

Gov. Pritzker Signs Bill Establishing Full Day Kindergarten

August 2 2023 2:15 PM



SPRINGFIELD — Today, Governor JB Pritzker signed HB2396, requiring each school board to establish a kindergarten program with full-day attendance, beginning with the 2027-2028 school year. Under this bill, every district must also establish a half-day program that is developmentally appropriate and provides opportunities for play-based learning.

“Full day kindergarten is an essential step towards getting young Illinoisans off to the best possible start in their education, which has long-lasting positive effects on reading,

math, and social skills,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “From Smart Start to school funding to early childhood, we’re investing heavily in our state’s youngest residents because we know that every investment we make now is paid back multiple times over by engaged and educated citizens.”

“Children across our state deserve the opportunity to reach their full academic potential, starting from their first moments in the classroom,” said Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton. “Our administration is committed to the building blocks that uplift every child from cradle to career, and fostering their growth by providing full-day kindergarten programs is a major step in equipping the next generation with the tools needed for a bright future.”

According to the National Education Association, children in full-day classes show greater reading and mathematics achievements than those in half day classes. Research also indicates that children’s early reading skills are enhanced with the additional instruction time provided by full day kindergarten programs. Alongside academic gains, full day kindergarten offers several social and emotional benefits to students.

Districts that currently do not offer a full-day program can apply for a waiver to extend the implementation date up to two years past the 2027-2028 school years if they meet certain criteria.

HB2396 also establishes the Full Day Kindergarten Task Force, which will conduct a statewide audit to inform the planning and implementation of full day kindergarten programs. Members will be appointed by October 1, 2023, and will be issuing an interim report on November 15, 2024 and a final report no later than January 31, 2025.

The task force will study the current state of full-day kindergarten in Illinois, including district capacity to provide for full day kindergarten in the districts that do not currently offer full day and associated capital costs that may be needed for building expansion.

"Developmentally appropriate, high-quality, play-based kindergarten lays the foundation for a child to grow academically and develop essential social-emotional skills," said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders. "Universal access to full-day kindergarten brings us closer to ensuring all Illinois students receive the early learning opportunities they need to thrive. Today we are taking another critical step toward making Illinois the best place in the nation to raise a family."

"Prioritizing early childhood education will help ensure that our kids get the start they deserve while alleviating the burden of full-time care on working parents," said State Representative Mary Beth Canty (D-Arlington Heights). "Getting substantive, consistent full-day kindergarten can be the foundation for our kids looking to build good

educational experiences and ultimately steady, well-paying careers. I have no doubt the measure codified into law today will bring Illinois a step closer to ensuring that foundation is a reality for every Illinois kid."

"Kindergarten is pivotal for children's learning journey," said Senate Majority Leader Kimberly A. Lightford (D-Maywood). "Full-day kindergarten classes across the state will ensure equal access to early learning opportunities for all our families."