

Extend the reach of your advertising
with banners on PhillyBurbs.com!
Call Mel Taylor today at 866-229-1210.



Jaguars cost less a
Cherry Hill Jaguar
Cherry Hill Jaguar at Cherry Hill Classic Cars
www.cherryhilljaguar.com 888-367-1391

ADVERTISE

NEWS

Local

Bucks County
Courier Times

Burlington
County Times

The Intelligencer

Hometown
Pennsylvania

New Jersey

National
World

Health
Washington
Elections

Columnists
Obituaries

Lotteries
Weather

**phillyBurbs
Highlights**

School already?
Almost. Here is
how to survive

**Burbs Blogs:
Join in the
conversation!**

**Thousands of
dollars, trips to
Vegas**
Play Fantasy
Football with us
and win BIG

**Find out if you
are getting paid
enough**

**Going out
tonight?**
Get on the EDGE

Home / Courier Times

Full-day kindergarten: Why not us?

By **MARION CALLAHAN**

Bucks County Courier Times

Colleen Eisenhart never expected kindergarten to be a struggle for her son.

He printed his name, wrote numbers and rhymed words like the rest of his peers. Yet, he fell short in other areas.

By year's end, he couldn't count backwards from 20. Some days he could sound out the letter "I." Other days he couldn't. And tying his shoelaces was a skill he couldn't yet master. According to state guidelines, he was behind.

Eisenhart said he just needed more time.

"How are these kids expected to meet all of these new standards in 21/2 hours?" Eisenhart asked. "These were skills once taught in first grade, where they had the luxury of a full day. Why not give them the time they need to learn?"

This year, for the first time in Pennsylvania history, the majority of kindergartners in the state will attend full-time programs. Almost two in three kindergartners nationwide, or 65 percent, are in school five to six hours a day.

Yet, the chances of full-time kindergarten in area districts anytime soon are slim.

The lack of money and space continue to prevent high-growth districts from even considering it, local officials say. And it's a sore spot for some local school administrators - who are faced with teaching students more in less time and have less money to do it.

Many district officials say an extended day is in the best interest of students. National and state studies point to academic benefits. Teachers

**CASH
Coupons**
from local
Car Dealers
CLICK HERE



CLICK HERE
only at
**CARSearch
CASH**

want more time to squeeze in what the state requires kids to learn by the end of the year. And parents, especially dual-income ones, are baffled as to why some districts offer it, while others do not.

"I never understood why they didn't offer it," said Buckingham resident Jennifer Carson, who is enrolling her 5-year-old son in an after-school program on the days she works. "You assume there are pretty wealthy districts here and a good taxpayer base. With what kids need to keep up with and the number of dual-income families, why wouldn't they offer it?"

But with the way full-day kindergarten is funded, surging enrollments and academic progress work against local districts.

A big portion of the money used by other districts to expand to full-day kindergarten comes from a new \$200 million state accountability grant, aimed at pumping money into early education programs. While all districts are eligible for a slice, a greater portion of the money is channeled to districts that show the greatest academic needs - those that have more students with low scores on state tests.

"Full-day kindergarten is important, but it is especially important for kids at risk of academic failure," said Joan Benso, president of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. "Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has one of the worst financing formulas in the country for education, and it has a long way to go to improve our funding for kindergarten for all school districts - rich or poor."

Still, she credits the Rendell administration for the \$200 million grant that kick-started programs for more than a dozen districts in the state - mostly ones with empty classrooms - to spare declining enrollment.

"Sixty percent of that money went to support full-day kindergarten," said Benso, whose organization just completed a study on the issue. "There was clearly a demand. Now the block grant needs to grow as well as our system for financing public education to make sure every district has equity across the system. It shouldn't matter where you live."

The fraction of money that made its way to districts locally - including Quakertown, Pennridge, Palisades, Central Bucks, Hatboro-Horsham and New Hope-Solebury - wasn't enough to provide for expanded programs.

"We don't have 12 more classrooms or 12 more teachers to fund a full-day program," said Pennridge superintendent Robert Kish. "Is it a good thing to do for kids? Absolutely. What good would it do to use \$100,000 from the grant for a program that would cost more than half a million? Believe me, if the money was there, we'd pursue it."

At Central Bucks, it would take an extra 32 classrooms - space the size

BizSearch

Find businesses &
stores near you

or

BUCKS COUNTY
Courier Times
Online Edition

SUBSCRIBE
SIGN IN

Events, Contests and Promotions

Comics contest

2005 Job Fairs

Area Congregations

NIE Online Auction

BCT Photo Gallery

- ▶ **Shop Online**
- ▶ **Find Deals**
- ▶ **Buy a Car**
- ▶ **Find a Job**
- ▶ **Buy a House**
- ▶ **Plan a Trip**
- ▶ **Go Out to Eat**

Frankford Hospital – Bucks County
Jefferson Health System®



1-800-JEFF-NOW

of a new school - to launch a full-day program.

"We are so many years away from this because of our growth," said Central Bucks assistant superintendent William Walter. "We keep adding schools and filling them as soon as

we build them, so until we get ahead, we can't even discuss it."

For now, parents who want an extended day pay for it through before- and after-school programs. Hatboro-Horsham has its own "enrichment program," which operates before and after kindergarten. And about 30 percent of kindergartners are enrolled in it - at their parents' expense.

"Right now that's the best we can offer - and parents have to pay. With money and space restrictions, full-day isn't even a consideration," said Hatboro-Horsham assistant superintendent Nancy Bobkoskie.

Quakertown superintendent Jim Scanlon said a growing number of parents are sending their children to private full-day kindergarten, which accounts for the annual 20 percent enrollment hike from kindergarten to first grade. Both Scanlon and New Hope-Solebury superintendent Barbara Burke-Stevenson hope the state will increase its investment in early education and make it possible for growing districts to afford full-day programs.

"Teachers are asking for more time in the classroom, many parents want it and the curriculum demands more time for instruction," she said. "The standards children are expected to reach before third grade are much higher than they have been. We have to plan backwards, raising the level of what we're doing in kindergarten, first grade and second grade."

Walter said that if Central Bucks had the money and the room, the district would propose full-day kindergarten as an "option," since many parents still may prefer the half-day schedule.

The movement that is driving full-day programs discourages Laurie Zila.

"Are we at all questioning what those expectations are? Aren't we asking too much of kids who are 5 years old. So many parents feel like this has to be done - it's the only answer. I love the idea of half-day kindergarten. But I believe I'm going to have to deal with the reality of

full-day when my youngest son (now 3) goes to school."

Eisenhart, of Doylestown, doesn't see much of a choice - after experiencing a high-pressured kindergarten year. She blames the state, not her district, for raising the stakes for 5-year-olds without adding more teachers and offering more instructional time.

"There is nothing wrong with my son's memory, he can tell me things that happened two years ago and name all of his Bionicle toys, which I cannot pronounce. I'm happy with my son's teacher and I know he is learning. I just wish they would increase the day to full time since they increase their workload."

Marion Callahan can be reached at 215-345-3166 or mcallahan@phillyBurbs.com

August 29, 2005 4:52 AM

Story Options: [Reader Comments](#) [Print this story](#) [Email a friend](#)

©2005 Copyright Calkins Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

[back to top](#)