

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: A CASE STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF
DISTRICT LEADERS IN FOUR SUBURBAN PENNSYLVANIA
SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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by
Elizabeth A. Santoro
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Examining Committee Members:

Joan Shapiro, Advisory Chair, Educational Administration
Corrine Caldwell, Educational Administration
Michelle Partlow, Educational Administration
Jayminn Sanford-DeShields, Early Childhood and Elementary Education
Joseph Ducette, Educational Psychology

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ABSTRACT

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By Elizabeth A. Santoro

Temple University, 2011

Major Advisor: Dr. Joan P. Shapiro

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the reasons why suburban district leaders opted for full-day or half-day kindergarten programming in a sample of four local suburban districts operating such programs in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. The primary data source was interviews with key district leaders including school board members, superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of elementary education, and directors of curriculum. Review of district documents as well as informal observations in the field were used to supplement the interview data. Suburban district leaders' perceptions, values, and opinions were examined in this study to determine how decisions for kindergarten programming were made.

District leaders, especially superintendents, are charged with the enormous responsibility to program appropriately for the needs of their district. This study sought to reveal how such a critical but complex decision pertaining to kindergarten programming was reached in suburban communities.

“Full-day kindergarten reappeared first in the 1960’s as an intervention designed to help disadvantaged children catch up to their peers through additional schooling” (DeCicca, 2007, p. 67). Presently, full-day kindergarten appears to be gaining increasing momentum as more and more mothers are working to provide additional income for their families. The era of middle class stay at home moms has been on a decline due to the unstable economy, rising cost of living, single parent households, a greater need to supplement family income, to further their own self-development, and an opportunity for women to contribute to the workforce.

Educators, on the other hand, remain divided on the issue of full-day kindergarten versus half-day kindergarten primarily due to funding issues, equivocal evidence of academic gains, and resource allocations. “Given the additional expense of full-day kindergarten, information regarding the size and duration of gains should be of great interest to policymakers” (DeCicca, 2007, p. 67). The recent push for full-day kindergarten has occurred at the state level. Whether the participation in a full-day program is associated with improved outcomes has been the focus of intense inquiry (Le, Kirby, Barney, Setodji & Gershwin, 2006).

Kindergarten programming in the United States has changed considerably in the last 50 years as a result of state and local standards enforced in districts across the country. All that children needed to do in a traditional kindergarten was to play and adjust themselves to a social setting (Nelson, 2000). Now, kindergarten has evolved into another grade of academics where rigorous curricula have been implemented along with higher expectations placed on schools to succeed.

The controversy arises over the inconsistencies with kindergarten programming, especially for suburban children. Suburban districts are continually challenged to meet the needs of all kindergarten learners as a result of the growing changes in demographics across the county. Due to the increased populations of English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged Learners, the challenge to program effectively for kindergarten students can be concerning to district leadership due to old mores that are no longer appropriate to program sufficiently.

The intent of this study was to inform the reader about how complex decisions such as kindergarten programming were reached. Another intent of this study was to delve deeper into the perceptions, values, and opinions of those decision makers to gain a better understanding of the reasons why and how decision makers selected half-day or full-day kindergarten for their district.

The methodology utilized in this qualitative study was a case study design. The researcher collected data through interviews with district leaders including school boards members, superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of elementary education, and directors of curriculum. Observations in the field were conducted along with a review of key district documents such as strategic plans, school improvement plans, curriculum, and achievement data.

The potential impact of this study was to inform the reader about the processes used by district leaders when making informed decisions about kindergarten programming. Suburban areas may benefit from this study because the results provided rich descriptive reports that can be utilized by parents, educators, policymakers, and the general public to gain a deeper understanding of suburban kindergarten in one state.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Initiation of change never occurs without an advocate, and one of the most powerful is the chief district administrator, with his or her staff, especially in combination with school board support or mandate” (Fullan, 1991, p.54). The issue of full-day kindergarten versus half-day kindergarten is a policy and program issue that takes root at the central level. District policies are top down in design and bottom up in implementation. Fullan (1991) contends, “It is the superintendent and central office staff who combine access, internal authority, and resources necessary to seek out external funds for a particular change program and/or to obtain board support” (p. 54). This study delved deeper into district leaders’ thinking when discussing and evaluating program design for kindergarten. This study sought to understand who district leaders go to for advice on programming and what research they accessed when in the process of discussing kindergarten programs. It sought to determine other key informants who were responsible for the decision making. The study attempted to understand funding issues and resource allocation issues related to programming along with clearer predictions of potential academic gains. “Given the limited availability of funds available to early childhood education and the considerable costs associated with the provision of a full-day program, it is reasonable to want an improved understanding of its academic benefits” (DeCicca, 2007, p. 81).

Kindergarten policy varies widely within and across states. Within the last ten to twelve years, a number of states have instituted a full-day kindergarten requirement and

other states are considering it as a way to increase educational achievement (Cannon, Jackowitz, & Painter, 2006). Kindergarten, as the transitional year into formal schooling, can have an important role in laying the groundwork for future school success (Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998). Kindergarten programming, a non-mandated program in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, continues to gain momentum as a result of an increasing number of working parents in need of care and the push from educators to begin formal schooling for youngsters at an earlier age.

Over the last three decades full-day kindergarten programs have increased across the United States. The U.S. Census shows that 60 percent of kindergarteners were in full-day classes in 2000 (Education Commission of the States, 2005), compared to approximately 13 percent in 1970 (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). “As high-stakes testing in education becomes more important and occurs at earlier stages in a student’s educational experience, the importance of early educational experience of students in kindergarten also increases”(Cannon et al., 2006, p.299). At the beginning of the 1990’s the number of states requiring full-day increased from six states in 1990 to fourteen in 1998 (Cannon et al., 2006).

Cannon et al. (2006) found that mothers are more likely to work full time in the kindergarten year if their children attend full-day kindergarten. “Increases in parental employment benefit society with higher tax revenue and can boost household incomes” (Votruba-Drzal, Li-Grining, & Maldonado-Carreno, 2008, p. 957). The changing educational demands on younger students explain the rapid growth of all-day kindergarten in recent years (Chang, 2008). These demands placed on younger students are a result of the push for proficiency by third grade on state standardized tests. The

federal mandates of reaching the benchmarks for adequate yearly progress (AYP) often leave district officials with the challenge of providing early interventions as soon as possible or re-examining existing kindergarten programs. With the ever changing demands placed upon all schools in the year 2010, how do districts select the best kindergarten program for their population? As this is such an important decision, it behooves researchers to understand the process or lack thereof engaged in by district leaders.

This qualitative case study explored the reasons why suburban district leaders opted for full-day kindergarten programming or half-day kindergarten programming in a sample of four local suburban districts operating such programs in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. It also illuminated for the reader, especially district leaders, the values and beliefs of educational leaders (their peers) when making decisions about kindergarten programming. This study afforded educators an opportunity to delve deeper into their own values and beliefs about kindergarten and its alignment to the K-12 continuum within their district. It could lead educators to prioritize their early childhood education goals and its centrality to the district's strategic plan. "The work at the district level is to produce a stream of wise decisions designed to achieve the mission of the organization" (Fullan, 1991, p. 211). The impact of this study may influence policymakers at the state level or even the federal level when considering strengthening kindergarten policies in state statutes.

Statement of the Problem

The growing diversity among today's kindergarten children in terms of racial, ethnic, cultural, social, economic and linguistic backgrounds challenges educators to serve children well in increasingly complex classrooms (Lee et al., 2006). The changing demographics of suburban communities have created increased concern by educators about meeting the diverse needs of kindergarten learners. Social reasons, such as the growing need for child care, have also provided an impetus for the growth of all-day kindergarten programs (Chang, 2008). In addition, many parents are enthusiastic about the full-day option for educational reasons and because it lessens the need for child care during the working day (Cannon et al., 2006).

However, recent empirical evidence suggests that full-day kindergarten, although helpful for some types of students, is not necessarily the best practice for all varieties of learners (Clark & Evans, 2005). Currently, nine states within the United States have mandatory full-day kindergarten, mostly in the southern states. The decision of whether states and school districts should continue to push for a full-day kindergarten requirement or direct funds to other avenues hinges on additional factors that are currently under-researched (Lee et al., 2006).

The problem presented in this research study was the varying access to full-day kindergarten programming for suburban students living in suburban communities near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Approximately 50% of the suburban districts in one suburban county outside of Philadelphia moved from a half-day kindergarten model to a full-day model over the last ten years. This research study was seeking to reveal how

some districts shifted from a half-day model along with how these districts selected a particular kindergarten model for their population. This study determined what educational beliefs district leaders held about kindergarten and its importance to early childhood education.

There is a need for quality kindergarten programming in all districts across the country. The purpose of this study was to discover how the decision to implement full-day kindergarten or half-day kindergarten programming in suburban districts was made based on the perceptions of the leaders. As more and more demands are placed upon districts to reach proficiency, it is necessary for district leaders to evaluate and determine if they have selected the most effective model of kindergarten based on the needs of the districts' students and the districts' goals and priorities.

The issue of kindergarten programming is a policy issue at both the state and local levels. Embedded in the decision making process about kindergarten programming are policymakers' ideological beliefs about their value of kindergarten programming within the K-12 continuum. Naturally, there are parents, teachers, leaders, and policymakers who are in favor of full-day kindergarten and an equally mixed camp of others who oppose a full-day model. "The challenge of maximizing returns on current public investments in educational programs for young children is the next research and policy frontier in education reform" (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005). Strengths and weaknesses of a longer day are supported in the research in which supporters for or against can base their argument.

A primary argument for a longer day is that it better prepares children for first grade and future learning (Clark & Kirk, 2000). A longer day also provides a less rushed

schedule and increased opportunity for individual children and proportionately less time on teacher-directed activities (Clark & Kirk, 2000; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998). A longer day is hypothesized to allow more time for child-initiated and process-oriented activities that encourage social and cognitive development (Cannon et al., 2006). On the other hand, child development experts will argue that a longer day in itself does not necessarily mean that the additional time is used in a developmentally appropriate manner (Gullo, 1990; Olsen & Zigler, 1989). A longer day could potentially have negative effects by increasing the academic curriculum and classroom structure that may not be appropriate for younger children (Gullo, 1990).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine how and why some suburban school districts opted for a half-day kindergarten program or a full-day kindergarten program as the model to implement in their districts. The outcome of this study was a better understanding of the perceptions and opinions of district leaders as it related to their decisions about kindergarten programming by revealing how these district leaders reached a decision for kindergarten programming in the era of high stakes testing, adequate yearly progress, and the increased demands for proficient learners.

Furthermore, this study sought to reveal who leaders turn to for advice in order to provide an informed decision about kindergarten models. The research on decision making theories and the processes used in kindergarten programming decisions in the current literature failed to provide a full understanding of the process.

The intention of this case study was to provide the reader with information about how districts were determining the benefits of their kindergarten program. This study delved into the philosophical beliefs of local decision makers to ascertain their values, beliefs, and opinions about kindergarten. Due to the ever changing demographics of suburban communities, it is imperative for local decision makers to be fully informed and to confidently provide the best education for all learners, especially kindergarten youngsters.

This study focused on four suburban school districts located in one county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. Two of the districts offered full-day kindergarten and two of the districts offered half-day kindergarten. The subjects were the current leadership in each district directly involved in the decision making for kindergarten. The research depended on interviews with key informants including school board members, the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, the director of elementary education, and the director of curriculum. The research also included a review of district documents such as strategic plans, achievement data, kindergarten curriculum, and school goals. Informal observations occurred in the field (i.e. school board meetings) to obtain data in the natural setting.

In particular, the research concentrated on the participants' perceptions, opinions, and values about kindergarten programming with a specific focus on the decision making for kindergarten programming. The analysis of the data yielded a description of the process used to reach the decision for kindergarten programming, the resources allocated for existing programs, the barriers for program implementation, and where leaders went for advice with programming. This study helped clarify how local suburban district leaders

reached a decision for kindergarten programming in order to provide information for other Pennsylvania districts. This study could provide information for state policymakers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as they continue to strengthen the state's mission of improved early childhood education opportunities.

The outcome of this study on the perceptions, values, and opinions of suburban district leaders with regards to kindergarten programming filled in the gaps in previous research by providing a framework for kindergarten programming as it related to decision making. This study has the potential to offer district leaders and policymakers a decision making model to utilize when embarking on kindergarten programming. Disclosing the values and perceptions of those key informants at the district level proved fruitful to the field allowing greater understanding of why one model for kindergarten was selected over another. District leaders' perceptions and opinions about kindergarten programming are unavailable in the current literature; therefore, this study has the potential to add to the literature especially in the context of suburban districts.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed the reasons why one model of kindergarten was selected over another in suburban school districts. Specifically, the questions were about resource allocations and processes enacted to reach a decision for kindergarten programming.

The research attempted to answer five specific questions pertaining to kindergarten programming. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were district leaders' perceptions, values, and opinions about kindergarten programming as it relates to pedagogy?

2. How did district leaders' perceptions, values, and opinions related to pedagogy influence their decisions about kindergarten programming?
3. What framework for decision making was enacted to reach the decision and who did districts leaders turn to for advice on kindergarten programming?
4. How did resource allocations and priority setting impact district leaders' decisions about kindergarten programming?
5. How did kindergarten fit into the district's K-12 strategic plan?

Definitions

Definitions (taken in part from www.ed.gov.com)

The following terms and definitions were used in the study:

1. **Accountability**- each state sets academic standards for what every child should know and learn. Every year student achievement is measured for every child and reported annually to the public.
2. **AYP**- an individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. Adequate yearly progress is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year.
3. **Block grants**- state monies issued to school districts that are eligible for additional funding. Block grants apply to early childhood educational programs.
4. **District leaders**- those individuals responsible for all operations of a school district at the macro level of a school system. Usually comprised of the superintendent, cabinet, and administrators.
5. **Extended day kindergarten**- a variation to a full day model in that the school day is extended for youngsters needing additional support, usually one hour.
6. **Full- day kindergarten**- a kindergarten program that is the same length/duration of the school day as the other grades in an elementary school.
7. **No Child Left Behind**- 2001 federal law detailing accountability expectations for all public school districts receiving federal monies in the United States. NCLB of 2001 is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act first enacted in

1965. NCLB has expanded the federal role in education. NCLB holds states and schools more accountable for student progress.

8. ***Proficiency***- satisfactory performance; solid understanding and adequate display of skills included in Pennsylvania's academic standards. Performing at grade level expectations as specified in a state's standards, benchmarks, and assessments.
9. ***School Board***- a local board or authority responsible for the provision and maintenance of schools.

Delimitations and Limitations of this Study

This study was limited in several ways. First, the logistical parameters of this study caused limitations since the researcher had specifically selected suburban school districts located in one county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania in order to answer the specific research questions of this study. Four districts were selected because of the researcher's need to have a manageable sample and close proximity to the field. Second, the researcher's position as a co-chair for an Extended Day Kindergarten Model was a limitation to the study. Third, this study restricted generalization since the sample size for collecting data was limited to four districts. The responses received from the participants interviewed in these districts may or may not be reflective of other school districts. The results of the study were entirely based on the data collected and analyzed about the four districts participating in the study.

The delimitation to the study was that it was atypical of other studies since the primary focus was to collect data from one specific area, suburban districts. The location and sample were atypical since most current research had been conducted in urban settings. Finally, the configuration of each district varied with central office administration and particular positions and titles.

Significance of the Study

This study will offer other school district leaders a reference or perhaps a framework for selecting, planning, and implementing kindergarten programming to best serve the needs of their district.

Suburban schools are continuing to become more diverse and complex. Coupled with the changing demographics are the rigorous demands placed upon all kindergarten teachers to produce proficient students so they can meet success early in order to perform well on standardized tests down the road (Karuez, 2005).

The researcher was conducting this study to demonstrate how district leaders selected a kindergarten program for their student population. As suburban communities continually change, how did district leaders adjust, modify, and meet the needs of their first students who attend formal schooling at the kindergarten level. It was important to the researcher to understand the dynamics of kindergarten programming on early literacy, and the importance of recognizing the changing needs of students in suburban communities.

As the demographics of suburban districts evolve, it is difficult to determine how leaders are responding, especially at the kindergarten level. How does kindergarten fit into the continuous improvement model in suburban districts? What role does kindergarten play in the K-12 continuum for their district? How and why do district leaders select their current kindergarten model?

The role of policymakers at the state level will have a direct impact on the significance of this study. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, kindergarten is not mandatory and districts are only required to offer half-day programming if they operate a

kindergarten model. Despite Governor Edward Rendell's push for full-day kindergarten, state legislators are not convinced the model is imperative for formal schooling (<http://www.state.pa.us>). This study may prove significant to policymakers as they continue to provide funding for districts across the state via block grants and other early childhood initiatives. Although the sample specifically focused on four suburban districts in Southeastern Pennsylvania, it could have a greater impact to inform all suburban districts throughout the state and even the country.

In sum, the crux of this problem deals with the political conflicts influencing the decision makers. Values and ideology conflicts are embedded in this issue of kindergarten programming. What did district leaders believe about a model for kindergarten programming? Who was involved in decisions about kindergarten programming at the district level and what influence do they have on programming? We need to know if the current model of kindergarten is working for the population of students it serves. We need to understand why and how the model of kindergarten was selected.

Theoretical Base

Lowi's (1964) theory of redistributive policy and Adler's (1994) theory of centering a child in multiple contexts will be discussed in-depth in a section to follow in the literature review.

Two potentially descriptive and predictive theories proved relevant to the study. Theodore Lowi's theory of power provided a framework to explain historical changes in U.S politics from the 18th century to the 21st century (Lowi, 2009). Lowi's theory provided important insights into the process of political and institutional change (Lowi,

2009). Since this study was seeking to gain a better understanding of kindergarten programming at the district level, it was primarily a policy issue at all levels, federal, state, and local.

Lowi's approach starts with two observations about the relationship of power in public policy making (Lowi, 2009). Lowi's first conceptual contribution is that the analysis of public policy should focus on the choices about how to apply the power of the state and not primarily on what substantive goals the state should pursue (Lowi, 2009). "Building consensus in support of a public goal is an important part of the political process; but remains rhetorical until a coalition is formed supporting a specific policy that directs the application of state power toward the goal" (Lowi, 2009, p.21). Lowi argues further, "Legitimate coercion is the defining characteristic of the state, and public policy is made when some public authority indicates its intent to influence conduct by the use of positive or negative sanctions"(Lowi, 2009, p.21).

Lowi's second observation is bound up in the contention that policies create politics (Lowi, 2009). "Policy proposals about how to use public power in pursuit of public goals will determine the institutional rules of combat and the access of various interests to the policy process" (Lowi, 2009, p.22). Specifically in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, early childhood education remains a cornerstone of Governor Edward Rendell's educational platform (<http://www.state.pa.us>). Full-day kindergarten has and continues to be a key educational belief for the governor (<http://www.state.pa.us>). To the contrary, the state legislature does not see kindergarten in the same manner; they are unconvinced that all students need full-day kindergarten and that the state should amend a statute to deem full-day kindergarten mandatory in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

(<http://www.state.pa.us>). Hence, the power yielded by the legislators has a direct impact on any formalized policy about kindergarten. Lowi argues, “A description of a public problem, combined with an expression of concern and an appropriation of funds, does not constitute policy” (2009, p. 21). Lowi (2009) further contends, “Public policy is made when some public authority indicates its intent to influence conduct by the use of positive or negative sanctions” (p. 21).

Lowi’s discussion of redistributive policies served as a framework for examining this topic at the school district level in a divided state. A redistributive policy redistributes power and funds to issues that are deemed priority or in greatest need.

A non-educational example of redistributive policy is the social security tax. All working Americans have the FICA tax withdrawn from their pay checks. These tax dollars are redistributed to age appropriate Americans as part of their income later in life. Working people do not reap the benefits of social security while working; however, they will eventually reap the benefit once they are eligible for the benefit. Redistribution of funds from one group to another in need is a non-educational example of redistributive policy.

The second theory, Adler’s theory of centering a child in multiple contexts, provided an alternate lens for decision making about any policy pertaining to children. Adler’s theory places all children at the heart of decision making to ensure all aspects of a child are being met educationally, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially. In a sense, child-centered theory urges that children be placed at the center of all decision making, not funding or political power. The child-centered theory encompasses the whole child and stresses the importance of appropriate resources for children at every age (Adler &

Gardner, 1994). The researcher was guided by both theories in coming to an understanding of the processes used by school districts.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Kindergarten programming has evolved in our school systems since the enactment of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act, NCLB 2001. The mandates imposed upon districts do not directly apply to kindergarten; however, the pressure to obtain proficient learners by grade three has a great impact on the primary grades of K-2. “Shifts in conception and purpose have changed the expectations for kindergarten curriculum and pedagogy in significant ways” (Goldstein, 2007, p.10). Due to the increasing performance and accountability demands placed upon educators, the focus on early childhood education, especially kindergarten, has become more critical. While full-day kindergarten continues to increase in our nation each year, is there a need for universal full-day programming that would benefit all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, and economic status?

This chapter reviews the literature about kindergarten programming. This literature review provides the foundation for the study; addresses three key areas that are critical to the context of the study: the history of kindergarten, the supports and critiques of full-day kindergarten and policy at the federal and state levels.

The first portion of the literature review discusses the historical background of kindergarten and the educational philosophy behind kindergarten programming. This section of the literature review discusses characteristics of full-day kindergarten and half-day kindergarten, kindergarten alignment to K-12, and pre-school initiatives.

The second section describes the current research in the field about the strengths and weaknesses of full-day versus half-day kindergarten including key areas such as

achievement gains, social/developmental gains, parental perceptions, and teacher perceptions. This portion of the literature review addresses the current status of full-day kindergarten at the national level and at the Commonwealth level in Pennsylvania. The controversy about full-day kindergarten included funding issues, resource allocations, costs, and benefits. The researcher addresses possible barriers faced by districts opting for full-day kindergarten with a focus on specific issues holding districts back from creating full-day programming for their students. The researcher discusses possible philosophical differences and ideological beliefs of school districts about full-day kindergarten programming.

Finally, the last section of the literature review discusses the theoretical bases for kindergarten programming as it pertains to district leaders' perceptions and values for implementation. Theodore Lowi's theory of redistributive policy is discussed as one plausible theory to explain decision makers' behavior when making programming decisions for kindergarten. Adler's (1994) theory of centering a child in multiple contexts is discussed as a counter theory to illustrate decision making practices that put children first. This final section of the literature review focuses on educational policy changes. Specifically, the impact of federal and state expectations in Pennsylvania is discussed along with a discussion of early childhood education policy.

Kindergarten: An Historical Overview

Kindergarten programming in the United States has changed considerably in the last 50 years as a result of state and local standards enforced in districts across the country. Kindergarten 50 years ago served as a pre-cursor to learning where children were exposed to letters, numbers, story time, play, and socialization. The focus was not on

academics per say, but to the exposure of a loosely structured learning environment where some “basic” readiness skills were introduced.

Kindergarten has evolved into another grade of academics where rigorous curricula have been implemented along with higher expectations placed on schools to succeed. The controversy arises throughout the country over the inconsistencies with kindergarten policies and funding at state and federal levels. Students residing in disadvantaged communities have greater access to a full-day kindergarten since funding is often subsidized through Title I Federal monies. Students residing in suburban communities are less likely to attend a full-day kindergarten program since funding of such a program comes from local district monies. The following discussion explains the purpose of kindergarten as it was initially designed in the mid 1800’s.

The concept of kindergarten began in 1837 by Frederick Froebel, a German educator and philosopher, who believed in the development of early childhood education. Froebel’s philosophy stressed the “emphasis on self-directed activities that fostered children’s innate curiosity and sense of social responsibility” (Olsen & Ziegler, 1989, p. 179). Swiniarski (2005) revealed “a basic assumption in Froebel’s philosophy was his belief in the innate goodness of the child, who under the guidance of a trained teacher can unfold and blossom into self-fulfillment” (p.219). The first kindergartens were centered on “gifts and occupations that Froebel designed to develop intellectual, moral, and religious growth in children” (p.219).

Kindergarten began as a full-day program until World War II when it became difficult to hire qualified teachers to teach this age group. Puelo (1988) found the conversion to

half-day kindergarten was due to the shortage of space and the belief that five year olds were not mature enough to handle full days.

Elizabeth Peabody established the first English speaking kindergarten in America in 1859. Peabody trained women to be kindergarten teachers and developed parent programs that involved families in the education process. Peabody's kindergarten followed the ideals set by the founder of kindergarten, Frederick Froebel. Kindergarten was designed as a full-day program for children from ages 3 to 7.

The metaphor for the school's climate or atmosphere was analogous to a garden of children, which provides an enriched environment for a nurturing start in the educational process (Swiniarski, 2005). Peabody adapted this German model of kindergarten to "fit the individualism of the American spirit" (Swiniarski, 2005). Peabody agreed with the notion of innate ideas, but her years and experience as a teacher prompted her to provide a curriculum with a "pedagogy founded on a linguistic approach to teaching literacy skills and a belief that all children can learn through an individualized program of instruction" (Swiniarski, 2005, p.220).

Jeynes (2006) argues that the research supports the value of the Froebel model which consists of moral education, exploration, nature, and being a good citizen. Jeynes (2006) contends, "Americans have departed from a true version of the Froebel model in the last forty years in order to compete with Japanese students. Ironically, the Japanese still cherish and practice Froebel's original concept of kindergarten" (p. 1937). Froebel's model of kindergarten is still implemented in Japanese schools today. Japanese educators believe that learning character education and self-discipline is better for young learners in the long run rather than moving so quickly into academics.

Those who favor Froebel's initial model for kindergarten do so because of the inquiry based learning that happens through every day living; it allows five year olds to seek, discover, and explore the world in ways that are developmentally appropriate to them. Jaynes (2006) contends, "The United States should be wise to return to the Froebel model, as much research supports its effectiveness over contemporary pedagogies and curricula" (p. 1953).

Discussion

Froebel's initial model of kindergarten coupled with appropriate developmental pedagogies will afford educators the opportunity to engage youngsters in these foundational experiences. Froebel's initial concept of kindergarten as an important time for young children to learn through discovery, inquiry, and nature, has been overpowered by today's concept of kindergarten that tends to stress academics over socialization and self-interest explorations. The next sections discuss characteristics of full-day and half-day kindergarten, their alignment to K-12, and their alignment to pre-school initiatives.

Characteristics of Full-Day and Half-Day Kindergarten

In general, a full-day kindergarten program offers twice as much instructional time, more academic activities and self-selected activities along with a deeper focus on literacy (Ackerman, Barnett & Robin, 2005). There are many core components of a full-day program to ensure all children can learn. According to Weast (2001), a full-day kindergarten should be meaningful to children, based on research, focused on literacy in reading, language arts, and math. A full-day kindergarten should be results oriented, based on best practices, organized around state standards, comprehensive, nurturing, and child-centered. Districts must provide meaningful and relevant professional development

to ensure teachers are well equipped and skilled in the most effective instructional strategies for young children.

From a policy brief published in 2005 by West Ed Early Education, researchers advocate that the characteristics of effective kindergarten programs are the same, whether the schedule is half or full-day. They include integration of new learning from past experiences through project or group work, informal interactions with peers and adults, emphasis on literacy and language, large and small group activities, and development of children's social skills (<http://www.West.Ed.org>). Elicker and Mathur (1997) found in their study that although large-group activities consumed the most time under both schedules, the full-day programs had substantial increases in time devoted to teacher directed individual work, cooperative group work and child initiated activities.

Full-day students attend daily and follow the same length of hours as designated for the other grades in the school. Full-day kindergarten allows students to explore topics in depth, be exposed to an environment that is more curricular based, and intellectually engaging. The characteristics of a full-day kindergarten offer a balance of grouping experiences such as whole class instruction, small group learning, individualized instruction, and engagement in independent activities

Half-day kindergarten typically runs for two and a half to three hours daily. The focus is primarily on language arts instruction and math instruction. Typically, the social studies and science curricula are integrated in the language arts content. Both programs stress read alouds several times throughout the course of the daily program.

Kindergarten Alignment to the K-12 Continuum

Each state has developed specific state standards in all areas of schooling as a framework for the intended outcomes of learning at each grade level. There are no national standards at the present time; each state is required to establish state standards for grades K-12. The Pennsylvania Department of Education outlines specific academic standards for districts to follow from kindergarten to grade 12. For the purposes of this discussion, the Language Arts Standards of Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening will demonstrate the continuous progression of skills in a student's K-12 career.

The Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking Standards “describe what students should know and be able to do with the English Language at four grade levels, (3rd, 5th, 8th, and 11th)” (www.pde.org). The standards increase with complexity and rigor as the grade levels progress. Beginning in kindergarten, teachers are guided by the standards as targets for instruction. The standards are aligned K-12 to reflect the skills/concepts teachers will use as guideposts to create lessons that are age appropriate to address the target for instruction. The Pennsylvania Department of Education defines the standards as:

- ***Learning to Read Independently:*** includes purposes for reading; word recognition skills; vocabulary development; comprehension and interpretation; and fluency.
- ***Reading Critically in All Content Areas:*** includes detail; inferences; fact/opinion; comparison; and analysis and evaluation.
- ***Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature:*** includes literary elements; literary devices; poetry and drama.
- ***Types of Writing:*** includes narrative; informational; and persuasive.
- ***Quality of Writing:*** includes focus, content, organization, style, and conventions.

- ***Speaking and Listening:*** includes listening skills; speaking skills; discussion and presentation.
- ***Characteristics and Function of the English Language:*** includes word origins; variations; and application.
- ***Research:*** includes selection; location of information; and organization.

Each school district adopts the state standards and designs curriculum to address the skills and concepts in the framework of the standards. State standards are critical to the success of all school districts. It is the responsibility of each school district to ensure the curricula in all academic areas are aligned to the standards. It is critical to note that “a new approach to educating young children from pre-kindergarten through third grade (PK-3) proposes aligning standards, curriculum, and assessment practices across the early grades into a coherent plan that takes into account the developmental characteristics and abilities of children in this age span” (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005). Alignment is critical to the overall success of the district organization.

Many students come to school with some readiness skills for learning. Others enter kindergarten with little or no pre-school experience. The level of readiness of all kindergarten students will depend on his/her previous learning experiencing in the pre-school or home environment. The importance of pre-school initiatives is critical in building a strong early education foundation. The need for an enhanced pre-K-12 alignment is needed to strengthen the early building blocks to learning.

Pre-School Initiatives

Millions of preschool children attend pre-kindergarten and other early education programs due to working parents and the desire of parents to reap the benefits of early schooling for their child. Policymakers, educators, and parents place high expectations on these programs. There is strong evidence from research suggesting these early education programs have a positive impact on the lives of young children. Hood, Little, Marshall, and Brown (2006) argue that such strong research of model programs are indicated in the Perry Preschool Program (Sweinhart et al., 2004) and the Abecedarian project (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Spoiling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). These studies provide clear and convincing evidence that high quality early education programs can prepare children for success in school and have tremendous benefits into adulthood.

“The Perry Preschool Study offered some of the most comprehensive research about the long-term effects of early childhood education” (Rose, 2008, p.12). The participants in the study were tracked from age three or four into their late twenties. “Researchers concluded from the study that those who participated in a high-quality early childhood program demonstrated cognitive gains, higher graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment, and gainful employment advantages over those who did not participate in early childhood programs” (Rose, 2008, p. 12).

The difficulty in early education (pre-school programs) is ensuring the programs are well designed, connected to early childhood standards, and taught by trained and qualified personnel. Most programs across the country are mediocre at best. The need for some measure of accountability is needed at the early childhood education level. Hood et al., (2006) contend, “Research does indicate that professional preparation is

important-teachers with degrees and specialized training do provide higher quality early education experiences for children” (p. 403). Data from the study conducted by Hood et al. (2006) concluded that their experience with South Carolina’s Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Assessments suggest that accountability systems with a focus on improving program quality can be an impetus for further improvements in professional practice. In order to implement and sustain high quality pre-school programs, a common understanding of what constitutes a “quality program” is needed throughout the states.

Decision makers must look closely at the ongoing push for early literacy initiatives. Students who attend pre-school usually enter kindergarten with adequate skills set preparing them for further learning. Youngsters who attend pre-school programs are exposed to the basic skills of numeracy, rhyming, letters, and socialization.

At the federal level, No Child Left Behind has clearly established educational standards for students in grades 3-8 and high school. As a result of *NCLB* and encouraged by Former President George W. Bush’s *Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative*, most states have adopted early childhood standards for students in grades K-2. These standards set guidelines for expectations of what young children should be able to know and do prior to entering kindergarten; they also delineate what students should be able to do after attending a year of kindergarten. Although most states have adopted kindergarten standards, it is difficult to ascertain their alignment with state standards for other pre-K and early learning programs (<http://nga.org>).

Governors across the United States continue to work diligently to expand access to early education and school readiness. There is great need for collaboration between Head

Start Programs and Pre-K/Kindergarten. “Developing partnerships, increasing alignment, strengthening collaboration across federal early education services and programs is essential to create an integrated system of early education” (<http://www.nga.org>). Head Start provides a vision of comprehensive services including a focus on the family, links to health and social services, and quality staff. Head Start is pivotal for economically disadvantaged students because it provides the readiness skills (socially and academically) that are needed for school readiness.

National and Pennsylvania’s Current Situation

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, over the past decade, new and emerging research on brain development and early learning programs has significantly contributed to the policy debate on school readiness (<http://www.ncsl.org>). Legislators and other state policymakers have learned from this research about the impact of quality kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs on later school success (<http://www.ncls.org>). As a result, states have been re-examining their investments in kindergarten programs (<http://www.ncls.org>). Issues states are struggling with include: providing funding for full-day rather than half-day kindergarten programs; determining whether kindergarten should be mandatory for all children; how to find and retain quality kindergarten teachers; and appropriate entrance and exit assessments for kindergartens (<http://www.ncls.org>).

Supports of Full- Day Kindergarten

The research literature provides many arguments and studies on the benefits of full-day kindergarten. In 1970, 16.8% of children attended a full-day kindergarten program. In 2002, 63% of children attended a full-day kindergarten program. In Pennsylvania,

65% of students attended a full-day kindergarten program during the 2007-2008 school year.

The current research reviewed on the benefits of full-day kindergarten is mixed. The majority of research in this area had been conducted in inner city school systems. One reason for the multitude of research in inner city schools was due to the accessibility of the program offered in these public school systems. Rothenberg (1984) cited in his study that “the greatest benefit from full-day kindergarten programs is for at-risk children and children from low socio-economic backgrounds” (ERIC document reproduction service No. 256474). As a result of his work and others that follow, children from urban settings had a greater degree of access to full-day kindergarten programs. “On average, children who are African-American, impoverished, or who attend a private school have greater access to full-day when considered relative to their counterparts in other demographic or sector groups” (Zvoch, Reynolds, & Parker, 2008, p. 95).

The research conducted in urban settings suggested that full-day programming works for students in these settings who may need the extra time and exposure to the content, materials, and class environment. “Disadvantaged students in full-day classrooms had a rate of literacy acquisition that outpaced that of demographically similar peers in half-day classrooms during the first year of program implementation” (Zvoch et al., 2008, p.105). The research is beginning to suggest that more access and exposure to a full-day program can result in an “initial and relatively immediate pay off in greater student literacy, the foundation for future academic and social success” (Zvoch et al., 2008, p. 105).

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K) was a national study conducted to improve the quality of the available data pertaining to

early childhood education. This study compared differences in instructional practices and curriculum in full-day kindergarten programs and half-day kindergarten programs using data from schools teachers, parents, and kindergarten students (Rosamilla, 2005). A nationally representative sample of 22,000 students from diverse backgrounds ethnically, socially, and racially was tracked from kindergarten to fifth grade. Students in full-day kindergarten made greater gains in reading and mathematics when compared to their counterpart peers in half-day kindergarten even after adjusting for gain score differences associated with race and poverty status (Walston & West, 2004). Students from economically disadvantaged households made gains during their kindergarten year but tended to both start and end the year behind students from more economically advantaged households (Walston & West, 2004, p. 45). Students from homes with incomes below the poverty threshold made slightly smaller gains compared to students from homes with incomes at or above the threshold (Walston & West, 2004, p. 58). The researchers cautioned against drawing causal relationships from the results of this longitudinal survey in that students were not randomly assigned to classes (Rosamilla, 2005).

In Montgomery County Maryland, after the first year of implementing a full-day kindergarten program, the Washington Post (2001) described significant positive results. This study of 7, 849 kindergarteners found that 71% of the high risk students who attended a full-day program mastered reading fundamentals by the end of the kindergarten year as opposed to 54% of those students enrolled in a half-day program.

Viadero (2005) reported on a national study that began in 1998 based on federal data from a representative sample of 8,000 children in public kindergarten programs over an eight year period conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan, the

University of Oregon in Eugene, and the Chicago-based Erikson Institute. The results demonstrated that, on average, the learning gains children make in full-day programs translate to about one month of additional schooling over the course of an academic school year (Viadero, 2005). Previous studies often focused on a small number of schools and districts or were conducted using weaker research designs (Viadero, 2005). Contrary to some previous findings, this study revealed that children from poor and minority families did not learn more in full-day classes than did white students or those from wealthier homes in the same programs (Viadero, 2005).

While most of the research had used reading/literacy skills as a dependent variable to measure achievement, some research had investigated achievement growth in math, spelling, handwriting, and individual skills. One study conducted in an Indiana School District found that “test scores in kindergarten measuring reading, spelling, handwriting, and individual skills (e.g. identification of colors, shapes, numbers and letters) are higher for students in full-day programs than students in a half-day program” (Plucker, Eaton, Rapp, 2004). Gullo’s (2000) longitudinal research on the effects of half-day versus full day kindergarten yielded results that “children who were in a full-day kindergarten program scored significantly higher in both math and reading on a standardized achievement test (Iowa Test of Basic Skills)” (p.17).

Most of the body of research about full-day programs measured the academic achievement of students at the end of the kindergarten year. Plucker and Zapf (2005) cited in their findings that “gains such as increased academic achievement, lower grade retention rates, improved attendance, and improved social skills were experienced by full-day kindergarten students by the end of the kindergarten year” (p. 1). Increased

attendance in full-day kindergarten programs was a common finding in most of the studies reviewed.

Class size in some of the studies was a variable in which the researchers were able to demonstrate positive correlations between full day, class size, and student achievement. For instance, in the work of Zvoch, Reynolds, and Parker (2008), they found data from their quasi-experimental study that concluded a strongly positive relationship between class size, full-day kindergarten and literacy gains. “In relatively small sized classrooms (<20 students), full-day kindergarteners’ rate of literacy acquisition was twice that of their half-day peers” (Zvoch et al., 2008, p.104). The students exposed to a full day of instruction had demonstrated a faster rate of literacy acquisition as compared to their counterpart peers.

Other studies explored the social and emotional effects of full-day kindergarten programs. A recent study conducted at Emporia State University revealed that “the research is inconsistent in finding differences in students’ social, emotional, or developmental factors because of full-day kindergarten” (Carnes & Albrecht, 2007, p. 64). Carnes and Albrecht raised a pivotal point in their perceptions about the recent data and findings pertaining to the academic and social-emotional effects of full-day kindergarten. “The debate about the nature and purpose of kindergarten is immersed in ideas of social-emotional development and the appropriateness of academic expectations of kindergarten-aged children” (Carnes & Albrecht, 2007, p. 64). Carnes and Albrecht (2007) cited in their findings that “results of their study suggest full-day kindergarten is an appropriate place to begin ensuring high quality education” (p. 71). Giving teachers and students the benefit of more time in the learning environment had a positive impact

on instruction and achievement. Teachers had the opportunity to think more deeply about their practice and incorporate research-based instructional methods during a longer day.

In addition to the length of day, a closer look at the curriculum and instruction in all kindergarten programs was needed. “Initial gains in kindergarten (full-day) place the onus of maintaining those gains on schools and teachers through their own internal policies, procedures, and will to sustain those gains” (Wolgemuth, Cobb, Winokur, Leech & Ellerby, 2006, p. 268). Providing a full-day program does not guarantee higher gains in student growth. A developmentally appropriate kindergarten program designed from early childhood standards along with an effective delivery of instruction must be in the forefront of all full-day programs.

“Vygotsky believed that mental functions are required through social relationships in which adults scaffold for children allowing youngsters to internalize activities and emulate behaviors. Large blocks of time were needed for exploration and a variety of experiences. This is not always possible in half day programming” (Morrow, Strickland, & Woo, 1998, p. 11). Giving teachers the time needed to allow students to apply the skills learned was often cut too short due to the length of a half-day kindergarten program. Students must be provided with ample time to engage in meaningful learning experiences which may not be accommodated in a half-day kindergarten program.

Research revealed that large skill gaps were evident even before students enter kindergarten especially in low economic and minority students (Le, Kirby, Barney, Setodji & Gershwin, 2006). The knowledge and skills students come to kindergarten with were predictors of later achievement. Those in favor of full-day kindergarten argue

that extended time in these programs can be used to increase students' readiness at the first grade and beyond (Le et al., 2006).

Critiques of Full- Day Kindergarten

Others are still not convinced full-day programs make a difference over the length of a child's education. Other research showed the gains were not always sustained past the second grade. The following discussion provides a critique of full-day kindergarten as presented in the data.

It appeared the major argument against full-day kindergarten was the costs for school districts in terms of space, salaries, and other resources. Not only were all-day programs more expensive, they also required more human resources and make increased demands on young children (Chang, 2008). The reality is that the effects of all-day kindergarten have not been established on the basis of empirical evidence using a nationally represented large-scale database (Chang, 2008). More research is needed on the effects of full-day kindergarten with a varying population of students to determine the impact on learning, social skills, and developmental gains.

Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) conducted research based on the findings of The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K), a nationally representative cohort of children across the United States that studied cohorts of children in both full-day and half-day kindergarten from kindergarten to the fifth grade. Nearly 22,000 students participated in the (ECLS-K) study in the fall of 1998. In general, findings represented gains at the end of kindergarten for full-day kindergarten as compared to their counter part peers with a decrease in benefits by third grade. Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) focused their research on finding out why and when this fade-out of

gains occurred during the elementary years. In particular, Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) used the (ECLS-K) study to examine associations between kindergarten program type and academic trajectories from kindergarten through fifth grade (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). “There were notable gaps in the literature regarding whether full-day kindergarten attendance is advantageous for children’s development” (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008, p. 973). Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) analysis suggested that “part time kindergarteners were more advantaged socio-economically; however the multivariate analyses that controlled for their difference surprisingly revealed higher levels of academic achievement at the fall of kindergarten among children enrolled in full-day kindergarten” (p. 974). “The modest nature of the full-day advantage may be attributed to slight differences in the amount and type of instruction taking place in kindergarten classrooms” (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008, p. 974). It is of particular interest to note that although full-day students participating in the ECLS-K study spent nearly two times as much time in the kindergarten than their half-day peers, they did not receive instruction comparable to two times as much (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008).

The Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) study also found that the academic benefits of full-day kindergarten subside soon after children leave kindergarten. The study revealed the fade-out of the full-day advantage of kindergarten occurs as the trajectories of children in part-day kindergarten grow at a steeper rate from the spring of kindergarten to the spring of fifth grade (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). In particular, the advantage of full-versus part-day kindergarten fades out approximately after the spring of the third grade (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). The key finding suggested that the fade out appears to be attributed to differences in the children and families that attend part and full-day

kindergarten, as well as school characteristics associated with kindergarten program type (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). The findings revealed that the gains for children from economically disadvantaged households and non-Hispanic Black ethnic backgrounds were more likely to fade out after kindergarten (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008).

Current research on the longitudinal effects of full-day versus half-day in subsequent grades provided insight into both the benefits and costs of full-day kindergarten. Because of the insufficient longitudinal research on the efficacy of all-day kindergarten on academic achievement, there was limited evidence on the long term benefits of all-day kindergarten for most children (Chang, 2008). Plucker and Zapf (2005) contend “despite the promising findings of the few longitudinal studies conducted in schools and school districts in the United States, there is a lack of sound research regarding the persistence of benefits experienced by full-day kindergarten students” (p. 5). Hildebrand (2001) found a slight variation in his research by making the connections to the rich opportunities provided in the home by suggesting there is little empirical evidence to support gains on students who are already exposed to rich educational experiences in the home environment. Those unsupportive of full-day kindergarten argued against such a reform due to the lack of sustainable gains past first grade.

Modest gains were associated with the impact of full-day kindergarten at the end of the kindergarten year; however, the long-term gains in subsequent years as a result of full day kindergarten were minimal. DeCicca (2007) found that the short term impact of full-day kindergarten had deteriorated considerably by the end of first grade. “The observed pattern is even more striking for minority children since some of the specifications imply that full-day kindergartens actually perform worse than their half-day counterparts by the

end of first grade” (DeCicca, 2007, p. 81). DeCicca’s (2007) findings suggested that on average, the academic returns associated with full-day kindergarten are quite low or non-existent (p. 81). In focusing on the multi-faceted nature of children’s lives, Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) found that child and family characteristics played a noteworthy role in why full-day benefits exist and in why these advantages fade relatively quickly.

Other studies (Woglemuth et al., 2006) are clear to suggest there is insufficient research and generalizable information in longitudinal studies, especially with sustained gains. Such longitudinal studies repeatedly have found no significant long term gains beyond first grade for students who have attended a full-day kindergarten program. “Over time, the learning appears to decline rapidly, so much so that by the start of first grade, the benefits of FDK have diminished to a level that has little practical value” (Woglemuth et al., 2006, p.267).

In general, a full-day kindergarten program offers twice as much instructional time, more academic activities and self-selected activities along with a deeper focus on literacy (Ackerman, Barnett & Robin, 2005). Despite the short term positive results cited with full-day kindergarten programs, more and better research is needed. Studies are needed that show the variables contributing to that outcome including types of learning activities, number of children in each classroom, and teachers’ training (Ackerman et al., 2005).

Those who are critical of full-day kindergarten base their opinion on the lack of demonstrated benefits of full-day kindergarten throughout the elementary years. Full-day kindergarten may not enhance achievement in the long run as demonstrated in the longitudinal study conducted by Le et al., (2006). Specifically, the study showed lower math achievement in 5th grade students who had attended a full-day kindergarten

program. Lee et al. (2006) concluded full-day programs have been shown to have initial positive effects on student achievement and concluded that it is unknown whether the apparent lack of enduring benefits merits the costs associated with implementation.

Scientific evidence is needed to determine if full-day kindergarten is the best investment of additional resources (Martinez & Snider, 2001). “Full-day programs are not developmentally appropriate, according to the experts, when the purpose is to cram more curriculum into the day to teach five year old children material that should wait until first grade” (Martinez & Snider, 2001).

Those unsupportive of full-day kindergarten suggest that the length of day does not always equate to higher student achievement and quality programming. Many would argue the rigor, standards based curricula, and teacher quality to deliver instruction are key ingredients to obtain greater student achievement. Weast (2001) contends, “Doubling the time for kindergarten doesn’t necessarily double program quality” (p. 6). Providing a full day of reading, math, science, social studies, and writing interwoven with art, music, and physical education in a stimulating and nurturing environment, plus an emphasis on technology or second language instruction-is the way to provide children with the readiness they need for first grade and beyond (Weast, 2001). A full-day program must be relevant to the learner, developmentally appropriate, rigorous, and provide whole blocks of time for sustained high quality teaching.

Teacher and Parent Perceptions

Parents and teachers overwhelmingly favor full-day kindergarten programs over half-day programs (Freda, 2005, p. 52). Both parents and teachers cited improved learning and socialization as a result of full-day kindergarten attendance (Hough & Bryde, 1996).

Teachers reported in the study conducted by Elicker and Mathur (1997) comparing full-day kindergarten to half-day kindergarten that participation in a full-day program eased the transition to first grade, helping children adapt to the demands of a longer school day. Teachers reported that full-day kindergarten provides opportunities for flexibility, engages students in child-initiated activities, and provides more depth to the curriculum (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). In full-day kindergarten programs teachers have a chance to know children and parents better, provide more individualization instruction, and expand the curriculum horizontally (Martinez & Snider, 2001).

Full-day kindergarten has become favored by the teaching professionals as a result of the difficulty educators have in meeting curricular expectations within the constraints of a half-day program. The movement toward a more developmentally appropriate curriculum necessitates a longer day to better integrate student centered learning (Baskett et al., 2005). The longer school day provides teachers with the flexibility to engage students in a variety of learning opportunities without being pressured for time. Participation in a full-day kindergarten allows appropriate challenges at all developmental levels. Switching to a full-day program provides teachers with more time for curriculum planning and incorporating thematic units with a more in-depth focus (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

In general, most parents understand the importance of education and the impact education has on their child's life. Over the decades, social and educational factors have contributed to the increase in full-day programs. Full-day kindergarten has become increasingly popular for working mothers and fathers. However, some studies show that parents believe full-day kindergarten should be voluntary (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

The parents of students enrolled in the full-day program reported that full-day kindergarten provided more opportunities for children to explore and learn; full-day kindergarten allowed the teacher to get to know each child better, in a less hurried atmosphere (Elicker & Mathur, 1997, p. 474). Parents' perceptions of the full-day program are different in that they appeared to see the full-day attendance as having more value. "An increase in attendance may have been related to parents' perception of the full-day program as being more like real school instead of another pre-school type setting" (Carnes & Albrecht, 2007, p. 70).

The need for a full-day program is cost effective for parents and provides needed daycare. Parents seek a full-day program due to the concern over day care and daily care of their child when enrolled in only a half-day program. Full-day kindergarten solves parents' day-care problems, while providing a comprehensive developmentally-appropriate program (Rothenberg, 1995). Parents believe full-day kindergarten allows for a seamless transition to the first grade and better prepares them for the full day atmosphere of schooling. Parents favor a full-day kindergarten because it reduces the number of transitions experienced in a typical day (Rothenberg, 1995). The full-day kindergarten creates less stress and less pressure (Martinez & Snider, 2001).

A parent's decision for the selection of a kindergarten program (full-day vs. half-day) is often made based on their child's pre-school experience (Bannon, 2005). In public school systems, parents are often left with no other alternative if a half-day program is the only program provided by their local school district. Parents understand the changes in school systems over the years and the rigorous curricular demands placed on schools. Changes in American society and education such as the increase in single-parent and dual

employment households and the fact many children spend a significant part of the day away from home have contributed to the popularity of full-day kindergarten in many communities (Gullo,1990).

Bannon (2005) argues, “The choice of academic preparation for young children can be confusing for parents. However, choosing the type of kindergarten program for their child can be even more intimidating for parents considering that kindergarten classrooms are becoming more and more academically oriented” (p.60). Parents’ decisions regarding those options is influenced more by their child’s pre-school experience, their perceptions of their own ability to effectively work with their child at home, and their perceptions of their child’s maturity in regards to what length of day the child can handle (Bannon, 2005).

Bannon (2005) spoke with many parents while conducting her research on full and half-day kindergarten programs to learn what influenced parents’ selection of a half or full-day kindergarten. Full-day kindergarten was perceived as an effective way to transition to first grade, deepen socialization skills with peers, and build self- esteem (Bannon, 2005). Parents who opted for full-day kindergarten did so because the program could provide their child with the individualization, attention, and enrichment (Bannon, 2005). The parents who opted for half-day programs did so because they saw it as an opportunity to spend quality time with their child. Ackerman et al., (2005) contend that parents and teachers report greater satisfaction with full-day programs. There is a greater satisfaction with curriculum and parents report their children experienced a great deal of growth in kindergarten.

Summary

There has been much dispute over the quality of research on full-day kindergarten. Some find the research to be inconclusive. Clark (2001) contends that the research on this focus has been criticized for having small and specialized samples, variability of the length of day, insufficient control of curriculum, teacher effects, pretest differences between groups and not following rigorous research standards. Despite these arguments, a good deal of data exists in support of full-day kindergarten. Baskett, Bryant, White, and Rhoads (2005) found that “empirical research outcomes describing the benefits of full-day kindergarten have been inconsistent over the past twenty-five years” (p. 420). Despite the inconsistency in the data, recent research reviews are consistent in “showing that full-day kindergarten is associated with greater academic achievement than half-day kindergarten” (p. 420).

The research is limited in suburban and rural settings across the country. “Like most difficult challenges it requires multiple initiatives-by the schools, by students and by parents-each of them necessary to achieving success. While reports and studies advocate that a full-day model will ameliorate the disparities between the social and financial classes, these conditions are still theoretical” (Chen, 2008). With these ever growing demands for proficient learners, it is important to critically examine the benefits of all-day versus half-day programs, and to gather data based evidence on the effects, both short term and long term, of all-day programs on children’s academic achievement (Chang, 2008).

Kindergarten Policies

Kindergarten plays an important role as one of the first steps toward educational success, yet kindergarten policies and schedules vary widely across and within states (Ackerman et al., 2005). Kindergarten programming is established and maintained by most local school boards in districts across the country. Most districts maintain kindergarten programs for students ranging from the age of four to six. Interpretation of programming, curriculum, length of day, and qualifications for teachers vary state by state. Each state develops its own state standards and early childhood education policies. Some states classify kindergarten by hours of the day attended; other states measure kindergarten by hours per year of attendance. Regardless of how it is measured, once the program is established, it must be maintained and students are required to attend (www.ecs.org).

“Public policy creates the foundation for equitable and high quality program delivery and state policymakers are in a pivotal position to take a comprehensive view of kindergarten policies to provide a coherent continuum of education for all young children” (Kaurez, 2005, p. 7). The ECS, Education Commission for the States, has examined closely the policies pertaining to all states. Their analysis along with support from advocates for full day programming reveals “widespread evidence that all states need to strengthen their policy focus on expanding full-day kindergarten opportunities; and in particular, to provide definitional clarity of FDK (full-day kindergarten), provide universal access to FDK, provide adequate funding policies, and address the quality of FDK programs” (www.ecs.org).

There is a great need for all states to clarify their policies for full-day kindergarten. Each state's statute needs to clarify policies guaranteeing access to full-day kindergarten, specific rules for funding by the state, and specific standards on instructional and teacher quality (www.ecs.org). Currently each state varies on the definition of a full-day kindergarten.

“Kindergarten is not firmly established either as an integral part of the states’ emerging systems of early care and kindergarten in the United States” (Kaurez, 2005, p. 1). The reality is that kindergarten is not specifically well aligned with the policies of elementary schooling. In addition, the disconnect between pre-school education and kindergarten programming is a growing concern in suburban communities due to the lack of effective partnerships between suburban school districts and all pre-school providers.

Most school districts that receive extra funding dollars in economically disadvantaged communities are able to provide full-day programs under their school budgets. Districts that receive larger sums of Title I monies have been providing full day programs for over a decade (<http://www.state.pa.us>). Mandates for full-day kindergarten are primarily concentrated in the south (Kaurez, 2005).

State funding or subsidies vary from state to state. Ten states provide more funding for full-day kindergarten than half-day kindergarten (including Pennsylvania). Thirty eight states fund full-day and half-day at the same level. In Pennsylvania, the state statute provides an incentive to districts to offer full-day kindergarten. “An incentive exists when the state provided kindergarten funds are equal to or greater than the funding for first grade” (Kaurez, 2005, p.6). An explicit incentive occurs when the state provides more funding for full-day than half-day programs. A disincentive to districts to offer full-day

kindergarten means the state provides no difference in funding for full-day and half-day kindergarten. Great variation exists among the states for example The Journal of the National Association for Young Children (2005) provides a summary:

- “Only 16 states define kindergarten by statute.
- Only 2 states (Louisiana and West Virginia) require children to attend a full day program
- 7 states provide an explicit incentive to offer full day kindergarten
- 21 states provide funding incentives for districts to offer kindergarten
- 19 states provide a disincentive to districts to offer full day kindergarten.
- Only 9 states require school districts to offer full day kindergarten.
- 8 states do not require school districts to offer kindergarten (Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey are included in that number)
- Only 14 states require age eligible children to attend at least a half-day of kindergarten” (Kaurez, 2005, p. 5 /6).

Programs vary within each state depending on the funding priorities of local school boards, the urgency to meet the needs of all students at entry level age, availability of space, and teacher hiring. This inconsistency of kindergarten programming per state is a concerning problem to educators. “A consistent state policy about district offerings of kindergarten helps ensure an equitable distribution of programs and prevents large variations in program access from one school district to another within a state” (Kaurez, 2005, p. 5). This inconsistency in programming sends a clear message to Americans that kindergarten is not a high priority in education; it also clearly paints the picture of the lack of uniformity across the nation.

The push to strengthen and change public policy about kindergarten in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been growing with much intensity over the last several years. “Explicit state-level policies establish a foundation for program implementation and define what kinds of programs, with what level of quality, should be made available to which children” (www.ecs.org).

The Purdon’s Statues for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania defines the establishment of kindergarten, admission, attendance, organizational policy, and proof of pupil age. Kindergarten in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is not mandatory; compulsory school attendance is not mandatory until age eight. The local school boards maintain the autonomy to make most of the decisions pertaining to kindergarten practices. However, the state clearly defines the mandatory time frame of a minimum of two and one-half hours of instruction for a half-day session or a minimum of five instructional hours for a full-day session (<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12>). Once a program is established it is considered part of the elementary program.

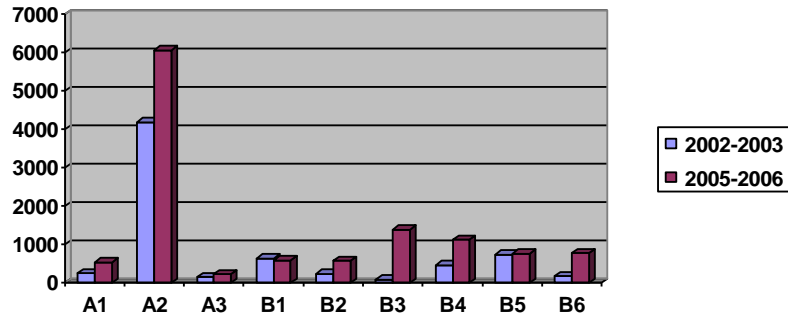
The issues with kindergarten programming specifically in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania arise from the changing demographics of districts throughout the state. Due to the increase of social economically disadvantaged students, ESL students, and single families, suburban districts are challenged to meet the needs of all students in kindergarten. Educators are challenged to meet the needs of all learners within this short time frame, expose students to effective resources for support, and engage children in meaningful instruction.

The following tables, Table 1.1 to 1.8 represent the full-day kindergarten enrollment in the sixty-seven counties in Pennsylvania. The tables demonstrate the enrollment

figures for the 2002-2003 school year and the 2005-2006 school year. Out of the sixty-seven counties in Pennsylvania, only one county did not offer full-day kindergarten or some variation of a full-day program (i.e. extended day for at risk learners) during the 2005-2006 school year. Due to the increase of block grants awarded to districts, most districts utilized the funds towards some variation of a full-day program with criteria created by the individual districts.

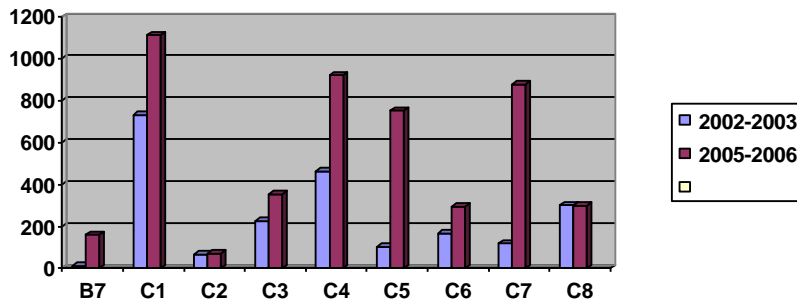
**FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN IN PENNSYLVANIA BY COUNTY
ENROLLMENT DURING 2002-2003 AND 2005-2006**

Table 1. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties A1-B6



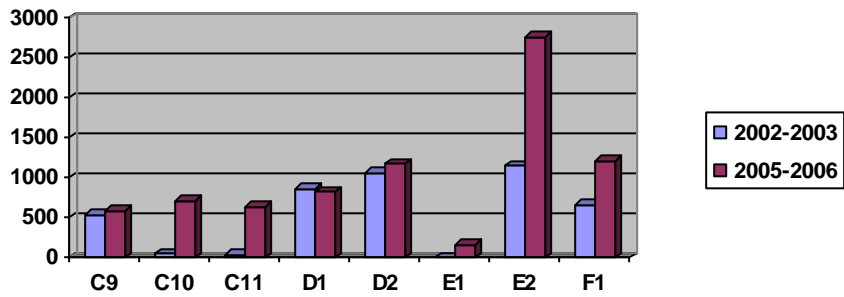
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6
2002-2003	251	4181	157	634	240	98	467	740	176
2005-2006	535	6058	223	587	579	1393	1126	761	779

Table 2. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties B7-C8



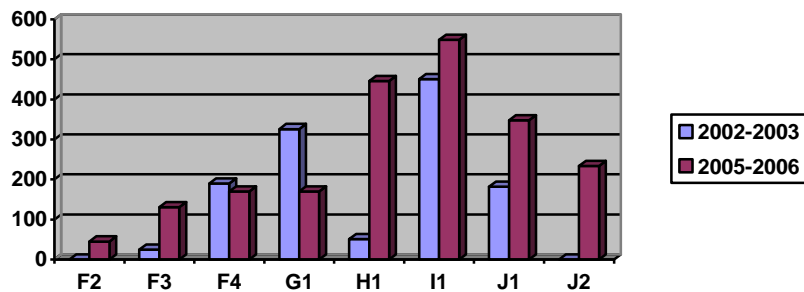
	B7	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8
2002-2003	12	733	67	226	463	103	168	120	301
2005-2006	161	1112	72	352	921	752	294	879	300

Table 3. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties C9-F1



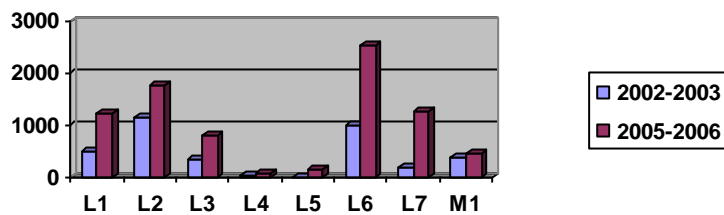
	C9	C10	C11	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1
2002-2003	537	55	44	860	1071	0	1152	663
2005-2006	592	717	646	827	1176	161	2754	1216

Table 4. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties F2-J2



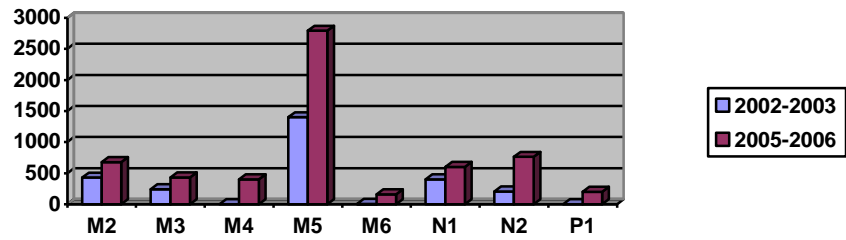
	F2	F3	F4	G1	H1	I1	J1	J2
2002-2003	0	25	190	326	51	451	182	0
2005-2006	45	131	170	170	446	549	348	234

Table 5. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties L1-M1



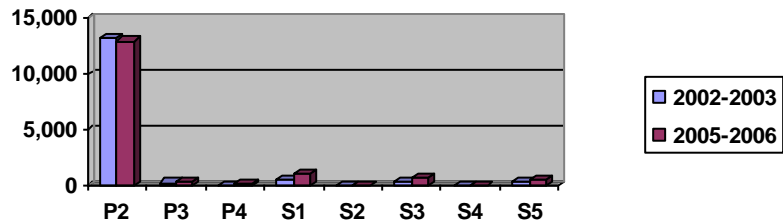
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	M1
2002-2003	516	1157	355	53	0	1018	182	379
2005-2006	1217	1751	817	80	144	2525	1275	467

Table 6. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties M2-P1



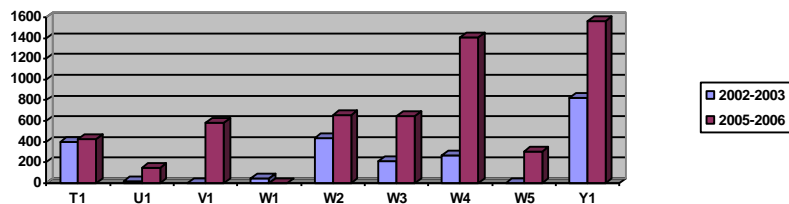
	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	N1	N2	P1
2002-2003	429	243	0	1400	4	402	204	0
2005-2006	677	452	400	2792	160	599	763	119

Table 7. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties P2-S5



	P2	P3	P4	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
2002-2003	13,200	326	105	623	2	435	52	390
2005-2006	12,890	379	188	1121	8	780	39	537

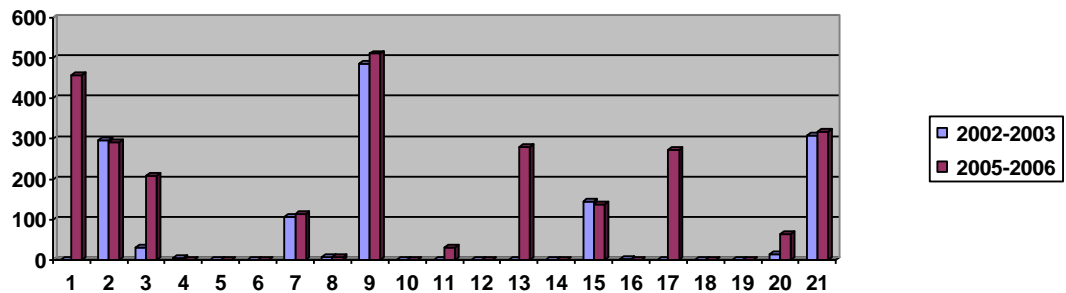
Table 8. Full Day Kindergarten in Counties T1-Y1



	T1	U1	V1	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	Y1
2002-2003	399	19	0	47	438	216	269	0	820
2005-2006	425	152	587	0	653	645	1402	305	1559

In the suburban districts under study in Southeastern Pennsylvania, ten of the twenty-one districts offered full-day kindergarten during the 2005-2006 school year indicating an increase of four districts from the 2002-2003 school year. Monies dedicated via block grants under the Rendell administration provided the additional funds for allocation of full-day programs or a variation of an extended day model for students needing additional support.

Table 9. Full Day Kindergarten Student Enrollment by District in One Southeastern Suburban PA County.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2002-2003	0	296	30	4	0	0	106	8	486	0
2005-2006	457	292	309	1	0	0	113	8	511	0

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
2002-2003	0	0	0	0	145	3	0	0	0	14	308
2005-2006	32	0	280	0	138	0	273	0	0	64	317

Funding

Too often districts focus on secondary schools to close the achievement gap; too many policymakers lack the foresight to realize that more emphasis at the primary years could possibly close the gap. In reality, policymakers need to focus their attention on prevention of an achievement gap. “Research is pointing to early childhood as a potent time for preventing the gap before it is established” (www.WestEd.org). Districts spend thousands of dollars on intervention programs at the intermediate and secondary levels to reduce the achievement gap. The priorities of many suburban districts are misaligned when it comes to solving the “gap” issues. A concerted effort to target funding and resource allocations toward early childhood programs, full-day kindergarten in particular, could be a reasonable solution to prevent any sort of an achievement gap (www.WestEd.org).

Ackerman et al. (2005) argue that many policymakers may assume too quickly that they cannot afford to implement full-day kindergarten or that substantially raising the cost of kindergarten will outweigh the potential benefit of a full-day schedule. Once effects on transportation costs, enrollment changes, grade retention and other remedial efforts are figured in, full-day kindergarten might turn out to be much less costly than policymakers think (Ackerman et al., 2005). At the present time, there is little data on the cost of full-day kindergarten compared to half-day kindergarten. Costs would vary according to the size of the district and the enrollment of students per elementary school. Districts seeking to explore full-day kindergarten would need to conduct a cost analysis prior to committing to a decision to move in that direction.

The Pennsylvania system has not recognized enrollment as a significant factor in generating additional state funds. Many school districts claim they simply cannot afford to double their kindergarten enrollments by shifting from half-day to full-day. Embedded in the financial implications are teacher salaries to increase staff, increase in materials, and acquiring appropriate space to house full day classes. Space continues to be a challenge to many districts when considering the shift from half-day to full-day. In most school districts, feasibility studies demonstrate the lack of space to provide for full day. In some cases, districts would have to build additional classrooms, realign existing space, or add modulars to accommodate all programs within individual buildings.

Another obstacle to consider for full-day kindergarten is the paradigm shift for parents, community, and educators as they relate to perceptions, values, and beliefs about the need and importance of a full-day program. Many districts, especially in Pennsylvania, have used variations in full-day programming by implementing pilot programs or extended day programs to gain community support. Districts that capitalized on block grants have been demonstrating to local districts the gains made from more time allotted to kindergarten students.

The challenge for districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, especially suburban districts, is to capitalize on the grants provided by the state and match them to district funds to make full day a reality. Urban school districts in the Commonwealth and low SES districts have matched funds to transition to full- day programming. Suburban districts would need to increase their tax base, cut existing programs, or shift monies to early childhood programs in order to fund full-day programming.

The influx of block grants in recent years to all districts within many of the states to supplement kindergarten programs through extended day models or other interventions for kindergarten students has partially addressed the funding problem. In July 2004, the General Assembly in Pennsylvania approved \$200 million in block grants for districts for the 2004-2005 school year to implement proven programs aimed at boosting student achievement. This was the first time such a large amount of block grant funding was appropriated for all 501 school districts. Rendell stated, “Accountability block grants will be used for tutoring, full-day kindergarten, pre-K programs, reducing class size, continuing professional education for teachers as well as other initiatives. Investing in early childhood education now will mean greater rewards for students’ families and schools in the future” (<http://www.state.pa.us>).

In 2006, Former Governor Edward Rendell stated, “Out of 501 school districts in the state, 419 of them have identified early childhood education as a high priority area” (www.able.state.pa.us/newsroom). As of 2006, 53,318 students in Pennsylvania were enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs. Highlights of the 2005-2006 mid-year block grant report included:

- Baldwin Whitehall School District (Allegheny County) reported an increase from 46% to 96% proficient in letter naming frequency and an increase from 35% to 69% in initial sound fluency as a result of full-day kindergarten.
- Anella Area School District (Washington County) reported a decrease in the number of children recommended for retention than in the past with half-day kindergarten.

Traditionally, states normally provide more funding for the disadvantaged districts that are in the most need of support. In recent years, suburban districts have been given the opportunity to apply for state grants to create/maintain extended day programs within the district.

The decision regarding where policymakers should direct funds needs to be guided by a cost/benefit analysis that compares and contrasts investments in full-day kindergarten programs to investments in other potential interventions, including programs that promote non-academic readiness skills (Le et al., 2006). Too often districts neglect to engage in a thorough analysis of the benefits of a full-day kindergarten due to their immediate need to remedy other urgent problems.

Levin and McEwan (2001) devised a specific system for estimating the tangible costs of a policy or program. "It requires calculating the expenditures and opportunity costs involved in providing five ingredients: personnel, facilities, equipment and materials, client inputs, and miscellaneous inputs" (Fowler, 2004, p. 246). Conducting a cost analysis in an organized and comprehensive manner will allow administrators and school boards to see first hand the financial impact of such a proposed program. Cost analysis determines exactly what the financial impact of a new project is likely to be and allows decision makers to move forward with planning (Levin & McEwan, 2001).

Fowler (2004) contends no policy, even a low-cost one, should be adopted if it is unlikely to be effective; any existing policy should be revised or dropped if it is proven ineffective. Any effective policy will demonstrate the intended outcomes as proposed. "Cost effective analysis is a systematic way to compare alternative methods for reaching the same goal in terms of cost and effectiveness" (Fowler, 2004, p. 265).

Levin and McEwan (2001) have outlined specific strategies for district leaders to follow for an efficient cost effective analysis. They include:

1. accurately identify one's true policy objective
2. select an appropriate measure of the effectiveness of the available alternative
3. conduct a thorough cost analysis on each alternative
4. review the research on the project and the alternative (s)
5. make the best choice

Fowler (2004) argues, "The best choice is not necessarily either the cheapest alternative or the most effective one. Cost must be balanced against effectiveness and keeping in mind the context in which the policy must be implemented" (p. 267). A careful reflection by district leaders is needed prior to taking action on a new policy or existing policy. "Most policy implementations fail primarily because those in charge of developing policy or planning the implementation did not think about their decisions" (Fowler, 2004, p. 267). In order to better understand the philosophical beliefs and ideological beliefs of decision makers, it is important for all leaders, especially school and district leaders, to reflect on their own values and beliefs about educational policies.

Values and Ideologies when Developing Policy

The following discussion describes some of the notions and ideas used by Stone and Fowler in their writing about policy development and values and ideologies.

In developing any policy, one must fully comprehend the values and ideology embedded in policy making. Values and ideological beliefs are the powerful forces for those proposing a policy. Fowler (2004) believes, "that due to the importance of ideas in the development and implementation of education policy, no policy proposal can be fully

understood without considering the values and ideological systems that under gird it” (p. 108). Fowler (2004) contends that “general social values pervade a society and are held by virtually all people, regardless of their ideological, philosophical, or religious commitments. These obvious values include order, individualism, democratic values, (liberty, equality, and fraternity) and economic values” (p. 110). Kindergarten policy remains controversial because there is not a foundation of shared values. There is considerable evidence in the wide range of implementation models of discrete ideologies and values. All of the groups contributing to full-day kindergarten policy, including legislature and school district leaders, have widely divergent perspectives as exemplified by the great variation in implementation.

Stone (2002) says there is no “gold standard” for policy making in our modern day society. Stone (2002) contends the issues of equity, equality, adequacy, and liberty are just a mere sampling of the many conflicts that gravitate to any policy issue in education. Stone’s (2002) argument demonstrates the contradictions embedded within policy issues. All individuals bring to a policy issue their own interpretation and perspective about the policy from their own view point. As this study sought to reveal, what values and ideals do district leaders uphold when programming for kindergarten within their districts?

Theoretical Policy Frameworks

Finally, the last section of the literature review discusses the theoretical bases for kindergarten programming as it pertains to district leaders’ perceptions and values for implementation. Theodore Lowi’s theory of redistributive policy will be discussed as one plausible theory to explain decision makers’ behavior when making programming decisions for kindergarten. Adler’s (1994) theory of centering a child in multiple

contexts will be discussed as a counter theory to illustrate decision making practices that put children first. This final section of the literature review focuses on educational policy changes. Specifically, the impact of federal and state expectations in Pennsylvania will be discussed along with a discussion of early childhood education policy.

Theodore Lowi's theory of redistributive policy guided this research as the predictive theory based on the premise that educational policy is generally explained by this theory since it is logical and pragmatic in meaning. Policy is explained and analyzed through theory. Lowi (2009) contends, "A policy is a rule formulated by some governmental authority expressing an intention to influence the behavior of citizens, individually or collectively, by use of positive and negative sanctions" (p. 21). Redistributive policies are less bureaucratic and more centralized in design.

Adler's (1994) theory of centering a child in multiple contexts guided this research as the descriptive theory. The child-centered theory calls upon policymakers to view children with a holistic lens, one that encompasses all aspects of the child including academic, social, health, and emotional aspects. This theory provided a framework to look at policy making and implementation from the perspective of the greatest benefit to children.

Lowi's Theory of Redistributive Policy

"In the United States, the history of political theory since the founding of the republic has resided in the Supreme Court" (Lowi, p. 314, 1969). "In a democracy, there is a tendency toward expansion of the public sphere, but no expansion can be shown a priori to be desirable or undesirable" (Lowi, p.ix, 1968). As Lowi argues, "Do democratic regimes legitimize themselves only through positive response in new programs, or is that

just a fashionable contemporary myth? Does each and every public policy produce an increment of public order, or have some forms of government action proven to be bad for public order” (Lowi, p.ix, 1968).

With any policy, federal, state, or local, the issue of power and the role it plays in agenda setting, development, formulation, and implementation is critical to the impact the policy will have on society at large. Lowi (2009) contends, “If power is defined as a share in the making of policy, or authoritative allocations, then the political relationship in question is a ‘power relationship’ or, over time, a power structure” (p. 688). In terms of kindergarten policy, the power structures at play are local school boards and politicians who are divided by policies for full-day programming based on their own perceptions about kindergarten.

Lowi (1964) contends, “The type of relationship to be found among people is determined by their expectations- by what they hope to achieve or get from relating to others. In politics, expectations are determined by governmental outputs or policies” (p.688). Lowi points out various key ideas as it relates to policy development and formulation. “A political relationship is determined by the type of policy at stake, so that for every type of policy there is likely to be a distinctive type of political relationship” (Lowi, 1964, p.688).

When developing policy at any level, it is crucial to think about who will be impacted by this policy the most or the least. Lowi (1964) contends, “The approach I have taken is to define policies in terms of their impact or expected impact on society” (p. 689). Hence, the major categories of public policies are distributive, regulatory, and redistributive.

“Each arena tends to develop its own characteristic political structure, political process, and group relations”(Lowi, 1964, p.690).

Lowi (1964) defines distributive policies as “policies that are characterized by the ease with which they can be disaggregated and dispensed unit by unit, each unit more or less in isolation from other units and from and general rule” (p. 690). Regulatory policies can be viewed as “policies that are specific and individual in their impact” (Lowi, 1964, p. 690). “Regulatory decision involves a direct choice as to who will be indulged or deprived.” Redistributive policies are viewed as policies that “are like regulatory in a sense of broad categories” (Lowi, 1964, p. 690). The impact is different with redistributive policies in that it focuses on the “haves and the have nots.” The aim of a redistributive policy is not the use of property but property itself and this is the category of policy most relevant to the kindergarten argument.

Fowler believes educational leaders should reflect on Lowi’s theories to better understand policy formulation and implementation. Fowler (2004) explains further that a redistributive policy is one that shifts resources of power from one social group to another. By redistributing sources, the government “seeks to control conduct indirectly by altering the conditions of conduct or manipulating the environment” (Lowi & Ginsberg, 1994, p.397). Redistributive policies can be defined under two broad categories. They are policies that “shift economic resources and those that shift power” (Fowler, 2004, p. 244). For example in the 1960’s and 1970’s redistributive policies “shifted power and resources from dominant social groups to groups that had been, or felt they had been, oppressed (Fowler, 2004, p. 245). Currently, most redistributive education policies shift power within the education establishment (Fowler, 2004). An

example of such a shift of power is found under Reagan's New Federalism which "shifted much authority over education from the federal to the state level" (Fowler, 2004, p. 245).

Kindergarten policies can be viewed from the lens of redistributive policy by placing more focus on early childhood education and funding for early literacy programs. "In education, redistributive policies are often controversial and tend to generate a political arena marked by conflict" (Fowler, 2004, p. 245). "The attitudes and discourse in this type of political environment are deeply ideological and marked by sharp division" (Fowler, 2004, p. 245). Policies should be understood in the short term. "In the long term, all policies are both regulatory and redistributive" (Fowler, 2004, p. 246).

According to Fowler (2004), "Lowi's basic policy types provide a way to anticipate the political environment that will develop around a policy both when it is under consideration and after its adoption" (p. 246). It is critical to understand with policy development that "the relationship between the techniques of control and their political arenas suggest ways to manage policy change at the local level" (Fowler, 2004, p.246). As is the case with local and state policy pertaining to kindergarten policies when it comes to a comprehensive understanding of the political powers that advocate or do not advocate for a change in kindergarten structure.

Adler's Framework for Centering a Child in Multiple Contexts

Being an advocate for children, an advocate to provide the best educational environment for all youngsters, and keeping students at the center of decision making about policy and programs requires an understanding of Adler's theory of centering a

child in multiple contexts. The following discussion will delve into Adler's theory as expanded upon by Marshall and Pepin.

To serve children and families, programs are needed that expand policy boundaries, necessitating the crafting of comprehensive and coordinated public policy (Adler & Gardner, 1994). Marshall and Pepin (2005) contend there are explicit interconnections "between levels of policy making and how a policy web of connections encompasses organizations and groups outside of education" (p. 236).

Marshall and Pepin describe Adler's framework as useful when examining or creating policy. Derived from Louise Adler (1994), it is known as the theory of 'centering a child in multiple contexts' (p. 238). This theory places the child in the center of the "policy web and examines the complex societal assumptions and policy norms, powerful structures and systems, and people who can shape a child's life" (p. 238). In our demographically challenging communities, are we meeting the needs of all learners in our current structure of kindergarten programming in suburban districts? Are we embracing the needs of our students from a holistic approach or through the process of an "as needed" approach? Adler (1994) contends, "In addition to programmatic changes, there must be a reorientation toward serving the whole child, rather than focusing on segmented needs" (p. 31).

In essence, this framework of centering a child in multiple contexts provides an expansive view of how policy can in fact embrace many forces and constituents. For example, Marshall and Pepin (2005) offer the following: "the student is enmeshed in a family situation, educational needs, economic situations, and psychological and physical health conditions which are embedded in a broader structure such as the specific issues

facing the community in which the child lives and the tangled web of district, state and federal policies based on assumptions that might be racially, culturally, and/or economically inequitable” (p. 238). The dominant values and key actors driving education politics have placed the needs of families and children at the margin. If educators and advocacy groups had access to the reins of power and budgets to create supports children need in schools, we would have different politics (Marshall & Pepin, 2005).

Embarking on a clear reform to shift all districts to a focus on mandatory kindergarten policies at the state level requires a deep analysis of educational policy change made over the decades. In doing so, “policy change requires policy actors and policymakers to be strategic about advocating for change” (Marshall & Pepin, 2005, p. 236). Direct attention must be given to each component of the “policy web and the multiple contexts in which they operate” (Marshall & Pepin, 2005). To create policy whether local, state, or federal encapsulates a wide view of many stakeholders such as politicians, educators, business interests, advocates, community groups, and parents. Depending on the depth and breadth of the policy will generate the interests of the stakeholders.

It is prudent to assume policy will include many facets and to accept that policy and politics are inseparable. Marshall and Pepin (2005) make it clear for educational leaders to understand that:

- No educational policy issue is solely about the classroom; it extends to societal goals and dilemmas.
- No dilemma in education ever gets dealt with completely, as one pressing demand overlaps another.

- Education policies are usually carried out via interconnecting and after competing demands from international, federal, state, local, and micro levels.
- Political and policy demands force decisions and actions that create further dilemmas, paradoxes, and peculiarities.

It is crucial to understand the policy web of leadership in order to envision how policies might be framed to better serve those intended.

The need for more attention at the kindergarten level is greater than ever based on the increased accountability and changing demographics. One of the greatest reasons is the ever changing structure of the American family which calls upon our school systems to provide the care for our young children (Kirst, 1992). “A combination of changing economic circumstances, which require large numbers of women to work, plus increased numbers of women who have chosen to work outside the home, has, perhaps permanently, altered the family, the fundamental structure for caring for children” (Kirst, 1992, p.300).

Educational leaders conduct the important business of schooling in the context of complex policy environments embedded with many political arenas (national and local) that influence the important decisions of meeting the needs of all students. This multi-leveled approach to educational policy has and continues to complicate the direct work of district leaders and school leaders to do what is best for students. The educational changes in policy making over the last forty years at the federal level provides a better understanding of the role of the federal government and state government in developing and implementing educational policy. The last portion of this literature review provides an analysis of educational policy from various levels.

Federal Policy

Over the decades a clear shift in political views about government responsibility has occurred in our nation. Historically, education policy has been under the guidance and direction of the state governments. “Political scientists and scholars of the politics of education have frequently pointed out that the process of policy development in the United States of America is unique because of the fragmentation caused by our federal system of government which requires the various levels of government to work cooperatively to move a policy issue forward, often resulting in policy stagnation” (Adler & Gardner 1994, p. 5).

Under Roosevelt’s New Deal, social services focused on relief and support for families. In the 60’s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations enabled the government to provide health care, develop programs for impoverished children, and “provide federal aid to stimulate innovation and equity through federally funded incentives to schools (Title I of ESEA)” (Marshall & Pepin, 2005, p. 242). In the 1960’s, “federal funds came with federal rules and required states and local communities to meet certain conditions to qualify for categorical funds” (Marshall & Pepin, 2005, p. 242). “The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided an equity rationale at the heart of federal education policy-the national government would provide states with supplemental funding and programs in the hope of equalizing educational opportunity for poor and minority students” (DeBray & McGuinn, 2009). During this era, there was no direct accountability attached to dollars; there were no clear guidelines for the accountability of student achievement.

From the period of 1965 to 1994 the teachers unions, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, were the two most powerful interest groups in education. Groups such as the Council of Chief State School Officers held political power as well. From 1965-1994 the unions strongly opposed school vouchers, merit pay, choice, charter schools, and rigorous standards and tests. The unions utilized their power to resist and prevent change in education on the issues they were opposed to during a particular shift in education policy.

The 1970's in education at the federal level observed a broad scale policy change under the Nixon administration termed as a period of "backsliding and loss." During this era, education observed the birth of public law (PL) 94-142 of 1975 titled the Education for Handicapped Children Act which provided a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities. This act demonstrated a "major policy shift with clear equity goals and specificity regarding methods for monitoring" (Marshall & Pepin, 2005, p. 243). "One result of the federal policy thrust of the 1970's and 1980's was that interest groups circled the policy wagons" (Adler & Gardner, 1994, p. 56). The general position of categorically based lobbies was to protect and defend established categorical programs (Adler & Gardner, 1994).

The Regan administration provided a realignment of values in education. Marshall and Pepin (2005) contend, "The new federalism meant deregulation and diminution of federal roles for education; new federalism sought to reduce the federal role in education by disbursing federal monies in block grants and leaving it up to state governments and political forces to set priorities" (p. 243). The Nation at Risk report in 1983 raised tremendous concerns within the political and educational arenas and caused the

governors to make new plans for the states to take the initiative with improving education in the nation. As an offspring of the Nation at Risk came such ideas as merit pay, vouchers, and charter schools. After withdrawing federal oversight, the United States Secretary of Education “assumed a bully pulpit role to advise and exhort, while each state bore the responsibility to make it happen” (Marshall & Pepin, 2005). In 1996, the Republican Party called for elimination of the federal role in education and the abolition of the United States Department of Education (DeBray & McGuinn, 2009).

Former President William J. Clinton’s struggle in the 106th Congress was fraught with partisan tensions between the Republicans and Democrats. The Republicans believed firmly in local control of schools with support from the Federal Government monetarily; the Democrats supported standards and accountability as mechanisms to close the achievement gap. The failure of Former President William J. Clinton to have an educational bill passed that stressed accountability to all school districts across our nation was directly tied to the lack of support and acceptance from the 106th Congress, primarily the Republicans. The division between parties and within parties had a major impact on policymakers coming to any sort of agreement on how to improve our educational system.

Several pertinent ideologies born under Clinton’s administration in the 106th Congress manifested itself in the 107th Congress such as: “Democrats would not step away from what they viewed as a historic commitment to the neediest students...Lieberman’s ‘proposal’ ensured that the subgroup accountability model remained alive in the policy stream...accountability whether through choice or intervention in failing schools needed to be strengthened in Title I” (DeBray, 2006, p.77).

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 gave birth to the mandated policy of No Child Left Behind under the Bush administration. This period represented a major shift in federal policy toward federal intrusion into education through the use of mandatory test scores to serve as the key indicator for student achievement and progress (Marshall & Pepin, 2005).

The historical view of federal educational policy over the past four decades has clearly demonstrated a dramatic overall increase in activity of influential interest group policies and increased federal emphasis on accountability (Marshall & Pepin, 2005). These federal shifts in policy thinking, control, values, and ideological differences will have a direct impact on the individual states, programs, and the needs of children.

Much has changed in education over the last seven years (2002-2009) since the passing of NCLB. Will the federal government create new policies for the K-2 structure in our schools to measure proficiency? What role will kindergarten play in the race for proficiency as defined by the federal government?

Pennsylvania Policy

In an address to the General Assembly to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (2003), Former Governor Edward Rendell stated that his “plan for Pennsylvania calls for all Pennsylvania to take charge of its own destiny, recognizing that tax reform and education are not simply important in and of themselves, they are also critical elements to revitalize Pennsylvania’s economy” (<http://www.votesmart.org/speech>). In 2003, Rendell emphasized how the lack of funding at the state level to support public education over the past decade has resulted in Pennsylvanians “shouldering the tax increases imposed upon them to assist with revenue for public education” <http://www.votesmart.org/speech>).

Rendell believes that investment in education can produce dramatic results and that money alone will not solve the problems and issues with failing public schools. Rendell believes in accountability for performance, proven practices, and highly qualified educators as major attempts toward improving public education in the state of Pennsylvania. Rendell (2003) contends, “Studies have shown that investment in early education can make all the difference for a young child. I know from first hand experience that full-day kindergarten works for our children. When I was mayor of Philadelphia we implemented full-day kindergarten in 1995, and by the end of the 2000 school year, according to the Council of Great City Schools, Philadelphia’s elementary test scores were rising the fastest of any big city school district in America.” (<http://www.votesmart.org/speech>). Rendell’s goal is to see every child in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have access to full-day kindergarten.

In the 2007-2008 budget year, Pennsylvania’s investment in pre-K through 12th grade was \$558 million for a total of 2.4 billion in new resources since Rendell took office as governor of the state. In the year 2007-2008, new Early Education investments included \$75 million for PA’s pre-K counts to give 11,000 more children an early start to learning through quality pre-K programs. Investments included an additional \$25 million in accountability block grant funds with \$20 million for full-day kindergarten programs. With this funding, nearly 7,600 more children were able to attend a full-day kindergarten program. All districts that currently offered full-day kindergarten received additional monies to support the investment.

Early Childhood Education Policies

“Early education from pre kindergarten to 3rd grade is a critical component of a strong education system. Lack of a coordinated integrated system from prekindergarten through high school has a large and wide spread negative impact on our ability to compete in the global market place” (www.newamericafoundation.net). Mead (2007), a policy researcher in Washington D.C., stated in a 2007 policy brief about early childhood education, “Evidence shows that roots of children’s academic success or failure are already firmly in place by third grade and as much as half of the black-white achievement gap already exists before children enter first grade. In order to meet the lofty goals established under NCLB, more must be done to support state and local entities to improve children’s education in the pre-school and early elementary years (Mead, 2007, p.1).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the nation’s premier organization for early childhood education professionals, offers several pertinent recommendations to the field pertaining to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and its impact on early childhood education. “NAEYC’s recommendations are focused on how Title I and other provisions of ESEA support positive development and learning of all eligible children from birth to third grade via a continuum of developmentally appropriate challenging standards, evidence based curriculum, and comprehensive instructional assessments supported with comprehensive services and meaningful family engagement” (www.naeyc.org). NAEYC strongly encourages local educational agencies, primarily school districts, to utilize these federal funding dollars to support early childhood education. NAEYC has made many pertinent

recommendations that provide the linkage to preschool and kindergarten. The following list will provide multiple recommendations made by this organization:

- Specialized knowledge for effective teaching and learning for teachers, principals, and other staff. There must be ongoing professional development for administrators, principals, special education directors in child development, developmentally appropriate practices, family engagement, and a supportive school climate of diverse cultures, language, and special needs.
- Create collaboration agreements and other mechanisms for ongoing communication between community-based early childhood programs and schools on issues of alignment, best practice, family involvement, and access to learning related services.
- Through Title I and its relationship to IDEA and Head Start, districts should ensure that children receive a developmental screening when they enter kindergarten if they have not had such a screening, with referral services as needed. (www.naeyc.org).

The West Ed Early Childhood Policy Brief (2005) suggests policy investments in early childhood initiatives should include an extended kindergarten day as a complementary part of the mix. The West Ed Policy Brief (2005) cited multiple effective statewide policies for full-day kindergarten that include the following:

1. ***Make access universal for full-day kindergarten with participation voluntary.***

In 2000, New Mexico and Arizona approved phased in plans that gave priority to schools with concentrations of students considered at risk or poor school performance and then expanded FDK to all schools over a five year period.

2. *Use of pilot program* in order to address concerns about unique policy contexts or demographics.
3. *Identify potential cost savings* which may include lower transportation costs since districts will not need separate bussing for kindergarten students. Another cost savings will be the early identification of services for students who may be in need of additional services to accommodate their learning needs.
4. *Develop a comprehensive strategic plan for early care and education from birth to age 8*. “Instead of addressing infants and toddler care, universal pre-school, kindergarten, and primary grade supports as separate initiatives, policymakers should address them as parts of the same whole” (<http://www.West.Ed.org>).

It is critical for policymakers who are involved at the early childhood education level to create a governance structure, identify gaps in service, analyze costs, and develop stable funding over time for the entire early childhood education continuum (<http://www.West.Ed.org>).

In a policy statement written by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009), calls for the 111th Congress to consider use of the federal economic efforts to support early childhood education efforts. “By making significant increases in child care, Head Start, and other early childhood education programs through federal economic recovery efforts and appropriate funding levels each year, we can stabilize employment for working families and we can help support the early childhood workforce with adequate compensation, professional development, and sufficient program resources” (www.naeyc.org). In essence, if we focus our resources, funding, and efforts

on a seamless comprehensive system of early childhood practices, the gaps we witness in children's development and learning in future years would diminish.

“Our goal is not to defend the status quo. NAEYC's convictions about early childhood education set forth a vision of a well-financed, high quality system of early care and education” (www.naeyc.org). One of the key recommendations presented by NAEYC is the joint professional development for teachers of young children in schools, childcare programs, state-funded prekindergarten, Head Start-particularly those teachers working with children in pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade (www.naeyc.org).

“Attention should be given to appropriate alignment of curriculum, assessment, and classroom practices; effective practices in teaching and supporting children and families of diverse backgrounds and experiences, children with disabilities, and children who are English-language learners” (www.naeyc.org). The effort to make every school a “ready” school to embrace the wide diversity of children economically, developmentally, and socially is an important argument of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. “All communities and states are accountable for the quality of their early childhood programs and support them through the local, state, federal, and private funding needed to deliver quality programs and services-investments which in turn will reduce the need for remedial and special education and lower teen pregnancy, school dropout rates, and the incidence of juvenile crime” (www.naeyc.org).

One of the major obstacles for policy implementation for full-day kindergarten centers on the issue of funding as noted earlier in the literature review. “Traditionally, policymakers have sought to identify the “best” programs, policy, or approach and support that. Best might be defined as the approach that provides the greatest

improvement in outcomes, addresses the community's greatest weakness, or other metric" (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008, p.30). Making a paradigm shift toward the economics of early childhood education policy will allow policymakers to realize the long-term impact resulting from all early childhood education programs that could have a positive and advantageous gain for our society. "The most widely recognized intersection between economics and early childhood policy is the analysis of the costs and benefits of early childhood programs and related analyses that describe the rate of return on investments in early childhood programs" (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008, p.29).

"The fundamental insight of economics when comparing early childhood policies to other social investments is that a growing body of program evaluations shows that early childhood programs have the potential to generate government savings that more than repay their costs and produce returns to society as a whole that outpace most public and private investments" (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008, p. 29). Economics contributes a unique insight into the way policymakers think about selecting how to invest in early childhood (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008).

Economists would argue for an "approach that would generate the most benefit per dollar allocated would be to identify an optimal portfolio of early childhood investments rather than selecting one early childhood approach and putting all resources in that basket" (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008, p. 30). The tendency with policymakers at the state and local levels is to do just that. Policymakers are proficient at examining early childhood education issues from a piece meal approach instead of a holistic approach, one that examines all aspects of the child from all demographic settings. Economic research in policy making, especially early childhood education, "promotes a

reorientation of child and human services toward investment and prevention, in contrast to the current approach of attempting to “treat” poor outcomes that manifest themselves later in the life cycle” (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008, p. 30). The call may be for policymakers to embrace full-day kindergarten as a long-term investment in education. The continued focus on secondary schooling to improve achievement tends to be the emphasis in most school districts. “Shifting toward a paradigm in which resources are invested in early human capital (early childhood education) might produce better outcomes, save tax payers money, and improve the quality of life for the people in whom we as a society invest” (Kilburn & Karoly, 2008, p. 30).

As stated in the Nation’s Report Card (2007) nearly 60% of White and Asian American fourth graders are reading below grade level while close to 85% of Latino, Black, and American Indian students are performing below grade level (Shore, 2009). Those in favor of full-day kindergarten contend the data are reflective of the lack of focus placed at the primary years to support student learning. Policy researchers support a more realistic approach to school reform- one that builds a solid foundation for learning opportunities every year from pre-kindergarten through third grade offering the best chance for raising achievement (Shore, 2009).

As mentioned in previous discussions throughout this literature review, the focus on middle and high school students to improve achievement is all too often the case in many school districts across the country. Improvement at the secondary level is indeed important, but the Nation’s Report Card offers powerful evidence that such initiatives rest on a shaky foundation (Shore, 2009). An earnest push to convince policymakers and

district leadership for a stronger comprehensive focus on the primary years of pre-kindergarten to grade 3 is needed in this nation.

Education reformers and policymakers at the state level tend to overlook the primary grades as a meaningful focus of school improvement. This is generally due to their assumption that children in the elementary schools are doing just fine (Shore, 2009). Policymakers and educators must ensure effective, evidence-based, developmentally informed learning experiences from the moment children enter school, and they must focus on the full span of years that lay the groundwork for later achievement (Shore, 2009). Policymakers will argue in favor of early learning experiences; however, the focus is often placed at the pre-kindergarten level and not kindergarten. Policymakers have paid far less attention to coordinating and consolidating the foundational early years of schooling or connecting them with what comes later (Shore, 2009).

Discussion

New legislation is proposed, new laws enacted, and new policies are implemented on a daily basis. Some policies make news; most do not (Adler & Gardner, 1994). In general, special interests capture policy via iron triangles known as interest group representatives, minor government officials, and small groups of legislators that have a particular interest in the issue (Adler & Gardner, 1994). In particular, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Former Governor Edward Rendell has been a major supporter of full-day kindergarten for all students within the Commonwealth. Most governors across the country support full-day kindergarten and encourage local districts to pursue avenues to make full-day a reality. However, the lack of continued support from interest groups could be one of the leading reasons why full-day kindergarten has

not been implemented in every state in the country. Interest groups, in effect, control the policy process, and government acts to freeze the status quo and retard innovation (Lowi, 1969).

In reality, policy is the product of the action of competing interest groups which strive for control, power and policy precedence in an ongoing political game of bargaining and compromise (Dahl, 1956). In the end, policy is the summed product of all the competing interests (Adler & Gardner, 1994). In order to change and shift a policy focus, we must change the political paradigm. Too often our educational policies are focused simply on the neediest children in low socio economic communities who benefit from such redistributive policies. In fact, the research is clear that students in urban settings and low socio economic communities have greater access to full-day kindergarten.

In today's society, full-day kindergarten may be needed for most children in order to provide the continuity of education and build an even stronger foundation for future learning. In order to have an impact on policymaking for kindergarten, the traditional way of creating policy (redistributive) must be rethought so all children have equal opportunity to a full-day of learning during their kindergarten year regardless of their demographics. "Creating coordinated, comprehensive, integrated policy for children requires breaking the mold of political convention, changing the current political paradigm, and dramatically altering the rules of the political game" (Adler & Gardner, 1994, p. 59). Traditional views of the policy development cycle are summarized as a process that starts with the recognition of a problem followed by the formation of a study group, the development of policy recommendations, political decisions in legislative and budgetary processes, implementation, and evaluation (Gramlick, 1981).

Conclusion

The nature of this study sought to disclose why some suburban school districts in Pennsylvania implemented a full-day kindergarten program and others did not. This study will help educators to understand the values, opinions, and perceptions of district leaders as it pertained to their goals for kindergarten programming. Did these district leaders firmly believe in early childhood education and understand that the achievement gap can be reduced with a deepened commitment and focus on kindergarten? Reinforcing this foundation requires a rigorous focus on the stretch of years from pre-kindergarten to third grade, when children acquire the cognitive, social, and academic skills that undergird later learning (Shore, 2009). In the midst of the pre-kindergarten to third grade continuum is the critical year of kindergarten.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

The selection of a case study design was appropriate in order to collect data on the perceptions, values, and beliefs of district leaders as they pertained to kindergarten programming. The researcher's decision to focus on a qualitative case study design was based on her quest to discover and interpret the values and opinions of a particular population in one focused geographical setting. The researcher's goal was to gather information and pertinent data from this one slice of phenomenon to provide a deeper and richer understanding about kindergarten programming in suburban communities.

“Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). The main thrust of this qualitative research was for the researcher to understand how district leadership constructed meaning and made sense of their experiences with decision making about kindergarten. “In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Hence, this was the desired outcome of the researcher in this study.

Maxwell (1996) suggests that qualitative research studies are particularly suited for; “understanding the particular context within which the participants’ act... identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating grounded theories about the

latter... it helps to expose the process by which events and actions take place...and, it can be useful in developing causal explanations” (pp. 19-20). Yin (2003) explains that the value of a case study is that it “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p.2).

To capture the true essence of what district leaders were thinking and to garner an understanding of the values held by district leadership about kindergarten programming, the inquiry was conducted through interviews with key informants including school board members, superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of elementary education and curriculum directors. Interviews were critical to the nature of this study in that they provided the needed data to answer the proposed research questions. “In this type of research, the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but the potential of each person interviewed to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomena” (Merriam, 1998, p. 83). The researcher developed a protocol for the interview process consisting of seventeen specific interview questions. The intent of the researcher was to utilize the prepared questions as a guide to conduct interviews that were fluid in a conversation-like manner. As noted by Yin (2003), “the researcher has two jobs: (a) to follow her own line of inquiry, as reflected by the case study protocol, and (b) to ask actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of the line of inquiry” (p. 89-90).

Observations in the field were necessary to obtain a true sense of the natural setting of district board meetings to establish a sense of the culture of the districts under study. Informal observations were conducted through field visits. The informal observations “offered a first hand account of the situation under study and, when combined with

interviewing and document analysis, allowed for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p.110). Detailed notes were recorded about the informal observations to include setting, what was being observed, interactions, and descriptions.

A careful review of district documents such as district strategic plans, curriculum, school goals, achievement data, and the mission/vision of each district were collected as data for analysis. These documents served as another valuable source of data collection as the researcher attempted to answer the specific research questions posed in this study. The researcher sought to disclose how kindergarten programming fit into the K-12 structure of the districts under study to determine the value and priority setting in these suburban communities. “Documentary data are particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they ground an investigation in the context of the problem to be investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p.126).

The case study design was compatible with the goals of the study, the research questions proposed, and the activities outlined to conduct the case study. A sample of sixteen district leaders from four suburban districts in one county was selected for this case study. The case study design allowed the researcher to derive meaning from the participants’ perceptions and actions observed throughout the course of the study. The case study design allowed the researcher to better understand the reality of these four districts by digging deeper into their ideals and beliefs about kindergarten programming. It was critical for the researcher to make meaning of these perceptions so that she could answer the research questions and provide thickly descriptive reports from many perspectives.

The main thrust of this case study was to examine the process in which leaders made complex decisions such as implementing full-day kindergarten. A case study design was applicable for this study since it was rooted in context. The researcher knew the larger cultural context played a pivotal role in the attitudes, values, and perceptions of the districts. The larger context of the K-12 system was examined to reveal the overall goals of the district plan.

At the end of the case study, which stood alone, the researcher was able to make a conclusion about this particular view of this single phenomenon. The case study was most appropriate because it was solely interested with the opinions and perceptions of the participants. The researcher's desire was to learn as much as she could from immersion in these sites. An investigation into the phenomenon revealed valuable insight to others who might examine the research seeking to understand how and why full-day kindergarten may or may not be the most appropriate model of kindergarten for their district.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was a doctoral student at a research university located in a large city in Pennsylvania. The researcher possessed qualifications and experiences that enabled her to undertake this particular study. The researcher had twenty six years experience in elementary education with twelve years as an elementary teacher and fourteen years as an elementary principal. The researcher worked in three educational systems during her career, the parochial school system, the urban school system and the suburban school system. The researcher holds a Bachelor's of Science in Elementary Education, a

Master's of Art in Educational Administration, and a Letter of Eligibility for the Superintendency.

The researcher had first hand knowledge of best practices in educational settings primarily at the K-6 level. Specifically, the researcher was well versed in curriculum, methodologies, and curriculum at the primary level due to her years of being a teacher and administrator. The researcher was heavily involved in the conversion of half-day kindergarten programs to full-day models in the late 90's under the Hornbeck administration in Philadelphia. As a current elementary principal in suburban Pennsylvania, the researcher had first hand knowledge of the half-day model presently in operation in her district.

The researcher possessed the knowledge of early literacy programs and had implemented successful literacy programs at the early childhood level throughout her career. The researcher had extensive training in balanced literacy, kindergarten assessments, achievement data analysis, and selection of reading and math programs at the primary level. The researcher served on many district committees one being an Extended Day Model for kindergarten.

The researcher believes full-day programming is appropriate for students who require the additional background experience, readiness skills, and time to be ready to enter first grade. The researcher believes that children in suburban communities are not given an option for kindergarten since the majority of districts only offer a half-day model. The researcher believes suburban districts may be unaware of the possible advantages to offering a full-day model due to their lack of research analysis, cost/benefits analysis and personal beliefs about full-day kindergarten. The researcher may be biased towards a

full-day kindergarten model due to her experience working with both models in both the inner city and suburban settings. In order to control for bias, the research was as accurate as possible while conducting the research and reporting the findings. The research was open to contrary findings. The researcher controlled for her own biases by “reporting preliminary findings to two critical colleagues who offered alternative explanations and suggestions for data collection” (Yin, 2003, p.62). According to Yin (2003), “If the quest for contrary findings can produce documentable rebuttals, the likelihood of bias will have been reduced” (p.62).

Due to the researcher’s direct contact in the field and years of experience with primary grades, the researcher was aware of her own biases about her perceptions, values, and opinions pertaining to full-day kindergarten. The researcher’s knowledge of kindergarten, knowledge of the politics of policy at the district level, direct contact with data, and best practices could have influenced her beliefs about full-day kindergarten. The researcher’s role as a principal and years of experience could have created limitations to the study in that the researcher needed to refrain from expressing her own beliefs directly to participants. If participants were aware of the researcher’s position in education and vast experiences, this could have limited the honest responses of the participants. However, this awareness led the researcher to be scrupulous in the collection and analysis of data.

Population and Sample

The intended population for this case study was four suburban school districts located outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Two of the districts currently operated full-day kindergarten programs and the other two districts currently operated half-day

kindergarten programs. All four districts were diverse; varied in size and economic status. The four districts were from one county which contained a total of twenty-one districts. The districts selected for the study were the Montrose School District, Cornerstone School District, Westerly School District, and Herbertsville School District.

The similarity in the four suburban districts being studied was based upon their close proximity to a large urban city, Philadelphia. All districts received Title I funding but in varying degrees. The varied responses from the participants in the study allowed the researcher to conclude priority setting for district leaders as it pertained to kindergarten programming along with the philosophical beliefs districts possessed about kindergarten. Due to the varying demographics and needs of each district, the researcher attempted to conclude common trends, patterns, and policies about each district to find commonalities.

The first school district, Westerly School District, was located 22 miles north of center city Philadelphia in the heart of suburban Montgomery County (<http://www.wsd.org>). The district had a population of 31, 923 residents and served approximately 4,507 students (<http://www.wds.org>). The district was comprised of five elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. There were currently 388 full time and part time certified teachers. The students came from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in which a substantial portion of the adult population was composed of college graduates (<http://www.wsd.org>). The budget for 2009-2010 included \$86 million dollars in expenditures with approximately 75% of the budget expended for staffing costs (<http://www.wsd.org>). The kindergarten model in Westerly District was full-day.

The second school district, Herbertsville District, was located approximately 17 miles north of center city Philadelphia in Montgomery County. The student enrollment was approximately 5,500 students with a configuration on five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The budget for the 2009-2010 school year was approximately 84 million dollars. Eighty-one percent of the budget was derived from local resources, 16.75% from state funding, and 2.49% from the federal government (<http://www.hatboro-horsham.org>). Approximately 61% of monies were expended for instructional costs, 31% for support services, 1.61% for non-instructional services, and 6.34% for debt services (<http://www.hatboro-horsham.org>). The Herbertsville School District offered a half-day kindergarten model.

The third school district, Cornerstone School District, was located northwest of Philadelphia. The district was comprised of five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school (<http://www.nces.ed.gov>). The district had approximately 720 employees which included 374 professional staff, 50 administrative staff, and 296 support staff (<http://www.colonialsd.org>). The budget for the 2009-2010 year was \$92,000.00. The district encompassed two townships and one borough with approximately 40,368 residents. The low income percentage was 14% with expenditure per student of approximately \$19,000.00. The total student enrollment for the district was approximately 4,689 students K-12 (<http://www.colonialsd.org>). The Cornerstone School District operated a full-day kindergarten model.

The final district, Montrose School District, located in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania served approximately 11,000 households. The district served over 5,300 students within its five elementary schools, two intermediate schools, and one

high school. The Montrose District employed over 800 people, more than 400 of whom were teachers (<http://methacton.org>). The budget for the 2009-2010 year was \$87,000.00. The Montrose School District provided a half-day model for kindergarten programming.

Table 10. DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOUR SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

DISTRICT	BUDGET 2009-2010	STAFFING	STUDENT POPULATION	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	DISTRICT LEADERSHIP
WESTERLY SCHOOL DISTRICT (FDK)	\$86 million	388 Full time and Part Time Teachers	4,507	5 E 1 M 1H	1 Superintendent 1 Assistant Superintendent 1 Director of El.Ed. 1 Supervisor of Ed. Programs
HERBERTS-VILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT (HDK)	\$84 million	390 Professional Staff	5,500	5 E 1M 1 H	1 Superintendent 1 Assistant Superintendent of Elementary 1 Assistant Superintendent of Secondary 1 Director of Curriculum
CORNER-STONE SCHOOL DISTRICT (FDK)	\$92 million	374 Professional staff	4,689	5E 1M 1 H	1 Superintendent 1 Assistant Superintendent 1 Director of Cur., Instr., and Asses. 4 Curriculum Supervisors
MONTROSE SCHOOL DISTRICT (HDK)	\$87 million	400 Professional Staff	5,339	5E 1M 1H	1 Superintendent 1 Assistant Superintendent 1 Director of Pupil Services

KEY

E= Elementary School
M= Middle School
H= High School
(HDK) Half-day kindergarten
(FDK) Full-day kindergarten

Student Demographics in Four Districts

The enrollment figures *K-12* for the 2009-2010 year were relatively within the same range the smallest district, Westerly, was 4,455 students and the largest district, Montrose, was 5,339 students. The Cornerstone School District had the largest per pupil spending of \$16,711.00 for 2009-2010 and the Montrose School District had the lowest per pupil spending of \$13,616 per pupil. The data revealed that the Montrose School district had the largest enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year and the lowest per pupil spending. The Montrose School District did not have a full-day kindergarten program.

The Cornerstone School District, one of the two districts in the study offering full-day kindergarten, had the largest per pupil spending. The Cornerstone School District had the highest percentage of special education (19%) for the 2009-2010 school year. The Westerly School District, the other district in the study with full-day kindergarten, had the highest African American population (12 %), Asian population (13%), and Latino population (5%). The Herbertsville and Cornerstone Districts had the same percentage of gifted students (4%). The two districts not offering full-day kindergarten, Montrose and Herbertsville, had the lowest per pupil spending of the four districts studied. Both districts' per pupil spending were within \$300.00 of each other.

The Social Economically Disadvantaged students reported for the 2009-2010 school year revealed that the Westerly School District had the largest percentage of social economically disadvantaged students, 11%. Westerly is the smallest populated district with an average enrollment of 4,455 students across grades K-12. The Herbertsville and Montrose School Districts were within one percentage point of SED, Herbertsville

(7.8%) and Montrose, (6.9%). The Cornerstone School District revealed an SED percentage of (8%). The Economically Disadvantaged numbers are based upon free and reduced breakfast and lunch determination. The criteria for determining eligibility is based on family income and is consistent with determination across all school districts.

Both school districts offering full-day kindergarten had the highest per pupil allotment for their population. It should be noted that the Cornerstone District had the largest per pupil spending out of the four districts in the study.

The following chart provides a snapshot that represents data from the 2009-2010 school year. The graphic provides student demographic information for the four suburban districts studied. The chart represents each district's enrollment, *ethnicity (white, black, asian, and latino)*, *special education, gifted, economically disadvantaged*, and *total per pupil spending*. The PSSA data represents scores for the 2008-2009 school year

Table 11. STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS OF FOUR SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS 2009-2010

DISTRICT	K-12 POP.	PER PUPIL	WHITE	BLACK	ASIAN	LATINO	SPEC. ED.	GIFTED	SED	PSSA 08/09 % Prof. or Adv. (Gr. 3-6)
WESTERLY <i>FDK</i>	4,455	\$16,170	68%	12%	14%	5%	10%	8%	11%	Math 89% Read 84%
HERBERTS VILLE <i>HDK</i>	5,122	\$13,931	83%	5%	8%	2%	12%	4%	7.8%	Math 92% Read 88%
CORNERSTONE <i>FDK</i>	4,689	\$16,711	80%	8%	5%	2%	19%	4%	8%	Math 93% Read 86%
MONTROSE <i>HDK</i>	5,339	\$13,616	77%	3%	13%	2%	15%	9%	6.9%	Math 93% Read 87%

Data were derived in combination from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and The Philadelphia Inquirer's Report Card on the Schools April 11, 2010. The chart was created by the researcher.

**Note: HDK= Half-day kindergarten
 FDK= Full-day kindergarten
 K-12 Pop.= K-12 Student Enrollment
 SED=Social Economically Disadvantaged**

Due to the topic of the study and the nature of the research questions, it was only logical to conduct a purposeful sampling of participants so that the research questions could be answered. Since the study was intended to reveal the perceptions and values of district leaders in regards to kindergarten programming, the participants involved informants who were directly involved in the decision making for kindergarten

programming. A combination of four district leaders from each district participated in the study yielding a total aggregate of sixteen participants. Such key informants included school board members, superintendents or assistant superintendents, directors of elementary education, and directors of curriculum. The organizational chart for each district varied; therefore, all titles of key central office stakeholders were not the same. Purposeful sampling was a “strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). The researcher was confident purposeful sampling was the best method for selecting the participants and population to “achieve representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals or activities selected” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 89).

The researcher did not randomly select districts because the researcher was seeking to conduct research in one county in one state of selected districts that were demographically diverse including English Language Learners, Title I, SED, high achieving, and affluent neighborhoods. One research question was seeking to find answers to resource allocations and priority setting as it related to kindergarten programming. The researcher was confident she would acquire enough rich data from the sample to effectively answer the research questions.

Data Collection

Qualitative research methods were inductive; they were based on the descriptive and specific data that were necessary to understand the leadership perceptions about kindergarten programming. Data were collected primarily from interviews, informal observations, and a review of district documents. The rationale for this method of data

collection was that in order to determine each district's priority, focus, and vision for kindergarten, direct contact in the field along with document reviews provided insight into these specifics.

The interview protocol consisted of seventeen questions as a general guide to the interview process. A combination of four district leaders was interviewed for approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. Each participant was only interviewed once. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed immediately to ensure accuracy. The researcher located a quiet space, a central office locale, to conduct the one-on-one interview for each participant. The interviews took place at a time that was convenient to the interviewee. Open-ended questions were used at the beginning of the interview such as "tell me about yourself" to put the participant at ease. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interview process with a specific focus on gathering information about the participants' perceptions, values, and beliefs about kindergarten programming in their district. The interview protocol was developed by the researcher.

Each superintendent of the district received a Consent Form and Introductory Letter about the study. Each superintendent indicated to the researcher his/her interest and permission to conduct the study in the district. After approval was granted by the superintendent, each interviewee participant received a General Consent Form to sign prior to participating in the interview. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured by coding and concealing the identity of the participants. Each district was assigned a pseudonym.

Direct observations in the field included attendance at two Board meetings for each school district during the spring of 2010 that provided the researcher with a first hand

account of any items being addressed that related to early childhood education, specifically kindergarten. The researcher took notes during each board meeting and reviewed Board meeting minutes on each district's website. The researcher could not gain access to any cabinet meetings or other management meetings in the districts.

The data collection consisted of a review of district documents. The researcher was able to access data through each district's website such as strategic plans, mission/vision statements, and general curriculum information. The researcher requested other pertinent district documents such as achievement data for grades K-3, specific kindergarten curriculum, school goals, board minutes, and policies pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Data Analysis

In an effort to explore the participants' perceptions and opinions of kindergarten programming, the participants were audio-taped to capture their responses from the interview session. The researcher transcribed and reviewed the audio-tapes consistently to maintain close proximity to the data as it was emerging. Existing research on leadership perceptions of kindergarten programming were reviewed by the researcher to ascertain other researchers' methods and procedures for analysis.

As the data were collected, the initial step to the analysis process consisted of a comprehensive review of the transcribed interviews, field notes from the interviews, field notes from the Board meeting observations, and district documents. The researcher had some initial ideas and conceptions about the overall organization in this case study. The data were coded into categories and themes. The process of coding allowed the researcher to make comparisons within and between the categories that contributed to the

developing of ethical concepts of theory. Varying colored poster boards were used to organize the responses from the interviewees into emerging themes. As major themes emerged from the transcribed interviews, the researcher posted the direct quotes from the respondents to support the theme. To most researchers engaged in qualitative research, coding serves as an initial step toward an analytic lens of the data. “Coding occurs at two levels-identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). Further stated, “the coding system can be quite simple, as in identifying a theme that can be illustrated with numerous incidents, quotes, and so on” (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). Maxwell (2005) contends, “The goal of coding is to rearrange data into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p. 96).

None of the Board meetings attended during the spring of 2010 yielded any specific data about kindergarten in general. Most Board meetings focused on budgetary issues as districts were preparing to finalize an adoption of next year’s budget. Therefore, the researcher relied on the respondents’ interviews as the primary data source for this study.

The constant comparative method was used as the primary strategy for data analysis. As interviews were transcribed, district documents reviewed, and Board meetings reviewed, the researcher continually immersed herself in the data by constantly comparing and analyzing the emerging data for an evolving theory.

After coding, the researcher used the constant comparative method to continue analysis of the data collected. As a result of the data analysis, Merriam (1998) claims the following will occur:

“When categories and their properties are reduced and refined and then linked together for tentative hypothesis, the analysis is moving toward the development of a theory to explain the data’s meaning. This third level of analysis transcends the formation of

categories, for a theory seeks to explain a large number of phenomena and tell how they are related” (p. 159).

Descriptive statistics were used to portray the data. Comparisons and correlations within the data sources were analyzed to compare patterns and relationships that developed within the data. The researcher then compared the patterns, trends, and relationships analyzed in the data to the evidence cited in the literature review and theoretical backgrounds.

The intent of the data analysis was to compare patterns and relationships that emerged in the data to the corresponding evidence cited in the literature review and theoretical framework. The researcher is confident this study could add to the current literature for full-day kindergarten, especially for suburban populations. This study has the potential to inform district leaders and policymakers at the local and state level for the future of kindergarten programming. This study stands on its own as a bounded event.

Methods of Verification

There were many procedures and safeguards to implement to ensure internal and external validity. The following discussion addresses four of those safeguards specifically.

Long term intensive involvement by the researcher was one attempt to ensure internal/external validity. The researcher spent a maximum of six months to conduct the interviews, conduct informal observations, and review the documents. The researcher immersed herself in the study by being present in the field (school districts) to conduct interviews and observations of key informants such as superintendents, school board members, directors of elementary education, and curriculum directors. The researcher immersed herself in the review of district documents such as district strategic plans,

achievement data, school plans, and curricular documents in order to obtain a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the kindergarten model in each district. The informal observations of board meetings provided the researcher with yet another method of gathering data.

One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multi-dimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research (Merriam, 1998). And because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher familiarized herself with the central office officials and key players to learn about the culture of the district. It was critical for the researcher to establish connections at the initial phase of this case study to instill credibility with those members involved in the case study.

Respondent validation was another procedure that was used by the researcher. Respondents were afforded the opportunity to verify the data collected from the interviews to establish accuracy and correct information. Respondents had the opportunity to read the transcripts of the interview or read direct quotes that were going to be incorporated in the case study. Respondents were given the opportunity to review the conclusions of the study to eliminate any misconceptions about their responses and interpretation of those responses. Merriam (1998) suggests, "Taking the data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results were plausible" (p. 204).

Searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases served as another attempt to ensure validity. The researcher needed to be aware of the possibility that some informants may be fearful of being honest about their values and beliefs as it pertains to kindergarten programming. The researcher executed prudent judgment to determine the value of those discrepant accounts to assess its impact on the conclusion. It was important for the researcher to actively look for negative cases since this topic tends to be controversial in some communities. An in-depth analysis of discrepant data was needed in this case study. Seeking feedback from others in the field was helpful so the researcher could keep her own biases in check.

The procedure of triangulation served as a viable measure to ensure validity. “A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many sources of evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 97). The use of multiple sources of evidence on kindergarten programming and decision making was paramount to this study. The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence was the development of converging lines of inquiry, the process of triangulation (Yin, 2003). It was necessary to create a diverse informant base for the interviews. Informants included school board members, superintendents, directors of elementary education, and curriculum directors which enabled the researcher to gather perspectives from various informed audiences.

Conducting interviews and observations along with district document reviews reduced the chance of systematic biases in the field. Triangulation alone did not increase validity; however, it was important for the researcher to consider the possible validity threats by examining the existing biases apparent within the districts involved in the case study. “Thus, any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more

convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode” (Yin, 2003, p. 98).

Finally, member checking served as another viable measure to ensure validity. The researcher sought feedback from other experts in the field of education pertaining to the data and conclusion. Such experts included fellow colleague principals, learning coaches, and other professionals involved in early childhood education. Obtaining feedback from fellow classmates in the doctoral program proved to be meaningful and insightful as well.

The researcher enacted simple descriptive statistics to organize the data collected in the study. The researcher suggests that several patterns or repeated occurrences of responses in the data collected from the participants emerged in this study on district leaders’ perceptions of full-day kindergarten.

The researcher continually analyzed each segment of the data as they were collected; she also continued to keep in the forefront the overarching research questions to ensure the study was on target and aligned to the intent of the research. The researcher was in constant on-going communication with her dissertation chair for advice, guidance, and editing of the study.

Ethical Issues

To maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the study, no real names were used for any subjects or districts. The issue of confidentiality was fostered by securely retaining all qualitative data including field notes, interview transcripts, names and other types of identifying information under close supervision. Pseudonyms were created for the various sites and all participants remained anonymous. All materials relevant to the study

were kept in a locked filing cabinet only accessible to the researcher. The researcher made every attempt to treat all participants fairly and with dignity by designing ethically sound interview questions with the intent to answer the research questions. The researcher was aware that ethical concerns must be considered while establishing protocols, while conducting the study, and during dissemination of the results.

All participants who agreed to contribute to the research were fully informed of its purpose, rationale, and potential benefits to future district leaders. All participants of the study were required to sign a consent form stating their understanding of the conditions of the study and their role in the study.

The researcher ensured all conditions and procedures outlined by the Institutional Review Board were followed and upheld. The researcher believes the scope of this research did not pose a threat to any participants' well being, reputation, or job status. The researcher ensured proper ethical considerations at all levels of the research from the initial phase to its final publication. In the end, "the best a researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-à-vis these issues" (Merriam, 1998, p. 219).

Outcome of the Study and its Relation to Theory and Literature

The principal literature strands connected to this study were the current kindergarten policies at the state and local levels, the supports and critiques of full-day kindergarten, the resource allocations for districts, achievement related to full-day kindergarten along with the two competing theories, Lowi's theory of redistributive policy and Adler's theory of centering a child in multiple contexts. The following discussion provides the linkage to the existing knowledge base and the contribution of this study.

The discussion in the literature review provided the reader with the positive gains noted from full-day kindergarten programs, specifically in large inner city districts. It revealed the lack of sufficient data for suburban districts and implicated how no data have been cited for gains in achievement for suburban districts. When decision makers pursue new programs, they review the research to understand the benefits of such programs. It was the assumption of the researcher that since the data for suburban communities were limited, suburban leaders may tend to place full-day kindergarten as a low priority. The contribution of this study will provide leaders with insight into the perceptions, values, and beliefs of other districts who moved forward with the implementation of full-day kindergarten despite the limited data to comparable suburban districts. The contribution of this study will illuminate why these districts were confident in their decision making to move forward with implementation of a full-day program.

The outcome of the study will shed more light on state policies for kindergarten programming within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as well as around the country. Within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, early literacy initiatives such as Pre-K Counts and block grants provide the financial support for school districts across the Commonwealth to implement programs that will have a direct impact on early years. Former Governor Rendell (2004) stated, “As a cornerstone of my administration, block grants will be used for tutoring, full-day kindergarten, pre-K programs, reducing class size, and continuing education for teachers” (www.state.pa.us/papower/cwp). Rendell’s attempt to focus on early childhood education programs had been a primary goal under his leadership. Policies at the Commonwealth level continually change as advocates for full-day kindergarten continue to rally for more programs. However, due to the deeply

rooted values and beliefs of policymakers at all levels on the issue of full-day kindergarten, the issue of access to full-day kindergarten for suburban students has not been resolved.

The researcher believes that suburban districts refrain from this discussion of full-day kindergarten due to costs including salaries, materials, and space. Do district leaders conduct a cost/benefits analysis of kindergarten or are they quickly assuming full-day kindergarten is not needed in their district? Do district officials elicit feedback from the parents and community to ascertain their position of full-day kindergarten? Do suburban districts evaluate their current model of kindergarten programming to determine if the program is meeting the needs of its population? The researcher contends that the outcome of this study will provide for the reader a deeper understanding of district priorities and where exactly kindergarten falls within the districts' priorities.

As noted earlier in the literature review, the issue of full-day kindergarten is a policy issue with deeply embedded ideological tensions. All stakeholders involved with kindergarten programming bring to the issue their own values, opinions, and beliefs about the current practices surrounding the issue of kindergarten. Lowi's theory of redistributive policy provides the current lens of how this policy would be addressed by redistributing funds or power from one priority to another, full-day kindergarten. Redistributive policies shift economic resources from one policy to another. Lowi's theory of redistributive policy provides an understanding of how policy is made or refined in education.

The ideal vehicle to understand decision making about children, especially educational policy decisions, is through Adler's theory of centering a child in multiple contexts. To

serve children and families well, programs are needed that expand policy boundaries, necessitating the crafting of comprehensive and coordinated public policy (Adler, 1994). This theory places all the needs of a child at the center of decision making so the most effective and beneficial policies can be determined for children. This theory of policy making is idealistic; however, is least likely used by decision makers in education. “In addition to programmatic changes, there must be a reorientation toward serving the whole child, rather than focusing on segmented needs” (Adler, 1994, p. 31). This study revealed how decisions were made by policymakers by disclosing which theory was enacted by district leaders.

Finally, the contributions of this study provide data related to district leaders’ decision making models as it relates to program analysis for kindergarten primarily in suburban districts. The research supports the advantages for youngsters to attend full-day kindergarten, especially students at risk. Since the research was limited on the perceptions, values, and opinions of suburban districts, this study provides initial data on decision making practices of suburban districts in the era of No Child Left Behind. District leaders conduct the important business of making complex decisions to ensure the needs of all students are being met. This case study illuminates how complex decisions for kindergarten students are being made in a demographically changing segment of one county.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Background of the Study

This study concentrated on two major areas. First, district leaders' values, perceptions, and opinions of full-day kindergarten were studied, directly examining the values and opinions of key district leaders who were involved with kindergarten in some capacity. Second, the process of decision making pertaining to kindergarten programming was studied. In particular, the study examined key factors and decision making tactics utilized for kindergarten programming. The data for this study were exhibited through three primary sources of evidence: personal observations of board meetings, one on one interviews with key informants, and a review of documents.

The researcher began the study in the winter of January 2010 by mailing consent forms and the purpose of the study to four suburban districts located in one county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. The researcher also sent the consent forms and purpose of the study electronically. Two of the districts selected had an existing full-day kindergarten and two of the districts had a half-day kindergarten program. Two of the four districts consented to participate in the study. After several attempts, phone calls and emails, to the other two districts, the researcher was unsuccessful in connecting with the superintendents of those districts. The researcher then had to select two other suburban school districts in the same county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. Both district superintendents consented to participate in the study.

Each of the four school districts was accommodating, flexible and excited to participate in the study. The researcher was able to gain access to the district within a

reasonable time frame to conduct the interviews. The interviews began in March 2010 and were concluded by May 2010. Sixteen informants were originally part of the sample for this study; however, in the Montrose School District and the Cornerstone School District, the researcher was unsuccessful in gaining access to the board members.

Two board members were interviewed, one from a district with full-day kindergarten and one from a district with half-day kindergarten. The initial sample of participants was sixteen but due to the two districts' inability to ask for board participation, the actual sample was fourteen respondents.

Fourteen informants were interviewed for this study. Two of the informants were board members, three were superintendents, three were assistant superintendents, one was the director of teaching and learning, two were directors of curriculum, two were supervisors of elementary programs, and one was a human resource director. Nine of the participants were female; five were males. Six of the participants held a doctorate in education/educational leadership, five held a master's in education/educational leadership, one held a master's in mathematics, and two had acquired a master's plus sixty in education/educational leadership.

All informants were leaders in suburban districts located in the same county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. Twelve of the participants at the central office level had a minimum of twenty years experience in education as either a teacher, instructional coach, or principal (elementary or secondary). Four of the participants had over thirty years experience in various positions such as elementary principal, middle school principal, assistant superintendent, or director of elementary education. One board member had seventeen years experience serving on the board in the Westerly School District; the

other board member interviewed had served seven years on the Herbertsville School District.

The following Table represents the participants' demographics. The graphic represents each leader's position in the district, the number of years in that particular position, their primary duties, and their educational background.

Table 12. CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>POSITION AND NUMBER OF YRS. IN POSITION</u>	<u>MAIN DUTIES</u>	<u>EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND</u>
WESTERLY	BONNIE	SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER; 17 YRS.	OVERSIGHT OF POLICIES AND BUDGET	MASTER'S IN MATH
WESTERLY	KARL	DIRECTOR OF ELEMENTARY TEACHING AND LEARNING; 2 ND YEAR (34 TH YR. IN ED.)	RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION OF ALL CURRICULAR AREAS	DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
WESTERLY	JANE	SUPERINTENDENT 2 ND YR. (35 TH YR. IN ED)	ENSURE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOSTER ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL STUDENTS	MASTER'S IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
WESTERLY	MIKE	SUPERVISOR OF ASSESSMENT AND ED. PROGRAMS; 8 MONTHS (17 YRS. IN ED.)	OVERSEES ALL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND THE DISTRICT'S DATA	MASTER'S IN EDUCATION
CORNERSTONE	KATIE	SUPERVISOR OF LANGUAGE ARTS K-12; 3 RD YR. (30+ YRS. IN ED.)	OVERSEES LA CURRICULUM FOR K-12	MASTER'S IN EDUCATION
CORNERSTONE	LISA	DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION,& ASSESSMENT 4 YRS. (27 + YRS. IN ED.)	CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT K -12; DATA MANAGEMENT	DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN ED. LEADERSHIP
CORNERSTONE	MARI	ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT 8YRS. (33 YRS. IN ED.)	SUPERVISES ALL PRINCIPALS; PUBLIC RELATION; PUPIL SERVICES; CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION	DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN ED. LEADERSHIP

Table 12. (continued)

MONTROSE	TED	SUPRINTENDENT 3 YRS. (27 YRS. IN ED.)	RESPONSIBLE FOR FUNCTION OF THE DISTRICT & SUPERVISING STAFF	DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN ED. LEADERSHIP
MONTROSE	HARRY	DIRECTOR OF LABOR RELATIONS & HUMAN RESOURCES; 2ND YR. (principal 7 yrs)	IN CHARGE OF ALL HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTIONS AND LABOR ISSUES	MASTER'S IN EDUCATION
MONTROSE	JOYCE	ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FOR CUR, INSTR. ASSESS; 3 YR. (33 YRS. IN ED.)	RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL CUR., INSTR, AND ASSESSMENT K-12	DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN ED. LEADERSHIP
HERBERTS- VILLE	NORMA	ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF ELEMENTARY 8YRS. (35 YRS. IN ED)	OVERSEES ELEMENTARY; SPEC. ED; STUDENTS SERVICES; FEDERAL PROGRAMS; CHILDCARE PROGRAMS	MASTER'S PLUS 60 IN ED. ADMIN.
HERBERTS- VILLE	BOB	SUPERINTENDENT 8YRS (35 YRS. IN ED.)	OVERSEES ALL OPERATIONS OF THE DISTRICT	DOCTOR OF EDUCATON IN ED. LEADERSHIP
HERBERTS- VILLE	JACKIE	DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM 2YRS. (37 YRS. IN ED.)	OVERSEES CUR.DEVELOP- MENT AND ASSESSMENTS	MASTER'S IN ED.LEADERSHIP
HERBERTS- VILLE	HELGA	BOARD MEMBER 7 YRS.	SET POLICY FOR THE DISTRICT	MASTER'S IN EDUCATION

Westerly School District

The four informants interviewed from the Westerly School District were the superintendent (Jane), the directory of teaching and learning (Karl), the supervisor of assessment and educational programs (Mike), and a school board member (Bonnie).

Jane has thirty- five years in education serving in various capacities such as an elementary special education teacher, special education supervisor, elementary principal, director of pupil services, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Jane was the assistant superintendent of the Westerly School District for ten years before being appointed as the superintendent. Jane's primary role as a superintendent is to:

“Make sure that the instructional practices here foster the achievement of all students; that’s my primary role. Secondary to that is to make sure we have the money to do that, that we have the appropriate staff to do that and that the facilities and the actual management of the school district is moving at the appropriate pace. And the board’s directive to me is that Westerly should always remain at the top, so that’s a tall order.

Karl, the director of teaching and learning for the Westerly School District, has been serving in that position for two years. Karl has thirty-four years in education; seventeen of those years were as an elementary principal. Karl has worked as both a teacher and administrator in three other districts before his assignment to Westerly. Karl’s primary responsibilities are the implementation and development of all curriculum, administrative guidelines, instructional staff, and instructional strategies.

Mike, the supervisor of assessment and educational programs in the Westerly School District, has served in this role for eight months at the time of the study. Mike was an elementary principal for seven years in two other districts; he taught at the elementary level for ten years. Mike’s primary role is to oversee all programs in the district, in particular, he works with the induction program, ESL teachers, reading specialists, and all the data for the district. Mike supports both the elementary and secondary departments.

Bonnie has served for seventeen years on the Westerly School Board in numerous capacities. Over the seventeen years, Bonnie has chaired many committees such as the strategic plan, redistricting, and class size. She has served as vice-president for seven years, and is currently the chair of the curriculum and technology committee.

The Westerly School District has a full-day kindergarten program that has been in operation since 1995. In 1993, the district had what was termed as a hybrid model for their kindergarten which was a model of having some half-day programs in some schools

and full-day programs in others. Jane, superintendent, described the current structure of their kindergarten model as:

“Our kindergarten program is a full-day program; it’s developmental. We do basic readiness. What we also do for students who are achieving at a higher level is we have differentiated instruction that begins here. So if kids are ready to begin reading, we start that process earlier. Same with any child who is performing well in math. So we do have a structure where we don’t throw everyone together; we try and meet the developmental needs of the kindergarten kids. The full-day structure came about prior to me being here. And the reason that was decided upon is because the board and the administration at that time had reviewed lots of research regarding student achievement, and the idea is that if you capture kids young enough you may be able to significantly impact the instruction for those children. And the board-which I consider to be very forward thinking-this board and previous boards-took on the challenge of trying to implement a full-day program long before it was even in vogue, and ran a hybrid model, which means we had several schools that had full-day but we also were running two programs at a half-day.”

All four informants for the Westerly School District believed their full-day model of kindergarten was meeting the needs of all youngsters. When asked if the program was effective for their population, the responses were generally the same. However, the respondents did see several challenges. Jane, the superintendent responded:

“I would say absolutely! I can’t imagine us not having a full-day model. I mean it’s just become part of our culture. I think what’s happened are a number of kids that I think would have been special education because they would’ve been so significantly behind the others got the proper attention and the ancillary services they needed in kindergarten, and we were able to circumvent some of those placements. There are a lot more kids at five ready to start. They are reading. We’ve addressed their needs as well. “

Mike, supervisor of educational programs, responded:

“I don’t think any model could be better. It’s the best model out there. We have found that some of our kindergarten students have come in to kindergarten better prepared. They have letter recognition, they know sounds, and some kids have very little. So there is a gap between those who have gone to preschool and those who have never set foot in any type of a structured program before. So that is where our challenge is right now.

Bonnie, the school board member, believed the full-day kindergarten program was addressing the needs of all populations, in particular, the economically disadvantaged and English Language Learners. As Bonnie noted:

“I mean we do have quite a diverse population. We have kids with parents who have multiple degrees and we also have a very heavy portion of kids who have free and reduced lunch. I definitely think for those kids from lower socioeconomic as well as kids of English with a second language the more exposure they have the better it is for them. I mean I don’t think we are there yet, that we are meeting the needs of every one of our kids, but we’re working towards it.”

Karl believed the full-day kindergarten was meeting the needs of the students but was still concerned with meeting the physical needs of the students. He claimed:

“I don’t think we allow them enough time outside for active things. We’ve cut back on recesses and I think they still need that movement for their brain resources. But does it meet their needs? I think as a profession we need to look at that. Some students are going to need more time with instruction and it starts in kindergarten.”

Cornerstone School District

The informants interviewed for the Cornerstone School District were the assistant superintendent (Mari), the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Lisa), and the supervisor for language arts K-12 (Katie). No school board member was interviewed for this school district due to inaccessibility. Mari has served as the assistant superintendent of the Cornerstone School District for eight years. She has been a school administrator for twenty years both in the urban and suburban settings. Prior to assuming the position of assistant superintendent at Cornerstone, she was a principal and director of elementary education. Mari has been an administrator for the past twelve years in the Cornerstone School District.

Lisa, the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment has served in that capacity for the Cornerstone School District for four years; she has been working in the

district for twelve years. Prior to that assignment, Lisa was a teacher, instructional coach, and curriculum supervisor for the district. Lisa began her career as a teacher in an urban school district for about eight years. Lisa's responsibilities range from professional development, local, state, and national data collection, Title I and Title III, federal programming, funding, curriculum development K-12, and assessments.

Katie, the supervisor for language arts K-12, has been in this position for the last three years in the Cornerstone School District. Katie has been in education for over thirty years. She has been a teacher, reading specialist, assistant principal, and principal for an urban school district for the majority of her career. Katie has a strong background in literacy, has taught every grade level from K-12, and has been a literacy coordinator. Katie's responsibilities as a language arts supervisor K-12 include: oversight of the language arts curriculum, rewriting and revising curriculum, articulation of the curriculum, and professional development.

The Cornerstone School District has a full-day kindergarten that has been in operation since 2003. Both the assistant superintendent, Mari, and the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, Lisa, were heavily involved in the design, development, and implementation of the full-day kindergarten in 2003. According to Katie, language arts supervisor K-12:

“We have a full-day kindergarten model that has a rigorous curriculum for kindergarten. The model is that they follow the same kind of curriculum design that all the other grades follow. It's an understanding by design with central content, central purpose, all the essential questions, unit questions, standards, essential skills and then all the resources. The model for kindergarten is very similar to what the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders have because it's based on the same format. It is a balanced literacy format.”

The three informants for the Cornerstone School District believed the full-day kindergarten program was meeting the needs of the students. So much so, they believed

the district could make the curriculum even more rigorous. This district was the only district out of the four studied that had data to support the effectiveness of the full-day model. Lisa, the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment claimed:

“If you look at it longitudinally, we have seen a tremendous amount of growth, especially in mathematics. The current PSSA data for third grade would demonstrate the high rates of proficiency.” We have seen with our local assessments in the beginning, you had a normal curve, now we see a J curve. We really do see the distribution scores going up among all populations. So at this point and time we are increasing the rigor in the curriculum.”

Katie, supervisor for language arts K-12 reported:

“It is absolutely amazing walking into a kindergarten classroom and watching what the children are doing, not just with the tools they’re working with, but their ability to collaborate purposefully. It is very efficient learning in the kindergarten classrooms, different than it was in half-day.”

Mari, assistant superintendent, believed the full-day model is meeting the needs of all students based on the fact they had a well defined curriculum in place prior to making the transition from half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten. Mari found that:

“When we did this design [FDK], I was adamant that all students needed a full-day program, and if we’re going to do it, we should do it for all students because I didn’t want to start picking and choosing who really needed it. I think all children benefit from this experience. I do think the readiness skills for the kids entering first grade is dramatically different. Students are coming in so much better prepared. We’re still conscious of the developmental nature of the program and the socialization components of kindergarten exposure and experiences that- I think actually the rigor could be bumped up a little bit the second half of the kindergarten year.”

Montrose School District

The informants interviewed for the Montrose School District were the superintendent (Ted), the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Joyce), and the director of human resources and labor relations (Harry). No school board member was interviewed for this district due to inaccessibility. Ted has been in education for twenty-seven years. Ted has served as the superintendent of the Montrose

School District for three years. Prior to his position as superintendent in the Montrose School District, Ted was a high school instrumental teacher and band director for eleven years. Ted has worked in various administrative roles such as middle school assistant principal, middle school principal, curriculum director, assistant to the superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and assistant to the superintendent for personnel. Ted's responsibilities include total oversight of the school district, function of the district, and supervision of all staff.

Joyce, the assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and assessment has served in this role for three years in the Montrose School District. Joyce has been in education for over thirty years. Joyce began her career as an elementary school counselor and later became the director of guidance and director of special education. Joyce was also a curriculum director and assistant superintendent for another school district. Joyce's main responsibilities as assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment include oversight of the K-12 curriculum, oversight of all assessments, writing curriculum, rollout of Response to Instruction and Intervention, and supporting the superintendent at executive sessions and board meetings.

Harry, the director of human resources and labor relations, has worked in this role for three years in the Montrose School District. Prior to this position, Harry was an elementary principal in the Montrose School District for seven years. Harry began his career as a police officer where he found the love of teaching when teaching the D.A.R.E. program at the elementary level. Harry's responsibilities include: oversight of all resource functions, oversight of all labor issues, and oversight of the five different bargaining units.

The Montrose School District runs a half-day kindergarten program. The kindergarten classes are included in the K-6 programming. Most of the half-day instruction centers on language arts and mathematics. According to the superintendent:

“We have a half-day program operating in all five of our elementary schools. We also have, and I think it’s important to mention here, a transitional first grade program. We had one program operating in each of the five buildings last year; this year it was reduced to four because of the slight decline in enrollment. It was an administrative endeavor to put together a pretty comprehensive list for the school board regarding possible areas of reduction. Within the list was the T-1 program, under the guise that transitions to first grade really have come and gone; that we are one of two left in the county with T-1. And that those funds should be looked at going toward a full-day program instead.”

According to the assistant superintendent:

“We’ve done a lot of work including kindergarten with trying to encourage and support teachers to make more data driven decisions about the needs of their students.”

The three respondents for the Montrose School District believe there is always room for improvement in terms of meeting the needs of the kindergarten population. The superintendent remained unconvinced that the movement to a full-day program would solve some of the issues they were having. The superintendent based his opinion on the fact that their PSSA scores were relatively high in the district. In particular, when asked if the current model was meeting the needs of the students, Ted responded:

“That’s interesting-we are doing some research for next year so we can make a proposal. If you look at our data, there is nothing jumping out that suggests we are not meeting the needs of students overall. The numbers are low of students who are basic and below. It will be interesting to see when they put an all day kindergarten in whether those numbers will decrease. I am not really convinced that by providing a longer day we’re going to make a difference. That’s not to say that providing more instruction is going to hurt them either.

Joyce, the assistant superintendent, believed for the most part the district was meeting the needs of the kindergarten students based on the high scores obtained on standardized tests starting in third grade. Joyce believed:

“For the most part I think we meet the needs of all students, but we can always get better. I think any district can improve.”

Harry, the human resources director, firmly believed the current model was not meeting the needs of all students based on the increased focus on academics in kindergarten. Harry concluded:

“I don’t think it’s effective [HDK] in the fact that we have drastically changed the academic rigors of kindergarten in the last five years, which have been necessary to keep pace with the rest of the program. I think that things are crammed tight in a half-day model with realistically only having two hours per day once recess and a special area class is factored in. A lot of the kids don’t come to us with experiences prior to kindergarten and don’t have the years of pre-school. I don’t think the readiness is possibly there.

Herbertsville School District

Four informants were interviewed for the Herbertsville School District. They included, Bob, the superintendent, Norma, the assistant superintendent for elementary, Jackie, director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and Helga, school board member.

The assistant superintendent for elementary, Norma, has worked in the Herbertsville School District for twenty-five years. During her tenure, Norma has held many positions including a special education teacher, elementary principal, director of elementary education, and assistant superintendent for elementary. Norma has served as the assistant superintendent of the Herbertsville School District for eight years. She is responsible for all aspects of elementary education, special education K-12, federal programs, and collaborates with the director of curriculum and director of childcare.

Jackie, director of curriculum, has worked in the district in this position for over two years at the time of the study. Jackie has thirty seven years in education where she has worked at all levels from pre-school to the university level. Jackie has worked in three

school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as well as in the Office of Curriculum and Assessment for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Jackie's main role is to work on curriculum development, developing common assessments, report card design and implementation, and supporting teachers.

Bob, the superintendent, has served as superintendent of the Herbertsville School District for eight years. He has spent over thirty years in public school administration. Bob began his career in education as an art teacher where he taught art at the middle school level for four years; he spent three years teaching art at the college level. Bob claimed he had the least experience at the elementary level. Bob was a middle school principal prior to becoming the superintendent of Herbertsville School District. Bob defined his role of superintendent as:

“There really is almost no balance to my roles and responsibilities. While I don't feel the need to have my hands on and oversee everything, all roads typically run to my office. I have three central office administrators that are extremely capable. They are my direct reports and a lot of information flows from them to me, but not much happens in this district that I don't have either knowledge about or some opportunity to weigh in on. The other large part of my work and my life is my connection to our community and the school board. I spend a lot of time in relationship to the board and that becomes a pretty powerful piece of my job and probably grows more complex as the world gets more complex.”

Helga, school board member for the Herbertsville School District, has served on the board for seven years. Besides serving on the school board, Helga is the librarian for a public library located in the borough of the town where the school district is located. Helga has a Master's in Education and has taught at the primary level before staying home to raise her children. Helga has worked at the public library for nearly twenty years since it allows her to work with children. Helga defined her role as a board member as:

“Our job is really oversight of the entire school district, to hire a good superintendent, and to set policy for the school district. That’s the technical job description. I serve on the curriculum committee because of my background in education. We know as a school board we really can’t do anything but approve.”

The Herbertsville School District runs a traditional half-day kindergarten program along with some other features to the program that makes it a bit different than the traditional model. For over the last ten years of so, the district has offered an extended day program which is one hour of extended kindergarten each day for students who qualify for the additional intervention. In addition to that, the district offers an additional half-day program of kindergarten support that allows approximately thirty students to attend a full-day kindergarten program. Students must qualify for this program as well. A third component of kindergarten is the Care Program. As described by the assistant superintendent:

“The Care Program provides childcare in two of our four schools. We serve probably one hundred children. Parents pay a fee for their child to attend. We do academic achievement and reinforcement of skills. It is not your standard childcare program. Our childcare staff actually works with our kindergarten teachers so they know how to support the students. And I think that is probably why we don’t have parents knocking at our door for full-day programming, because we do offer that childcare piece.”

Two of the four participants (the superintendent and the assistant superintendent) from this district believed the current model of kindergarten in addition to the other features provided, is meeting the needs of the student population in kindergarten. However, the director of curriculum and the school board member still believed a full-day kindergarten model would serve all students better. In particular as offered by the superintendent:

“I think we are meeting the needs of the kids adequately. I never trick myself into thinking that we’re meeting everybody’s needs all the time. I think what we are doing is well more than adequate.”

The assistant superintendent for elementary stated:

“I think we are doing the best we can under the current conditions. I think our district does a lot for children. I do see the shift in some of our population where we’re seeing children coming into school with less exposure to print and less life experiences.”

Jackie, director of curriculum, believed a full-day kindergarten would serve all children better. She based her opinion on the changes in population and the lack of readiness of students entering kindergarten. She stated:

“I know parents are interested in having full-day. Many are coming from preschool programs that are full-day and then they are coming into a half-day kindergarten program. It would be better suited for the population we have. I think as parents become more sophisticated about school readiness, etc. they are really looking for that for their children. “

Helga, the school board member, responded to the effectiveness of their current model of kindergarten as follows:

“I believe in the near future we will be going to full-day. I believe it serves the parents well as our curriculum becomes more challenging at a lower level. I believe we are expecting children in kindergarten to do what was traditionally first grade work. There are still people in a blue collar neighborhood who can’t afford the preschool program they really should have because the majority of children do have it [preschool] today.”

Academic Achievement

The following Table represents standardized test scores for the four suburban districts located in Southeastern, Pennsylvania for the 2008-2009 school year. Under the No Child Left Behind Education Act, each district in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is required to administer the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment in Mathematics and Reading to all students in grades 3-8 and 11. Each school district must meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measure as determined by the state. The Adequate Yearly Progress measure required for the 2008-2009 school year was 63% proficient in Reading and 56% proficient in Mathematics.

As the Table indicates, each of the four suburban school districts in this study met the AYP for the 2008-2009 school year. In third grade, the highest percent proficient in Mathematics was the Cornerstone District, (95.4%) and the lowest percent proficient was the Westerly School District, (91.7%). The other two districts fell within the 91% to 95% range for percent proficient. In third grade reading, the Cornerstone School District had the highest percent proficient, (93.3%). The other three districts fell within the range of 87% to 87.7% proficient in Reading at the third grade level. The Cornerstone district has a full-day kindergarten program.

In fourth grade Mathematics, the Herberstville School District, (98.1%) and the Montrose School District, (96%) had the highest percent proficient on the 2008-2009 PSSA. In fourth grade Reading, the Herberstville School District, (93.2%) and the Montrose School District, (91%) had the highest percent proficient. Neither district provides full-day kindergarten.

Fifth grade students in all four suburban school districts scored 90% proficient in Mathematics and between 84% and 87% proficient in Reading. The Cornerstone School District, (92.9%) and the Montrose School District, (90%) were the highest two districts in the sixth grade PSSA for Mathematics and the highest two districts in the sixth grade PSSA for Reading, Cornerstone (86.4%) and Montrose (86%).

In the Cornerstone School District, which offers FDK, all seven of the schools met or exceeded AYP targets for the 2008-2009 academic year. The third grade in this district were the first in the county in reading and math PSSA scores. The fifth graders were third in the county in both reading and math. Eighty percent of the third graders scored at the advanced level in math.

In the Herbertsville School District, which does not offer FDK, students scored well above the threshold in PSSA as set by the state. Herbertsville School District did not meet AYP in the sub group of Special Education at the high school level where scores for math and reading were below AYP requirements which placed the high school in the Warning Category.

Table 13.

**ACHIEVEMENT DATA FOR FOUR SUBURBAN DISTRICTS IN
PENNSYLVANIA
PSSA 2009 (2008-2009 School Year)
PERCENT PROFICIENT OR ABOVE**

	3rd		4th		5th		6th	
	M	R	M	R	M	R	M	R
WESTERLY (FDK)	91.7%	87.7%	88.2%	85.1%	90.4%	81.3%	87.2%	81.2%
HERBERTSVILLE (HDK)	92.2%	87.3%	98.1%	93.2%	90.1%	87%	88.1%	84.4%
CORNERSTONE (FDK)	95.4%	93.3%	93.8%	89.3%	90.7%	85.8%	92.9%	86.4%
MONTROSE (HDK)	94%	87%	96%	91%	90%	84%	90%	86%

*Data were derived from the Pennsylvania Department of Education 2009
M=Mathematics R=Reading*

Document Analysis

Various documents were analyzed in each of the four districts including strategic plans, curriculum documents, and board meeting minutes. Documents varied in length and specificity. In the Herbertsville School District, the district's curriculum is aligned to state, national and global standards, challenging and relevant at all grade levels according to student ability, researched based and aligned from kindergarten through 12th grade (<http://www.pde.state.pa.us>). The strategic plan for the Herbertsville School District describes the two programs pertaining to kindergarten programming. Under section S.19, extended learning opportunities in the strategic plan, it specifics:

“The Elementary Extended Day Program provides remediation in the areas of reading and language arts for one hour beyond the half-day of kindergarten instruction for those students identified. This opportunity is afforded to eligible learners in all four of our elementary schools” (<http://www.pde.state.pa.us>).

“The Elementary Kindergarten Support Program provides an additional half-day of academic instruction emphasizing the acquisition, maintenance, and reinforcement of skills, with particular focus on language arts. The small class size of fifteen students allows every student to receive individual attentions” (<http://hatboro-horsham.org>).

In order to better align the curriculum in Herbertsville, effort is being made to establish a consistent curriculum framework for all content areas K-12. The district is working towards the development of a common language within the district in relation to curriculum, instruction, and assessment by utilizing current research and literature. The school plans reviewed at the elementary level revealed a strong emphasis on balance literacy with careful monitoring of the guided reading and shared reading components. This curriculum alignment was referenced by the assistant superintendent of elementary when discussing the additional features of the kindergarten program to ensure

collaboration between the CARES program staff and kindergarten teachers was occurring.

The Westerly School District's strategic plan and curriculum documents revealed an emphasis on the integration of technology, cultural awareness, and closing the achievement gap. The district's efforts are in the area of curriculum alignment and the development of a scope and sequence for the curriculum (www.wsdweb.org). To maximize the instructional opportunities for students in the primary grades, blocks of time have been established without disruption to classroom time. The focus of the uninterrupted time at the primary level is to ensure students are not taken for classes pertaining to related services during this block of time. This uninterrupted time block was implemented during the 2009-2010 school year as referenced by the supervisor of educational programs from Westerly.

The Cornerstone School District developed a framework for evaluating curricular design that focuses on the deepening of students' understanding of the curriculum. Two of the three participants from the Cornerstone School District discussed in detail during the interview the notion of going deeper with the curriculum in kindergarten. Embedded into the existing Cornerstone frameworks of teaching are critical thinking and problem solving, creativity, innovation, and collaboration. Within the strategic plan are two goals that highlight the strong emphasis of curriculum, instruction, and assessment across all grade levels K-12 along with a culture to create a 21st century teaching and learning environment. Two of the seven goals in Cornerstone's strategic plan stated:

“The district will provide a 21st century teaching and learning environment and a culture of excellence that enhances, enriches, and strengthens student learning through effective educational opportunities”

“The district will provide all students with a curriculum that is both academically rigorous and real world relevant which includes projects/problems that are related to authentic contexts”(<http://www.pde.state.pa.us>).

The Montrose School District’s curriculum document for kindergarten stressed the continued implementation of the balanced literacy approach to language arts with a researched based program aligned to the kindergarten standards. A progress report to the school board and community in regards to the goals of the strategic plan was presented in the spring of 2010. The presentation revealed the following progress towards the achievement portion of the strategic plan during the 2009-2010 year:

1. Identification and implementation of researched based programs to further support the instructional needs of students at risk of not achieving proficiency in reading.
2. Training provided for co-teaching, differentiated instruction, and Response to Instruction and Intervention.
3. Expansion of the district assessment plan and elimination of duplicate assessments.
4. Data team meeting to analyze needs and assign interventions. (<http://methacton.org>).

The researcher attended two board meetings for each district during the winter/spring of 2010. The topic of kindergarten or early childhood education never surfaced during any of these sessions. Some of the key topics discussed at the board meetings included:

- Capital projects
- Personnel retirement/new hires
- Homebound instruction
- Budget transfers
- Intermediate Unit report
- School expulsions

- Educational Foundational Report
- 2010-2011 calendar approval
- Curriculum/technology reports
- Policy report (copyright laws)
- Report on pupil and instructional materials (field trips, curriculum materials, and social studies planned course of study K-12)
- Student recognitions
- Superintendent's report/treasurer's report/board president's report

The documents reviewed including strategic plans, curriculum documents, and district updates corresponded to the data from the interviews with the participants. The board meetings attended did not disclose any data about kindergarten practices, programming, curriculum or funding.

Shifts in Academic Rigor in Kindergarten

All fourteen informants from all four school districts would agree that the academic curriculum has become more rigorous over the last five or ten years. Due to the Early Childhood Educational Standards, district leaders see the need to increase the rigor of the academics in kindergarten to become better aligned to state standards. Although most leaders did not discuss PSSA as a factor except for one, they based their perception on the increased readiness of students to learn when entering kindergarten. The leaders believed in order to meet the needs of youngsters ready to handle formal reading, it is their responsibility to design and implement curriculum to meet those needs. In particular, the superintendent for the Montrose School District noted the changes in kindergarten from the days when students would learn a letter a week. He claimed:

“There was a time when kids came in and did the letter of the week. Now kids come in and we are assessing them and we know what their strengths are right up front and we’re looking to push them further. It’s basically the difference between Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget was ready, ready, ready, waiting till they’re ready and let’s not push them; they’re just going to come in and push blocks around. Now, we’re saying they are ready. We’re going to push them in. Frankly, I think things have changed dramatically in kindergarten.”

Harry claimed:

“I think it has gotten more rigorous than it was in the past. Our curriculum is much more research based than it was in the past which makes it difficult to cram all that into a half-day.”

Joyce believed:

“We continue to increase the rigor across the board, and the fact that the state now has early childhood standards and benchmarks I think speak to that. There is more of a realization that there are definite curricular benchmarks that need to be met, even at that age, and the differentiation has to move down.”

Mike contended:

“The focus used to be third grade but now with the early childhood standards we dropped it down to kindergarten”.

Bonnie, the school board member, believed:

“Based on my experience with my own children 20 yrs ago, we’ve changed the curriculum significantly. There was less emphasis on reading, writing, and math. There was more of a social part to it. The requirements are so great now.”

Jane, superintendent, noted the following specific changes in the kindergarten curricula:

“I think a lot of the skills based learning that you saw in first grade, we’ve sort of moved that down. And we see the flip side that our kids are really able to access a more rigorous curriculum.”

Bob, superintendent, claimed:

“I believe kindergarten has moved from a program that was in part academic-part socialization to something that is more rigorous academically. That’s what I see-I believe it is the way of the world. That is certainly the way of primary education.”

Karl, director of teaching and learning, has noticed the huge shift in academics over the years. He is concerned with the increase in academics and the decrease in socialization. The concern is focused on the lack of developmentally appropriate curriculum. Karl contended:

“I think the curriculum has become more academic; there are more academics and less social development. We are more prescriptive meaning there are goals and standards that they’re expected to reach rather than starting at a developmental level and showing progress. I think kindergarten teachers are aware of the expectations and when you put high stakes testing in third grade the impact is starting in kindergarten. We know it’s there and you can’t start in third grade to be successful.”

Jackie, curriculum director, had a similar view point as Karl in terms of the curriculum becoming too academic and less developmental. She claimed:

“I do worry that we don’t have structured play. We have kind of limited the ways that children really develop language and a deep understanding of concepts. So again, I think we have focused and worried about PSSA in third grade, even in kindergarten. So I think we have lost our way a little bit as far as early childhood and kindergarten. With the half-day program we have no choice but to be academically focused.

Through the interviews with the district leaders, it was found that one district in particular, the Cornerstone School District, believed they as a district were responsible to prepare students for the many changes in the 21st century. They related their responses about curricular changes to preparation for the work force.

Katie, supervisor for language arts K-12 believed:

“What has changed is we have to understand what our world is like in the 21st century. We are not teaching kids for our world. We don’t even know what kind of jobs they are going to have. If we don’t teach them good communication skills, good reading skills, good critical thinking skills and the ability to question and develop good questions-then I just don’t think we are doing our job right. I think our world is a different place than it was five years ago. I think it is our job to start crafting, not only to teach them how to read, but at a very young age, younger than possible, that’s how it changed.

The interviews of the informants coupled with a review of their curriculum documents would substantiate the finding that the curricula for kindergarten has increased with rigor

over the last decade. Each of the four districts has implemented a balanced literacy approach to reading in the kindergarten year. This approach to reading incorporates guided reading, shared reading, read alouds, shared writing, Kid writing, and learning centers. This approach to teaching reading is a shift from whole class instruction to small groups of learners being instructed on their level. The instruction is scaffolded and differentiated to meet the needs of the learners.

Each district screens kindergarten students upon entering into kindergarten to determine areas of strengths and needs in language arts and mathematics. This baseline data allows each kindergarten teacher to gather the necessary data to plan for instruction and to determine what resources are best suited for students to meet success. Each of the four school districts keeps class size at an average of twenty students per class. None of the districts have classroom assistants with the kindergarten teachers unless for students with individual education plans.

All of the participants agreed that the kindergarten curriculum has become more academic over the last decade due to the push for proficiency as a result of NCLB. The two districts with a half-day program are challenged to teach the entire curriculum in a half-day program. However, both of the half-day kindergarten districts had additional supports in place such as the transitional first grade, extended day kindergarten, kindergarten support and the CARE program to help meet the needs of the diverse learners. The two districts with full-day kindergarten believed their teachers were able to teach the curriculum effectively in a full day. They believed students had the opportunity to engage in more activities that were inquiry based, collaborative with peers, and child-

centered. They believed teachers were not rushed to teach the curriculum but had ample time to incorporate meaningful lessons that expanded students' thinking and social skills.

Quantity versus Quality: The Great Debate

The research on half-day versus full-day kindergarten often raises the question over the quality of the program versus the quantity of the program. Some would argue that a full-day program does not guarantee quality. Others would argue that you can obtain a quality kindergarten in a half-day model. The fourteen informants interviewed for this study had various mixed opinions on this debate. The responses from the leaders of Cornerstone (FDK) and Westerly (FDK), offered the following about this debate:

Jane, superintendent of Westerly, claimed:

“I’ve worked under both models and what I saw in the half-day program is that you are running a race to provide a quality program. And simply in a two and a half-hour span of time, it’s not enough time to do a true quality program and hit all the areas you need to. It is impossible for any teacher as good as they are to deliver that kind of quality in that short period.”

Bonnie, the school board member believed:

“I believe there is value in the extra time with FDK and that with the other kids, the socialization part of it. So I think there is value to FDK but I don’t think that the entire time should be spent on curricular areas on the reading and math.”

Mike, supervisor of educational programs, believed quantity was important in that it allowed teachers to go deeper with the curriculum. He attributed his opinion based on research. He believed in a full-day program the teachers had the opportunity to go deeper with their instruction. He was not convinced teachers were always going deeper with the curriculum. He believed:

“I believe we need to go deeper in kindergarten because sometimes we feel that if we cover a lot of different things that the kids would get it. The quality and the deeper instruction are needed. How deep are we going rather than just hit the surface?”

Mari, assistant superintendent for the Cornerstone School District, firmly believed that quality was key to any program whether it be a half-day model of a full-day model. She confirmed:

“I think the quality is key and critical. I would rather have a half-day quality kindergarten program rather than a non-quality full-day. You really can’t address the academic instructional needs of the kids in a half-day program because you have to pay attention to all those other needs-as you do that through the learning experiences. But you do have to spend enough time with young children to allow them to explore their environment.”

Lisa, director of curriculum and instruction, believed you could have a quality half-day program. She also believed you could have a full-day program that was not quality due to missed opportunities for teachers to utilize the time effectively. She believed that the full-day program has given teachers more focus and more time with children. In particular, she believed:

“I think quantity does not matter in terms of time and taking that time so that you’re not rushing or pushing curriculum in an abbreviated manner. So I would say the quantity is important as well to get the quality kinds of curriculum programming in there and give kids time to explore and to learn material.”

Katie, supervisor of language arts K-12, believed even though kids in some districts only have a half-day program they will eventually catch up down the line. Based on the young age, she believed the full-day was needed to fit in the other aspects of the children’s day like snack, recess, and transition times. Katie believed:

“You just don’t have enough time logistically to do all those wonderful things in kindergarten in a half-day model. It’s an energetic delivery of a lot of good important ideas, and it’s not trying to cram more things into a kid’s head. In fact it is the opposite, it’s about going deeper. You may have taught a concept in the morning and the kids could spend more time in the afternoon investigating and exploring more about the topic. In FDK, there is no urgency to finish hurriedly. It is the leisure to investigate, to learn, to solidify. You are not going to find that in a test concept or sound assessment, but what you will find are the happy faces, looks of discovery, looks of all those things that you can’t truly wrap your head around and measure.”

The Montrose and Herbertsville Districts both provide half -day programming for their kindergarten population. The Montrose district, a district that is contemplating a move into full-day programming over the next several years, believes that you need the quantity (time) in order to achieve the quality. The superintendent of the Montrose claimed:

“I don’t think quantity and quality are exclusive of each other to suggest that you can get the quality even if the quantity’s not there is kind of foolish. The fact is that the half-day program after adding some of the special classes into the time, leaves you almost no time for real good programming.”

Harry, the director of human resources, believed there was no substitute for time. He stated:

“The greatest quality in the world is not going to make a five year old move fast-quality is important, but you just can’t fudge time.”

Joyce, the assistant superintendent of Montrose, claimed:

“Quality is certainly important however you can address a broader range of areas of quality product if you have more time. You can do more the longer you have access to a child and the more exposure they have to you, all you can give them. So I think it is both.

Interestingly enough, the leaders from the Herbertsville School District shared an array of opinions on the quantity and quality debate. The school board member Helga believed it was all about the teacher. She found:

“I think quality does matter. If you have an excellent kindergarten teacher and she has a good curriculum she’s probably going to do just as good a job as somebody that does have a full-day. Because I truly believe the teacher makes the difference. On the other hand, in today’s world, we are expecting a lot more at an earlier age. You almost have to go to a full-day, extended day to cover the material you want to cover. So it’s a double edge sword.”

Another leader, Jackie, the curriculum director, would challenge the quality versus quantity debate even further by asking for the word quality to be defined. Being an

advocate for a developmentally appropriate curriculum and programming for kindergarten, Jackie believed:

“I mean is it like quality just strictly an academic focus or do we worry about the development of children, in their creativity, their ability to innovate even as little children? Do we worry about their ability to get a long with others?”

The opinions of the superintendent of Herbertsville were a definite outlier in this issue of quality versus quantity in kindergarten programming. He claimed:

“I’ve always believed that things shouldn’t be measured in just time, but if you take that argument to its logical conclusion our whole public school education system is built on time, not quality. I just think kids are so young and so little for such a short amount of time that I think ramping up to a full-day’s work could happen over time if really forced to. I don’t know that I would go the argument that kindergarten should be more time. I would go the argument that first grade should be less time, and that maybe by second or third grade we’re ramping up to full-day of academic activity. As a dad, as an educator, as a human being, I just think hot housing and forcing academics on kids at five and six years old, unless it really is an environment where they have some big need at the start-I would give my kids more socialization, more creativity, more physical, and less academics.”

Interestingly enough, the districts offering a full-day program argued that the model allowed teachers more of an opportunity to go deeper with the curriculum, increase the student engagement activities, and offer more socialization time. The districts offering the full-day model did not believe the day was too long or taxing for the students. They did not suggest in their responses any particular opinions on student interventions for those youngsters needing additional supports. They believed in order to provide a quality program the time was needed to do it effectively. Some leaders questioned whether their teachers were taking advantage of the full-day to provide the depth of content and not just simply doing more of the same. The leaders of the Montrose School District (HDK) believed both the quantity and quality were important; they believed that the time would

obviously allow for better instruction with more time for teachers to interact with students and students more time to interact with each other.

The only leader who believed that the half-day program was appropriate for kindergarten was the superintendent of the Herbertsville School District. In fact, he believed so strongly in his contentions that he was in favor of reducing the first grade day to a half-day. His opinion was based on his belief that five year olds are too young to developmentally absorb the structure of a full-day unless the children had special needs to be addressed in a longer day. The superintendent admitted he was not a PSSA guy and that he did not overwhelm his staff with the stress of scores. It appeared to the researcher that his approach to schooling was purely developmental and meeting students where they are when educating them. Due to his background and experience in education, the superintendent wanted to ensure that students in kindergarten were not pushed too quickly. His goal was more of a holistic approach to develop the whole child socially, physically, emotionally, and academically.

Decision Making Process as it Pertains to Kindergarten

Within any educational organization, district leaders are faced with the tremendous task of making many decisions about program design and implementation. Many key stakeholders were involved in the process; each district process varied with participation of stakeholders and the level of involvement, but all four districts in the study had some sort of a process for decision making with educational programs. Ultimately, the final approval rests with the school board.

The two districts providing full-day kindergarten, Cornerstone and Westerly, were able to articulate the process undertaken when their districts made the shift from half-day

kindergarten to full-day kindergarten. The Westerly School District began the process of moving from half-day to full-day in 1993. The process began in Westerly after a decline in enrollment numbers were noted for kindergarten students. The reason for the decline was in response to parents seeking full-day programs due to both parents in the home working. The superintendent for Westerly recalled:

“When we were getting started with the shift from half-day to full-day we had an array of educators involved, that was primary. But also when this was getting started we solicited parents. We had a number of child psychologists on the committee to talk about developmental needs of younger students. Certainly community members and the school board directors were involved. We had a compliment of people. The participation was very broad based.”

Other key leaders were involved in the process including principals, director of curriculum, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Factors that were considered for the movement to full-day kindergarten were space, salaries, resources, and funding. Since the district was experiencing a declining enrollment with their kindergarten numbers, the space was available to move into the full-day model. Other factors of kindergarten programming required the district to look closely at the curriculum. Specifically, the push was to ensure the curriculum for the full-day program was developmentally appropriate; it also needed to be aligned to the K-12 continuum.

Karl, director of teaching and learning, claimed:

“I would say the factors have to be developmental and the appropriateness should also include brain based research to the programs of how kids learn. And the instructional staff needs to be knowledgeable in the area of responding to the developmental concerns.”

Mike, the supervisor of educational programs, found:

“I think what they look at is the community support. What bump did we get from kids who attended half-day kindergarten that went to first grade? It was about 20% difference and they just realized that some of the kids were coming to us in first grade from private kindergartens that didn't have the skills set. So we were playing catch up in first grade.”

District leaders in the Westerly School district sought advice from the research, the Intermediate Unit, other districts, and state information when pursuing the move from a half-day model to a full-day model. Prior to moving into the full-day model, much consideration was given to the design and curricular expectations. The Westerly District did not mention a particular framework or lens for their decision making but they did tap into other resources for advice and information. Jane, the superintendent of Westerly, contended:

“Well as district leaders we seek advice from the IU, the group that looks at early childhood education. That is one arena. Certainly we consult the research. We have worked with the University of Pennsylvania and we have had a relationship with Temple over the years and some of the other local colleges in the area. Certainly we tapped into other models of school districts that had full-day kindergarten. We visited a lot of model programs throughout the state and nationally to get an idea of best practices. We have always brought in consultants that were considered to be leaders in the field.”

Karl, the director of teaching and learning, found:

“So financially I think most of the time whenever we are looking at a change in our district there is an expectation of finding model programs of other districts on a local and national level. We have always looked at authorities in the area and have them come to the district to speak directly to us and the committee.”

The Westerly School District phased in the full-day model and gave parents the option to decide which program they wanted for their child. After two years of this hybrid model, the district realized the full-day program was favored and provided full-day kindergarten for all students. Funding was never an issue for the district since they were confident the budget was able to accommodate the full-day program. The school board was in full support of the move to full-day and trusted the recommendations of the district leadership on the vision and direction of kindergarten.

The Cornerstone School District moved to the full-day model in 2003. Prior to making the shift, the assistant superintendent formed a committee of various stakeholders such as teachers, principals, and curriculum staff to lead the charge of visiting other districts, reading the research, and conducting a cost analysis of the resources needed to make the shift. Parents were not formally on the committee but had an opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions at several board meeting presentations. The committee prepared a proposal to the community and school board that discussed the research, the need for full-day kindergarten, and the costs involved in making the transition. The assistant superintendent believed strongly that in order to make the shift from half-day to full-day a well defined curriculum needed to be articulated along with expectations for learning. She stated:

“We really were looking for model schools that had a well-defined curriculum instructional program in place. Again, we were looking for a quality curriculum instructional design program.”

Lisa, the director of curriculum, stated:

“We looked at other districts and models. We looked at the benefits of early childhood education and really explored the research piece and looked at those districts having success as well as those that were not meeting success with the full-day program. The process that we undertook had to be a thoughtful rollout of a two-three year action plan with looking at what we were going to do first. It was done thoughtfully, you know, you just can't throw staff people together. I collected data for three years and then we did some comparisons across districts that have full-day.”

The Cornerstone School District considered other factors before pursuing the full-day model. Certain factors they considered dealt with community support, board support, and faculty support. The district believed strongly that they needed the stakeholders support because the move to full-day involved an increase in expenditures. Lots of research was done of best practices and best design. Mari, the assistant superintendent explained:

“Other factors that we needed to look at were the space issue, the staffing, and costs related to instructional materials. We had to look closely to see if we were able to accommodate FDK. We had to look at other factors and really try to project particularly the costs factors involved. We needed to be as comprehensive and clear as possible so there were no surprises.”

As noted by the supervisor of Language Arts K-12:

“There was a lot of study that went into it prior to the move. There was a lot of investigation to really make sure we were serving the constituents well.”

The Cornerstone School District also considered the community and teachers as other stakeholders needing consideration when investigating the FDK design. Professional development for teachers needed consideration so they could ensure once the transition was made to FDK, the teachers would have the proper and appropriate training. Along with the design of FDK programs, the district was very interested in the materials being used in other districts with FDK. A process was used as described by the director of curriculum:

“The assistant superintendent and I did the research for FDK and then we put together a task force and had a preliminary conversation with the superintendent. We put the proposal together and the superintendent asked the hard questions to ensure we thought of all the steps needed to move forward. We sought principal input, curriculum input, and board input. The proposal was shared at departmental meetings, curriculum council, and leadership meetings. The proposal then went to the curriculum committee of the board and then it was taken to the board for approval. We had to show the research and explain the rationale. We used our curriculum supervisors and task force to address the questions from the board and parents.

The Cornerstone School District was able to obtain the buy-in from the community, parents, and school board due to their clear articulation of the goals, curriculum, and rationale for the move to full-day kindergarten. The district looked closely at the achievement scores of other suburban districts as a factor. The district was clear to all stakeholders that the intent of the full-day program was not about acceleration by pushing

more and more onto children. As noted by the director of curriculum concerning the rationale for the movement to FDK:

“We’re going to get deeper into the learning conceptually and we will have more time to do that. So their foundation will be much stronger. We had to help parents understand that. That was probably the biggest challenge for me, helping parents understand what that meant to go deeper and more conceptual.”

The Cornerstone District and the Westerly District accessed the research on FDK, looked at similar districts in suburban communities, and formed a committee to create a plan for design and implementation. One district, Westerly, based their need for FDK on declining enrollment and the need to assist working parents. The Cornerstone School District based their decision to move to a full-day model to create a better foundation for early learners. Cornerstone believed in higher expectations for student learning with an increase in the rigor and a shift to go deeper with the curriculum.

The other two districts in the study, Herbertsville and Montrose, had similar responses when looking at factors for decision making in regards to kindergarten, stakeholder involvement, and who they reached out to for advice on programming. Although neither district offers full-day kindergarten, decisions were made in regards to existing kindergarten programming and other features in place that supported kindergarten. Both districts look at the research in the field of early childhood education, best practices, and other model districts. According to Joyce, the assistant superintendent of the Montrose School District:

“We talk to superintendents and assistant superintendents from other districts. We want to know what other districts are doing, but more importantly, we would look at high achieving districts across the state. So with the research we go to high performing districts to feel the pulse of local districts to see what they are doing. We would attend conferences as well.”

The Montrose District takes into account other factors when looking at kindergarten programs, especially if they decide to venture into the full-day model. Space will become a big factor along with increased teacher allocations. The superintendent of Montrose stated:

“If we implement FDK district wide, we will need to look at students that may have needs that could benefit from this, so that is an educational programming factor.”

The Herbertsville School District, the other suburban district offering the traditional half-day kindergarten model, turns to other key administrators for programming about kindergarten. These key administrators include elementary principals, curriculum staff, and lead teachers. The district traditionally operates by committees when new initiatives or changes are going to take place. Herbertsville talks with other districts and visits with other districts to obtain advice. They also look at the research and keep abreast of the latest trends at the state level.

Since the structure of the kindergarten model has not changed over the years, the district would use a collaborative approach if they were to investigate the efficacy of kindergarten. According to the director of curriculum for Herbertsville:

“We would have all stakeholders involved from the board to parents. We don’t make many decisions certainly at the central office level in our district. It’s just not our culture. When looking at factors about kindergarten programming, I am not sure if there was a strong philosophical orientation to kindergarten when it was developed and I don’t think it changed much over the years.”

Strengths and Weaknesses of Full-Day Kindergarten

The two districts offering full-day kindergarten were naturally in favor of the model since it has become the culture of their district. Several of the participants believed in the model but cautioned not to become too academic. The concern remained centered around

the socialization piece. Bonnie, the board member from the Westerly School District, stated:

“I am in favor of full-day kindergarten. I think we need to find the right balance. I don’t think kindergarten should be seven hours of solid academics. I think we need to find the right balance where they’re getting that kind of information but a lot of kids need the social part of it and interactions. I think some of these kids are young. If some of these kids are too young that could be a con.”

The strengths shared by these informants dealt with the notion of getting to know the needs of the students earlier so they could be addressed. The biggest strength that was stressed by informants from these two districts was the idea of time. The time allowed educators to go for deeper understanding of concepts in a pace that is a natural balance. The students in full-day programs have time to develop as learners. The full-day model provides students with an opportunity to develop the soft skills along with the academics. It allows students to acquire the foundational skills so they are better prepared for first grade. Mari, the assistant superintendent of Cornerstone, replied:

“I think I am absolutely a supporter of full-day kindergarten. I don’t see any negatives as long as it is a quality program and there is accountability for the quality of the program.”

Jane, superintendent of Westerly, stated:

“I love full-day kindergarten. I just think in the times we live in now that kids need to be getting a full-day program at five. I think it has shown a benefit in the upper grades. We have a chance to get services to kids where there are developmental needs and sort of equalize the playing field. I just see total benefit.”

Other strengths reported by the two districts offering half-day kindergarten referred to the readiness of students coming to school. The superintendent of the Montrose School district was in favor of full-day kindergarten and cited the following perspective to support his argument:

“I am in favor of FDK. I think the emphasis on writing, reading, and math to a certain degree has increased markedly. We have students coming to school more than ready to learn who given initial support and time could achieve at higher levels. If you look at the fact that our raw materials are coming in better than ever, why wouldn’t you want to create better results than ever if you have more time to do it.”

Participants of the Herbertsville School District were mixed on their points of view if they were in favor of full-day kindergarten. Three of the four informants were in favor of FDK and discussed several of the strengths to offering a full-day program such as it provides students an opportunity for socialization and the opportunity to work with others. Three of the four participants believed that parents could not always provide the necessary developmental resources needed to provide the academic readiness. The full-day program allows teachers to assist children with the readiness skills to prepare them for future academics. As noted by the director of curriculum:

“I think it is critical for all children to understand and to work with others. I am in favor of full-day kindergarten if it is a well constructed, developmentally appropriate and attentive program.”

The one outlier of all the participants was the superintendent of Herbertsville when responding to a question about whether he was against or in favor of full-day kindergarten. He did believe that FDK gave you more hours in a day to do quality programming, but needed the term quality defined. In particular, the superintendent responded:

“I think an awful lot of parents would be supportive of FDK not only for its educational value, but also it reduces the burden at home. I have some old fashioned values about what little ones should have to withstand over the course of a day; I think sometimes we over regiment kids. I do think with shrinking resources you need to pick your spots where you expand your investments, and I’m not sold that there is enough bang for the investment.”

Most participants shared basically the same weaknesses of full-day kindergarten. The cost, facilities, resources, materials and student adjustment to the longer day were the

primary weaknesses expressed from most participants. Overall, most of the participants had a very short list of the weaknesses. No participants discussed a decline in enrollment or lower grades/achievement. Some believed a very small percentage of students may not be ready for the full-day. In particular, Lisa, the director of curriculum for Cornerstone, noted:

“Probably for a very small percentage of students that probably are not quite ready socially or emotionally –having some challenges and needing a little more time.”

Along the same line of readiness, Mike, the supervisor of educational programs in Westerly, stated:

“You have some kids that come into kindergarten with a little skills set and others that are on a second grade reading level. We have a wide gap in kindergarten since some kids are coming in with better prepared pre-school experience. It is challenging for us to find the balanced playing field.”

The one comment made mostly about the weaknesses dealt with the issue of funding, especially for districts that received little support from federal dollars. Due to the cost issues, districts need to think critically about the funding to feel confident the benefits will outweigh the costs. Jane, the superintendent of Westerly, claimed:

“FDK is costly to do. I know that’s why lots of districts stay with half-day kindergarten. And by costly, I mean facilities. We have to have facilities large enough to handle that. Fortunately, Westerly does, but the board in its wisdom built an additional school years ago to accommodate that need. I know that our financial situation here is not the same as other school districts, so we’re in a good place right now.”

As illustrated by the participants in this study, the greatest opposition to full-day kindergarten lies in the financial piece and the space issue. It is important to note that none of the districts discussed student achievement as a weakness for students as the research provided in the literature review revealed a leveling off of progress by the third grade year. The two districts operating a full-day model did not suggest that FDK would

ever become a negotiable item if pressed to make changes in programs due to the turbulent economy. The other two districts not offering FDK appeared to remain open minded about the idea of FDK as a possibility and were well aware that a thorough investigation of budgetary costs is the largest obstacle to tackle.

Resource Allocations

For the purposes of this next portion of the data analysis, resource allocations will refer to funding, staffing, material resources, and facilities resources. Before any school district can venture into a full-day kindergarten model or any feature that adds to the existing traditional half-day model, the key factor of resource allocations must be methodically considered in any educational setting. In today's economic struggles, funding is a critical piece to the puzzle. The challenge for districts today across the nation is to prioritize the programs that must remain in place and decide which programs are negotiable.

The two districts offering full-day kindergarten had to initially consider if their district could financially implement FDK and maintain it year after year. Within the initial costs for FDK were facilities issues such as having enough classroom space to enroll the students into full-day kindergarten. In the Cornerstone School District, they conducted a costs analysis as they were doing the research on full-day kindergarten. From the beginning, they factored in the needed construction to build the extra classrooms needed in the elementary schools. They factored in the cost of teacher salaries as well as materials such as furniture, books, and classroom equipment. Since the district had a well established tax base and had planned financially over a three year period to increase taxes, the district was confident they could efficiently implement full-day kindergarten

and maintain its costs year after year. The program, now in its seventh year, is part of the yearly resource allocations for the K-3 design of the district. The district operates from an annual zero based budget. Mari, the assistant superintendent for Cornerstone, argues that FDK is primarily about what districts value and don't value. She contended:

“I think if you follow the money, you're going to find what districts really value. And I think if the district is really committed to full-day kindergarten to provide as many resources and supports to children when they come to your district as possible, I think there's probably other resources that are aligned to other activities and programs that could be aligned to support this. But I truly think this is a priority and it can be done. There are ways to do it. It's just a matter of a commitment to aligning resources to it. Easier said than done. I don't think it is hard to generate passion for FDK. That's the easy part.”

Also from the Cornerstone District, the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment argued:

“It's about looking at your vision and goals for education. We did an analysis of our goals for early learners and found ways to think outside of the box to make FDK a reality. I would encourage districts to take a look at surrounding districts that have had similar challenges with space issues. This issue is about shifting or realigning your priorities.

Since the implementation of FDK in 2003, the program is embedded in the yearly budget of the district in terms of teacher allocations and material resources. After the initial expenditure to add classroom space, the need for increased facilities has not been a concern in the Cornerstone District. Today, the district strives to keep kindergarten class size at lower numbers (20-22) which is always a consideration when looking at budgetary allotments for teacher allocations.

The Westerly District, the other district offering full-day kindergarten since 1993, ventured into the model as a phase in model. The district analyzed its low enrollment numbers for kindergarten and realized parents were seeking other educational settings to provide the full-day program they wanted for their child. In an effort to be financially

responsible to taxpayers and be certain the model would increase enrollment, the district phased in the full-day program by offering parents the option of which program they wanted for their child. The district had the funding to support the increase in teacher allocations and materials. In its infant stages, the district had enough space available to accommodate the requests for full-day kindergarten in several of its buildings by making sacrifices to the art and music programs. This meant art and music classes would not be served in their own classroom but on a cart where the teacher (art/music) travelled to the homeroom to teach the lessons. Over the next year or so, the board found it best to build another school which then allowed full-day kindergarten to be offered at each of its elementary buildings. It also allowed the special area teachers to have their own classroom to teach the arts. Jane, the superintendent of Westerly, recalled:

“When we first implemented FDK, before the new building, we made some sacrifices, like art and music on a cart. We were still able to deliver the whole program, but we had to do it in a different way to accommodate that need. Now in many districts that’s a value that they don’t want to see art and music on a cart. When exploring FDK in terms of resource allocations, you need to weigh the cost to the benefit. We felt strongly in this district that [FDK] needed to be a component of our program in order to see the growth we wanted to see at the other end. So the district did what they could to accommodate that need in terms of cost, but it’s a value that the community had too. I think other districts handle it however they choose. It was a priority of Westerly to meet the needs of the kids. And maybe it came at other costs here.”

Today, resource allocations in the Westerly School District are accepted as the program K-12, they do not separate kindergarten out by having separate funding sources for kindergarten. Kindergarten is included as part of the elementary budget. The teacher allotment for kindergarten is all inclusive in the larger scheme of staffing; the need for additional space has not been an issue for Westerly since the additional elementary school was built years ago.

The Montrose and Herbertsville School Districts include the half-day kindergarten program into their elementary budget in terms of staffing and materials. Similar to the other districts, the kindergarten resource allocations are aligned to the elementary budget and are treated as equitably compared to other elementary grade levels.

The Herbertsville District at the present time is content with the existing half-day model it provides along with the extended day hour daily for students in need, the one full-day class for at risk learners, and the day care program optionally offered to parents who need care the other half of the day. Some of the federal Title I funds are utilized for the extended day program (one hour of time per building) for students needing additional supports in areas they may demonstrate a deficit. The current budget and space issues are able to maintain their existing half-day model and the additional features it provides.

Bob, the superintendent of Herbertsville, argued:

“We don’t have any evidence that would tell us that our kids aren’t sustained academically with the current model [HDK]. I believe we have board members that believe that [FDK], while it could be advantageous to some kids, is in large part a cost that absolves parents of day care and that if we could provide for the needs of the kids that need the help the most, why would we need [FDK] if there is no evidence that we need to be doing that academically or socially. I don’t see it as a rising high priority that our model will change in the next five or ten years.”

The school board member, Helga, believed differently about resource allocations for full-day kindergarten. She believed that in the near future the district should look more closely at a move to full-day kindergarten to keep students in the forefront educationally and socially in order to compete in today’s world. As a supporter of full-day kindergarten, one who years ago approached the topic at a board meeting, believed the budget can always be reshaped and reviewed to find the resources to implement full-day kindergarten. She stated:

“As far as resource allocations, I can think of a lot of other things or areas that you could cut corners. Not cut corners-not cut quality in any way-but there are areas of our budget that you could minimize some areas to make way for a quality full-day kindergarten program. The space in this district is there since the enrollment is going down. That’s true all over the state of Pennsylvania. Like I said, the budget is the budget. You can always make room for what you want.”

The director of curriculum for Herbertsville believed you need to be creative with your resource allocations and look at ways to make full-day kindergarten happen in the district. As an advocate for early childhood education, her passion and eagerness is to see full-day kindergarten in the district in the future. She believed that funding and space did play a major role in holding districts back from even considering full-day kindergarten as a possibility. Her viewpoint offered the following:

“I understand that resource allocations are an issue with full-day kindergarten, especially the space issue but the reality is that buildings are required to be updated. If the district is really committed to early childhood education they have to look at the restructuring of their whole elementary program perhaps. There are creative ways to look at kindergarten.”

The Montrose School District, the other district offering the traditional half-day kindergarten model, currently incorporates the kindergarten resource allocations into the elementary program when budgeting for staffing needs and materials. Although the district operates a traditional half-day kindergarten model, it also provides a transitional first grade program for students who are not quite ready for first grade. The Montrose School District is the only district in the county that still offers a transitional first grade program. During the 2010-2011 year, the district plans to begin talks of the full-day model with hopes of phasing out the transitional first grade and using the funding to support a phase in model of full-day kindergarten. The district is in the talking phase at the point with the desire to begin a formalized process to look candidly at all resource

allocations and begin to generate a process towards the investigation of full-day kindergarten.

The staffing needs, materials, and other resources are driven by kindergarten enrollment numbers. Staffing allocation is very much driven by the registration numbers in the district and need. According to the superintendent of Montrose in terms of budgeting:

“Budgeting really is based on need every year. The teachers will tell you we have support for the materials that they need and we monitor enrollment. We try to keep class size numbers reasonable from year to year.”

According to Harry, the Human Resource Manager for Montrose:

“The budget has created its own unique challenges, unlike we have ever seen before and I don’t think that is going to change. I think every year is going to be a new budget barrage. I believe when looking at resources for [FDK] in terms of funding, staffing, and space, it is accurate to say that to implement such a program now in these economic times will be difficult to pull off. Looking ahead to the 2011-2012 financial situation will make it hard to maintain the programs we have now. So instituting a program like [FDK] that’s labor intensive and space intensive will be challenging to pull off.”

When looking at resource allocations needed to implement full-day kindergarten for the Montrose School, if they travel down that road, would focus on the need for additional funding, staffing, and space. Joyce, the assistant superintendent for Montrose admitted:

“As far as space and funding I would like to say if there is a will there is a way, but we don’t have it. Sometimes you have to be creative with resources. I guess there are some districts that just don’t have the physical space. I think that space would be the biggest impediment because you can always find ways to share materials. If you don’t have room, that is difficult to surmount. However, like everything else, it’s just reordering priorities and if there are other things in a district or Pennsylvania deemed to be more critical then-they don’t have kindergarten.”

The notion that urban and suburban districts are not provided with equal funding by the state can have an influence on suburban districts’ intentions to pursue full-day kindergarten. Since suburban districts in this particular county receive on average about

17% of their funding from the state and about 1% from the federal government, the remaining (81%), comes from local funding. Also factored into the equation is the issue of Act 1 and its impact on suburban communities. Ted, the superintendent of Montrose, argues:

“If we went from 17% given to us now by the state to 27% that would be gigantic for us. So these poor districts are heavily funded by the state. What’s even more ironic is when you look at the Act 1 index, those poorer districts have a higher allowable rate they can increase taxes on the Act 1 index. So they can raise their taxes more and the public seems to accept that there and the state gives them more in state aid, when the state is limiting our increases in state aid by 2% on top of what we get in a year. So Act 1 was intended to level off taxes and so on, but I am calling it the great equalizer. We are going to take the best districts and make them worse, and help the worst districts and help them be a little better. I don’t think the folks out there know well enough what to ask for, and because of that the costs are lower. So the state needs to wise up, take a look at what our (suburban) costs are so they can help us.”

Resource allocations will continue to be the driving force for implementation of full-day kindergarten in suburban districts. In essence, suburban districts that have successfully funded full-day kindergarten are confident that continued financial resources will remain intact for their districts despite the downward spiral of our current economic times. The resources allotted are an integral part of the entire K-12 budget for these districts. The challenge still remains for those suburban districts to ascertain whether the full-day model is cost effective for their students and the district. Does the budget overshadow their decision or does it still rest with the values and priorities of the district?

Values and Opinions of District Leaders about Kindergarten

As the researcher conducted the fourteen interviews of all key informants for all four suburban districts in one Southeastern County in Pennsylvania, it was made clear that each participant had great value for kindergarten whether it was the half-day model or the full-day model. Each informant described kindergarten as “important, critical, crucial,

essential, and builds the foundation.” All participants believed strongly that as educators we need to find the balance between the academics and the socialization piece. All participants recognized the changing demographics of the districts and believed more can always be done to meet the needs of all learners. All of the participants had strong opinions about kindergarten and shared what they believed to be of greatest value to this grade level.

The participants for the Westerly District and Cornerstone District (FDK) believed kindergarten was of great value, especially the full-day model. Most of these participants shared common values such as:

- It provides for a smoother transition to first grade.
- It allows teachers to provide the needed interventions early or provide the enrichment needed for students above the kindergarten level.
- It has lessened the need for special education services in future years.
- It has allowed for the development of a rigorous balanced literacy approach to teaching reading.
- Increased opportunities for instruction.
- Increased opportunities for socialization/collaboration/team building with students.
- Increased time for problem solving, investigation, and exploration.
- Assisted children with building softer skills.

The Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for the Cornerstone District shared her values and opinions about full-day kindergarten as follows:

“I think FDK is critically important. It is foundational and it needs to be structured. It allows students to formulate friendships, communicate, solve problems, and work out differences. I value the balance between the softer skills and the academic skills.”

The Assistant Superintendent for Cornerstone values the time the full-day model provides so teachers can deliver the curriculum in a more balanced and well paced instructional day. Her opinion and values about FDK were:

“I think FDK is terrific. When we had a half-day model there was very little you could do—you get the socialization components and you might get some instruction in, but it was very limited. There was not enough time for the exploratory approach to learning. FDK has provided the time to create literacy blocks and develop a full-balanced literacy curriculum.”

Other participants noted that the value of FDK allows time for students to be exposed to the readiness skills needed for learning since some students did not have the opportunity to attend pre-K or pre-school and needed the full-day model to develop. Others valued FDK because it provided teachers with an opportunity to fully immerse students in literacy. The board member for the Westerly District shared the following opinion about FDK:

“My opinion of FDK is I think for most kids it’s a must and a lot of kids in our district don’t have pre-school opportunities due to financial reasons. I think it is an opportunity for kids to socialize with other kids in addition to all the obvious educational advantages.”

The superintendent of Westerly shared many values and opinions of FDK since she has experienced working under both models in her career as a teacher, principal, and central office administrator. She believed:

“I think the demands on kids nowadays with the curriculum necessitate a full-day program. We have had less transition problems with students from FDK to first grade than we did when we had HDK. I value the effectiveness of FDK because we have noticed in the last ten years our kids are accessing much more courses in terms of rigor. I believe that’s because they have a good base. Our special education numbers have dropped because I feel strongly that lots of kids were misplaced before, where developmental issues looked like learning disabilities. So I believe strongly in the

positive affect the [FDK] has had on our district, and I do believe the research that if you get them young enough, you're able to break some of those patterns.'

One participant from the Westerly District, Karl, the Director of Teaching and Learning, had another slant about his specific values and opinions of FDK. He believed strongly that school districts need to shift their focus from the students to a more concerted effort to educate parents about kindergarten prior to students entering kindergarten. He believed:

"I believe districts need to provide strategies for parents. I believe the district has a responsibility to work with parents of pre-school students to help them with ideas that would help develop their students in areas such as the concept of print. We need to help parents get ready"

The participants for the two districts offering half-day kindergarten shared similar values of those district leaders offering a full-day program. While asking these district leaders about their values and opinions of full-day kindergarten, the researcher noted how these participants paused when answering this question because it really made them reflect on the reality of their current design to what they believed it should be. They all believed kindergarten in general was critical and the foundational premise for future learning.

In both of these districts, there had been previous discussion about full-day kindergarten. In particular, in the Herbertsville School District, the superintendent and assistant superintendent for elementary believed that while FDK provided the extra time, they were confident their traditional model along with some added features as discussed earlier, meets the needs of the students appropriately. They believed it would be a hard sell to the school board to move into a full-day model during these current economic times. It appeared to the researcher that the investigation of this initiative was not on the

priority list for the administration of the district. To the contrary, the school board member for Herbertsville had the perception that it would be a topic of interest for the school board. It appeared the administration and the board may be unclear of their values of full-day kindergarten as a district. Helga, the board member, shared her values and beliefs about full-day kindergarten as follows:

“I am sometimes torn. I am a believer that our children do not have enough time to play today when they are young. I think their lives are too organized. I don’t think we give our children enough time to dream, to pretend, or to imagine. But by the same token I know that in order to compete with their peers, children need to be prepared for public school. They need to know things that used to be taught to them in kindergarten before they even get there. The studies show usually the whole thing levels out by third grade, but they have to start at some point. The early start is important. Down the line I see our district moving in the direction of FDK.”

The participants for the Montrose District have a high regard for kindergarten and believe a full-day kindergarten would be beneficial for most students. However, they do see students in their current half-day program doing more and more. In particular, they believe that students in less affluent communities present differently than those students coming from middle to upper middle class suburban communities. In particular, the superintendent for Montrose believes the following when asked about his value and opinion of kindergarten:

“It is essential. I think the essentiality of kindergarten is on a sliding scale. If you go to the less affluent districts of the state and you look at students who are coming to kindergarten who have not had preschool or who are not in a home with very educated families, you see a different child. But it’s essential. The students see you have a year to prepare for school. They’re doing more and more with the same time they have.”

The assistant superintendent and human resources director had a very strong value for kindergarten and believed the full-day model would have the greatest impact for their district. As educators, they saw first had the challenges of the half-day program for the students, teachers, and parents. They believed in the balance of academics and

socialization and believed the full-day model could provide that balance. From their perspectives, the value of FDK would serve all families well; it would help to level the playing field of students who come to kindergarten with limited experiences and background knowledge. The human resources director believed;

“I think kindergarten needs to be a year where kids are learning socially how to interact with one another and work with other students and work within the framework of the classroom. In kindergarten, students should begin to get the concept of school and of personal responsibility. I just don’t think there is enough time in the day to do all this in the half-day model. I think a lot of our kids are coming to us without any background. We’ve got some very wealthy families and some families that are not, and the difference in their exposure to so many things is so vast that it’s hard to deal with those differences in a half-day structure.”

The assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment holds the following opinions about kindergarten:

“Kindergarten should be an integral part of a child’s educational experience. I think that kids who have a kindergarten experience are much more comfortable coming into first grade than those who do not. I do think it is appropriate to have academic expectations; it isn’t just socialization, although that is part of it. Personally, I think that most children at that age could handle full-day kindergarten. I think it is a challenge when you have a half-day program. For most districts like us that have a half-day kindergarten, they end up for the most part concentrating on language arts and math.”

The two districts offering full-day kindergarten have seen first hand the benefits of FDK and were able to clearly articulate their value in this model due to the positives provided to students, teachers, and families. The value for the program does not rest alone with educators, but with the parents and community at large. The value for full-day kindergarten has become part of the culture for Cornerstone and Westerly. It is the way these districts “do business.”

The two half-day kindergarten districts would agree there is value to the full-day model but realized this is not an initiative that can be tackled lightly. While the value remains, the desire and passion to make the commitment to act on this transition to a full-

day model remains to be seen. In essence, the budget is the reality and that will have a direct impact on the full-day kindergarten. The budget will impact these districts with what they want to do and force them to do what they have to do. The district leaders in these districts will have to articulate what is priority for their community and what is of greatest value to their student population.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

“Initiation of change never occurs without an advocate, and one of the most powerful is the chief district administrator, with his or her staff, especially in combination with school board support or mandate” (Fullan, 1991, p.54). The topic of full-day kindergarten versus half-day kindergarten is a policy and program issue that takes root at the central level. District policies are top down in design and bottom up in implementation. New initiatives and program design are generated from the district leadership based on their priorities, values, and beliefs for continuous school improvement. Fullan (1991) contends, “It is the superintendent and central office staff who combine access, internal authority, and resources necessary to seek out external funds for a particular change program and/or to obtain board support” (p. 54).

“Research confirms that early childhood education can create more productive citizens. Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff, the director of Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, has shown that experiences in early childhood affect the very architecture of the brain” (Yalow, 2010, p. 4). It is critical for students to enter kindergarten with some preliminary skills set cognitively, emotionally, and socially in order to succeed. As educators, we know how crucial early learning is for all students from all backgrounds and all experiences. “If we are to achieve U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s vision that ‘all students regardless of background have access to a high quality education,’ educators, policymakers, school administrators, and parents

must begin to look more closely at our systems of education for public schools as it pertains to early childhood education” (Yalow, 2010, p. 10).

This study examined the values, perceptions, and opinions of district leaders as it pertains to full-day kindergarten. This study investigated four suburban school districts in one county located in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. Two of the districts studied had full-day kindergarten and two of the districts had half-day kindergarten. This study delved deeper into district leaders’ thinking when discussing and evaluating program design for kindergarten. This study sought to understand who district leaders go to for advice on programming and what research they accessed when in the process of discussing kindergarten programs. The study determined other key informants who were responsible for the decision making. This study examined funding issues and resource allocation issues related to programming along with clearer predictions of potential academic gains.

Summary of Findings

Results of this case study suggest that the majority of suburban district leaders in this study value full-day kindergarten based on their understanding of its benefits as provided in the research coupled with their first hand experience working directly with kindergarten populations. Most leaders are in favor of full-day kindergarten and view it as an opportunity for teachers to go deeper with the curriculum, provide effective socialization time, and identify students needing additional support or services. All leaders are challenged with the fiscal responsibility full-day kindergarten incurs but believe this obstacle of funding is tackled with appropriate or creative alignment of funds. All leaders agreed that the continuous changing demographics of their communities

remain a challenge for kindergarten teachers to program effectively to meet the needs of all learners.

Data were collected through informal observations (board meetings), interviews with key informants, and a review of district documents (school plans, strategic plans, curriculum, assessment scores, and district data). Triangulation of data occurred using the three sources of data collected. The constant comparative method was used as the data were collected, coded, and analyzed. General over arching themes emerged through the data analysis.

Limitations to the Study

The findings from this study are limited to the population from which this sample was taken. This case study was conducted with four suburban public schools in one county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania. Sixteen district leaders were asked to participate in the study but the researcher had access to only fourteen. Nine of the participants were female and five of the participants were male. In all, each of the fourteen participants were asked the same interview prompts in order to gather the data in light of the five over arching research questions. Some of the participants knew the researcher and two of the participants were former administrative colleagues. The researcher currently works in a suburban district in the same county as the other districts in the study.

Research Question 1

What are district leaders' perceptions, values, and opinions about kindergarten programming as it relates to pedagogy?

Through this study, it was made clear that each participant had great value for kindergarten whether it was the half-day model or the full-day model. Most informants

described kindergarten as “important, critical, crucial, essential, and builds the foundation.” All participants believed strongly that as educators we need to find the balance between the academics and the socialization piece. In this time of high stakes testing and accountability, it is imperative as educators not to lose sight of the developmental needs of kindergartners both academically and socially. Regardless of half-day kindergarten or full-day kindergarten, educators must seek to find the appropriate balance between academics and socialization. As noted by several administrators:

“I believe there is value in the extra time with FDK and with the other kids, the socialization part of it. So I think there is value to FDK but I don’t think that the entire time should be spent on curricular areas on the reading and math.”

“I mean is it like quality just strictly an academic focus or do we worry about the development of children, in their creativity, their ability to innovate even as little children? Do we worry about their ability to get along with others? Quality of kindergarten relies on ensuring students are developmentally ready for academics and their ability to develop relationships with others”

All participants realized the need for stronger skills at the kindergarten level in order for all students to be proficient and successful learners. All of the participants had strong opinions about kindergarten and shared what they believed to be of greatest value to this grade level. Some opinions and view points from several participants about the value of kindergarten were:

“It is essential. I think the essentiality of kindergarten is on a sliding scale. If you go to the less affluent districts of the state and you look at students who are coming to kindergarten who have not had preschool or who are not in a home with very educated families, you see a different child. But it’s essential. The students have a year to prepare for school. They’re doing more and more with the same time they have.”

“My opinion of FDK is I think for most kids it’s a must and a lot of kids in our district don’t have pre-school opportunities due to financial reasons. I think it is an opportunity for kids to socialize with other kids in addition to all the obvious educational advantages.”

“When we had a half-day model there was very little you could do—you get the socialization components and you might get some instruction in, but it was very limited. There was not enough time for the exploratory approach to learning. FDK has provided the time to create literacy blocks and develop a full-balanced literacy curriculum.”

“I think kindergarten needs to be a year where kids are learning socially how to interact with one another and work with other students and work within the framework of the classroom. In kindergarten, students should begin to get the concept of school and of personal responsibility. I just don’t think there is enough time in the day to do all this in the half-day model. I think a lot of our kids are coming to us without any background. We’ve got some very wealthy families and some families that are not, and the difference in their exposure to do so many things is so vast that it’s hard to deal with those differences in a half-day structure.”

All leaders’ perceptions of kindergarten as it related to pedagogy stressed the importance of academics to afford students the necessary learning experiences to become proficient in the areas of reading and math. In today’s educational times, with the push for proficiency, leaders viewed kindergarten as the integral starting point to set the stage for future learning.

Research Question 2

How do district leaders’ perceptions, values, and opinions related to pedagogy influence their decisions about kindergarten programming?

Within any educational organization, district leaders are faced with the task of making many decisions about program design and implementation. As this case study demonstrated, each district understands and recognizes the need to examine closely the kindergarten year more critically in these demanding educational times. With the increased measures for accountability on school systems to perform at high levels and graduate students with the necessary skills to succeed in the 21st century, educators know how critical the kindergarten year is for their population. The two districts offering full-day kindergarten made the conscious decision to move from a half-day model to the full-

day model based on parental values (need) and/or the desire to increase the rigor and depth of kindergarten. It is evident that each of these districts made kindergarten a priority and illustrated their value for early childhood education by actively engaging in this paradigm shift. Most leaders noted how the district administration and school board shared the same values and made kindergarten a priority. As noted by several district leaders below:

“By looking at district budgets you can see what they really value and see what is priority for their student population. If the district is really committed to full-day kindergarten, they will make it happen. But I truly think this is a priority and it can be done. There are ways to do it. It’s just a matter of a commitment to aligning resources to it.”

“It’s about looking at your vision and goals for education. We did an analysis of our goals for early learners and found ways to think outside of the box to make FDK a reality. I would encourage districts to take a look at surrounding districts that have had similar challenges with space issues. This issue is about shifting or realigning your priorities.”

In districts with half-day kindergarten, the data and evidence to support the need for full-day kindergarten are still undergoing investigation. While both superintendents believed more time would allow for more educational experiences, they were not totally convinced the full-day model was warranted for their district based on their academic scores from kindergarten. As argued by one superintendent from a half-day kindergarten district:

“We don’t have any evidence that would tell us that our kids aren’t sustained academically with the current model [HDK]. I believe we have board members that believe that [FDK], while it could be advantageous to some kids, is in large part a cost that absolves parents of day care and that if we could provide for the needs of the kids that need the help the most, why would we need [FDK] if there is no evidence that we need to be doing that academically or socially. I don’t see it as a rising high priority that our model will change in the next five or ten years.”

District leaders’ values, perceptions and opinions of kindergarten coupled with their sources of achievement data have provided the basis for leaders to move forward with

[FDK] or to remain with the existing structure of [HDK]. Those districts providing [FDK] made the transition to this model due to the priorities and values held by central administration, teachers, parents and the school board. All districts were influenced by the values of the district and the culture of the organization to determine which program design best suited the needs of their population.

Research Question 3

What framework for decision making is enacted to reach the decision and who do districts turn to for advice on kindergarten programming?

District leaders are challenged to make many decisions about program design and implementation. Many key stakeholders are involved in the process; each district process may vary with participation of stakeholders and the level of involvement, but all four districts in the study had some sort of a process for decision making with educational programs. Ultimately, the final approval rests with the school board.

The decision to move from a half-day kindergarten to a full-day kindergarten was determined by a declining enrollment in one district and the need to increase the rigor and depth of the curriculum in the other district. Both districts formed some version of a committee to define the purpose, investigate the research, assess the facilities, resources, and funding, and create a timeline for implementation. Key stakeholders involved in the decision making ranged from the school board, superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of elementary education, director of curriculum, curriculum supervisors, principals, teachers and parents. District leaders reviewed the research on the strengths and weaknesses of full-day kindergarten with close attention to the academic gains maintained or sustained in later elementary years. District leaders visited with other

districts locally and at the state level to learn first hand about the transition and implementation from a half-day model of kindergarten to a full-day model. District leaders also accessed local educational consultants, intermediate units, and local colleges and universities for advice.

Lisa, the director of curriculum, stated:

“We looked at other districts and models. We looked at the benefits of early childhood education and really explored the research piece and looked at those districts having success as well as those that were not meeting success with the full-day program. The process that we undertook had to be a thoughtful rollout of a two-three year action plan with looking at what we were going to do first. It was done thoughtfully, you know, you just can’t throw staff people together. I collected data for three years and then we did some comparisons across districts that have full-day.”

Both districts carefully assessed the resources needed and thoughtfully projected the costs for moving from the half-day model to the full-day model. One district in particular was clear to articulate to all constituents the rationale for such a move by stressing the curriculum and the increased expectations in kindergarten to yield higher performing students as a result of the full-day model. This district ensured that a well defined kindergarten curriculum was designed and communicated to the staff prior to the move to a full-day model.

All four districts enacted a collaborative approach to decision making and ensured that the right people were sitting at the table to provide input and feedback. One or two stakeholders served as the leaders of the committee or team to organize the process for decision making; they also ensured ideas and solutions were communicated in a timely manner.

Research Question 4

How do resource allocations and priority setting impact district leaders' decisions about kindergarten programming?

Resource allocations served as the most influential dynamic to this topic of full-day kindergarten. All leaders believed that resources such as funding, space, staffing, and materials had an impact on their decision to pursue the full-day model. Those districts that pursued the full-day model made it a priority for the district and ventured into this model with a vision and commitment to bring it to fruition. Both districts offering the full-day model planned for the increase in funding over several years in order to provide the proper allocations for staff, classrooms, and materials. Mari, assistant superintendent offered:

“I think if you follow the money, you’re going to find what districts really value. And I think if the district is really committed to full-day kindergarten to provide as many resources and supports to children when they come to your district as possible, I think there’s probably other resources that are aligned to other activities and programs that could be aligned to support this. But I truly think this is a priority and it can be done. There are ways to do it. It’s just a matter of a commitment to aligning resources to it. Easier said than done. I don’t think it is hard to generate passion for FDK. That’s the easy part.”

The two half-day kindergarten districts would agree there is value to the full-day model but believed this is an issue that needs further thought and evaluation in their districts. While the value remains, the desire and passion to make the commitment to act on this transition to a full-day model remains to be seen. The budget is the reality and that will have a direct impact on the implementation of full-day kindergarten for the two districts currently offering half-day models. The budget will impact these districts with what they want to do and force them to do what they have to do. The district leaders in

these districts will have to articulate what is priority for their community and what is of greatest value to their student population.

It is the responsibility of the district leadership to clearly define the priorities of the district and ensure all members/stakeholders know, understand, and act upon the priorities of the district. Often districts have numerous priorities that tend to cloud the organization because they are too lofty or unreachable. Too often districts tend to stress secondary priorities and lack the vision to define clear expectations for early childhood education. A clear articulation of early childhood priorities must be communicated to all constituents with fidelity.

Research Question 5

How does kindergarten fit into the district's K-12 strategic plan?

All district leaders agreed that kindergarten is part of the strategic plan. Kindergarten is not noted separately but is aligned to the achievement and instructional goals which encompasses all grades K-12. The strategic plan is an extensive action plan required for all public school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. District leadership is held accountable to the plan; they are held responsible for measuring the goals and noting the progress towards completion of the goals. As noted by the language arts curriculum supervisor:

“It is completely aligned to the strategic plan. In fact, when we did our curriculum review, we made sure that was one of the questions. (How does kindergarten align). Does the vision, mission, and everything that we do here, how is it aligned? We absolutely found that it was one of the things that was 100%. People know what is in the strategic plan. Everything is aligned to where we want to go in the district.”

Although the strategic plan is a required document for all districts, most district leaders follow a more specific version of an action plan that outlines the specific goals

and initiatives for the district that aligns to curriculum, instruction, achievement, data, and professional development. The strategic plan remains as a live working document that is reviewed and amended each year by key district staff. Each district in this study clearly communicates the district's strategic plan to staff, parents, and the community via the website or in a hard copy.

Outcome of the Study and Its Relation to Theory and Literature

Theoretical Frameworks

The topic of full-day versus half-day kindergarten is a policy issue with deeply embedded ideological tensions. Since kindergarten is not mandatory in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the researcher believes that school districts will remain with the status quo of half-day kindergarten unless the full-day model becomes mandatory. Those districts opting to remain with the half-day model are content with their model and the additional features they have designed to address the academic or child care issues of the district.

Lowi's (1964) theory of redistributive policy clarifies the current lens of how districts made the decision to shift from a half-day model of kindergarten to a full-day model. Lowi's theory redistributes funds or power from one priority to another. As explained by one superintendent:

“It was the endeavor of the administration to put together a pretty comprehensive list for the school board regarding possible areas of reduction. Within that list is the transitional first grade program under the guise that transitions to first grade really have come and gone. And that really those funds should be looked at going toward a full-day kindergarten program instead. So, we are going to reduce the number of T-1 classes for the 2010-2011 year and fade out the program. Most likely we will shift our monies toward full-day kindergarten for the 2011-2012 school year. The move to full-day will save us on the transportation costs that now occur at mid-day for the half-day program. We predict that the shift to full-day kindergarten will increase our enrollment by 25%.

We don't get a lot of students now for kindergarten because parents send their kids to private schools that have full-day kindergarten.”

The funding for full-day kindergarten was center stage for the districts that made the shift from half-day to full-day kindergarten. Districts had to find creative ways or alternatives to their existing programs in order to implement full-day. Once districts shared the vision and value for full-day, they committed themselves to make the transition to full-day kindergarten a reality. According to one superintendent:

“When we first implemented FDK, before the new building, we made some sacrifices, like art and music on a cart. We were still able to deliver the whole program, but we had to do it in a different way to accommodate that need. Now in many districts that's a value that they don't want to see art and music on a cart. When exploring FDK in terms of resource allocations, you need to weigh the cost to the benefit. We felt strongly in this district that [FDK] needed to be a component of our program in order to see the growth we wanted to see at the other end. So the district did what they could to accommodate that need in terms of cost, but it's a value that the community had too. I think other districts handle it however they choose. It was a priority of Westerly to meet the needs of the kids. And maybe it came at other costs here.”

Resource allocations will continue to be the driving force for implementation of full-day kindergarten in suburban districts. In essence, suburban districts that have successfully funded full-day kindergarten are confident that continued financial resources will remain intact for their districts despite the downward spiral of our current economic times. The resources allotted are similar to the entire K-12 budget for these districts. The challenge still remains for those suburban districts to ascertain whether the full-day model is cost effective for their students and the district. Does the budget overshadow their decision or does it still rest with the values and priorities of the district?

The two districts offering full-day kindergarten have seen firsthand the benefits of FDK and were able to clearly articulate their value in this model due to the positives provided to students, teachers, and families. The value for the program does not rest

alone with educators, but with the parents and community at large. The value for full-day kindergarten has become part of the culture of the two districts offering full-day kindergarten. It is the way these districts “do business.”

The counter theory to Lowi’s theory of redistributive policy is Louise Adler’s (1994) theory of centering a child in multiple contexts which “places the child in the center of the policy web and examines the complex societal assumptions and policy norms, powerful structures and systems, and people who can shape a child’s life” (p. 238). It is evident in today’s economic challenges that budgets drive all decisions in school districts. In Adler’s theory, children become the nucleus of the decision making despite the monetary issues surrounding the issue. The researcher believes that district leaders do not intentionally place the needs of children at the margins but the politics involved with critical educational decisions can overpower students’ needs. The dominant values of society and the key factors driving education politics have placed the needs of families and children at the margin (Marshall & Pepin, 2005). If educators and advocacy groups had access to the reins of power and budgets to create supports children need in schools, we would have different politics (Marshall & Pepin, 2005). As noted by one superintendent in the study:

“I think the next several years the mission of school districts is going to be severely challenged and that we are at the Y in the road. Folks are going to have to decide if they are going to continue to fund (FDK) and really make that commitment or if society is going to suddenly devalue education. Again, I think back to the budget. I think we are living through a time where budget is reality and that’s going to impact what we do and force us to what we have to do. So it is without consideration that I see (FDK) in this district in the next five years. However, budget is the trump card.”

In light of the issue of full-day kindergarten and half-day kindergarten, district leaders made the decision to move to the full-day model with an initial inkling rooted in Adler’s

child centered theory because they value the model and believe it is the model that will serve their students best. The process to act upon their values and beliefs forced them to design and implement full-day kindergarten through Lowi's theory of redistributive policy.

In order to make full-day kindergarten a reality, the priority of the district must shift to this initiative with appropriate funding to support its implementation. Since the move to full-day kindergarten is a huge paradigm shift, the efforts of the school district must shift its priorities to the full-day model until the design is successfully in place and maintained. Lowi's theory provides understanding of how and why districts redistribute funds to issues that are deemed priority or in greatest need.

Sustainability of Academic Gains

The principal literature strands connected to this study were the current kindergarten policies at the state level, the supports and critiques of full-day kindergarten, the resource allocations for districts, achievement related to full-day kindergarten and two competing theories, Lowi's theory of redistributive policy and Adler's theory of centering a child in multiple contexts.

The discussion in chapter three of the literature review provided the reader with the positive gains noted from full-day kindergarten programs, specifically in large inner city schools. Since each district measures the progress of kindergarten students with various assessment tools, it was difficult for the researcher to obtain one standard tool to measure kindergarten achievement across all four districts. The researcher provided achievement scores from the PSSA for all four districts to illustrate which school districts were making the most gains consistently across the grade levels of three to six. All four school

districts in the study have made the Adequate Yearly Progress Measure overall for all students since the beginning of PSSA in 2001.

In Mathematics in the grades tested at the elementary level (3-6), all four districts obtained 87% proficiency or better for the 2008-2009 school year across grades three to six. In Mathematics, the Cornerstone School District (FDK), averaged 93% proficient for grades 3-6 on the PSSA for the year 2008-2009. The Montrose School District (HDK) and the Herbertsville School District (HDK) each averaged 92% proficiency in mathematics on the PSSA for the 2008-2009 year. The Westerly School District (FDK), averaged 89% proficiency in mathematics for grades 3-6 on the 2008-2009 PSSA. The 2008-2009 PSSA in Reading demonstrated Cornerstone (FDK) with the highest percent proficient overall for grades 3-6 with 88% proficiency. Both the Herbertsville and the Montrose Districts (HDK) averaged 87% proficiency in reading overall for grades 3-6. The Westerly School District (FDK) averaged 83% proficiency in reading for grades 3-6.

The achievement data on the PSSA illustrated no dramatic differences between those districts with full-day kindergarten and those districts with half-day kindergarten. In fact, the district that has had full-day kindergarten the longest had the lowest overall averages in both reading and math out of the four districts studied. There were no significant findings to demonstrate strong academic gains for those districts operating full-day kindergarten as represented by the PSSA scores from 2008-2009.

As noted in the literature review, the Votruba-Drazil et al. (2008) study found that the academic benefits of full-day kindergarten subside soon after children leave kindergarten (p.974). The study revealed the fade- out of the full-day advantage of kindergarten occurs as the trajectories of children in part-day kindergarten grow at a steeper rate from

the spring of kindergarten of fifth grade (Votruba-Drzal et al., p. 974). The study found that the advantage of full-versus part-day kindergarten fades out approximately 36 months after the spring of the third grade (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). DeCicca (2007) found that the short term impact of full-day kindergarten had deteriorated considerably by the end of first grade. DeCicca's (2007) findings suggested that on average, the academic returns associated with full-day kindergarten are quite low or non-existent (p.81). The gains noted for end of the year growth in full-day kindergarten can be attributed to the research findings of Votruba-Drzal et al. (2008) which indicate that child and family characteristics played a primary role in why full-day benefits exist and in why these advantages fade relatively quickly.

Recommendations

The following suggestions can assist the four districts in this one county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania and others who plan to study this topic:

1. This study can be replicated in other school districts to determine to what extent district leaders' values, perceptions, and opinions of full-day kindergarten are similar. Interview questions should be developed in light of resource allocations, decision making methods, research, and stakeholder participation.
2. Since none of the districts have conducted a formal evaluation of their current kindergarten program to determine its benefits, each district should explore a vehicle to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their current design.
3. All four districts studied made reference to the collaborative process enacted when pursuing a programmatic change. Each district included various stakeholders as part of the decision making process. Districts should explore a

research based decision making tool that is suitable to their district to utilize for all programmatic changes. An example could be the Program Improvement Model (Balridge).

4. Each district discussed soft data they used to describe the growth made in their kindergarten program. Those districts operating a full-day model should conduct a longitudinal study to ascertain the long term effects of the full-day kindergarten model.
5. The districts not offering full-day kindergarten should consider conducting a cost benefit analysis to determine if the full-day model would serve their population better than the existing half-day model. Key actors should include finance personnel, kindergarten teachers, and district leaders with expertise in early childhood education.
6. The characteristics of the two superintendents providing a half-day kindergarten model was that both superintendents had only secondary experience in teaching and in administration. Superintendents with limited experience and background in early childhood education should confer with other district leaders about the current trends and policies of early childhood education. All superintendents should be knowledgeable about the standards and curriculum for early learners.
7. Many district leaders expressed concern with the limited amount of time to teach the curriculum in a half-day kindergarten program. Many shared that students were often short changed with investigations and social activities. District leaders in half-day programs should ensure the curriculum is aligned and viable in the amount of time provided in the half-day program. Teacher and student

expectations should be examined to avoid frustration. District leadership should review curriculum documents to ensure students are exposed to exploration, investigation, and social activities. Leaders need to evaluate the potential long-term impact the lack of meaningful student engagement might have on student achievement.

8. District leaders should seek more input and feedback from parents and the community to ascertain their beliefs and values about the current design of their kindergarten programs.
9. Observations of board meetings revealed minimal to no discourse around early childhood education topics. The board should be kept abreast of the latest trends and standards for early childhood education by the central administration.
10. All leaders expressed great concern with the range of readiness for in-coming kindergarten students. Some students attend pre-school programs or pre-kindergarten programs. Some students enter kindergarten with no experience at all. District leadership should explore a mechanism to provide better transitions to the kindergarten year. District leadership should consider forming partnerships with the local pre-schools and pre-kindergarten programs to communicate district curriculum and expectations for better alignment of learning standards.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. Further study is needed to expand the scope of this study. Since this study investigated four districts in one suburban county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it is recommended to expand the number of participants to include a larger sample. It is

suggested that a survey be conducted to include a wider range of counties and district leaders in suburban districts to obtain their perceptions of kindergarten.

2. Since there are greater demands on school districts to reach proficiency, a long range study should be implemented to determine if there are any statistical gains in mathematics and reading as measured by the third grade PSSA for students enrolled in FDK as compared to those in HDK.

3. Parental input and feedback are crucial to the nature of this topic of full-day kindergarten versus half-day kindergarten. Further exploration is needed to understand parents' perceptions, values, and opinions of full-day versus half-day kindergarten. Parent satisfaction serves as an important factor in continuing any new program. Focus groups of parents from suburban districts should be conducted to obtain these data. Surveys could also be utilized to obtain data.

4. The elementary principal serves as an advocate for all children. As a school leader, principals must communicate the vision, values, and beliefs of the school. It is important to ascertain the vision of school leadership in terms of kindergarten programming. Further data are needed to include the opinions and values of elementary principals in suburban districts for both half-day programs and full-day programs.

5. The two districts offering half- day programs discussed additional services they provide for students needing further support or day care options. Such programs included a one hour extended day model, one full-time class for at risk learners, a day care program, or a transitional first grade. Further research is needed on a larger scale to determine if other suburban school districts are offering similar programs to support learning concerns and day care issues to determine their efficacy.

6. Most district leaders believed that a full-day program provided for an easier transition to first grade. It is reasonable to conduct further research to obtain teacher data on student transitions to first grade. A survey could be used with suburban teachers to obtain this information.

Conclusions

High stakes testing, No Child Left Behind, and teacher accountability are of paramount importance for teachers and administrators. Districts continue to examine their achievement data with great concern for achievement gaps that tend to appear in the intermediate grades. District leadership often focuses much of their energy and funding towards secondary interventions and fails to realize the impact interventions would have in the early grades, especially kindergarten. Research has indicated that time provided to remediate achievement gaps/delays in the early grades will result in future cost savings to districts in terms of referrals to special education and/or provision of basic skills instruction (Slavin, 2004). Those districts offering full-day kindergarten see the benefits of the program as a means to provide early intervention for students needing additional supports, to expose the students to meaningful learning activities, and to allow students to engage in more child centered learning.

While preventing an achievement gap from occurring through the avenue of full-day kindergarten, it is worthwhile to caution educators about the over emphasis of academics in the kindergarten year that may rush skills at the expense of children's socialization and development. Above all, students must be exposed to academics that are developmentally appropriate, allow for socialization, and develop achievement based self-esteem. The readiness of youngsters to engage in learning opportunities must be

weighed carefully to avoid the “push” for academics when students may not be developmentally ready. Educators are cautioned to implement curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and guard against stifling the creativity of youngsters. Districts must promote creativity, innovation, discovery, and investigation with youngsters at this age so students can think critically about their learning. Educators are cautioned to meet each child where they are and build learning opportunities that align to each child’s learning needs, experience, and developmental ability.

The researcher contends that districts value kindergarten in general but do not focus much of their attention to this first year of schooling since no real emphasis has been made to examine the current program in place. The researcher believes funding does play a part in district leaders’ decisions but also strongly contends that this issue of full-day kindergarten versus half-day kindergarten is a priority issue. District leaders providing a full-day program made full-day kindergarten a reality in their districts based on a shared vision of all stakeholders in the district. Since the research on the benefits of full-day kindergarten is mixed, these leaders pursued this model because they believed the efficacy of the program would serve their student population well.

The varying access to full-day kindergarten in suburban communities is evident not only in this one county in Southeastern, Pennsylvania but across the United States. The data in this study revealed the variety of additional features provided for those districts not offering full-day programs. While the research demonstrates the fade out of gains associated with full-day kindergarten in later primary years, districts must assess the diverse needs of their population to program effectively for all students. The researcher believes full-day kindergarten is not needed for all youngsters; however, options must be

provided for students needing additional time for socialization, readiness skills, and literacy development. It would behoove districts to capitalize on a variety of options to ensure effective programming is established.

Early childhood education is the cornerstone of American education. Policymakers across the country must continue to examine policies for kindergarten and provide consistency for all states to level the playing field of kindergarten education. Full-day kindergarten may not be appropriate for all children but parents and children must be given the option to decide which program will appropriately meet the unique needs of their child. Districts need to pay closer attention to early childhood education and re-evaluate their priorities as a district to serve all students well.

Districts implementing full-day models should continue to analyze the data and report gains to local communities and the state to prove its effectiveness. Districts need to highlight student growth in terms of skills learned academically, socially, and behaviorally. Local districts need to have their voices heard at the state level to articulate the need for more state funding to support kindergarten. Local districts need to collaborate with local policymakers to develop partnerships with them to voice their issues.

In particular, there are four key areas that should be considered to strengthen state policy:

1. There is lack of clarity on what full-day kindergarten can provide. A plausible solution is to define in statutes the number of instructional hours required daily for FDK.
2. There is a lack of universal access to full-day kindergarten. The solution is to provide a consistent statewide policy for all districts to offer full-day

kindergarten. Policymakers must demand better data collection that report gains on achievement, demographics, and comparisons on full-day versus half-day.

3. There is inadequate funding for FDK. Funding depends on monies from federal, state, and local government. Usually, categorical funding is used towards FDK. State policymakers should encourage categorical funds where resources are limited.
4. There is a lack of quality standards for FDK. The debate continues to be over the quantity versus the quality. The question arises. Should we spend more hours in school or should we focus on the rigor? There is no empirical research that discusses the quality of the program as it pertains to curriculum, learning activities, or teacher training. State policymakers need to ensure learning standards are created and aligned to the existing state standards. State policymakers need to look at the five domains of early learning: physical, social, emotional, language/literacy development and cognitive development to ensure state standards are inclusive of these domains.

Local districts, including school boards and administrators, need to assess their current kindergarten programming to determine if they are adequately serving the students entrusted in their daily care. Realigning the strategic goals of the district to include an emphasis on early childhood development is ideally the first place to begin in this journey to strengthen kindergarten programming.

“State policies define the public expectations for a program’s accessibility, equity, and quality” (<http://ecs.org>). In reality, policies are necessary; however, policy alone will not ensure the implementation of high quality programming. Strengthening state policies on

kindergarten programming can serve as a guide for local districts to pursue a deeper analysis of their existing programs to determine accessibility, quality and equity needs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT TO CONDUCT RESESEARCH

Mrs. Judy Clark, Superintendent of Schools
Wissahickon School District
601 Knights Rd.
Ambler, PA 19002

September 21, 2009

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Elizabeth Santoro and I am currently an elementary principal in the North Penn School District located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. I have worked in the field of elementary education for the last 25 years and have served as an elementary principal for thirteen of those years.

I am an advanced doctoral student at Temple University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program. I am beginning my dissertation research in the winter of 2010. The topic of my dissertation is "*A Case Study on the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full Day Kindergarten Programming.*" The main objective of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of district leaders' perceptions and values of full-day kindergarten in our current educational times. This is a topic of great interest to me as I have observed first hand the on-going needs of our primary aged-students.

I am seeking your approval for your district to participate in this qualitative case study about kindergarten programming. The study will require audio-taped interviews of central office administrators and a school board member that will last approximately 45 minutes in length. Confidentiality of all participants will be upheld through the use of a coded number system in order to protect each individual's identity. I will also need access to district documents such as the district's strategic plan, kindergarten documents, and school goals if applicable. I will also conduct informal observations in the field to obtain a general feel for the kindergarten programs in your districts.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in this study. I believe the context of this study has the potential to illuminate policy making for kindergarten at the federal and state levels. If you wish to contact me with any questions or feedback, I can be reached at elizabeth.santoro@temple.edu or by cell phone at (267) 718-1471.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Santoro
Doctoral Candidate (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies)
Temple University

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

September 21, 2009

Dear Administrator:

My name is Elizabeth Santoro and I am currently an elementary principal in the North Penn School District located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. I have worked in the field of elementary education for the last 25 years and have served as an elementary principal for thirteen of those years.

I am an advanced doctoral student at Temple University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program. I am beginning my dissertation research in the fall of 2009. The topic of my dissertation is “*A Case Study on the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full Day Kindergarten Programming.*” The main objective of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of district leaders’ perceptions and values of full day kindergarten in our current educational times. This is a topic of great interest to me as I have observed first hand the on-going needs of our primary aged-students.

I am seeking your approval to participate in this qualitative case study about kindergarten programming. The study will require an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. This interview is the only requirement if you choose to participate in the study. Your confidentiality will be upheld through the use of a coded number system in order to protect your identity.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in this study. I believe the context of this study has the potential to illuminate policy making for kindergarten at the federal and state levels. If you wish to contact me with any questions or feedback, I can be reached at elizabeth.santoro@temple.edu or by cell phone at (267) 718-1471. Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Santoro
Doctoral Candidate (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies)
Temple University

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: A Case Study on the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full Day Kindergarten Programming.

Investigators:

Principal Investigator Joan P. Shapiro, Ed.D Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Temple University (215) 204-6645.

Student Investigator Elizabeth A. Santoro, Doctoral Student at Temple University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program (267) 718-1471.

Purpose of Research

The two investigators are currently engaged in a study that is examining the perceptions and opinions of suburban district leaders as it pertains to full-day kindergarten. To be eligible for the study, the participants have to hold a district administrative position of superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of elementary education, director of curriculum, or school board member. To obtain further insight into this research we would like to ask you to participate in this study by taking part in a 30 to 45 minute interview. This interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. The interview should not impact your work day or take you away from your responsibilities.

General Research Design

The research design that is proposed will be done in an interview format and will be audio taped and transcribed at another time. The researcher will ask approximately 10-15 questions that focus on decision making processes as it relates to kindergarten programming in your particular district. The researcher will conduct the interview at the district at a time that is convenient to the participant.

Benefits of the Study

The results of the data collected and the recommendations from the investigators will provide rich descriptive reports that can be utilized by parents, educators, policymakers, and the general public to gain a deeper and richer understanding of suburban kindergarten programming in one state. Since kindergarten programming continues to be a controversial issue, this study will illuminate for the reader the processes enacted to reach complex decisions such as kindergarten programming.

Title: A Case Study on the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full Day Kindergarten Programming.

Confidentiality

The data that you provide will be recorded anonymously. Your participation and anything you say during the session will be held in the strictest confidence. A numbered coding system will be utilized with each participant to ensure confidentiality. The number correlating to each research subject will only be known to the researcher and no one else. We welcome questions about this study at any time. Your participation in this study is on a voluntary basis. You may refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice.

Research Rights

Questions about your rights as a research subject may be directed to Mr. Richard Thom, Office of the Vice President for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 3400 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19140, (215) 707-8757.

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understand the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE

Title: A Case Study of the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full-Day Kindergarten Programming.

Principal Investigator Joan P. Shapiro, Ed.D College of Education
Professor of Educational Leadership and
Policy Studies at Temple University (215) 204-6645.

Student Investigator Elizabeth A. Santoro, College of Education
Doctoral Student at Temple University in
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (267) 718-1471.

Subject: _____ *Date:* _____

Log#: _____

I give Elizabeth Santoro permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used for the following purpose:

RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in this research project. At no time will my name be used.

WHEN WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period: January 2010 to June 2010.

Title: A Case Study of the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full-Day Kindergarten Programming.

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

I give permission for these tapes to be used from: January 2010 through Sept. 2010.

This audiotape will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the private office of the investigator's residence for a period of three (3) years after completion of the study.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdrawal my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my care or relationship with Elizabeth Santoro or Temple University in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotape(s).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If I want more information about the audiotape(s), or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Investigator's Name: Elizabeth Santoro
Department: College of Education, Ed. Leadership and Policy Studies
Institution: Temple University
Street Address: 266 Ritter Hall
1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Telephone: (267) 718-1471 or (215) 343-6747

Title: A Case Study of the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full-Day Kindergarten Programming.

This form will be placed in my records and a copy will be kept by the person(s) named above. A copy will be given to me.

PLEASE PRINT

Subject's Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

(Or signature of parent or legally responsible person if subject is a minor or is incompetent to sign.)

Relationship to subject:

Subject cannot sign because: _____

but consents orally to be audiotaped under the conditions described above.

Witness signature: _____ Date _____

Witness signature: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Investigator's Name: Elizabeth Santoro

Title of Study: A Case Study on the Perceptions of Suburban District Leaders as it Relates to Full-Day Kindergarten Programming.

Interview Protocol: Questions for the Participant

1. My goal is to understand your point of view about kindergarten. As we converse during the next 45 minutes or so, I will refer occasionally to my list so we don't miss anything important. Let's begin by you telling me about your educational background, your life, or your future career aspirations.
2. Please define your role and responsibilities in the school district along with how many years you have been serving in this capacity.
3. Describe the current structure of the kindergarten model in this district.
4. Would you say the current design of this kindergarten model in this district is meeting the needs of youngsters adequately? Are they effective for all populations? Please explain.
5. How have curricular expectations changed in early childhood education over the last 5 years?
6. What values and opinions do you hold about kindergarten?
7. Some stakeholders believe we need to focus on the quality of the kindergarten program, not the quantity. What would you say to these stakeholders?
8. Who are the stakeholders involved when making a decision in regards to kindergarten programming?
9. What factors are considered when choosing a kindergarten program?
10. Who do district leaders go to for advice on kindergarten programming?
11. How does the kindergarten program align to the district's strategic plan?
12. Describe your resource allocations for kindergarten programming in this district.

13. Where do you see kindergarten programming in the next 5 years? 10 years?
14. Are you in favor of full-day kindergarten? Please discuss the strengths and weaknesses as you see them.
15. Some people will say that suburban districts are unable to implement full-day kindergarten due to funding, resource allocations, and space issues. What would you say to them?
16. Has this district ever conducted an evaluation of the kindergarten program? If so, what were the results?
17. If there is anything I have not covered in this interview, please feel free to share.