

Portland Public Schools

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An Open Letter from the Superintendent concerning pending changes to the way Developmental Kindergarten and Kindergarten are funded.

Language in Section 6(4)(r) of the School Aid Appropriations Act for 2008-2009 states that beginning in 2009-2010, in order to keep the funding for Developmental Kindergarten (DK) at the same rate as in prior years, school districts must provide DK for a full-day, every day. Beginning in 2010-2011, Kindergarten programs (K) must be scheduled for at least 60% of a school day every day and then by 2011-2012, 70% of a school day every day in order for school districts to receive the same level of funding for these programs as they have for the past 15 years.

What the Governor and legislators are saying is, "Your DK and K students are only in school half of the day so you should only get half of the funding", which on the surface and in the simplest of terms makes sense. However, more forethought is necessary in order to see the real impact this simple premise will have on local school districts.

Please allow me to explain the impact and pitfalls of this intent language as it applies to our situation at Portland Public Schools.

Since the passage of Proposal A in 1994 school aid funding has been based on a simple student head count regardless of whether the district had half-day or full-day Developmental Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs. The total number of students is multiplied by Per-Pupil State Foundation Allowance and the result is your school state aid for the year. The state aid goes to support every child, DK – 12th grade, with no variation of the amount behind different grade or ability levels of students. A high school student costs more to educate than a first grader and a special education student costs far more to educate than a general education student, but no differentiation was made.

The Governor and the legislators are simply looking at the front end of the K-12 spectrum and ignoring the added costs of providing an education to other students on the other end of the same spectrum. To only change this part of the equation, without making up the difference in some other way is fundamentally unfair. If half-day DK and K students are unilaterally adjusted to equal one half of a full-time student, then our high school students should equate out to a factor of 1.2 on a full-time equivalent basis while a special education student should be about a 2.5 full-time equivalent for funding purposes, etc.

Our community has not asked for full-day kindergarten. Parents are questioning if children at that age are developmentally ready to go to school all day, especially boys. Our student achievement level on standardized tests is very high. We have no data that points to a need to change the length of day for our DK and K students.

The premise of being able to schedule Kindergarten classes for 60% or 70% of a day is a fallacy. Two sections of 60% or 70% Kindergarten will not fit in to one day. Any prorated kindergarten membership greater than 50% is really a mandate for full day kindergarten when you consider bus schedules.

Beyond the issues of fairness in changing state aid rules and loss of local control, this issue quickly boils down to one of money and unfunded mandates. Yes, we have a choice to increase the length of our DK and Kindergarten classes or lose state aid. In our case, the choices are to **lose** up to **\$598,344** if we stay with our half-day classes or **spend \$315,975** a year more, without any increase in revenue, for full-day every-day DK and Kindergarten. What kind of “choice” is that?

Here is how the financial impact of the full-time equivalent language for DK and K works out for Portland Public Schools:

- In 2009-2010 we have three choices:
 - a. **Lose \$274,350** in state aid for our DK program if we keep our current half-day program or
 - b. **Spend an additional \$114,900** to hire 2 more DK Teachers in order to be able to offer full-day, every day Developmental Kindergarten or
 - c. **Fold our DK program** in to our Kindergarten program, keep our half day format and keep our state aid the same for the 2009-2010 school year.

- In 2010 -2011 it gets even worse as we will need to either:
 - a. **Lose \$436,347** in state aid for our DK and K if we keep our current half-day programs or
 - b. **Spend \$315,975** on the 2 additional DK teachers (\$114,900) and add another 3.5 K teachers at a cost of \$201,075.

- By 2011-2012 we will be either:
 - a. **Losing \$598,344** a year in state aid if we keep our current half-day programs or
 - b. **Spending an additional \$315,975** a year to staff a full day DK and K program.

Choosing between spending \$315,975 a year more on DK and K or losing \$598,344 a year is a no win decision for Portland Public Schools. We are broke. We balanced last year's 17 million dollar budget by \$6,587! Our fund equity is at 5% of our budget.

Any additional costs or losses in revenues caused by this pending legislation will come at the expense of our 1st -12th grade students. We will be forced to make up the extra expense/loss from our DK and Kindergarten program by doing things like cutting our one assistant principal, the School Nurse, the In-House Suspension Program, one section of Reading Recovery and bussing for High School students and we would still have to cutback to cleaning our classrooms every other day in order to make up the difference!

It would take a little over 1 million dollars to build and equip the five additional classrooms needed to offer full-day, every day DK and K programs. We certainly are not going to ask the voters to approve a million dollar bond to build classrooms that they have not asked for.

We will be forced to displace the very programs that are designed to help our neediest youngsters succeed in school like Head Start, the Great Start Readiness Program, our Special Education Sensory Program, the I.S.D.'s Early Childhood Playgroup and our Latch Key room in order to make room for five new DK and K classrooms.

The question becomes, "Are you really improving the education for all children if you are forced to stop doing something for one group in order to pay for enhancements to the opportunities for another?"

The House of Representatives passed their version of the School Aid Act for Fiscal Year 2009-10 (HB 447) in mid April. One of the major differences in the language from the current School Aid Act is the postponement of any changes to the way DK and K are funded until at least 2011-2012. This was enough for us to revert back to offering DK as usual for next year. We held our Kindergarten Round Up in April and enrolled our youngest Raiders in to half-day Developmental Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes just like we have for the past 30 years.

The House School Aid Bill of FY 2009-10 now goes over to the Senate. We do not anticipate the Senate taking any action on this bill until after the May Revenue Consensus hearings. Then it will be time for us to become active once again. It is likely that the Republican controlled Senate may strike any intent language that deals with mandating full-day every day Developmental Kindergarten and Kindergarten in its entirety. That would be wonderful!

It is not too late to have an impact on the decisions made on our behalf in the legislature. If you have strong feelings, either way, on this issue, you may want to contact:

- Governor Jennifer Granholm (D)
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E-mail: Go to www.michigan.gov/gov
Click on Contact the Governor
Go to the Share Your Opinion link
- Senator Ron Jelinek (R), Chair
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- Senator Wayne Kuipers (R), Chair
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Sincerely,

Charles Dumas
Superintendent