

Full Steam Ahead for Full-Day Kindergarten in Utah!

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Written by: Anna Thomas



Congratulations, Utah parents and educators! Together, we did it. Funding for optional full-day kindergarten is now a reality for schools statewide.

The Utah Legislature passed HB477, "Full Day Kindergarten Amendments," sponsored by [Rep. Robert Spendlove](#) (R-Sandy). This bill establishes the same flexible, stable funding stream for full-day kindergarten as currently exists for all other grades of public school, first through twelfth. Last week, Governor Spencer Cox signed this historic bill into law!

([Click here to jump to our four-minute explainer video](#), which is also included at the bottom of this page)

Does this mean that next school year, every family in Utah will have the opportunity to enroll their kindergartner in a full-day program in their neighborhood school? Unfortunately, no. It DOES mean that the number of families who will have access to full-day kindergarten will increase dramatically - we estimate between 60% and 65% of kindergarteners will be able to enroll in an optional full-day program during the 2023-24 school year. This is a huge leap from fewer than 25% just five years ago!

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The passage of HB477 means that next school year (2023-24), every district and charter elementary school will have the *opportunity* to offer optional full-day kindergarten, using this new state funding stream.

In order to offer more full-day kindergarten, schools must have more classroom space, more teachers, and more equipment like tables and chairs. Some school districts and charter schools have spent the last several years making plans to overcome these challenges, and will be ready to offer optional full-day kindergarten to most, if not all, of their local families in the coming school year.

Some elementary schools are not quite ready to take advantage of this opportunity. These schools will need some time to overcome the challenges of: 1) limited classroom space; 2) recruiting new teachers; 3) purchasing new materials and equipment; 4) busing adjustments; and other practical issues. This is true particularly in some of our large, suburban school districts, such as Jordan, Davis and Alpine. Other small- and mid-size districts face some of these issues, as well.

We estimate that it will take between three and five years before all Utah families have the opportunity to enroll their child in a full-day kindergarten program. Based on the popularity of newly expanded full-day programs in different parts of the state, we expect to see more than 90% of parents opt for full-day kindergarten for their children when it becomes available to them.

The best way to find out whether your local elementary will be offering optional full-day kindergarten during the 2023-24 school year is to contact the current principal of that school (or the director, in case of charter schools) and ask them directly! Not only will this help you to plan for your family's schooling schedules, but it will help our local education leaders assess how much community interest exists for more optional full-day kindergarten.

In case you were worried, the new law preserves parents' right to enroll their child in a half-day program, and does not make kindergarten mandatory. There is nothing in the law that tells districts and charters how much optional full-day kindergarten they must offer to their communities, or how soon they have to do so. HB477 was created to be as flexible as possible, allowing local communities to decide the right mix of half- and full-day programming for them.

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Thanks to all the hard work of education leaders, insistent parents and committed community advocates, we have finally accomplished state funding for optional full-day kindergarten in Utah! We especially appreciate the commitment of the United Way of Salt Lake and the Utah PTA, our core partners in the Utah Full-Day Kindergarten Now Coalition.

Of course, this would not have happened without the support and leadership of State Superintendent Sydnee Dickson, Sara Wiebke, Christine Elegante and other superhero staff at the Utah State Board of Education. We owe a lot to our bill sponsor, Rep. Spendlove, and the other legislative champions like Senator Ann Millner who have been key to this effort in the past (former Reps. Lowry Snow and Steve Waldrip, we are looking at you!).