

## **The New Kindergarten – A Plea for All Day Kindergarten ©**

By Connie J. Schlosberg

It's 2:00 on a Sunday afternoon. My five-year old daughter is on her fifth page of homework, which is due Monday morning. Sitting next her, I observe her facial expressions so intense in her work. The assignment is determining two dimensional objects from three dimensional, by circling the correct geometric shape. I am astounded by how well she is doing. Then she turns to her next page of homework which entails writing the lower case letter to match its upper case counterpart. The letters are out of order so she becomes a little confused on what the lower case letter should look like. Her frustration causes her to slap her head and shout "Oh, what is it! What is it!" The same child, who a few minutes ago was accomplishing dimensional geometry so easily, couldn't focus on simple letters that she had recognized since she was three.

Studies have shown the importance of early education in lifelong academic success. There is tremendous importance with building an academic foundation early for later learning. As of 2000, sixty percent of school districts in the nation have kids enrolled in full-day programs. In California, legislatures are now pushing for more full-day programs plus making public preschool available to all four-year olds. Two years ago, Maryland decided to make its kindergartens full day by 2007 to fight its achievement gaps. Our neighbor state, New Mexico, is finishing up a five-year plan for all state-wide districts to offer it. If Falcon District 49 administrators want to succeed in their quest to eliminate illiteracy then they should take the lead in Colorado and enact full-day kindergarten programs to accommodate the community.

I believe that Falcon District 49 needs to use funding from the school tax increase voted in November 2005 for full-day kindergarten programs in its elementary schools. If we have full day kindergarten programs, our children will have a higher success rate needed to perform well by the Colorado Student Assessment Program standards. Changing from a three hours per day program to six hours will allow more time for teachers to spend with students in all the important subject areas, especially reading, writing, and math. For working parents like me, full-day kindergarten programs can alleviate the logistics and costs for child care.

I understand the school district will be concerned about the additional costs. However, the costs should be minimal. The schools can still use the existing facilities and staff. There are already rooms allocated for kindergarten classes with full-time kindergarten teachers. The advantages far outweigh any costs. Studies have shown that the states that have moved to full-day kindergarten programs are proving that their children are excelling at math, reading, writing and other key skills.

The "No Child Left Behind Act" signed by President George Bush on January 8, 2002, calls for a reform in our education systems and dictates that all American children should be reading by the third grade. This act is an attempt to eradicate illiteracy in the United States. According to a study completed as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress by the United States Department of Education, in 2003 an alarming thirty-seven percent of fourth graders and twenty-six percent of eighth graders were rated Below Basic and less than thirty-one percent of students were at or above Proficient!

With the switch to a full-day kindergarten, our children will be able to master certain reading and math skills before they graduate to the first grade. An estimated sixty percent of kindergartners are thought to be unready for the first grade. Some of these requirements are reading rudimentary sentences and counting and recognizing numbers one through one hundred by the end of the school year. By our children having more time to center on reading, writing and math, they will enter first grade with both feet running. The bottom line is that we need to foster our children in all aspects of learning regardless of any minor costs.