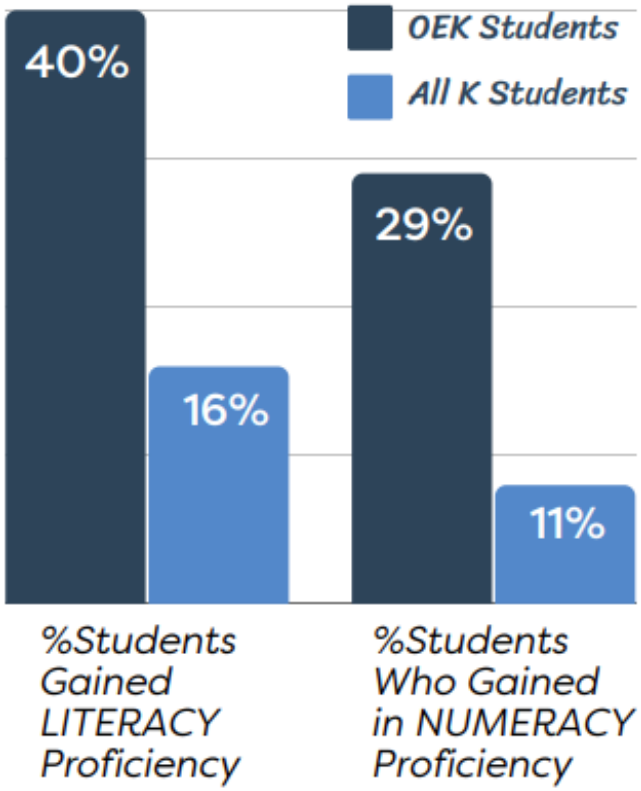


in 2019, fewer than 23% of Utah kindergarteners participated in full- or extended-day programming - despite strong enthusiasm from educators and strong demand from families. Conversations with educators and parents statewide indicated that the problem was NOT a lack of interest. Rather, school districts and charter schools lacked stable funding to expand their FDK programs to meet community need and interest.

As the state legislature has slowly increased the amount of funding available through the Optional Enhanced Kindergarten (OEK) program, schools statewide have been able to open more FDK classroom seats to families that wish to utilize this important and effective early learning intervention for their children. In 2021, nearly 30% of Utah children are able to participate in full- or extended-day kindergarten instruction.

Based on several years of data at both the state and district

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level, we understand that FDK is an incredibly effective education opportunity that should be available to as many families that want to participate.

For example, results of the Kindergarten Entry and Exit Profile (KEEP) show that children who participate in full- or extended-day programs make much greater academic gains during their kindergarten school year than those who do not.

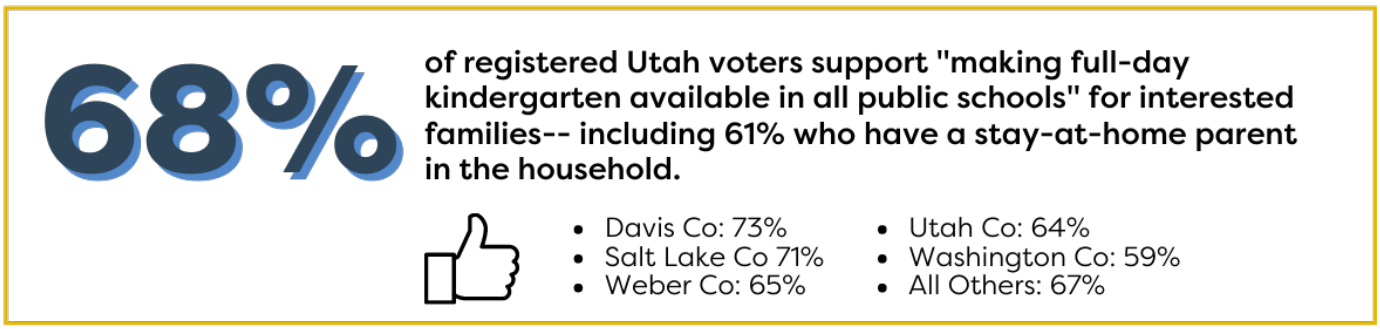
Based on survey data from hundreds of Utahns across the state, we are confident that Utahns support the expansion of FDK programming to ensure that all the families that *want* to participate are able to do so, regardless of the community in which they live.

Additionally, the majority of registered voters in Utah understand that FDK is a solid educational intervention for children at risk for falling behind academically, and provides greater flexibility for working families.

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We will be working hard for the next several years with our many partners in this effort - the United Way of Salt Lake, the Utah PTA, the Utah Charter School Board, the Utah Education Association, and school districts across the state - to ensure that every family that wants to be part of a FDK program is able to do so. That means increased state funding to support stable, sufficient kindergarten programs that truly meet the needs of the communities served by all school districts and charter schools.

We hope you will join us in this effort, and invite you to download and share this handy four-page brief with your elected officials - including district and state school board members, as well as state legislators - when there are opportunities for action.

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