

July 2009

Passing mark for full-day K

By Elizabeth Redden, Delaware State News

DOVER - The results of a study of the state's full-day kindergarten pilot programs are in and the findings are "overwhelmingly positive," its author said.

"There was nothing significant that was negative," said Dr. Michael Gamel-McCormick, a professor of individual and family studies at the University of Delaware who wrote the study.

The study, released to the public Tuesday, compared the state's 10 pilot programs with eight part-day programs.

The General Assembly commissioned the study last year after legislators approved funding for one pilot full-day kindergarten classroom in each of 10 districts, including Capital, Lake Forest, and Appoquinimink.

Gov. Ruth Ann Minner has said she wants to see full-day kindergarten programs made available to all students in the state by 2008.

The study considered curricular content, use of educational time, in-class observations and interviews, and student outcomes.

Full-day students demonstrated more advanced literacy skills than part-day kindergartners as measured by Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills examinations administered three times through the year, the study said.

"This holds across all sorts of students - students who are living in poverty, students who are not living in poverty, students in certain risk categories," Dr. Gamel-McCormick said.

The study found that full-day programs offer almost 2 1/2 times the amount of literacy instruction as part-day programs and more than two times the amount of writing and science instruction.

The study also found that 98 percent of parents with children in full-day kindergarten prefer all-day programs, while 72 percent of parents with children attending part-time programs prefer the full-day curriculum.

Full-day kindergarten students were shown to have participated in more high-level cognitive activities, using skills of analysis, synthesizing and comparison.

The findings contrast a January 2004 study completed by the Delaware Education Research and Development Office at the University of Delaware.

That study said, "surveys and interviews with staff from nine districts suggest that (full-day) programs are extensions of existing (half-day) programs, rather than significant reconceptualizations of the kindergarten curriculum."

The new study suggests the extra classroom time allows for a deeper level of cognitive engagement than is offered in half-day programs.

House Majority Leader Rep. Wayne A. Smith, R-Wilmington, said legislators did not have the data from the 2005 pilot study when they crafted the fiscal 2006 budget and bond bill last month.

He said there was concern about making a multi-million-dollar investment in an initiative that was not conclusively proven beneficial in the 2004 study.

The legislature agreed with the governor's proposal to spend another \$3 million on the pilot program in fiscal 2006.

The state's capital budget includes \$13 million for districts that need to build classrooms for full-day programs.

Gov. Minner had proposed \$30.8 million for kindergarten construction.

Legislators also voted to fully fund full-day kindergarten for all charter schools and districts that already offer it to all students - Laurel, Seaford, Smyrna and Woodbridge.

The General Assembly did not provide funding for full-day programs at districts not involved in the pilot program, including Caesar Rodney.

"I welcome new data and hope it provides a better support for this initiative than the prior studies that call into question the advisability of such a massive investment in full-day K," Rep. Smith said.

Dr. Jim Lesko, education associate for early childhood education at the state Department of Education, said the contract with the University of Delaware for the study has expired, the department is considering options for continuing to research the pilot full-day program.

Post comments on this issue at newsblog.info/0409.

Staff writer Elizabeth Redden

can be reached at 741-8247

or eredden@newszap.com.

