



Lexington Public Schools

146 Maple Street ♦ Lexington, Massachusetts 02420

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

(781) 861-2550
email: pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us
fax: (781) 863-5829

Our Schools

Full-Day Kindergarten

February 11, 2008

Paul B. Ash, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools

The School Committee members and I spent this past Saturday morning holding a public hearing about full-day kindergarten. The meeting was moved from the Selectmen's meeting room to Cary Hall because of the large number of parents, teachers, and interested residents who attended. I am pleased that the majority of those present expressed a strong interest in having a full-day kindergarten program in Lexington. Many excellent questions were asked, leading us to explore additional options on how we could extend this opportunity to as many families as are interested.

I feel it is important for all of us to know the history of full-day kindergarten discussions in Lexington and my current thinking on the topic. The discussion of whether to implement full-day kindergarten began more than five years ago when a study committee, headed by Assistant Superintendent Carol Pilarski and comprising teachers, administrators, and parents, convened to determine whether full-day kindergarten would benefit Lexington children.

The study committee's work included a review of the research on full-day kindergarten. National studies show that full-day kindergarten has a positive effect on short- and long-term student achievement, supports literacy and language development, improves students' social and behavioral skills, reduces the achievement gap, and decreases costs by reducing retention and remediation rates.

The study committee also surveyed the parent population that would be affected; 78% of the respondents supported full-day kindergarten in Lexington. A full summary of the study committee's work in 2003 can be found at <http://lps.lexingtonma.org/about/FDKGInfo.html>

The School Committee unanimously accepted the study committee's recommendation that Lexington should implement a full-day program. Unfortunately, the timing of that decision coincided with a downturn in state revenue, and we did not receive the implementation grant from the Department of Education. Since that time we have been trying to determine how to move toward implementation.

In the intervening years, the Department of Education has continued to offer planning and implementation grants for these types of programs. Although the grant guidelines did not preclude Lexington from applying, we did not believe we would be selected, given the demand from less-affluent communities. Since that time, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of systems offering full-day kindergarten. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education, 76% of the state's municipalities now have some form of full-day kindergarten.

In November, after learning that a comparable community had been awarded a grant for this academic year, we contacted the Department of Education to inquire about our eligibility. We were encouraged to apply for the planning grant within the short window of time left before the deadline. In January, we were notified that we received the planning grant for \$225,000, which would cover the cost of curriculum planning, professional development, and supplies for up to 20 full-day kindergarten classes. The grant will be prorated if we offer fewer classes. As a recipient of the planning grant, we are likely to receive the state's implementation grant at \$15,000 per kindergarten classroom the following year, which would pay for the increased salary for the kindergarten teachers, from just over half-time to full-time. The state has continued funding the existing grant recipients each year since the first year of the program in 2000.

We have also been investigating how to close the gap between high-achieving and low-achieving students. The research on this subject overwhelmingly shows that providing full-day kindergarten for urban students is powerfully beneficial. The research on the benefits of full-day kindergarten, along with research on closing the achievement gap, supports changing the METCO entrance policy from starting the program in grades 1 and 2 to starting it in kindergarten.

The majority of the parents who attended the public hearing last Saturday told us that they want a full-day kindergarten program next fall, while some of the parents still want half-day kindergarten classrooms. Most of those who support full-day kindergarten also said they would be willing to pay a fee to cover the remaining costs. Lexington kindergarten teachers and principals strongly favor offering full-day kindergarten next fall. We are currently studying several options for implementing full-day kindergarten, including one that is fee-based. We expect to make a decision early in March. Please feel free to share your views with me via email at pash@sch.ci.lexington.ma.us and/or the School Committee at school-com@silver.ci.lexington.ma.us.