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FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN IS HARMFUL AND WASTEFUL

Across the nation today, there is a tremendous push from the education establishment to legislate compulsory full-day kindergarten. Like the proverbial cat, this movement has nine lives.

Some propose that kindergarten attendance be made compulsory under penalty of arrest for truancy. Some propose that children be denied admittance to the first grade unless they have attended an "accredited and approved" kindergarten.

Some propose that kindergarten be mandated as full-day instead of half-day. Some propose that local school districts be bribed into accepting this with special incentives of state funds.

Some propose that the compulsory school age be lowered a year or two from whatever it is currently in each state. These proposals want to force children into educational institutions at age six, then age five, then age four, then age three.

Some propose that children be tested for "graduation" from kindergarten and "flunked" if they don't display some arbitrary achievement level. One Minnesota school district requires kindergartners to pass a "competency test" before they can be "promoted" to the first grade. In the current school year, 295 are being forced to repeat kindergarten after 489 flunked the test. In the previous year, 234 little children were forced to repeat kindergarten after 460 had flunked the test.

There is no evidence that these proposals are beneficial to children. These proposals are designed to (a) provide free baby-sitters for parents, (b) create more jobs for teachers, (c) increase the tax revenues available to the education establishment, and (d) deliver little children into the hands of those who want to mold the attitudes and beliefs of the children.

Illinois now offers extra state taxpayer funds to school districts that institute full-day kindergarten. One school district superintendent who just accepted this offer was very blunt in stating why.

First, she said, the full-day program will benefit parents so they will no longer have to worry about supervision of their children for the other half of the day. Second, it's a device to get parents to start their children in public schools instead of possibly enrolling them in private schools. She made no claim or argument that full-day kindergarten would benefit the children.

The State Journal-Register, the leading newspaper in Illinois' state capital, recently editorialized against full-day kindergarten. It said that "kindergarten should be maintained on a part-time basis, as an introductory level to basic learning and social adjustment, and not as a full-scale educational program."

The newspaper examined the claim that full-day kindergarten is the way to improve student performance in later years. Recent studies show that this is simply not true.

First, the attention span of a five-year-old is so limited that the formal education process reaches the point of diminishing returns very quickly, long before even the half-day is completed. The editorial predicted, "What is likely to happen with full-day kindergarten is that it will become a free day-care center for working mothers for half a day -- paid for by the taxpayers."

Second, the quality of time children spend in school below age 8 is far more important than the quantity of time. This is where the oft-heard slogan, "quality time, not quantity time," is really appropriate.

A recent study of poverty-area schools conducted by the Illinois Board of Education shows that class size is a much greater factor in measuring learning and performance. Half-day classes with only 16 pupils outscored youngsters in full-day classes of 22-28 pupils in all areas checked -- language, word analysis, mathematics, and vocabulary.

The editorial concludes by urging the school board to take the money spent on kindergarten and instead improve the quality of educational programs in the first three grades of school. This is where the real fundamentals of learning are established.

Children do not develop at the same rate, and parents are the best judge of when their children are ready for formal schooling. As a parent, I found that kindergarten is an environment of germs, not learning, and did not enter my six children in school until the second grade.

The drive to lower the compulsory school age and to mandate kindergarten is a direct attack on the rights of children, parents, homeschoolers, private schools, and taxpayers.